

# CHINESE INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

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## A Machiavellian Moment

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## About IRSEM

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Paul CHARON & Jean-Baptiste JEANGÈNE VILMER

Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM)





# CONTENT

Foreword .....	11
Preliminary note .....	13
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	15
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	19
<b>First Part</b>	
<b>CONCEPTS</b> .....	25
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>THE VOCABULARY OF CHINESE INFLUENCE</b> .....	29
<b>I. The United Front</b> .....	29
<b>II. The “Three Warfares”</b> .....	29
A. Public opinion warfare.....	30
B. Psychological warfare.....	30
C. Legal warfare.....	31
<b>III. “Cognitive domain operations”</b> .....	31
<b>IV. Discursive power</b> .....	32
<b>V. Political warfare</b> .....	33
<b>VI. Active measures</b> .....	33
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>THE UNITED FRONT: THE PARTY’S “MAGIC WEAPON”</b> .....	35
<b>I. Concept of Leninist origin</b> .....	36
<b>II. Revival and diversification of the United Front under Xi Jinping</b> .....	37
<b>III. Objectives</b> .....	38
<b>IV. The infrastructure: A “United Front system”</b> .....	39
<i>The Western Returned Scholars Association</i> .....	40
<b>V. Typology of United Front operations</b> .....	42
A. Mobilizing the diasporas.....	42
B. Controlling the narratives about China.....	43
C. Building databases .....	43
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>THE “THREE WARFARES”</b> .....	45
<b>I. Public opinion warfare</b> .....	48
<b>II. Psychological Warfare</b> .....	49
<b>III. Legal warfare</b> .....	51
<b>Summary of the First Part</b> .....	57

## Second Part

<b>ACTORS</b> .....	59
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>THE PARTY</b> .....	63
<b>I. The Propaganda Department</b> .....	63
<b>II. The United Front Work Department (UFWD)</b> .....	66
<i>A Brief History of the UFWD</i> .....	67
<i>A Global Network of “Service Centers”</i> .....	69
<b>III. The International Liaison Department</b> .....	70
<b>IV. The Communist Youth League</b> .....	72
A. Operation and organization .....	73
B. CYL influence operations .....	74
<b>V. The 610 Office</b> .....	78
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>THE STATE</b> .....	81
<b>I. The Ministry of State Security</b> .....	81
<b>II. Taiwan Affairs Office</b> .....	84
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>THE PEOPLE’S LIBERATION ARMY</b> .....	87
<b>I. The PLA prior to the reform</b> .....	87
<b>II. The PLA after the reform</b> .....	88
<b>III. Base 311</b> .....	89
A. An opaque structure .....	93
1. The commandment structure .....	93
2. An outline of the internal structure .....	97
B. VTS and CHBC: Two PLA media outlets used to influence Taiwan .....	100
1. Voice of the Strait (VTS) .....	101
2. China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC) .....	103
a. Executives specialized in psychological warfare .....	104
C. Haifeng, the Base 311’s publishing house .....	106
1. The directors of Haifeng .....	108
D. Other subordinate units affiliated with the Base 311 .....	110
1. The Unit 61070: A center for network propaganda .....	111
2. Unit 61198 .....	114
3. The Huaxin Training Center .....	116
<b>IV. A web of relaying platforms</b> .....	119
A. CAIFC – China Association for International Friendly Contact (中国国际友好联络会) .....	121
1. The US-China Sanya Initiative: how to influence US generals .....	122
B. CAPCC – China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture (中华文化发展促进会) .....	124
C. CCPPNR – China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会) .....	124
D. CUSEF – China-United-States Exchange Foundation (中美交流基金会) .....	125
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMPANIES AS DATA COLLECTION TOOLS</b> .....	129
<b>I. Infrastructure</b> .....	130
A. Buildings (the example of Africa) .....	130
B. Submarine communications cables .....	131
<b>II. New technologies</b> .....	133
A. Beidou .....	133
B. Huawei .....	133
C. Databases .....	136
1. GTCOM .....	137
2. OKIDB .....	137
<b>Summary of the Second Part</b> .....	139



## Third Part

<b>ACTIONS</b> .....	143
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>SEDUCE AND SUBJUGATE</b> .....	147
<b>I. The “Chinese model”</b> .....	148
<b>II. Tradition</b> .....	151
A. The example of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) .....	152
1. TCM and the WHO.....	152
2. TCM and the BRI .....	153
<b>III. Benevolence</b> .....	155
<b>IV. Power</b> .....	158
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>INFILTRATE AND COERCE</b> .....	161
<b>I. The Diasporas</b> .....	165
A. Ethnic Nationalism .....	165
B. The largest campaign of transnational repression in the world .....	166
<i>Women victims of particularly virulent hate campaigns</i> .....	167
C. The mobilization of the diasporas to serve the Party’s interests .....	168
<i>Chinese embassy involved in counter-protests in Lithuania</i> .....	169
<b>II. The Media</b> .....	172
A. Chinese mainstream media .....	174
1. Xinhua .....	174
2. CCTV/CGTN.....	176
<i>The “Laurène Beaumont” affair</i> .....	178
3. <i>China Daily</i> .....	180
4. <i>Global Times</i> .....	181
5. China Radio International .....	181
6. Their presence on social networks .....	181
<i>A network of young French-speaking Chinese women</i> .....	183
B. Control of Chinese-language media abroad .....	184
C. Influence on mainstream media .....	186
1. Infiltration .....	186
a. Through its diplomats.....	186
b. Through the “China Watch” of the <i>China Daily</i> .....	187
<i>The Daily Telegraph’s “China Watch”</i> .....	188
c. Through accessible and reusable content .....	188
2. Acquisition .....	191
<i>The Japanese counter-example</i> .....	191
<i>Two radio stations broadcasting in the United States are controlled by Beijing</i> .....	192
3. Cooptation .....	193
4. Training and networking .....	193
a. “Training” journalists .....	193
b. Networks .....	194
5. Constraints .....	194
D. Control over the containers .....	195
1. Television.....	195
2. Digital Platforms .....	196
a. WeChat .....	196
b. Weibo.....	199
c. TikTok.....	200
3. Smartphones .....	201
E. The Case of Africa .....	202
<i>Russian media are much more reproduced than Chinese media</i> .....	204
<b>III. Diplomacy</b> .....	205
A. International Organizations and Standards .....	205
1. Controlling high-level positions at the UN.....	206
2. Management of four norm-producing specialized agencies.....	208
3. Leadership positions in other organizations.....	210

<i>A former World Bank Chief Executive accused of having changed China's ranking in report</i> .....	212
4. Controlling the discourse: the example of the WHO during the Covid-19 pandemic.....	213
<i>Controlling and shaping the discourse on organ trafficking</i> .....	214
5. A Crippled U.N. Human Rights Council .....	216
6. A Committee on NGOs diverted from its mission.....	218
7. Influence on regional organizations: the Chinese-European “friendship”.....	220
B. “Wolf-warrior” diplomacy or how to dignify trolling.....	222
<i>When the Chinese embassy puts pressure on Indian journalists</i> .....	224
1. The origin.....	228
2. The Twitterization of Chinese diplomacy.....	229
<i>Zhao Lijian (@zlj517), leader of the “wolf-warrior” diplomats</i> .....	232
3. The artificial amplification of diplomatic accounts.....	233
4. The French Case .....	234
<i>Lu Shaye, a not so diplomatic ambassador</i> .....	235
<i>The “Bondaz Effect,” or the demonstration of the perverse effect of the wolf-warrior diplomacy</i> .....	237
5. Doubts about its efficiency .....	239
<b>IV. The Economy</b> .....	245
A. Economic pressures on foreign companies .....	247
<i>The case of the NBA</i> .....	250
B. The German Case.....	250
<i>The China Brücke</i> .....	252
C. CCP agents lobbying from within Western companies .....	252
<b>V. Politics</b> .....	254
A. Political parties .....	254
1. A strategy initially oriented toward China’s allies, in a process of diversification.....	255
2. Converting influence into political resources .....	258
3. Priority to investments in the regions .....	261
<i>Influencing federated and decentralized actors: the German example</i> .....	262
B. People.....	262
<i>When a German MP hijacks a Chinese communication operation with some irony</i> .....	264
<i>The resistance of Prague’s mayor</i> .....	266
<i>The visit of the president of Czech Parliament in Taiwan</i> .....	267
C. The elections.....	268
<i>On WeChat, a letter instructing votes in Australia</i> .....	269
<b>VI. Education</b> .....	270
A. Universities .....	270
1. Financial dependence vis-à-vis China .....	270
<i>Two cases at Charles University, the oldest University in Central Europe</i> .....	272
2. Academic freedom and freedom of expression on campuses.....	273
a. Surveillance and intimidation of Chinese students. ....	274
b. Intimidation of professors and university administrators .....	276
<i>The University of New South Wales censored itself under Chinese pressure</i> .....	277
c. The role of Chinese diplomats.....	279
3. Student Associations (CSSA) .....	280
<i>A feeling of impunity and omnipotence on foreign campuses</i> .....	284
4. Shaping China studies.....	284
<i>Influencing publishers, printers and booksellers</i> .....	287
5. Acquiring knowledge and technologies .....	290
a. Many recruiting programs .....	290
b. Programs that raise a lot of issues .....	293
<i>When Australia indirectly contributes to the repression of Uyghurs</i> .....	295
c. Strategic infrastructures: the example of the China-Belgium Technology Center (CBTC).....	297
B. Confucius Institutes.....	299
1. Organization .....	299
<i>The Confucius Institute project in Greenland</i> .....	301
2. The true nature of Confucius Institutes .....	301
<i>A closed Confucius Institute in Lyon</i> .....	305
3. Hanyuqiao: the Chinese Bridge Program.....	306
<b>VII. Think tanks</b> .....	308
A. The international development of Chinese think-tanks .....	308

1. CGTN think tank.....	309
2. Offensive on Central and Eastern Europe (The China-CEE Institute and the SASS).....	310
<i>Hungary, Europe's soft underbelly for Beijing</i> .....	313
B. The use of local relays.....	314
1. Think tanks .....	314
a. Occasional partners .....	315
The example of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS) .....	316
The example of The Bridge Tank (France) .....	318
b. Circumstantial allies.....	323
The example of the French Prospective and Innovation Foundation (FPI).....	323
c. The accomplices.....	326
The example of the International Schiller Institute.....	326
2. Publishers .....	331
a. The example of La Route de la Soie – Editions (The Silk Road Editions, France).....	331
<i>When Maxime Vivas attacks the IRSEM</i> .....	340
<b>VIII. Culture</b> .....	346
A. The production and export of cultural products .....	346
1. TV shows.....	347
2. Movies.....	348
3. Video games.....	349
B. Influence on foreign cultural productions.....	350
1. Influencing the cinema of others: the example of Hollywood .....	350
a. Access to the Chinese market .....	351
b. Blacklists.....	352
c. Cut or modify to suit.....	353
d. Add or modify in order to please.....	357
<i>#SupportMulan (2019)</i> .....	358
2. Other cultural sectors .....	359
<b>IX. Information Manipulations</b> .....	362
A. Simulate authenticity .....	362
1. Trolls, sock puppets and astroturfing.....	362
a. Domestically: A distraction strategy to prevent dissident collective action.....	363
b. Internationally: A more offensive strategy to defend Chinese interests .....	365
2. Hiring middlemen .....	367
a. Content farms.....	367
<i>Earning money with KanWatch</i> .....	367
Mission .....	368
Evan Lee and Yee Kok Wai .....	370
Qiqi .....	371
Happytify .....	373
b. Other methods.....	374
<i>The fake articles that supported the takeover bid on Club Med by a Chinese company</i> .....	377
B. Coordinated campaigns on social networks.....	377
1. A persistent campaign since 2017.....	378
2. Spamouflage Dragon: an enduring network using fake accounts and fake AI-generated human faces .....	379
3. More than 10,000 fake Twitter accounts linked to the Chinese government.....	382
4. Targeted botnets from Serbia to Xinjiang.....	383
<i>#forzaCinaeItalia</i> .....	385
C. Discredit, divide, and scare opponents.....	385
<i>Psychological manipulation: gaslighting</i> .....	391
D. The PLA is also waging war through social networks .....	392
E. Satire and irony.....	395
F. Doxxing, or inciting hatred online .....	397
G. Language as a clue to the Chinese origin of the manipulations.....	399
<b>X. Other levers</b> .....	401
A. Citizen movements .....	401
1. Pro-independence movements: New Caledonia and Okinawa.....	401
2. Pacifist movements: the example of the group No Cold War .....	403
B. Chinese tourists .....	405

C. Foreign influencers .....	406
1. YouTubers .....	407
2. Academics .....	408
<i>The case of Dean Mestre (France)</i> .....	409
<i>The case of Professor Lange (Germany)</i> .....	410
D. Hostages.....	411
<b>Summary of the Third Part</b> .....	413
<b>Fourth Part</b>	
<b>CASE STUDIES</b> .....	419
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>TAIWAN</b> .....	423
<b>I. From the outside: How traditional Chinese media penetrate Taiwan</b> .....	425
A. The use of conventional media .....	425
B. The creation of dedicated outlets.....	428
1. The Voice of the Strait (VTS).....	428
a. Using “voice carriers” to reach a wider audience .....	429
b. Using local dialects for a rapprochement.....	430
c. Diversifying communication supports.....	430
d. Turning VTS into a mass media.....	431
e. Adapting its message to the target audience.....	432
f. Quickly reacting .....	432
2. The China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC) .....	433
a. The organization of events promoting the Chinese culture .....	433
b. The youth: A key target group.....	435
c. One galaxy .....	436
d. A Collaboration with local media .....	436
3. Haifeng .....	437
a. The events it organizes involve the same galaxy.....	439
<b>II. From the inside: local intermediaries</b> .....	440
A. Taiwanese media .....	440
1. Access to the Chinese market .....	441
2. Advertising .....	443
3. Money .....	443
4. Buyouts by Taiwanese tycoons.....	443
5. Other levers .....	446
B. Private cyber-armies .....	447
C. Politics.....	447
1. Political parties.....	447
2. Individuals .....	449
D. Influencers and other intermediaries.....	449
1. Groups and prominent figures on the cultural and artistic scenes.....	449
2. Civic organizations.....	450
3. Networks of Buddhist and Taoist temples .....	450
4. The business community .....	451
5. Members of the military .....	451
6. YouTubers .....	453
7. Disgruntled individuals .....	453
8. Overseas Taiwanese people .....	454
9. Chinese people living in Taiwan .....	454
<b>III. Information manipulation</b> .....	454
<i>The ghost island narrative</i> .....	456
A. The Typhoon Jebi Affair: when disinformation kills .....	456
B. Electoral interference.....	458
1. The November 2018 municipal elections.....	459
2. The presidential and legislative elections of January 2020 .....	461
C. Agriculture as a key battleground for disinformation .....	465
D. A Chinese journalist posed as a Taiwanese YouTuber (2019) .....	467



E. The Li Jie Case (2019).....	470
F. The Covid-19 pandemic (2020).....	472
G. Diplomatic Relations.....	476
<i>The ICAO's Twitter account</i> .....	477
<b>IV. Armed Force</b> .....	478
<b>V. Conclusion</b> .....	483
<i>From Taiwan to Hong Kong and Back</i> .....	485
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGAINST HONG KONG PROTESTERS IN 2019</b> .....	487
<b>I. Beijing's difficulties in imposing its narratives on the protests</b> .....	487
<b>II. The Chinese media's narrative</b> .....	488
<b>III. The Example of Guancha</b> .....	491
<i>Jimmy Sham's "self-mutilation"</i> .....	492
<b>IV. The use of social networks with an international audience</b> .....	493
A. TikTok.....	493
B. Facebook.....	494
C. Twitter.....	495
1. A Typology of the accounts involved in the disinformation campaign.....	496
2. Spam and dormant accounts.....	497
3. Case Study.....	497
a. Methodology.....	498
b. Reactivated dormant accounts.....	499
c. "Relay accounts".....	502
d. Anti-protester hashtags, narratives and iconographies.....	503
D. The new corps of volunteers on Weibo.....	507
1. Diba.....	507
2. Fanquan.....	509
3. Coordinated actions.....	509
E. Conclusion.....	511
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>SINGAPORE</b> .....	513
<b>I. Vulnerabilities</b> .....	513
<b>II. The Terrex Affair: taking pledges</b> .....	515
<b>III. The cases of Huang Jing and Jun Wei "Dickson" Yeo</b> .....	517
<b>IV. Resilience</b> .....	518
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>SWEDEN</b> .....	521
<b>I. A typical case of a "Machiavellian moment"</b> .....	523
<i>The Gui Minbai Affair</i> .....	527
<b>II. The case of the Chinese tourists and the reactions to satire (2018)</b> .....	528
A. Prologue.....	528
B. Chinese tourists allegedly abused by the Swedish police.....	529
C. The reactions to satire.....	532
<b>III. The Anna Lindstedt affair</b> .....	535
<b>IV. Local relays of Chinese Influence</b> .....	536
<b>V. The Swedish case as an example of the Russification of Chinese operations</b> .....	537
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>CANADA</b> .....	539
<b>I. An old story</b> .....	541
<b>II. The 2018 Crisis and Its Aftermath</b> .....	544
<i>The Australian Awakening</i> .....	544
<i>The Abduction of Canadian Citizens</i> .....	547

<b>III. The Efforts to Silent Dissenting Voices</b> .....	549
A. Systematic, Aggressive Counter-Demonstrations .....	550
B. Targeted Campaigns of Harassment and Intimidation.....	551
C. Family and Friends in China Used as Leverage.....	552
D. Permanent Surveillance .....	553
E. Cyberattacks.....	553
F. Identity Thefts.....	554
G. Travel restrictions .....	555
H. Conclusion .....	555
<b>IV. A Chinese Willingness to Influence Politics</b> .....	557
A. Politicians under influence .....	557
1. MPs and Ministers.....	557
<i>The MP Vincent Ke</i> .....	559
2. Municipal politicians .....	560
B. Elections under influence.....	562
<b>V. An Influence on Media Outlets</b> .....	563
<i>A case of doxing</i> .....	566
<b>VI. An Influence on Education</b> .....	567
A. At the university .....	567
<i>Evidence of the embassy's intervention in student demonstrations</i> .....	568
1. The Role of CSSAs .....	569
B. In Secondary schools .....	572
<i>The Nishan Bookstores</i> .....	574
<b>VIII. The Manipulation of Information</b> .....	574
A. The fake letters from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Immigration .....	574
B. WeChat's role.....	575
<b>VIII. A Myriad of Local Organizations as Relays</b> .....	577
<i>The Transformation of S.U.C.C.E.S.S.</i> .....	579
<i>A public holiday to commemorate the Nanjing massacre</i> .....	582
<b>IX. Seducing First Nations</b> .....	583
<b>X. The Canadian case illustrates the russification of Chinese influence operations</b> .....	586
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>THE INFEKTION 2.0 OPERATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020)</b> .....	589
<b>I. The Chinese informational war on the coronavirus</b> .....	590
A. Controlling the hemorrhage .....	590
B. “Turning the stigma over” .....	590
C. Discrediting adversaries .....	592
<b>II. The Soviet “Infektion” Operation: a Model for China?</b> .....	593
<b>III. Chronology of the Operation “Infektion 2.0”</b> .....	595
<b>IV. An Analysis of the “Infektion 2.0” Operation</b> .....	602
A. The CRG .....	602
B. Larry Romanoff .....	603
C. The motivations behind the operation .....	610
D. The Operation's efficiency.....	611
<b>V. An Undeniable Russification of Chinese methods</b> .....	611
<b>Summary of the Fourth Part</b> .....	613
<b>CONCLUSION A MACHIAVELLIAN MOMENT</b> .....	619
<b>I. The Russification of Chinese influence operations</b> .....	620
A. Russian inspiration .....	621
<i>For the PLA: Russia is a model to emulate</i> .....	622
B. Some differences subsist.....	631
C. Cooperation .....	633
<b>II. Some Tactical Successes but a Strategic Failure</b> .....	638
<i>The French Awakening</i> .....	640
<b>Glossary</b> .....	647

## FOREWORD

The influence strategies and operations presented in this report have been implemented by the Chinese regime, not by China or the Chinese. Just as we recommended in the 2018 CAPS-IRSEM report to prefer “the Kremlin” to “Russia,” to avoid conflating the government and the people,<sup>1</sup> we will therefore preferably use “the Party-State” or “Beijing” rather than “China.” “The Party-State” designates the regime as a whole (with its three cornerstones: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the state, and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)). Any occurrence of “China,” therein used for convenience, refers to the regime and not to the Chinese society or to the Chinese people.

This vocabulary precaution has become necessary because both those who dare criticize the CCP’s practices are immediately accused by the Chinese authorities, state media, and social media trolls of being “anti-China” (“反华”<sup>2</sup>) “anti-Chinese,” “racist,” “xenophobic,” or “Sinophobe” – exactly as the Kremlin brands its detractors as “Russophobes.” All are “labels that polarize and kill productive conversation.”<sup>3</sup> We anticipate being the targets of such attacks, and we make clear straightaway that, in either case, what is questioned is neither a population, nor a country, but rather the practices of an authoritarian government. It is possible to criticize one without denigrating the other. In conflating the two, the regime claims to speak for the “Chinese people” which, whether in China or abroad (albeit with different means), is often the first to criticize CCP practices.

From this perspective, those who deny the reality or impact of the influence operations described in this volume and those who, on the opposite end of the spectrum, describe “China” as an “enemy” or speak about a “clash of civilizations” should be rejected. In fact, both are playing into Beijing’s hands: an overtly hostile attitude conflating the government and the people feeds an anti-Chinese sentiment that certainly lingers in certain areas (generally places with large diasporic communities) and at certain times (during the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance). This allows the Party-State to kill two birds with one stone: it presents itself as the savior and protector of the Chinese living abroad, thus extending its influence over them, and it denounces any criticism of the regime as being “anti-Chinese” and therefore “racist.”

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1. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcía, Marine Guillaume, and Janaina Herrera, *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*, Policy Planning Staff (CAPS), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM), Ministry for the Armed Forces, Paris (Aug. 2018), 50.

2. The China Media Project found 79 occurrences of the term “anti-China” in the *People’s Daily* in 2020, a sharp increase compared to the 2010s (between 10 and 30 yearly). The frequent use of this term highlights the tensions inside the regime and the heightened perception of risks among the Party’s leaders. 2008 was the last time a similar number was found (82). That said, and despite the sudden rise, we remain far from the levels reached during important periods of tensions, such as under Jiang Zemin after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, following the EP-3E incident in 2001 (more than 100 occurrences), or during the Sino-Indian War of 1962-1963 (more than 200). See, Bill Bishop, “China’s Political Discourse in 2020: China Media Project,” *Sinocism* (22 Feb. 2021).

3. John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia. And How Democracies Can Push Back,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Mar. 2018).

This explains this preliminary vocabulary clarification: the problem is not “China,” it is not an “enemy” (the Party is actually the one dividing the world into “friends” – those who support its interests – and “enemies” – those who dare criticize it<sup>4</sup>) and there is no “clash of civilizations.” The problem is not a philosophical difference between two equally valid options, a supposedly “Confucian” China or the international “liberal” order. The problem, according to historian Frank Dikötter, is that the “CCP remains, structurally, a Leninist one-party state [that tries to undermine] anything and everything opposed to it at home and abroad.”<sup>5</sup> What we are confronted with, in the words of Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, is not “some Confucian ‘other,’ but an authoritarian regime, a Leninist political party replete with a central committee, a politburo and a general secretary backed by enormous economic, technological and military resources. The real clash is between the CCP’s repressive values and practices, and the freedoms enshrined in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the freedom of speech, assembly, religion and belief; freedom from persecution; the right to personal privacy; and equal protection under the law. The CCP rejects each of these, in words or in deeds.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, it is important to specify that this report was not commissioned by the Ministry or the government, but that it was initiated by the authors. Only a minority of IRSEM’s work is produced in response to orders from the Ministry of the Armed Forces. For the rest, the Institute freely chooses its subjects. In this case, it was the authors who, in 2019, in the wake of the publication of the CAPS-IRSEM report on *Information Manipulation* (2018), decided to work on the Chinese case specifically, only to quickly discover that they needed to broaden the focus from the informational field to that of influence as a whole. The study of influence strategies has been one of IRSEM’s research axes since 2017. The present work is therefore part of a series of publications (→ p. 650).

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4. Matt Schrader, *Friends and Enemies: A framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries*, Alliance for Securing Democracy, German Marshall Fund (22 Apr. 2020), 1.

5. Frank Dikötter, cited in: Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s influence in Australia* (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), 276.

6. Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing how the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2020), xi.



## PRELIMINARY NOTE

In this report, all Chinese terms (i.e. from mainland China) are transliterated according to the rules of Hanyu Pinyin, except for several words which are used in common parlance and could be potentially incomprehensible with this method of transliteration. For example, the French text uses Canton for Guangzhou, Pékin for Beijing and Nankin for Nanjing. On the other hand, we have used the Hanyu Pinyin transcription for Mao Zedong instead of Mao Tse-tung, which we consider outdated. For Taiwanese terms and proper nouns the situation is more complex. Taiwan has long used the Anglophone transliteration system known as Wade-Giles. In 2002, the Republic of China developed an indigenous transliteration system, Tongyong Pinyin, which was not widely adopted, certain cities opting for the continental Pinyin and most media continuing to use Wade-Giles. We therefore tried to comply with the most common uses. Finally, Hong Kong names are written according to the Romanization rules for Cantonese adopted by the Hong Kong government.

Works are cited first in the original language and then, in parentheses, in English. Unless stated otherwise, English translations are our own. In general, we have translated into English all the names of Chinese institutions, except if an official English translation exists or when an institution is known by its English name.

The departments of the CCP Central Committee are sometimes named “Central Departments” (Organization, Propaganda, United Front Work, and International Affairs). In this report, an affiliation with the Central Committee is implicit: we did not specify that they are “central” departments at every occurrence.

When writing without additional precision, “dollar” refers to the American dollar. Sums in American dollars are generally not converted in euros, but all other currencies are.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For a long time, it could be said that China, unlike Russia, sought to be loved rather than to be feared; that it wanted to seduce, project a positive image of itself in the world, and arouse admiration. Today, Beijing has not given up on seduction, on its attractiveness, and on its ambition to shape international norms. Not “losing face” remains very important for the CCP. And yet, Beijing is also increasingly comfortable with infiltration and coercion: its influence operations have been considerably hardened in recent years and its methods increasingly resemble Moscow’s. The Party-State has entered a **“Machiavellian moment”** in the sense that Beijing now appears to believe that, as Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*, “it is better to be feared than loved.” This evolution shows a **“Russification” of Chinese influence operations**. And our report analyzes this evolution, with the ambition of covering the entire spectrum of its tools of influence, from the most benign (public diplomacy) to the most malign – which means interfering in other countries’ affairs (clandestine activities). To do so, our analysis proceeds in four parts, successively presenting the concepts, actors, actions pertaining to this moment, and it ends with several case studies.

**1. The concepts** that are important to understand Chinese influence operations include the **“United Front”** – a CCP policy that consists in eliminating internal and external enemies, controlling groups that could defy its authority, constructing a coalition around the Party to serve its interests, and projecting its influence abroad – and the **“Three warfares,”** which represent the core of China’s “political warfare,” i.e. a form of non-kinetic proneness to conflict aimed at overcoming an opponent without a fight through the creation of an environment favorable to China. A wartime and peacetime undertaking, it encompasses public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare (the latter being close to what is called “lawfare” in English).

A Soviet concept is also useful to describe Beijing’s repertoire: **“active measures,”** which includes disinformation, counterfeiting, sabotage, discredit operations, destabilizing foreign governments, provocations, false-flag operations and manipulation aimed at weakening social cohesion, the recruitment of “useful idiots,” and the creation of front organizations.

**2. The main actors** implementing Chinese influence operations are emanations from the Party, the State, the Army, and the companies. **Within the Party**, this includes the Propaganda Department, which oversees ideology, controls the entire media spectrum and all the cultural production in the country; the United Front Work Department (UFW), with its twelve offices reflecting its main targets; the International Liaison Department (ILD), which maintains relations with foreign political parties; the 610 Office, which has agents across the world acting outside any legal framework to eliminate the Falun Gong movement. The Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL) should also be included in this group, serving at once as a link toward young people, as an incubator for future Party executives, and as a force that can be mobilized when needed – even if it is not a formal structure of the Party but rather a mass organization.

**Within the state**, two bodies in particular are involved in influence operations: The Ministry of State Security (MSS), which is the main civilian intelligence agency, and the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), in charge of the propaganda aimed at Taiwan.

**Within the People's Liberation Army (PLA)**, the Strategic Support Force (SSF) is at the forefront, especially through its Network Systems Department. It has the resources and is entrusted with missions in the informational domain. More precisely, the principal actor identified in this domain is Base 311, headquartered in Fuzhou, which is dedicated to the implementation of the "Three Warfares" strategy. It also operates media companies as civilian covers and a fake hotel to hide a training center.

Finally, **public and private companies** play an important role in collecting the data needed to decide who should be targeted by influence operations, when, and how. Infrastructures are particularly useful in data collection – buildings and submarine cables for instance – as are new technologies: digital platforms such as WeChat, Weibo and TikTok, companies like Beidou and Huawei, and databases that provide insight into what researchers call China's "techno-authoritarianism" or "digital authoritarianism" are all used to prepare and feed influence operations abroad. The Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission, which has apparently inherited intelligence missions previously entrusted to the former 2APL, should also be included in this list. However, due to insufficient sources, this institution is not covered in the report.

**3. The actions** carried out by Beijing in its influence operations abroad pertain to two main and non-mutually exclusive objectives: **first, to seduce and captivate** foreign audiences by crafting a positive representation of China, which can be illustrated by four specific narratives (the Chinese "model," its tradition, benevolence, and strength); **and then, and above all, to infiltrate and coerce**. Infiltration aims at slowly penetrating the opposing societies to hamper the very possibility of an action contrary to the Party's interests. Coercion corresponds to the progressive enlargement of the Chinese "punitive" or "coercive" diplomacy toward a policy of systematic sanctions against any state, organization, company, or individual that threatens the Party's interests. Both are generally carried out via a web of intermediaries. Overall, these practices target the following categories:

- **Diasporas**, with the dual objective of controlling them – so that they do not represent a threat for the Chinese power (Beijing carries out a transnational campaign of repression which, according to the NGO Freedom House, is the "most sophisticated, global, and complete in the world") – and mobilizing them to serve its interests.

- **The media**, as Beijing's explicit goal is to establish "a new world media order." Indeed, the government has invested €1.3 billion annually since 2008 to impose a tighter control over its global image. The major Chinese media outlets have a global presence, in several languages, on several continents, and on all social networks, including those blocked in China (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram), and they invest large amounts of money to augment their digital audience artificially. Beijing also seeks to control the Chinese-language outlets abroad, which has proven so successful that the CCP now effectively enjoys a near-monopoly among them, and it also seeks to control the mainstream media. Finally, the Party-State is interested in controlling the containers, exerting its influence over each step along the global information supply chain, targeting televisions, digital platforms, and smartphones.

- **Diplomacy**, with a focus on two aspects. First, influence over international organizations and norms: Beijing deploys classic diplomatic resources along with clandestine influence operations (economic and political pressure, cooptation, coercion, and corruption) to strengthen its influence. Second, the so-called "wolf-warrior" diplomacy: it refers to more aggressive postures adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokespersons and a dozen diplomats. These attacks take both classic and relatively new forms, notably relying on the use of social networks and on an uninhibited recourse to invective, admonition, even intimidation. Overall, this aggressive turn of the Chinese diplomacy has proven counter-productive and it has largely contributed to



the abrupt deterioration of China's global image in recent years. This evolution is probably sustainable for the actors involved, as the objective is less to conquer the hearts and minds than to please Beijing.

- **The economy:** an economic dependence is often the first lever China uses. Economic coercion then takes very different forms: a ban from the Chinese domestic market, embargos, trade sanctions and restrictions on domestic investment, quotas imposed on regions highly dependent on Chinese tourists, or mass boycotts. Besides, Beijing increasingly imposes censorship as a prerequisite to access its domestic market; many companies end up bowing under pressure.

- **Politics,** with the goal of penetrating target countries to influence public policymaking mechanisms. Maintaining direct relationships with political parties and influential political figures allows the Party-State to infiltrate the target countries, to gather official and unofficial support there, and to circumvent eventual blockages within the governments by using opposition or “retired” public figures. Beijing also interferes with elections (over the last decade, China may have interfered in at least 10 elections in 7 countries).

- **Education,** via universities first and foremost, which are one of the main targets of the Party's influence efforts. Its principal levers are: financial dependence, leading to self-censorship in the universities; surveillance and intimidation of Chinese students, university instructors and administrators on foreign campuses; imposed modifications in course content, teaching materials, or programmed events; and shaping Chinese Studies, by encouraging self-censorship and punishing critical researchers. The Party-State also uses universities to acquire knowledge and technology, via legal and overt means, such as joint research programs, or illegal and covert actions, like theft and espionage. In a context of civil-military fusion, certain joint programs or researchers holding positions in dozens of Western universities involuntarily aid Beijing build weapons of mass destruction or surveillance technologies which are used to oppress the Chinese population. On this topic, several scandals broke out in public in 2020 and 2021.

Finally, there is another important actor of Chinese influence in education tied to the universities: the Confucius Institutes and Classrooms that have opened all around the world and which, under the guise of teaching Chinese language and culture, have heightened the dependency, or subjection, of certain universities to China, damaged academic freedom. They may have occasionally been used for espionage.

- **Think tanks:** the Chinese strategy in this domain is two-pronged. Beijing seeks to establish overseas branches of Chinese think tanks, and to take advantage of local relays that may themselves be think tanks, with three possible scenarios: occasional partners acting as amplifiers on local markets of ideas, circumstantial allies that spread the Party's narratives, and accomplices that share a common worldview and convergent interests with the CCP.

- **Culture:** first via the production and export of cultural products, such as films, TV series, music, and books – all powerful tools of seduction. Influence can also be exerted on foreign cultural productions, especially filmmakers, with the example of Hollywood: to avoid upsetting Beijing and hence maintain an access to the enormous Chinese domestic market, many American movie studios censor themselves, cutting or modifying movie scenes. Some are even overzealous, casting Chinese characters for the “good” roles. Being denied access to the Chinese market is almost certain for any artist who criticizes the Party-State. Via other types of pressure, Beijing also hopes to encourage artists to modify their work or, for those exhibiting elsewhere in the world, to simply stop, or even to do the work of Chinese censors.

- **Information manipulation,** resorting to fake accounts on social networks to spread the Party's propaganda in the media, trolls and astroturfing (to simulate spontaneous popular movements), and to numerous “internet commentators” (falsely labeled the “50 cent army”) that are paid to “guide” public opinion. Generally controlled by the PLA or the CYL, trolls defend, attack, stir controversy, insult, or harass their targets. Another way to simulate authenticity is to have content published by third parties in exchange for money (content farms, purchase of messages, of influence over an account, of an account or a page, or recruitment of “influencers”).

Since 2019, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube no longer refrain from identifying coordinated campaigns originating in China. Hence, tens of thousands of fake accounts have been suspended: some had long been “dormant,” others had been bought or stolen, most of them amplifying Chinese propaganda and attacking the United States (in Chinese and in English). Some accounts have profile pictures generated by artificial intelligence – a now regularly-observed practice in Chinese operations on social networks. Additionally, an important aspect of these campaigns is that they do not simply defend China: the promotion of the Chinese model goes hand in hand with the debasement of other models, especially liberal democracies, as Russian influence operations have done for years. The PLA is at the heart of these maneuvers, using social networks to conduct “open” influence operations and circulating propaganda on the one hand, often aiming at deterrence and psychological warfare; and to conduct clandestine and hostile operations against foreign targets on the other hand.

- **Other levers:** Beijing also uses citizen movements in its influence operations – especially separatist (New Caledonia, Okinawa) and pacifist groups (No Cold War) – Chinese tourists, influencers (including Western YouTubers), and foreign academics, as well as hostages, since Beijing has deployed a “hostage diplomacy.”

**4. The case studies** are introduced in concentric circles. Taiwan and Hong Kong constitute the first front in Beijing’s “political warfare”: they are outposts, training grounds, “R&D labs” for Chinese operations which are subsequently refined and applied to other targets worldwide – not unlike what Georgia and Ukraine meant for Russian operations. A first widening of the circle of Chinese operations targeted Australia and New Zealand. A second step was to aim for the rest of the world, particularly – but not exclusively – Europe and North America. This part introduces four cases – Taiwan, Singapore, Sweden, and Canada – and two operations, which targeted Hong Kong protestors in 2019 and framed the Covid-19 as an American creation in 2020.

Finally, **the conclusion** comes back to this notion of a “Machiavellian moment” in two steps. First, to confirm that there has indeed been a “Russification” of Chinese influence operations since about 2017: the parallel had already been made in 2018 during the Taiwanese municipal elections, and later during the 2019 Hong Kong crisis; but the world only became aware of the problem in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic. The three components of this Russification are then laid out: Beijing draws inspiration from Moscow on several levels (the existing Chinese military literature acknowledges that, for the PLA, Russia is a model to emulate on such operations). Yet, differences obviously remain between the two, and there is also a certain degree of cooperation.

Last but not least, the conclusion seeks to assess the effectiveness of this new Chinese posture and concludes that, if it brought certain tactical successes, it has been a strategic failure overall, China being its own worst enemy in terms of influence. The abrupt degradation of Beijing’s reputation since the arrival of Xi Jinping, particularly in the last couple of years, confronts China with a growing unpopularity problem that may indirectly come to weaken the Party, including vis-à-vis its own population.

## INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the best China watchers, particularly those based in the outposts that are Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as the intelligence services of a certain number of Western countries, have warned of the **CCP's hegemonic and revisionist ambitions**.<sup>1</sup> Their warnings were not taken seriously by most decision-makers, who held a naïve belief in the Chinese “peaceful rise” theory and were overconfident about the superiority of the democratic model. As the CCP opened itself to the world, and with its greater economic integration, people thought it would “normalize” itself, i.e. liberalize itself politically. Those who did not believe in this evolution were generally too consumed by the Russian threat or terrorism to pay attention to China.

Therefore, taking advantage of the spirit of engagement that emanated from the rest of the world, **the CCP was able to consolidate its global influence, in almost total peace and quiet**, by investing widely and massively, creating economic dependencies, developing trade partnerships as well as cultural relations, in each country via an extraordinarily dense network of local Chinese associations and stakes in a growing number of international organizations, media outlets, and so on. Today, faced with the depth and density of this network across all regions and sectors, many have come to understand that **globalization has not liberalized the Chinese regime: it has impressively developed the Chinese economy and its power incidentally, without weakening the Party**. As one of us wrote elsewhere, “the notion according to which China would soften with the development of economic exchange was an illusion. It has in fact become more aggressive.”<sup>2</sup>

**First came a phase of increased self-confidence or assertiveness following the 2008 economic crisis**, from which Beijing profited to consolidate its power. **A second followed with the rise to power of Xi Jinping in 2012**. With him, the CCP's control over the Chinese society has considerably increased in all its dimensions, putting an end to the subtle efforts at manufacturing consent put in place under Jiang Zemin and, especially, Hu Jintao. On the international scene, Xi has also reinforced the Party's historic tendency to see its interlocutors through the dichotomous division between “friends” (those who support the Party's interests) and “enemies” (those who are the least bit critical).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, he went on with an accelerated militarization of the country and adopted a more aggressive posture.<sup>4</sup> Finally, since the adoption of the 2017 national intelligence law, both citizens and Chinese public companies have been required to cooperate with Chinese intelligence ser-

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1. Revisionism because the CCP aims at reconfiguring the international system according to its own norms, values, and institutions (→ p. 148).

2. Paul Charon, cited in: Vincent Nouzille, “La grande offensive des espions chinois” (“The Great Offensive of Chinese Spies”), *Le Figaro Magazine* (7 Jul. 2020), 32.

3. Schrader, *Friends and Enemies*, 1.

4. *NIDS China Security Report 2021, China's Military Strategy in the New Era*, NIDS (Tokyo, 2020).

vices. This obligation further blurs the line between public and private spaces in the life of overseas citizens and companies. Any citizen or company can be forced to become a CCP agent, in other words at the very least an informer and sometimes a spy.

**Since 2017, approximately, we have witnessed a third phase that has accelerated with the 2019 Hong Kong crisis and the 2020 pandemic.** Andrew Small and Shruva Jaishankar list four possible theories to explain this last transformation:<sup>5</sup> (1) the opportunistic assertiveness theory (Beijing takes advantage of political and economic problems in the rest of the world, and in the West in particular, to advance its interests – in this respect Beijing is convinced that democracies will inevitably decay, that this process has already begun and accelerated with the pandemic: the Party-State is thus encouraged to seize this opportune moment [*kairos*]) – this is also the thesis brilliantly supported by Rush Doshi<sup>6</sup>: China would face a period of strategic opportunity revealed by the internal difficulties of the West (Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, or the West’s inability to manage the health crisis in particular); (2) the imperious assertiveness or *hybris* theory (“China’s leaders have internalized their own success to an inordinate degree. They genuinely believe that China now offers a viable alternative to the United States as a global power and that any criticism is unjustified or hypocritical.”<sup>7</sup> Rivalry is accepted and taken on. This excessive confidence is at once unfounded, as China has numerous weaknesses, and dangerous, as it could further encourage an aggressive posture); (3) the “reactive assertiveness”<sup>8</sup> theory (the Chinese behavior is here explained as an “escalatory response to the immediate economic, reputational, security, and political challenges China faces through the pandemic and its aftermath”<sup>9</sup>); and (4) the insecure assertiveness theory (the Chinese behavior would then be explained by the leadership’s fear that China is entering “an extended period of vulnerability:” Beijing’s actions thus reveal not “a sense of strength, but of weakness.”<sup>10</sup>) These theories are not mutually exclusive, and a combination of explanations is possible and even probable. This is why Peter Martin is right to speak of the “mixture of self-declared confidence and jumpy insecurity manifested by the current leadership” of the Party-State.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the right explanation(s) may be, **Beijing has demonstrated a growing aggressiveness in recent years**, first in its regional environment (Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines and to a lesser extent Malaysia and Japan), but also in the rest of the world (North America and Europe first and foremost). This behavior, which breaks with the “non-intervention” tradition of the Chinese foreign policy, is sometimes called “**sharp power.**” While “soft power” is “the ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion,” according to Joseph Nye’s definition,<sup>12</sup> “sharp power” is **the use of “subversion, bullying, and pressure, which combine to promote self-censorship.”**<sup>13</sup> The term is not new but was popularized by a report from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which, in December 2017, applied it to the Chinese and Russian postures. “Sharp power,” as explained by its authors, does not seek to attract (unlike soft power)

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5. Andrew Small and Dhruva Jaishankar, “For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns: Explaining China’s New Assertiveness,” *War on the Rocks* (20 Jul. 2020).

6. Rush Doshi, *The Long Game. China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (London: Oxford University Press, 2021).

7. Small and Jaishankar, “For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns.”

8. Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, “China Takes the Gloves Off,” International Crisis Group, Op-ed Asia (25 Jul. 2012).

9. Small and Jaishankar, “For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns.”

10. Ibid.

11. Peter Martin, *China’s Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 229.

12. Joseph S. Nye, “China’s Soft and Sharp Power,” *Project Syndicate* (4 Jan. 2018).

13. “What to do About China’s ‘Sharp Power,’” *The Economist* (14 Dec. 2017).

but to “pierce, penetrate, or perforate the information and political environments in the targeted countries.”<sup>14</sup> The term is fashionable but debatable (is sharp power ultimately nothing more than “a type of hard power,” as Joseph Nye believes?).<sup>15</sup> Like J. Michael Cole therefore, we prefer to speak of “political warfare” or “**influence operations**.”<sup>16</sup>

The goal of these operations is, on one hand, to **prevent any negative discussion of the CCP**, by anticipating and controlling all the narratives on the “five poisons” (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong, “pro-democracy activists,” “Taiwanese separatists”) and any criticism of the Party generally; on the other hand, they mean to **generate a positive narrative** about the prosperity, strength, and peaceful rise of China. This is directed at **several targets**: first at overseas Chinese citizens (students, researchers, businessmen, etc.) who will return home or travel back and forth, thus potentially importing corrupting (democratic and liberal) ideas into China; then, at those presented as forming a Chinese overseas “community,” “sons and daughters of China,” who are foreigners of Chinese ancestry in the broadest sense, whatever their current citizenship or the number of generations since their closest ancestor born in China (ethno-nationalism); finally, at the rest of the world, i.e. national public opinions, primarily in the countries that matter for Beijing, and for various reasons. In any case, outward influence has first and foremost domestic motivations: the CCP’s top priority is to stay in power and perpetuate the regime. But this cannot *ipso facto* mean that China does not, at the same time, have global ambitions or a grand strategy, as a careful study of the Party’s output reveals (→ p. 148).<sup>17</sup>

The question of Chinese influence, in the world in general or in a country in particular, has in recent years sparked **an exponential number of publications**, an overview of which can be found in the more than 3,000 footnotes in the present volume. The “literature” on Chinese influence covers the whole spectrum of publications, from scientific articles and press articles to books and (numerous) reports from think tanks and research centers of which several, like the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in Canberra, have developed a real expertise and a regular production on the subject in recent years.<sup>18</sup> Despite this extraordinary abundance, the greater part of which is written in English and focuses on several cases – such as Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States and Canada – **our knowledge of these complex operations, carried out by an intricate web of actors, remains fragmented**. Like Antoine Bondaz, we feel that “a better understanding of the mechanisms of the Chinese influence abroad, and more specifically in Europe and France, is crucial.”<sup>19</sup>

In analyzing these activities, **the line between influence (which is legitimate) and interference (which is illegitimate) is thin and blurred**. “As with many things involving China, there is a continuum, running from what is acceptable to not acceptable,” noted David Mulroney, former Canadian ambassador to China.<sup>20</sup> Thus, drawing red lines has been

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14. National Endowment for Democracy, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (2017), 6. See also: Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, “The Meaning of Sharp Power: How Authoritarian States Project Influence,” *Foreign Affairs* (16 Nov. 2017); Christopher Walker, “What Is ‘Sharp Power?’” *Journal of Democracy*, 29:3 (2018), 9-23.

15. Joseph S. Nye, “How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power,” *Foreign Affairs* (24 Jan. 2018).

16. J. Michael Cole, “A Conversation About China’s Sharp Power and Taiwan,” Brookings Institution (11 Sep. 2018), 12.

17. Doshi, *The Long Game*.

18. Among the most comprehensive books recently published on the subject, see: Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand*; Hsu Szu-Chien and J. Michael Cole, eds., *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester: Eastbridge, 2020).

19. Antoine Bondaz, “‘Faire entendre la voix de la Chine’: les recommandations des experts chinois pour atténuer la perception d’une menace chinoise” (“‘Make China’s Voice Heard’: The Recommendations of Chinese Experts to Lessen the Perception of a Chinese Threat”), *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 115/3 (2019), 106.

20. Gerry Shih and Emily Rauhala, “Angry Over Campus Speech by Uyghur Activist, Chinese Students in Canada Contact their Consulate, Film Presentation,” *The Washington Post* (14 Feb. 2019).



one of the major issues for states. Following former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, a red line could be drawn by “foreign influence activities that are in any way covert, coercive or corrupt.”<sup>21</sup> This then includes deceptive conducts and activities that corrupt “political processes, media markets, public debate and academic freedom, for example, by using improper inducements falling short of criminal bribery.”<sup>22</sup> Because any attempt at a definition is inevitably open to criticisms, a more pragmatic way to understand where the line between acceptable influence and unacceptable interference lies is, as Charles Parton suggested, approaching it in terms of its reciprocity: would similar actions be tolerated by the CCP in China?<sup>23</sup> Obviously, the comparison has its limits, as a liberal democracy does not behave the way an authoritarian regime does. Ultimately, it is up to each country to draw the boundaries of acceptable behavior according to its interests and values.

Be that as it may, **this report covers the entire influence spectrum, from benign influence (public diplomacy) to malign influence, that is, interference** (“clandestine, coercive, and corrupt” activities<sup>24</sup>). Preparing this report, we conducted numerous interviews during travels to Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan (November 2018), Kenya (January 2019), Japan (March 2019), Vietnam (April 2019), Canada and the United States (April-May 2019), Singapore (April, August, and November 2019), Taiwan (April 2019 and January 2020), South Korea (April and June 2019), Mongolia (June 2019), Australia (August 2019), the Czech Republic (November 2019), Denmark (January-February 2020), Sweden (February 2020), Germany (March 2020) and the United Kingdom (March 2020). We also drew from the available scientific literature in several languages and used open source intelligence (OSINT) resources.

This report proceeds in **four parts: concepts, actors, actions, and case studies**. Without of course claiming to be exhaustive, particularly for the actions and cases presented here (they ultimately only illustrate what Beijing is capable of), this report aims nevertheless to lay out **a relatively comprehensive overview of Chinese influence operations across the globe** – avoiding as much as possible the problem of biting off more than one can chew. It thus goes in-depth on certain subjects, and a few investigations, notably those on the Base 311 (→ p. 89), the LJC’s influence operations (→ p. 74), the ecosystem of think tanks and publishers relaying the Party’s influence in France (→ p. 314), and on Larry Romanoff (→ p. 603), are, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive, in any language.

The reader might be surprised not to find in this volume a chapter dedicated to France, since the authors are French and the fourth part contains case studies on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sweden and Canada. France is not absent from the following pages, which contain many French examples, but we did not want to gather them in a separate chapter for several reasons. First, because we have tried, as far as possible, to adopt a “view from nowhere”<sup>25</sup>: we did not conceive this work as a French report aimed at a French audience, and therefore focused on the French case, but as a study of Chinese influence operations – its concepts, its actors, its operating modes – throughout the world. Secondly, because it seems to us that France has not been a priority target of Chinese influence until now, at least compared to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom or even Sweden, which are cases with certain specificities. Finally, because, for a long time, France

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21. Malcolm Turnbull, “Speech Introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017,” Parliament of Australia (7 Dec. 2007).

22. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper (Feb. 2019), 3.

23. Ibid.

24. Turnbull, *Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment*.

25. Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986).

was seen as a “soft” target, on which it was sufficient to exert economic pressure to obtain the desired effects. It was therefore not necessary to mount clandestine and complex influence operations. For some years now, however, France has been putting up resistance: this is the “French awakening” described in the conclusion (→ p. 640). As the environment becomes less permissive for Beijing, one can therefore expect its operations to become more aggressive in the future. Hence the usefulness of this report in the French context.

**That said, our approach is descriptive, not normative:** the goal of this report is to describe, understand, and analyze Chinese influence operations as precisely as possible. Of course, there is, implicitly, a normative dimension, in the sense that this description contributes to a growing understanding of the risks these practices pose to civil liberties, human rights, and national sovereignty worldwide.<sup>26</sup> That being said, we do not address “what should be done”: **this report contains no recommendations. It is left to others to draw the necessary political consequences**, which are evidently not the same for everyone.

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26. Normativity is everywhere because all approaches have “a point of view, a perspective, even when they do not recognize it.” The question is to know to what extent it is assumed (Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, *Théories des relations internationales (Theories of International Relations)*, Que sais-je ?, 2020, 15-16).





First Part

# CONCEPTS



Resorting to influence operations is not new for the Chinese regime; scholars have highlighted the existence of a particularly active policy of internal and external propaganda since the formation of red bases at the end of the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> **Chinese influence operations are partly inspired by the Soviet experience, and they draw on two major doctrinal sources: first, the United Front (统一战线), which originated with the Party itself and feeds now its entire machinery of power; and then, the “Three Warfares” doctrine (三种战法), more recent and more restrictively used.** The doctrine was devised by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) but it has been used well beyond the military realm. Here, the PLA takes on its traditional role as the Party’s influence multiplier, for instance. Beyond these frameworks, the actors of Chinese influence operations have created numerous concepts tied to their influence strategies, and the most important of them are succinctly laid out in this first part. After briefly introducing the relevant concepts (United Front, Three Warfares, cognitive operations, discursive power, political warfare and active measures), we elaborate on the two principal theoretical sources of Chinese influence operations, the United Front and the Three Warfares.

The reader may be surprised not to find in the following pages familiar references that are commonly used to describe the Chinese strategy. If Chinese theorists sometimes call on classic authors, Sun Zi above all, they do so essentially to give credibility and a historical foundation to their work. But their debt to this heritage should be nuanced. This report also does not make use of the famous book by the Chinese generals Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999),<sup>2</sup> which is unrepresentative despite being frequently highlighted as an indispensable reference to understanding contemporary Chinese strategic thinking. As Peter Mattis noted, “[one] of the first clues about whether someone is a credible analyst of the PLA comes from their preferred source for Chinese military thinking and strategy. An analysis that places *Unrestricted Warfare* above (or perhaps does not even reference) *The Science of Military Strategy* (the reference manual at the Academy of Military Science)<sup>3</sup> offers little insight into how the Chinese military came to develop a strategy to wage war and protect China’s national interests.”<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, the concept of the “information warfare” or “informational warfare,” central to other strategic traditions, including in the United States (*information warfare*) and Russia (информационная война), are not used as such in this report since it takes broader conno-

1. Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao’s China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship* (Lanham: Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

2. 乔良 (Qiao Liang) and 王湘穗 (Wang Xiangsui), *超限战 (Unrestricted Warfare)* (Beijing: People’s Liberation Army Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999).

3. 寿晓松 (Shou Xiaosong), ed., *战略学 (The Science of Military Strategy)*, 军事科学出版社 (Academy of Military Science Press) (2013), <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/sms-2013.pdf>.

4. Peter Mattis, “So You Want to be a PLA Expert?” *War on the Rocks* (19 Nov. 2019).

tations in the Chinese context. Indeed, the field of informational warfare (信息战) includes not only psychological warfare (→ p. 49) and political warfare (→ p. 33), but also, and above all, electronic warfare, which undoubtedly constitutes its essential component. As the authors of *The Science of Military Strategy* maintained, informational warfare aims first at “carrying out electronic attacks on networks, high-intensity informational attacks, jamming and damaging the adversary’s operating systems to render it incapable of seeing and hearing clearly and unable to log in, all in order to create the conditions for future strikes.”<sup>5</sup> In this report, we instead adopted the notion of “information manipulation” (→ p. 362), at once narrower since limited to informational operations strictly speaking (excluding electronic warfare and cyber operations), and more extensive since not limited to actions put in place by the PLA.

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5. 寿晓松 (Shou Xiaosong), ed., 战略学 (*The Science of Military Strategy*).

## Chapter 1

# THE VOCABULARY OF CHINESE INFLUENCE

## I. The United Front

The term United Front commonly refers, first, to the alliance forged by the communists and the nationalists when they fought their common Japanese enemy during the Second World War. But the United Front is in fact limited neither to this coalition nor to those subsequently formed with non-communist forces to overthrow the government and bring about the revolution. In fact, the United Front has endured from the revolution to this day, and it now entails above all “**mobilizing the Party’s friends to strike its enemies.**”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, it is a matter of **shaping the forces outside of the Party to ensure its durability.** Originally formulated by Lenin in his essay “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), in which he criticized the communists who refused to take advantage of the platform offered by the democratic life in parliamentary regimes in the name of ideological purity, the United Front is one of the “three magic weapons” (法宝) theorized by Mao Zedong in 1938<sup>2</sup> – the other two being armed struggles and the construction of the Party. These strategies are not the sole responsibility of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) but are deployed throughout the entire Party apparatus, as all its arms are tasked with implementing this policy (→ p. 35).

## II. The “Three Warfares”

The “Three Warfares” doctrine was formulated in 2003. It encompasses **psychological warfare** (心理战), **public opinion warfare** (舆论战), and **legal warfare** (法律战). These three dimensions – which respectively aim at influencing the adversary’s decisions, shaping its public opinion, and forging a normative environment favorable to China – should not be understood as a Chinese version of the “hybrid warfare,” but as **an extension of the actions of the Party.** The People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which is the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) more than a national army, is primarily tasked with ensuring the longevity of the regime by augmenting the CCP’s political power. The “Three Warfares” should be interpreted within this framework (→ p. 45).

1. Peter Mattis, “China’s Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control,” *Hearing before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence* (Washington, 16 May 2019).

2. 毛泽东 (Mao Zedong), “共产党人” (“Communists”), 毛泽东选集 (*Anthology of the Works of Mao Zedong*) (Oct. 1938).

## A. Public opinion warfare

An article published in 2004 in the *PLA Daily*, the PLA's English newspaper, defined public opinion warfare (→ p. 48) as “the integrated use of newspapers, radios, televisions, the Internet, and other news media” in a “planned and targeted manner to encourage the drive to fight in its own camp and to make the will to fight in the enemy's collapse, driving the international public opinion at the same time.”<sup>3</sup> In 2011, the Chinese *Dictionary of Military Terminology* explained that the notion consists in “creating a public opinion environment favorable to political initiative and military victory (through) the use of diverse media and informational resources to combat the enemy.”<sup>4</sup> The Chinese generally translate “public opinion warfare” (舆论战) as the “war of consensus.”

The PLA also takes a great interest in methods shaping online public opinion. Two different terms are used to refer to the general idea of public opinion, 舆情 (*yuqing*) and 舆论 (*yulun*), which we have translated as “public emotion” and “public opinion” respectively. According to Li Changzu (李昌祖), of the Department of Propaganda at Zhejiang University of Technology, and to his colleague Xu Tianlei (许天雷),<sup>5</sup> the first term refers to the subjective interpretation of certain social realities while the second stresses the socio-political attitudes generated by social interactions. Public emotion can thus be individual whereas public opinion is the collective majority opinion; public emotion can be implicit in nature while public opinion is explicit; similarly, a public emotion does not necessarily become the public opinion and the latter is not always based on public emotion; finally, control over public feelings is an important part of the work to orientate public opinion. In this context, **the PLA is interested in tactics that allow the manipulation of opinions and emotions.**

## B. Psychological warfare

According to the 2011 *Dictionary of Military Terminology*, psychological warfare (→ p. 49) consists above all in “**using specific information and media [for] combat actions that affect the psychology and behavior of the target audience.**”<sup>6</sup> It comprises several aspects including **dissuasion** (“to encourage a potential adversary to be cautious about joining a war or, ideally, to be opposed to fighting in a particular war”) and **deception** (“to develop false information to ‘draw the enemy's attention’ and thereby adversely impact his decision-making”).<sup>7</sup>

3. 王林 (Wang Lin), 王贵滨 (Wang Guibin), “舆论战与心理战辨析” (“An Analysis of Public Opinion Warfare and Psychological Warfare”), 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*) (8 Jun. 2004).

4. 全军军事术语管理委员会 (Military Terminology Management Committee), 中国人民解放军军语 (*Military Terminology of the People's Liberation Army*), 北京: 军事科学出版社 (Beijing, Military Sciences Publishing House, 2011).

5. 李昌祖 (Li Changzu), 许天雷 (Xu Tianlei), “舆论与舆情的关系辨析” (“Analysis of the Connections Between Public Feeling and Public Opinion”), 浙江工业大学学报 (*Zhejiang University of Technology Review*), 8/4 (2009), 393-398.

6. 全军军事术语管理委员会 (Military Terminology Management Committee), 中国人民解放军军语 (*Military Terminology of the People's Liberation Army*).

7. Jeffrey Engstrom, *Systems Confrontation and System Destruction Warfare: How the Chinese People's Liberation Army Seeks to Wage Modern Warfare* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2018), 71-72.

## C. Legal warfare

The Chinese legal warfare (→ p. 51), which echoes Western debates on lawfare,<sup>8</sup> refers to a **strategic use of the law**. It is one of the tools of a non-kinetic war that offers influence over an actor's behavior to strategic ends. As with the two other components of the "Three Warfares," successful legal warfare **limits the others' freedom of action while it increases that of China**. It provides a basis to entrench the legitimacy of Chinese demands. As such, it is less a legal "war" than a rhetorical confrontation. The goal is to **show that the law is on one's side**, whatever the (international or national) law may actually state – even if this means instrumentalizing courts for political ends. The military is indeed encouraged to identify and exploit the legal provisions favoring Chinese interests as much as possible, to ignore those that run counter to them, and hence to support a favorable interpretation of international law, even if it differs from the accepted interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

## III. "Cognitive domain operations"

Combat in the cognitive domain (认知领域作战) is one of the concepts recently developed by the PLA. The goal of these operations is to constitute "a power to control the mind" (制脑权) or, in other words "using psychological warfare to **shape or even control the enemy's cognitive thinking and decision-making**."<sup>10</sup> These concepts (cognitive domain operations and mind-control power) appeared in 2012,<sup>11</sup> and the second was theorized in a book published in January 2014,<sup>12</sup> co-authored by Professor Zeng Huafeng (曾华锋), the dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学). Zeng defined mind control power as "using spiritual/psychological information disseminated by propaganda outlets, national language, cultural products, etc., as a tool to infiltrate, influence and even steer the nation's public and its elites' knowledge, emotion, and consciousness. The goal is to **manipulate a country's values, national spirit/ethos, ideologies, cultural traditions, historical beliefs, etc. to encourage them to abandon their theoretical understanding, social system, and development path** and hence to achieve strategic objectives without fighting."<sup>13</sup> Activities in these areas are **closely tied to the progress made in artificial intelligence**.

8. There is no unanimous definition of the concept of lawfare yet. For a discussion of the concept, see, for instance: Charles J. Dunlap, "Law and Military Interventions: Preserving Humanitarian Values in 21<sup>st</sup> Conflicts" (Humanitarian Challenges in Military Intervention Conference, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2001); Orde F. Kittrie, *Lawfare: Law as a Weapon of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 43:1 (2010).

9. 赵培英 (Zhao Peiyang), 当代军人国际法基础 (*The Foundations of International Law for Use by the Commons Soldier*), 解放军出版社 (PLA Publications) (1996), cited in Kittrie, *Lawfare: Law as a Weapon of War*, 165.

10. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military's Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 10.

11. 心战之巅的光芒: 现代战争中的认知域作战研究 (*The Light at the Summit of Psychological Warfare: A Study of Cognitive Domain Operations in Modern Warfare*), 白山出版社 (Shenyang, Baishan Press) (2012).

12. 曾华锋 (Zeng Huafeng) and 石海明 (Shi Haiming), 制脑权: 全球媒体时代的战争法则与国家安全战略 (*Mind Control Power: The Laws of War and National Security Strategy in the Era of Global Media*), 军事科学院出版社 (Academy of Military Science Press) (2014).

13. 黄昆仑 (Huang Kunlun), "夺取未来战争 制脑权" ("Seizing Mind Superiority in Future Wars"), 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*) (16 Jun. 2014).



## IV. Discursive power

The notion of discursive power (话语权) appeared in China at the end of the 2000s.<sup>14</sup> It was meant to replace the notion of soft power (软实力) which had generated sustained debates following the translation of Joseph Nye's work at the beginning of the 2000s. The emergence of this discursive ambition for the Party in fact reflects the **failure – or at least the shortfalls – of the policy of building a Chinese soft power. This failure was attributed not to the Party's miscalculations but to the discursive domination of the great Western powers.** Zhang Zhizhou (张志洲), in an article published on the website of the Chinese government's Information Office,<sup>15</sup> evoked the **influence of the ideas of Michel Foucault** in the emergence of the concept. Foucault is one of the best-known French philosophers in China, even if the understanding of his thinking remains often “superficial and mundane.”<sup>16</sup> The notion of discursive power developed by Chinese intellectuals and the Party seems in this way to draw its inspiration from Michel Foucault's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France entitled *L'Ordre du discours* (*The Order of Discourse*). In it, Foucault notably defended the idea that access to the discursive space is always conditioned and that **“speech does not simply translate the struggles and systems of domination, but that it is what for which, by which we struggle – the power that we seek to seize.”**<sup>17</sup> To seize a voice is to seize power, and to seize power is to exclude the others' voice. This is how the Party represents itself on the international stage: incapable of asserting its interests for lack of a sufficiently audible voice.

In this context, the Party hopes to **develop its capacity to influence the formulation of norms, the construction of values, governance structures, and so on. In other words, for want of an ability to seduce the world, the Party seeks to dominate it by imposing its voice and its narratives.** The notion of discursive power, omnipresent in the diplomatic and cultural fields, has also been used in the military domain. For the PLA, discursive power is based on the ability to shape information, beliefs, and minds (信息—信仰—心智) in peacetime as well as in wartime, which includes times of emergencies.<sup>18</sup> Considerations on the discursive power in the military realm are thus partly linked to the “Three Warfares” doctrine.<sup>19</sup>

14. Emmanuel Dubois de Prisque and Jean-Yves Heurtebise, “L'ordre néo-maoïste du discours (analyse d'un usage récent de Foucault en Chine)” (“The Neo-Maoist Order of Discourse (Analysis of a Recent Use of Foucault in China)”), *Monde chinois*, 60:4 (2019), 83-101.

15. 张志洲 (Zhang Zhizhou), “国际话语权建设中几大基础性理论问题” (“Several Fundamental Theoretical Questions in the Construction of International Discursive Power”), 国务院新闻办公室 (*State Council Information Office*) (17 Feb. 2017), <https://archive.vn/Ll5Tv>.

16. Jean-Louis Rocca, *Foucault en Chine. Les enseignements du “séminaire itinérant Michel Foucault”* (*Foucault in China: Teachings from the “Itinerant Seminar on Michel Foucault”*), Franco-Chinese Doctoral Workshop in Human and Social Sciences, University of Tsinghua (2006).

17. Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (*The Order of Discourse*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

18. 寿晓松 (Shou Xiaosong), ed., *战略学* (*The Science of Military Strategy*), 军事科学出版社 (Academy of Military Science Press) (2013), <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/sms-2013.pdf>.

19. Elsa B. Kania, “The Right to Speak: Discourse and Chinese Power,” Center for Advanced China Research (27 Nov. 2018).



## V. Political warfare

In their publication on the PLA-led political warfare (政治战), Mark Stokes and Russel Hsiao defined the concept more precisely as fall the methods used to influence emotions, motivations, objective reasoning, and the behavior of the governments, organizations, groups, and individuals of a target country in a way that is favorable to the acting country's own political and military goals.<sup>20</sup> This echoes the definition given by George Kennan in his famous 1948 telegram: broadly speaking, to “**the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives**”.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. Active measures

Although the notion of “active measures” comes not from China but from the Soviet Union, it is useful and it adequately complements the previous concepts in order to understand the repertoire of actions of the Chinese actors.

Active measures (*активные Мероприятия*) are “the heart and soul of Soviet intelligence,” in the words of the former KGB general Oleg Kalugin.<sup>22</sup> They were defined by Vasili Mitrokhin, a former senior KGB archivist, as “operational measures aimed at exerting useful influence on aspects of the political life of a target country which are of interest, its foreign policy, the solution of international problems, misleading the adversary, undermining and weakening his positions, the disruption of his hostile plans, and the achievement of other aims.”<sup>23</sup> The *Dictionary of Counterintelligence* used by the Higher School of the KGB and published in 1972 referenced “acts of counterintelligence making it possible to **penetrate the intentions of the enemy, allowing his unwanted steps to be anticipated, to lead the enemy into error, to take the initiative from him, to thwart his actions of sabotage**.”<sup>24</sup> In the Soviet terminology, active measures were influence operations manufactured and carried out by the KGB and in particular by Service A of the First Chief Directorate (forbearer of the SVR).<sup>25</sup> They were carried out abroad to create a favorable environment for the USSR. For that reason, the classification of these operations as counterintelligence may have been surprising but active measures were not conflated with defensive measures: rather, they were operations that fell in the oxymoronic category of **offensive defensive measures**. Active measures were largely incorporated within the USSR's foreign policy apparatus where they constituted a mode of action seen as both regular and legitimate,<sup>26</sup> unlike in the United States and other Western countries where clandestine actions were perceived as falling outside of ordinary law and were incidentally thought of as exceptions.

20. Mark Stokes and Russel Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute* (2013), 3.

21. “George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare,” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Woodrow Wilson Center: Digital Archive International History Declassified (30 Apr. 1948), <http://bit.ly/GKennan1948>.

22. David V. Gioe, Richard Lovering, and Tyler Pachesy, “The Soviet Legacy of Russian Active Measures: New Vodka from Old Stills?” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 33:3 (2020), 3.

23. Vasili Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officers Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2002).

24. Cited in: Jolanta Darczewska and Piotr Zochowski, “Active Measures. Russia's Key Export,” *Point of View*, 64 (Jun. 2017).

25. Christopher Andrew and Vassili Mitrokhine, *Le KGB contre l'Ouest 1917-1991 (KGB Against the West 1917-1991)* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 334-335.

26. Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia, The strategy of Soviet disinformation* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986).

Active measures constituted a vast – and variable, according to the authors – repertoire of influence tools in the Party’s hands. **Among them, we found disinformation, counterfeiting, sabotage, discredit operations** against people or organizations, the **destabilization** of foreign governments (via the organization of protests for instance), **provocation, false-flag operations and manipulations aimed at weakening the social cohesion of the target, the recruitment of “useful idiots”** often employed to spread narratives created by the KGB and the **creation of façade structures (front organizations)**, officially independent but that operated to the KGB and USSR’s advantage. Some experts also included **assassinations and terrorist actions**.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the means, the goal was always to influence the policies pursued by a foreign actor.

Certain scholars and experts have revisited the notion of active measures since the conflict in Ukraine to describe influence operations carried out by Russian intelligence agencies (GRU, SVR, FSB) in the post-Soviet era. The notion is rarely used in the Chinese case however, but Chinese actors seem to have drawn from the repertoire of tools created by the KGB to carry out their influence operations, as we will see with the case of the operation we named “Infektion 2.0.,” which framed the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic as American (→ p. 589). More generally, it will be featured in our conclusion on the “Russification” of Chinese strategies (→ p. 620).

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27. Numerous examples of this repertoire can be found in: Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

## Chapter 2

# THE UNITED FRONT: THE PARTY'S "MAGIC WEAPON"

The notion of the United Front remains insufficiently understood despite being an invaluable key to understanding the Communist Party's influence operations. The first difficulty undoubtedly comes from the confusion that arises from the ambiguous nature of the expression "United Front." In the words of Emmanuel Jourda, whose doctoral thesis constitutes the most complete work on the subject, the United Front designated a **triple "dispositive of thoughts on society, the organization of the CCP, and the political action."**<sup>1</sup> In turn, Alex Joske differentiated between "[the] **United Front** (统一战线), a coalition of groups and individuals working toward the CCP's goals; **the work of the United Front** (统一战线工作) which refers to the CCP's efforts to strengthen and expand the United Front by influencing and co-opting targets; the **United Front Work Department** (中央统一战线工作部), a CCP Central Committee department that coordinates and carries out the United Front's actions; and the **United Front system** (统一战线系统 or 统一战线工作系统), which brings together the agencies, social organizations, businesses, universities, research institutes and individuals carrying out the United Front's activities."<sup>2</sup> **At once a dedicated body within the Chinese Party-State apparatus and a galaxy of actors orbiting around it, the United Front is not easily understood.**

A further difficulty comes from its **broad spectrum**, whose depth is often underestimated, **ranging from "open" operations** – i.e. public diplomacy undertaken by ambassadors across the world – to **clandestine operations** aiming to "undermine social cohesion, exacerbate racial tension, influence politics, harm media integrity, facilitate espionage, and increase unsupervised technology transfer."<sup>3</sup> While the UFWD is not an intelligence service *per se*, it can nevertheless offer a cover for intelligence officers carrying out clandestine actions and "recruiting" Taiwanese agents.<sup>4</sup> Finally, understanding the United Front implies highlighting the historical trajectory of this central CCP concept.

After a brief overview of the key moments in the construction of the concept of the United Front, we mention the objectives and infrastructures on which its operations rely. Ultimately, we offer a typology of United Front operations.

1. Emmanuel Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires d'un canon orthodoxe: le Front uni et l'invention politique de l'après-révolution en Chine (The Post-Revolutionary Uses of an Orthodox Canon: The United Front and the Political Revolution of the After-Revolution in China)*, PhD Thesis, EHESS, 2012, footnote 3, 6.

2. Alex Joske, "The Party Speaks for You. Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Policy brief*, 32 (2020), 6.

3. *Ibid.*, 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 16.

# I. Concept of Leninist origin

The concept of the United Front in China comes from a graft operated by the Comintern at the beginning of the 1920s. The concept finds its roots in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) in which Marx and Engels considered possible temporary alliances between communists and democratic parties to accelerate the course of history and to take power. **Lenin, however, is considered “the true father of the United Front.”**<sup>5</sup> In his criticism of *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), he hammered home that to achieve the victory of communism, it was sometimes necessary to accept certain compromises, to seize the “slightest possibility of ensuring a numerically strong ally, be it a temporary ally, faltering, conditional, fragile or insecure.”<sup>6</sup> For Lenin, the United Front was a tactical collaboration, considered as an intermediary step before the victory of communism. The Comintern then promoted the use of the concept of temporary alignment, allowing the reconciliation of short-term demands and long-term objectives, in Europe as well as in Asia. **The United Front is thus not a proper Chinese concept.**

In China, it was initially tied to the anti-Japanese alliance with the Kuomintang between 1924 and 1927, and then from 1937 to 1945. The term used in Chinese was first *Lianhe Zhanxian* (聯合戰線), before being replaced by *Tongyi Zhanxian* (統一戰線).<sup>7</sup> In the late 1930s, the Party took ownership of the Leninist concept, modified its theoretical framework and used it as a vector of its drive to take power. From 1938 on, **Mao maintained that the United Front, the building of the Party’s and the armed struggle were the “magic weapons”**<sup>8</sup> (法宝) **that would allow the communists to triumph**, an expression that was picked up by several of his successors (up until Xi Jinping) to benefit from his symbolic aura.

When the People’s Republic of China was declared on October 1, 1949, the United Front became **the tool to rally the majority around the party**. The first United Front national labor conference was held from March to April 1950. And the normative recognition of the United Front landed in 1954, with its integration **in the preamble of the Constitution**. It now states that the “popular democratic United Front” makes itself useful in mobilizing and rallying “the entire population in the common struggle to achieve the fundamental role of the State during the transition,” but also to “**confront internal and external enemies.**”<sup>9</sup> The CCP put in place a strategy found more or less everywhere across the communist world: communist parties collaborate with what Robert Havemann called the “empty acronyms,”<sup>10</sup> namely parties without real positions and literally domesticated by the communist parties. This tactic was particularly developed after the Comintern’s Seventh Congress in 1935 which set building national fronts as a global strategy.<sup>11</sup> Mao’s theory of a new democracy is thus the Chinese implementation of this United Front policy. Once the regime was established, the United Front’s role was no longer to take power but to perpetuate the CCP’s control. To do so, the United Front became at once **the intellectual,**

5. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 17.

6. Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An infantile disorder*, in. *Collected Works*, Volume 31, 17–118, Progress Publishers, USSR, 1964.

7. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 21.

8. 毛泽东 (Mao Zedong), “共产党人” (“Communists”), 毛泽东选集 (*Anthology of the Works of Mao Zedong*) (Oct. 1938).

9. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 46-48.

10. Robert Havemann, *Être communiste en Allemagne de l’Est* (Paris: La Découverte, 1979).

11. Mongolia was the first to adopt the label “people’s democracy,” in 1924.

**political, and organic framework to rally needed allies to the CCP while it silenced those it couldn't persuade.**

After the disappearance of the United Front during the Cultural Revolution, the institution was once again identified as a “magic weapon” in 1983. It was reemployed by the Party for its flexibility, its ability to forge ties (in other words, for its “primary function as a cohesive force”<sup>12</sup>), but also to fight against international criticisms following the Tian'anmen events.<sup>13</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> United Front Work National Conference in 1993 marked the return of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as the body supervising the United Front. Created in 1949, it was considered the “United Front structure of the whole Chinese democratic people”<sup>14</sup> before the United Front Work Department gained the upper hand. Bringing together representatives of minority parties and other religious or independent ethnic groups, it has become the symbol of a semblance of political plurality and representativeness. Finally, the United Front accompanies the country's growing international footprint in striving to strengthen links with the Chinese diaspora and to silence opposition to the CCP abroad.

## II. Revival and diversification of the United Front under Xi Jinping

**Since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping has reinvigorated the United Front, with which he was already very familiar:** his father had contributed to its activities in Tibet and Xi wrote an article about its work in the diaspora in 1995, while he was the Party secretary in the city of Fuzhou. The new CCP Secretary worked to reform the United Front after having purged the director of the UFWD, Ling Jihua (令计划) in December 2014, because he had been a close ally to former secretary Hu Jintao (胡锦涛). His goal was to correct what he saw as the shortcomings of the United Front and put it once again at the heart of Party's action. Xi pointed out that the United Front was not sufficiently united, and insisted that its work should be carried out by all Party members.<sup>15</sup>

**In May 2015, the United Front Work National Labor Conference was raised to the rank of central conference,** thereby acknowledging its increased importance. The same year, a steering group of the Central Committee for United Front activities was established, and the first provisional ruling on United Front activities published.<sup>16</sup> **The United Front Work Department saw its number of offices increase** to account for the new targets (→ p. 68). The goal of the reforms was to ensure a better coordination of the activities of the United Front and to reinforce the Party's control on the structures. It also enlarged its perimeter of activities to include the protection of the Party: in his report to the 19<sup>th</sup>

12. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 121.

13. Anne-Marie Brady, “Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities Under Xi Jinping” (Conference paper at “The corrosion of democracy under China's global influence,” sponsored by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Arlington, Virginia, US, 16-17 Sept. 2017).

14. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 43.

15. “统战工作要靠全党共同来做” (“The Work of the United Front Must be Carried Out by the Entire Party”), 天津统一战线 (*Tianjin United Front*) (25 May 2015), <http://archive.vn/akR11>.

16. “习近平主持中央政治局会议 决定设立中央统一战线工作领导小组” (“Xi Jinping Chairs Politburo Meeting and Decides to Establish a Leadership Committee for United Front Work”), *Xinhuanet* (30 Jul. 2015), <http://archive.vn/7KOcs>; “中共中央印发 ‘中国共产党统一战线工作条例(试行)’” (“The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Issued a Provisional Regulations on the Activities of the United Front”), *Government of the People's Republic of China* (22 Sept. 2015), <http://archive.vn/pwh3q>.



Congress, Xi Jinping spoke of **drawing, with the United Front, the widest possible concentric circle around the Party.**<sup>17</sup>

From a rhetorical point of view, the reference to a “magic weapon” was reactivated. Xi Jinping also brought the expression “Great United Front” (大统战) back into fashion, which had initially been promoted by a theoretician from the Central Institute of Socialism in 1993. Its meaning seems, however, to have evolved. According to another theoretician from the Institute, this is the most distinctive characteristic of United Front thinking in the Xi Jinping era:<sup>18</sup> it insists more than ever on the strategic importance of the United Front and on the necessity to improve its coordination.<sup>19</sup> For Gerry Groot, the new “Great United Front” is no longer limited to representing and creating links between different social groups in order to exert control over them, but it is **a method that can go as far as forcing the assimilation into the dominant Han culture, using methods such as mass internment.**<sup>20</sup>

The United Front is therefore **a Communist Party policy devised to develop and reinforce its hegemony.** The activities of the United Front consist in allying with or neutralizing groups situated outside the sphere of CCP control to ensure its role as the sole legitimate representative of the Chinese people. Concretely, this means **eliminating domestic and external enemies, controlling groups that could defy CCP authority, building a coalition around the Party in order to serve its interests, and projecting its influence abroad in such a way that even individuals and groups based in liberal societies are brought to censor themselves and avoid taking a position against the CCP.**<sup>21</sup> The United Front accordingly takes on a considerable part in the influence operations carried out by the Party.

### III. Objectives

The United Front is a policy that essentially “uses the friends of the Party to fight its enemies.” It should be thought of as **a strategy deployed in concentric circles and whose ambition is to bring together the largest possible population.** This is therefore not a Chinese policy but rather a policy of the Party, employed in China as well as overseas. Wherever the Party is threatened, the United Front system is active.

The Party distinguishes **twelve primary targets**, which correspond to the twelve offices of the UFD (→ p. 68): the members of eight minority parties (known as the eight democratic parties); individuals without a party affiliation, intellectuals not linked to the Party, ethnic minorities; religious individuals; private companies; urban professionals; students studying or returning from studies abroad; residents of Hong Kong and Macao; the Taiwanese and

17. “习近平十九大报告全文” (“Speech Delivered by Xi Jinping at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress”), *Jfeng* (27 Oct. 2017), <https://archive.vn/yTzEg>.

18. “冯海波:十八大以来统一战线理论的丰富和发展” (“Feng Haibo: Enrichment and Development of the Theory of the United Front by Xi Jinping Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress”), 光明思想理论网 (*Guangming*) (8 Oct. 2017), <http://archive.vn/6faQG>.

19. 李仁质 (Li Renzhi), “关于‘大统战’的几点思考” (“Several Elements to Analyze the Great United Front Concept”), 中共社会主义学院 (*Central Socialism Institute*) (8 May 2017), <http://archive.vn/y0uh7>. “从2015统战工作会议看‘大统战’思维的升级” (“An Analysis of the Promotion of the Great United Front Concept since the 2015 Central Conference of United Front Work”), 中国农工民主党 (*Website of the Democratic Party of the Peasants and Workers of China*) (24 Sept. 2015), <http://archive.vn/1Gvkg>.

20. Gerry Groot, “The CCP’s Grand United Front abroad,” *Sinopsis*, (24 Sept. 2019), 2.

21. See also: Gerry Groot, “United Front Work after the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, 17:17 (22 Dec. 2017); Peter Mattis and Alex Joske, “The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China’s United Front,” *War on the Rocks* (24 Jun. 2019).

their relatives in mainland China; individuals of Chinese ancestry throughout the world (diasporas) and their relatives in mainland China; and all the other individuals requiring “unity and connection.”<sup>22</sup> This list illustrates **the continuity between domestic spaces and the rest of the world: the only meaningful distinction for a United Front that operates everywhere, inside and outside of the country, is between the Party and the rest.** The goal is to control this dozen priority targets, to prevent them from doing harm on the one hand and, on the other, to incite or force them to act as representatives of the Party.

In this respect, the goals of the United Front should also be understood in light of the 2015 National Security Law (中华人民共和国国家安全法).<sup>23</sup> As Peter Mattis rightly noted,<sup>24</sup> Article 2 of the law defines **security as the absence of domestic or external threat** (没有危险和不受内外威胁的状态), which legitimates preventative actions to reduce any threat. The law furthermore adopts a particularly extensive definition of national security – much broader than the 1993 version of the law which mostly focused on protection against espionage. **This law also includes culture since the Party fears “cultural infiltration”** (文化渗透),<sup>25</sup> in other words the penetration into China of Western values that are deemed subversive (rule of law, democracy, liberalism), but also ideas that could weakened the CCP’s legitimacy and monopoly. It is therefore fundamental for the Party to **control the realm of ideas** and, consequently, the narratives that construct China’s image abroad and which shape the environment in which it evolves. In this interpretative framework, it is understood that **the diaspora constitutes a priority target for the Party; Chinese of the diasporas, via their command of local cultural codes, are indeed the most likely to import democratic values into China and thereby to threaten the Party.**<sup>26</sup> Control over these diasporas, and by extension the elimination of all cultural threats, makes the United Front’s missions an absolute priority for the Party. To this end, United Front activities are coordinated by the UFWF but can be carried out by a broad spectrum of actors in the Party, a nexus that can be referred to as the “United Front system.”

#### IV. The infrastructure: A “United Front system”

Actors implementing the work of the United Front can be found wherever the Party exists – from the Central Committee to provincial and municipal offices, youth leagues to unions, diplomats posted overseas to branches of the Xinhua press agency, but also inside the large state-owned companies and numerous universities and research centers.

The **Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)** is the highest supervisory and coordinating body of the United Front system. The UFWF is required to follow its directives. Then, numerous organizations are directly subordinate to, or maintain close ties with, the UFWF. It is not easy to draw up an exhaustive list as these ramifications can be sprawling – and they have been since the creation of the regime: a 1957 CIA report, declassified in 1999, presented an instructive list that revealed the United Front’s capacity

22. “中共中央印发《中国共产党统一战线工作条例(试行)》” (“The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Issued a Provisional Regulations on the Activities of the United Front”).

23. Text available here (in Chinese) at [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-07/01/content\\_2888316.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-07/01/content_2888316.htm).

24. Peter Mattis, “China’s Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control,” Hearing before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Washington (16 May 2019).

25. See: 李士珍 (Li Shizhen), 曹渊清 (Cao Yuanqing), 杨丽君 (Yang Lijun), “警惕西方对我国的文化渗透” (“Beware of Western cultural infiltration”), 红旗文稿 (*Red flag manuscripts*) (May 2018).

26. Ibid.

to penetrate all social spaces.<sup>27</sup> **Organizations supervised by the United Front can be found in all sectors, and first of all in:**<sup>28</sup>

• **The Media:**

The China News Service (中国新闻社), the party's main press agency, which has dozens of bureaus worldwide and organizes, together with foreign outlets, a biennial Forum on the Global Chinese Language Media; the journals *China Religion* (中国宗教), *China Tibet* (中国西藏), and so on.

**The Western Returned Scholars Association**

The **Western Returned Scholars Association** (WRSA), founded in 1913 by Chinese reformist intellectuals, and which name literally means the association of students in Europe and America (欧美同学会)<sup>29</sup> currently brings together 40,000 Chinese students and scholars and it has branches in 15 countries including in France (its headquarters are in Marseille). Its secretary general is a UFWD executive. It is used, for instance, to develop relationships with foreign think tanks and to contribute to recruiting foreign researchers for Chinese research centers and companies via the “Thousand Talents” program put in place in 2008 (→ p. 292). The WRSA also created the **Center for China and Globalization (CCG)**, a self-described “non-governmental” think tank based in Beijing, and whose president, Wang Huiyao (王辉耀), also a member of several United Front groups, is a UFWD advisor and one of the thinking heads behind the Chinese strategy of international recruitment.<sup>30</sup> According to *Intelligence Online*, which cites a few names, “in order to expand its network, CCG has recruited as consultants former foreign officials from the political, economic and academic worlds.”<sup>31</sup>

• **Education and Research:**

Here, we can mention the Beijing Chinese Language and Culture College (北京华文学院), dedicated to students of Chinese origin who have returned to China; Jinan University (暨南大学), based in Guangzhou, which is one of the oldest Chinese universities, one of the first to have welcomed foreign students and currently one of the universities in China hosting the most of them; Huaqiao University (华侨大学), based in Xiamen and Quanzhou, in Fujian – whose name literally means “Overseas Chinese University”; the China Tibetan Language High Institute of Buddhism (中国藏语系高级佛学院), which teaches a “patriotic” Tibetan Buddhism, and so on. **Besides, most Chinese universities host local UFWD branches that monitor students as well as instructors, handle student informers and establish databases on everyone.**<sup>32</sup> The

27. “The United Front in Communist China. A Technique for Controlling, Mobilizing, and Utilizing Non-Communist Masses,” *Central Intelligence Agency* (May 1957), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000600210003-9.pdf>

28. “中央统战部直属事业单位2019年度公开招聘应届高校毕业生公告” (“2019 Recruitment UFWD Organizations”), *UFWD* (17 Apr. 2019), <http://archive.vn/u09Ts>; “中央统战部直属事业单位2020年度公开招聘应届高校毕业生公告” (“2020 Recruitment of UFWD Organizations”), 中央和国家机关所属事业单位公开招聘服务平台 (*Recruitment platform of Party and State organizations*) (14 Apr. 2020), <http://archive.vn/fneI3>; “国家机构改革后,暨南大学归属中央统战部、国务院侨办领导” (“With the Reforms, Jinan University is Now Supervised by the UFWD and the State Council”), *Sobu* (29 Jun. 2018), <https://archive.vn/2d4YV>; “中国藏语系高级佛学院” (“China Tibetan Language High Institute of Buddhism”), *Baidu*.

<http://archive.vn/2FhQU>.

29. In the early 2000s, the institution took on the name Friendship Association of Expatriate Students and Researchers (中国留学人员联谊会).

30. Joske, “The Party Speaks for You,” 29.

31. “Le China Center for Globalization en soutien de Pékin pour attirer des investissements étrangers” (“China Center for Globalization supports Beijing in attracting foreign investment”), *Intelligence Online*, September 15, 2021.

32. Joske, “The Party Speaks for You,” 13.



Chinese Academy of Sciences also has an internal UFWD office that plays the same role regarding the more than 60,000 researchers working for the institution. And, across the world, **the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs 中国学生学者联合会)** (→ p. 280) supervise Chinese students carrying out United Front work in coordination with the Ministry of Education in most universities: one of these CSSAs incidentally admitted that the UFWD is actually responsible for the “general orientation of student associations abroad.”<sup>33</sup>

#### • Diasporic affairs:

Since March 2018, the diaspora falls under the direct responsibility of the UFWD, whereas this responsibility was previously shared between the Office of Overseas Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>34</sup> The diaspora being an **imaginary community**, since it is in fact extremely diverse, United Front efforts consist in **shaping, controlling, and homogenizing** its constituent groups. Also falling under the United Front are the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (中华全国归国华侨联合会), the China Overseas Friendship Association (中华海外联谊会), Huangpu Military Academy Alumni Association (黄埔军校同学会统战), the All-China Taiwan Compatriots Organization (中华全国台湾同胞联谊会), and the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会), which manages a network of branches worldwide (→ p. 124).<sup>35</sup>

#### • Economy:

Several organizations contribute to the work of the United Front, including the Huaxing Economic Advisory Service Center (华兴经济咨询服务中心), which provides economic consulting services, and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (中华全国工商业联合会).<sup>36</sup> **The large state-owned companies generally have an internal United Front section**, such as the world’s leading steel manufacturer, China Baowu Steel Group, the former CEO of which (2007-2016) became vice-Minister of the UFWD. **Chinese and foreign private companies** are also increasingly a target. Deloitte China, for example, has had an internal United Front association since 2016, run by the CEO himself.<sup>37</sup>

#### • Culture:

The cultural sector is also the object of major United Front operations. The Chinese Literature and Art Federation (中国文学艺术联合会),<sup>38</sup> and the Confucius Institutes (→ p. 299), are supervised by the United Front and represent powerful levers of mobilization, intelligence gathering, and informational warfare across the world.

The actors of the United Front system sometimes tend, when acting abroad, to enter into partnerships with prestigious foreign institutions to “whitewash” their activities. This

33. “历史沿革” (“History”), 高丽大学中国学人学者联谊会 (*Chinese Scholars and Scholars Association of Korea University*), <https://archive.vn/dhFks>; Joske, “The Party Speaks for You,” 30.

34. *Ibid.*, 14.

35. John Doston, “The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, 19:9 (9 May 2019).

36. According to the Tianyancha page of the Huaxing Economic Advisory Service Center: <https://m.tianyancha.com/company/3227616926>.

37. Joske, “The Party Speaks for You,” 18.

38. Jourda, *Les usages post-révolutionnaires*, 343.

INTRODUCTION

is the approach taken, for example, by the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF → p. 125) in the United States, which entered into agreements with, among others, Johns Hopkins University, the EastWest Institute, the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, the Atlantic Council, and the Brookings Institution.<sup>39</sup>

CONCEPTS

## V. Typology of United Front operations

The work of the United Front consists first of all in **identifying and classifying the targets and enemies of the Party**. There exist, in particular, enemies of first or second rank, those that cannot be fought and those with whom it is possible to form an alliance before combatting them.<sup>40</sup> This work is done via **the recruitment of supporters for the Communist regime, attempts to influence individuals who are prominent in their respective fields or in their countries, controls exerted over groups challenging the Party's authority, intelligence gathering, and the elimination, or at least disruption, of the Party's enemies**.<sup>41</sup> The work of the United Front, inseparable from that of the Party-State, is nevertheless “hardly perceptible in its details,” as “everything pertaining to the activities of representative personalities is theoretically tied to the United Front.”<sup>42</sup> Besides, its operations have the distinctive characteristic of being frequently conducted by **front organizations** whose proximity to the United Front is not always obvious.<sup>43</sup>

ACTORS

The United Front has, in theory, total freedom to mobilize individuals and social groups in favor of the CCP's objectives and ambitions. We can nevertheless identify three principal types of operations under which the other more or less fall.

ACTIONS

### A. Mobilizing the diasporas

Overseas executives and agents of the United Front are primarily tasked with working with the Chinese diasporas in order to circulate the Party's narratives and its interpretation of global affairs, but also in order to mobilize them when necessary. The diasporas are thus instrumentalized to exert pressure on governments whose policies contradict the Party's interests. This can include protesting against visits by individuals like the Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong or the Dalai Lama, movements sympathetic to Hong Kong protestors, or events on Tibet or Xinjiang.<sup>44</sup> Diasporas can also be “positively” mobilized to support the visit of a Chinese official in their host country.

CASE

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39. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “This Beijing-Linked Billionaire Is Funding Policy Research at Washington's Most Influential Institutions,” *Foreign Policy* (28 Nov. 2017).

40. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 225-226.

41. United Front operations have been widely documented. See, for example: Alexander Bowe, “China's Overseas United Front work. Background and Implications for the United States,” *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Report* (24 Aug. 2018); Gerry Groot, “The CCP's Grand United Front Abroad,” *Sinopsis* (24 Sept. 2019); Takashi Suzuki, “China's United Front Work in the Xi Jinping Era – Institutional Developments and Activities,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 8:1, (2019); Martin Hála, “United Front Work by Other Means: China's “Economic Diplomacy” in Central and Eastern Europe,” Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, 19:9, (9 May 2019); Mattis, “China's Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control.”

42. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 321-323.

43. “The United Front in Communist China. A Technique for Controlling, Mobilizing, and Utilizing Non-Communist Masses,” *Central Intelligence Agency*.

44. Groot, “The CCP's Grand United Front Abroad,” 12.

## B. Controlling the narratives about China

The United Front also aims to ensure that, throughout the world and in all languages, the way in which media, journalists, editorialists, researchers, instructors, etc. report on China conforms to the Party's interests, particularly on the most sensitive subjects, such as the "five poisons" (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong, pro-democracy activists, Taiwanese separatists). This desire to control the narratives about China leads the Party to deploy its charms toward key opinion-shapers (researchers, journalists, businessmen, politicians, social media influencers). This strategy most often takes the form of leisure trips paid for by the Party during which Chinese leaders pull out all the stops.

## C. Building databases

The United Front also takes on the work of collecting data profiling the political or religious preferences of university students, politicians, public figures, and others. Whether vast (one database is believed to contain information on 2.2 million Chinese scientists abroad) or very precise (another targets Chinese doctoral students in the United States originating from one particular town in China),<sup>45</sup> the goal is the same: to provide the United Front with the means to expand, thus to extend the Party's influence. Public and private companies play an important role in this collection of personal data (→ p. 129).

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45. Joske, "The Party Speaks for You," 29.



## Chapter 3

# THE “THREE WARFARES”

The “Three Warfares” strategy is one of the main doctrines of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) but, like the United Front, it remains relatively unknown, or at least insufficiently taken into consideration, despite the publication of several books and articles on the subject.<sup>1</sup> **These “Three Warfares” – public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare – represent most of the Chinese political warfare**, understood as all the forms of non-military confrontation that can be used to achieve a strategic objective.<sup>2</sup>

This three-front strategy of political warfare was officially adopted in 2003 by the Central Committee of the CCP and the Central Military Commission (CMC) with the revised “PLA Political Work Regulations.” It noted that wartime political work ought to include the implementation of public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.<sup>3</sup> The 2010 revision added that all members of the military had to be trained in the “Three Warfares” (Art. 14 §17); that military propaganda had to include public opinion warfare (Art. 14 §10); that liaison work had to include psychological warfare (Art. 14 §14); and that political, legal (Art. 14 §7) as well as judicial work (Art. 14 §9) had to include legal warfare.<sup>4</sup>

Political warfare is understood as **a form of non-kinetic conflict**. While it can take diverse forms, the logic remains the same: political warfare is used to **win without fighting** (不战而胜) – or at least to achieve a broad victory with limited combats (小战大胜) – so that enemy troops admit defeat without ever having fought (不战而屈人之兵).<sup>5</sup> **It is undertaken in wartime as well as peacetime** (平战结合). The “Three Warfares”

1. Steven Halper, “China: The Three Warfares,” *Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense* (May 2013); Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” *Backgrounders*, 2692, The Heritage Foundation (18 May 2012); Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” *Backgrounders*, 2745, The Heritage Foundation (21 Nov. 2012); Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge,” *Backgrounders*, 2821, The Heritage Foundation (11 Jul. 2013); Timothy A. Walton, “China’s Three Warfares,” *Special Report*, 3, Delex Systems (18 Jan. 2012); Sangkuk Lee, “China’s “Three Warfares”: Origins, Applications, and Organizations,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37:2 (2014); Elsa Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” *China Brief*, 16:13, Jamestown Foundation (22 Aug. 2016); Peter Mattis, “China’s “Three Warfares” in Perspective,” *War on the Rocks* (30 Jan. 2018).

2. “政治战作为一种为了达成总体战略目标而采取的非军事行动的活力对抗形式，其主要作战方式是舆论战心理战法律战。” See: 常艳娥 (Chang Yan’e), 欧立寿 (Ou Lishou), and 王芙蓉 (Wang Furong), “舆论战心理战 法律战概论” 课程教学探析” (“Analysis of the Lessons from the Book ‘Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare’”), 国防大学 人文与社会科学学院军队政工研究所 (*Institute for Research on the Political Work of the Army of the Academy of Human and Social Sciences of the National Defense University*) (2007), <http://archive.ph/IZsi7>.

3. Art. 14 §18: “战时政治工作 [...] 进行舆论战, 心理战, 法律战, 开展瓦解敌军工作, 开展发心战, 反策反工作, 开展军事司法和法律服务工作。” The text of the 2003 Revision of the PLA Political Work Regulations (in Chinese) (中国人民解放军政治工作条例) is available here: <https://archive.ph/VBOoG>.

4. Art. 14 §17: “军事训练中政治工作。 [...] 会同有关机关组织开展舆论战、心理战、法律战教育训练”; Art. 14 §10: “军事宣传工作。 [...] 开展舆论战工作”; Art. 14 §14: “联络工作。 [...] 开展心理战工作”; Art. 14 §7: “政法工作。 [...] 法律战和法律监督等工作”; Art. 14 §9: “军事审判、军事检察和司法行政工作。 [...] 开展法律战工作。” The entire text in Chinese of the 2010 Revision of the Regulations is archived here: <http://archive.vn/zrmmu>.

5. Chang Yan’e, Ou Lishou, and Wang Furong, “Analysis of the lessons.”

are sometimes considered as a strategy of hybrid warfare to the extent that they blur the boundaries between war and peace, between combatants and civilians, and between military and non-military means.<sup>6</sup> Franck Hoffman's definition echoes the "Three Warfares," referring to the coordinated use of different types of warfare jointly employed and creating a synergistic effect between the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.<sup>7</sup> It is important, however, not to confuse them, especially because the concept of "hybrid war" itself is not precisely-defined.

With the development of information and communication technologies, and the speed with which ideas can circulate worldwide, the "Three Warfares" are understood as a **means to develop a discursive power** (话语权), in other words the ability to influence the perceptions of a target audience, control narratives and impose one's own version of the facts.<sup>8</sup> For that reason they are **also portrayed as a confrontation in the cognitive domain** (认知领域的对抗).<sup>9</sup> Their goal is to influence potentially destabilizing actors to deter them from taking any action against China.<sup>10</sup> The "Three Warfares" could also be understood as a form of psychological warfare in the broadest sense. Others have underlined that **this strategy is comparable to the anti-access, area denial strategy (A2/AD)**, here applied to the realm of ideas.<sup>11</sup> These three types of offensive operations in peacetime pursue the same goal, that of **shaping an environment favorable to China (meaning to the Party) and unfavorable to its enemies** in order to limit their freedom of action and to meet the regime's objectives. Their mission is to allow the PLA to seize the decisive opportunity (先机) and retain the initiative (主动). They are **force multipliers**.<sup>12</sup>

Last but not least, the "Three Warfares" must be understood as a **strategy to strengthen the Party's political power**, in the same way as the United Front. As the CCP's armed wing, the PLA's principal mission is to guarantee the regime's survival and augment the CCP's power. For Peter Mattis, **the "Three Warfares" could even be understood as an outgrowth of the United Front system and of the Party's propaganda**.<sup>13</sup> As previously outlined, the United Front's work consists in forming alliances with or neutralizing the groups outside the reach of the CCP to impose the Party as the one and only legitimate representative of the Chinese people. The "Three Warfares" need to be understood as part and parcel of this policy and these efforts complement those of the United Front.

The conceptual origin of the notion is unclear. If its principles echo those of classical Chinese military strategy, notably Sun Zi, according to whom "to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill,"<sup>14</sup> nothing proves that these ancient roots have had a decisive influence on

6. "Hybrid Warfare with Chinese Characteristics" is the title that Michael Raska chose for a short article describing the "Three Warfares" strategy in *RJIS Commentary*, 262 (2015). There is no agreement on whether the "Three Warfares" should be labelled hybrid warfare however. See, for example: Michael Clarke, "China's Application of the 'Three Warfares' in the South China Sea and Xinjiang," *Orbis* (Jan. 2019), 192.

7. Frank Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars," Potomac Institute for Policy Studies (2007), 8.

8. Nadège Rolland, "China's Counteroffensive in the War of Ideas," *Lowy Institute* (24 Feb. 2020).

9. Chang Yan'e, Ou Lishou, and Wang Furong, "An Analysis of the Lessons."

10. See Peter Mattis's remarks in: Tasha Wibawa, "China's National Security and the 'Three Warfares': How Beijing Decides Who or What to Target," *ABC News* (25 Feb. 2019); Mattis, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective."

11. The comparison is made in: N. Rolland, "China's Counteroffensive in the War of Ideas."

12. Kania, "The PLA's Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares."

13. Peter Mattis's remarks in: T. Wibawa, "China's National Security and the 'Three Warfares.'"

14. 孫子 (Sun Zi), "孫子兵法" ("The Art of War") in: 中國大百科全書 (*Encyclopedia of China*), Vol. 2 (Beijing, 2009), 1066-1069.



the development of the “Three Warfares.” A possible influence could however have been the *Introduction to Psychological Warfare* published in 1990 by the National Defense University.<sup>15</sup>

There is also an American root to a certain extent. When the Central Committee and the CMC adopted the “Three Warfares” strategy in 2003, it was not seen as a new strategy conceived to get a head start over others, but as a necessary step to make up for China having fallen behind compared to other countries. **From a Chinese perspective, the United States is the champion of public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.** As they studied recent wars undertaken by Washington, from the 1991 Gulf War which “made China aware of the considerable limits of its own capacities” in this domain,<sup>16</sup> to the 2003 Iraq War (by way of the Balkans), Chinese analysts concluded that modern warfare could be won thanks to non-military operations and non-kinetic capabilities.<sup>17</sup> They maintain that the United States was the first to employ propaganda and techniques manipulating public opinions, psychological attacks, and offensive legal maneuvers in a coordinated manner to make their enemies fold.<sup>18</sup>

The insertion of the “Three Warfares” in the 2003 revision of the “PLA Political Work Regulations” did not, however, mark the beginning of the use of these techniques by China; it was an official endorsement instead, and an injunction for their coordinated implementation at all levels. The execution of the “Three Warfares” strategy was coordinated by the Liaison Department of the former General Political Department (LD/GPD) which used to oversee political warfare. Since the 2015 military reforms, the Liaison Department of the new Political Work Department (LD/PWD) has probably inherited this mission. Theoretically, **all levels of the PLA are called to carry out the “Three Warfares,” but at least one PLA base is specifically dedicated to this mission: Base 311**, also known as PLA Unit 61716 located in Fuzhou, in Fujian province, which faces Taiwan (→ p. 89). **The “Three Warfares” strategy addresses both external and internal threats**, like the Taiwanese independence movement, which is one of its principal targets. It applies to members of the military but also to civilians, as the Party mobilizes all its branches along with intermediaries to strengthen its power. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, plays a particular role in the diffusion of the Chinese discourse overseas via its network of embassies – a role falling at once under the United Front and the “Three Warfares.”

The “Three Warfares” are considered as the **three arms of the same body**. They serve the same strategic objective, are employed with the same logic, and are reinforcing each other, each one paving the ground for the development of the other two. Public opinion warfare offers a combat platform to psychological warfare and legal warfare. Legal warfare provides the necessary legal bases for public opinion warfare and psychological warfare. Finally, public opinion warfare and legal warfare both require psychological influence over the public to be effective.<sup>19</sup>

15. 温金权 (Wen Jinquan), 杜汝波 (Du Rubo), and 周敏 (Zhou Min), *心理战概论 (Introduction to Psychological Warfare)*, 解放军出版社 (PLA Editions) (1990); Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute* (2013), footnote 176, 67.

16. Valérie Niquet, “La Chine: une modernisation des pratiques de guerre de l’information” (in “China: The Modernization of Information War Practices”) Céline Marangé and Maud Quessard, eds., *Les Guerres de l’information à l’ère numérique (Information Wars in the Digital Era)* (Paris: PUF, 2021), 152.

17. Chang Yan’e, Ou Lishou, and Wang Furong, “Analysis of the Lessons”; Sangkuk Lee, “China’s ‘Three Warfares’: Origins, Applications, and Organizations,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37:2 (2014).

18. “美军无不是将舆论宣传, 心理攻击和法理斗争融为一体。” See Chang Yan’e, Ou Lishou, and Wang Furong, “Analysis of the Lessons.”

19. Ibid.

# I. Public opinion warfare

The goal of public opinion warfare is to **win over target audiences** – those of enemy countries but also the international community – on the position defended by the government. The issue is not so much to know which armed forces will win, but which narrative, which version of the facts will prevail in a public opinion. Concretely, public opinion warfare, as conceptualized by the Chinese, consists in **carrying out the “cognitive orientation”** (引导认知) **of the masses, to “excite their emotions”** (激发情感) **and to “constrain their behavior”** (约束行为).<sup>20</sup> This is an activity that can be carried at low intensity as it is a continuous, permanent, and long-term endeavor: its goal is to **surreptitiously shape the psyche**.

All the media can be mobilized: the press, radio, television, social networks (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WeChat, Weibo, TikTok, Plurk, etc.), films, and books. They are used to **impose a version of the facts as early as possible and to frame the debate** – since the first impression makes more of a mark than the subsequent ones, even if it is a mistaken one (this is known as the **anchoring bias** in cognitive psychology). To carry out successful public opinion warfare, one must be the first to react and to multiply sources defending this version of the facts, while eventually (but not systematically) concealing the ties that might lead back to the acting political source, in order to influence the perceptions and behavior of target audiences. To impose their narrative, the protagonists of the Three Warfares can also lean on the **illusion-of-truth effect**, a bias according to which the probability of believing false information depends not on its logical nature but on an individual’s familiarity with the idea.<sup>21</sup>

By way of example, a video defending Chinese sovereignty in the South China Sea was shown approximately 120 times per day on a 200-square-meter screen in Times Square in New York City between July 23 and August 3, 2016.<sup>22</sup> Earlier, on July 12, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague had disavowed Beijing by indicating, among other things, that China did not have historical rights over the South China Sea. The 3-minute video subsequently broadcast suggested that the British MP Catherine West supported the Chinese position, even though she had accepted the interview only to express her support for a peaceful resolution of the tensions and did not expect the distorted use of her remarks.<sup>23</sup> The video’s authors selected several words from her statement and placed them between those of three other individuals, whose remarks could not be clearer, and with whom the MP thus seemed to agree: Wu Shicun, president of the National Institute of South China Sea Studies; John Ross, introduced only as the former director of the Department of Economic Policy for the Mayor of London, while he was also a columnist for the website China.org, senior fellow at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies

20. Ibid.

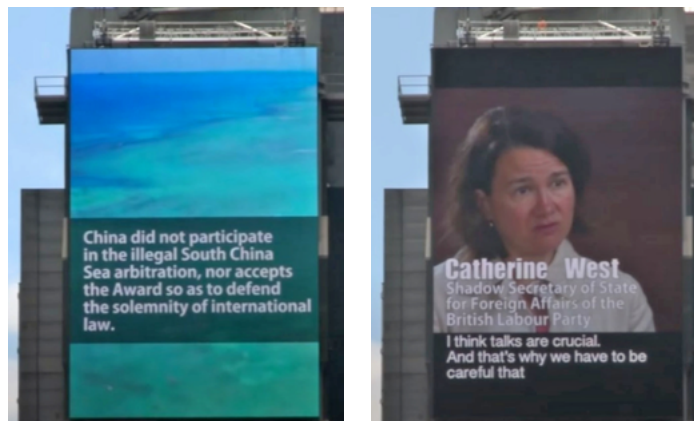
21. Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein, Thomas Toppino, “Frequency and the Conference of Referential Validity,” *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 16:1 (2017), 107-112.

22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4KIWLgUSmc>.

23. Will Worley, “Labour MP Says She Was Misrepresented in China’s Times Square Propaganda Video,” *Independent* (31 Jul. 2016). Here are Catherine West’s remarks: “I think talks are crucial. And that’s why we have to be careful that yes, we need to resolve something very locally, and have a grown-up approach to dialogue.” And here is how she reacted after the video was published: “I was unaware that these comments would be used in this manner. Although I was of course happy to give an interview on my concerns regarding the militarization of the South China Sea and the need to work together to secure a peaceful resolution, I am not happy for the footage to be used in a way that suggests that I support the current approach adopted by China toward these islands.”



at Renmin University, and a former member of a Marxist group;<sup>24</sup> and Masood Khalid, ambassador of Pakistan to China.<sup>25</sup> The narrative structure was deceptive and misled the audience.<sup>26</sup> But, by diffusing its message repetitively in English in a public place frequented by some 350,000 tourists from across the world daily, China targeted an international audience and stressed that it was ready to **invest the money needed to shape opinions**. The maneuver’s effectiveness, however, was perplexingly limited given the concentration of billboards in Times Square<sup>27</sup> and the message’s lack of subtlety.



Video defending Chinese sovereignty in the South China Sea, broadcast in Times Square, New York, in 2016, with the British MP Catherine West (on the right). Source: taken from the video published by CCTV on YouTube (28 Jul. 2016), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPe\\_TTYTn7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPe_TTYTn7c).

## II. Psychological Warfare

Psychological warfare is used to **demoralize and dissuade enemy forces, making them doubt, and even to terrorize them** in order to undermine their ability and willingness to fight. It is used to **break the bond of trust between those governing and those governed and to disrupt the decision-making process** of the enemy country. In other words, it is used to defeat the enemy without a fight. Strictly speaking, psychological warfare is more frequently employed in wartime than peacetime, unlike public opinion warfare which is constantly used whatever the level of tensions, and which targets a larger audience than psychological warfare.

A work released by the PLA publishing house distinguished **four types of psychological warfare**: **“coercion”** (威慑), which seeks to force the other to adopt a certain behavior; **“mystification”** (欺诈), which spreads confusion and misleads; **“division”** (离间), which takes advantage of all potential weaknesses and disagreements within the enemy country and paralyzes its decision-making process, breaks the motivation of the enemy’s fighters

24. See John Ross’s profile on *China.org*: <http://archive.vn/ZaupG>. John Ross was a member of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group.

25. “South China Sea Video Playing in Times Square,” *China Daily* (27 Jul. 2016), <http://archive.vn/OnCic>.

26. In Joseph Nye’s words: “all persuasion involves choices about how to frame information. Only when that framing shades into deception, which limits the subject’s voluntary choices, does it cross the line into coercion.” See Joseph Nye, “How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power,” *Foreign Affairs* (24 Jan. 2018).

27. Fang Bing and Zhang Zhen, “China Airs Propaganda Video Over New York’s Times Square,” *VOA* (7 Aug. 2016).

and the people's confidence; and finally, **"defense"** (防护), to safeguard the morale of one's own troops when they are the target of similar efforts by the enemy.<sup>28</sup>

**The actions carried out by the Chinese communist regime against the Uyghur ethnic minority in China (and overseas), is an example of psychological** (but also physical) **warfare**, which would correspond to the coercive type presented above. Random arrests, mass internment, forced labor, digital tracing, frequent inspections, forced Sinicization, "reeducation" of children, destruction of places of worship, harassment, settlement of nomads... the Uyghurs, a majority-Muslim Turkic ethnic group, are violently repressed in the name of the fight against religious extremism.<sup>29</sup> It is estimated that one to three million Uyghurs are currently interned. Women are subjected to forced sterilization,<sup>30</sup> but also other "impos[ed] measures [intend] to prevent births within the group"<sup>31</sup> – all acts that legally constitute a crime of genocide.<sup>32</sup> Prisoners have also presumably had organs removed (which Beijing did openly on persons sentenced to death until 2015 → p. 214). It feeds a lucrative traffic of "halal" organs exported to the Gulf countries.<sup>33</sup> Numerous testimonials prove that the Uyghurs are terrorized; they fear that the smallest gesture or word could be used against them, they do not dare to speak to strangers, and they do not know if one day they will see their relatives disappear. Fear of the central government follows them beyond the Chinese border, even when some manage to flee to another country.<sup>34</sup> This psychological warfare aims to force the Uyghurs to adopt the behavior desired by the central government: submission. This example reminds us that the "Three Warfares" are not limited to external threats: any threat to the Party, whether inside or outside of China, must be annihilated.

There are **additional examples**: the actions taken by Beijing to paralyze the enemy's decision-making process during **the Sino-Indian confrontation on the Doklam plateau, in the summer 2017**, fit the different types of psychological warfare presented above. The Party-State did not hesitate to regularly utter threats such as: "military conflicts to escalate if India refuses to withdraw troops,"<sup>35</sup> "India's provocation will trigger all-out confron-

28. 郝唯学 (Hao Weixue), 心理战100例: 经典案例分析 (*One Hundred Examples of Psychological War: Analysis of Classic Cases*), PLA Publications (2011). For a more detailed presentation of these four categories, see Dean Cheng, "Winning without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge," 6-9.

29. See, for instance, Sylvie Lasserre, *Voyage au pays des Ouïghours. De la persécution invisible à l'enfer orwellien (Journey to Uyghur Country: From Invisible Persecution to the Orwellian Hell)* (Paris: Éditions Hesse, 2020); Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020]; see also, the publications of human rights NGOs on the subject, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. On the Xinjiang, see the publications of Rémi Castets.

30. Adrian Zenz, "Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang," *China Brief*, 20:12, The Jamestown Foundation (Jun. 2020, updated 21 Jul. 2020).

31. Article 6(d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

32. *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention*, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (Mar. 2021); Peter Mattis, "Yes, the Atrocities in Xinjiang Constitute a Genocide," *Foreign Policy* (15 Apr. 2021).

33. Justine Reix, "Comment la Chine vend les 'organes halal' de ses prisonniers ouïghours aux riches" ("How China Sells the 'Halal Organs' of Uyghur Prisoners to Rich Clients"), *Vice* (19 Jun. 2020).

34. Notably on this topic, see the China Cables and Xinjiang Papers published in 2019; Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Exposed: China's Operating Manuals For Mass Internment And Arrest By Algorithm," *ICIJ* (24, Nov. 2019); Scilla Alecci, "How China Targets Uyghurs 'One by One' For Using a Mobile App," China Cables, *ICIJ* (24 Nov. 2019); Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, "'Absolutely No Mercy': Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims," *The New York Times* (16 Nov. 2019); "Nowhere Feels Safe, Uyghurs Tell of China-led Intimidation Campaign Abroad," *Amnesty International* (Feb. 2020).

35. "Military Conflicts to Escalate if India Refuses to Withdraw Troops," *Global Times* (21 Jul. 2017), <http://archive.vn/mwChi>.

tation,”<sup>36</sup> “the countdown has begun,”<sup>37</sup> especially via the *Global Times*. This newspaper also accused the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Sushma Swaraj, of having lied in front of the Parliament when she claimed that India had the support of the international community.<sup>38</sup> China did not limit itself to mere words in an attempt to intimidate its opponent: videos showing Chinese military exercises in Tibet, not far from the Indian border, were broadcast; military equipment and logistic materiel were moved closer to the line of conflict, thus suggesting a possible escalation of the hostilities; and memories of the Chinese victory in the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict were revived to demoralize Indian soldiers.<sup>39</sup> The role that this campaign of psychological warfare played in the conflict’s outcome was nevertheless uncertain and difficult to measure.

A third example of psychological warfare instrumentalizing military exercises can be found in **the case study on Taiwan** (→ p. 423).

### III. Legal warfare

Several Chinese articles have defined legal warfare as **the use of law as a “weapon of war”** (以法律为武器), i.e. **to dissuade, attack, counter-attack, coerce, and punish**. Its implementation consists in instrumentalizing legal principles to achieve an advantage, acquire normative superiority, and allow the PLA to keep the initiative.<sup>40</sup> Attaining this normative superiority is not only a question of positive law, but indeed of using all the legal and moral principles on which the Chinese can rely to justify their actions. Legal warfare is pursued throughout the war-peace continuum: before a conflict, it is used to set up the right conditions and allow China to have law “on its side”; during a conflict, it justifies the use of force and legitimizes the PLA’s actions; after a conflict, it is used to retain any gains or to claim its due.

The practice itself is not new, but several factors, including the judicialization of international relations, the democratization of political regimes, as well as the rise of new information and communication technologies, explain its increasing deployment.<sup>41</sup> In the case of China, the most commonly cited examples are its actions in favor of a **revisionist interpretation of maritime law** to serve its interests in the South China Sea and prohibit access to the area, especially by the United States. Singapore-based RSIS researcher Collin Koh explained that, in practice, Beijing “tries to take advantage of its growing military power to constrain coastal states on the South China Sea to renounce exercising their legitimate rights, guaranteed by the UN Convention, to exploit the resources situated in their

36. Duo Mu, “India’s Provocation Will Trigger All-Out Confrontation on LAC,” *Global Times* (18 Jul. 2017), <http://archive.vn/5gtJQ>.

37. “Countdown to India-China Military Clash Has Begun: Chinese Daily on Doklam Standoff,” *India Today*, (9 Aug. 2017).

38. Sutirtho Patranobis, “Sikkim Standoff: Chinese Daily Says Sushma Lied About Support from Other Nations, Warns India of War,” *Hindustan Times* (21 Jul. 2017).

39. “PLA Brigade Holds Live-Fire Military Drills in Tibet: CCTV,” *Global Times* (16 Jul. 2017), <http://archive.vn/Y8EcH>; Liu Zhen, “Was China’s Military Drill in Tibet Really Just an Exercise in Logistics?” *South China Morning Post* (18 Jul. 2017); Indrani Bagchi, “Doklam standoff: China Playing Out its ‘Three Warfares’ Strategy against India,” *Times of India*, (13 Aug. 2017).

40. 刘继贤 (Liu Jixian), and 刘铮 (Liu Zheng), 新军事变革与军事法制建设 (*New Military Developments and Military Legal Structure*), 解放军出版社 (PLA Publications), (Beijing, 2005) 325.

41. Julian Fernandez, “Lawfare: le droit comme continuation de la guerre par d’autres moyens?” (“Lawfare: Law as a Continuation of War by Other Means?”), Blog, *Mediapart* (7 Oct. 2019).

Exclusive Economic Zones.”<sup>42</sup> To the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Party-State opposes “historical rights” that are devoid of any legal basis. It refuses to recognize the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration of The Hague which stated in 2016 that the “Nine-dash line” (the Chinese territorial claim) had “no legal basis”; nonetheless, China multiplies incidents, involving its civilian flotillas – including its coast guards<sup>43</sup> – and maritime militias, as part of an offensive that falls within the “grey area” of “hybrid warfare.”<sup>44</sup> Overall, this policy of the *fait accompli* puts China as a “revisionist state in international maritime law.”<sup>45</sup> This legal warfare also includes participation in the **development of norms through international organizations**, efforts within these to promote the emergence of interpretations favorable to Chinese demands, to influence individuals playing a normative role, or to create precedents to serve as future normative bases.

Besides, the Party uses **intermediaries** to carry out the “Three Warfares.” In the case of the legal warfare, United Front organizations like the All China Lawyers Association (ANAC, 中华全国律师协会) may be playing a role.<sup>46</sup> The ANAC, for that matter, organized a Global Lawyer’s Forum in December 2019 with some 800 organizations and individuals, and it founded the Belt and Road International Lawyers Alliance (一带一路律师联盟) to promote legal cooperation between member states and the BRI.<sup>47</sup> This type of platform could be serving as a relay for the Party to implement legal warfare, for example, by allowing it to impose its interpretation of international law more easily on its interlocutors.

A recent example of defensive legal warfare is the initiative separately taken by two Chinese lawyers, Liang Xuguang in Wuhan and Chen Yueqin in Beijing, to press charges against the United States as part of the Covid-19 pandemic in response to complaints lodged by Americans accusing China of being responsible for the health disaster. Even if this type of complaints is unlikely to result in a conviction on either side, it is useful for the Chinese to **supply a counter-narrative and turn the blame onto the actor slandering them**. Liang and Chen for instance accused the United States of having concealed the epidemic’s emergence on its soil and undermined China’s image in naming Covid-19 the “Chinese virus.”<sup>48</sup> In a hypothetical scenario of offensive legal warfare, China could be imagined as inciting Pacific nations threatened by rising sea levels to bring charges against the United States on the grounds that, due to insufficient respect of the environment, the US bears responsibility for its disastrous environmental consequences on these states.

An additional example is the **Hong Kong national security law passed by Beijing on June 30, 2020, and the extraterritoriality of Article 38 more specifically, which criminalized the least violation of the law committed by anyone, anywhere in the world**. The first to be concerned are Hongkongers temporarily living overseas, especially the thousands of students who, on Australian, American, Canadian or European campuses,

42. Nathalie Guibert, “La Chine, un empire à l’assaut du droit de la mer” (“China: An Empire Attacking the Law of the Sea”), *Le Monde* (5 Mar. 2021).

43. Benoît de Tréglodé and Eric Frécon, eds., *La diplomatie des garde-côtes en Asie du Sud-Est (The Diplomacy of Coast Guards in South-East Asia)*, IRSEM Report, #73 (Mar. 2020).

44. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, eds., *China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, Annapolis, China Maritime Studies Institute / Naval Institute Press (2019).

45. Guibert, “La Chine, un empire à l’assaut du droit de la mer.”

46. Here, the CCP undoubtedly drew from the Soviet experience. In 1946, the USSR created the International Association of Democratic Lawyers to bend international law toward positions more favorable to the Soviets.

47. “Lawyers Association Serving BRI Established in Guangzhou,” *Ministry of Justice of the People’s Republic of China* (10 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/rN68n>; Zhang Yangfei, “Body for Belt, Road Lawyers Launched,” *China Daily* (9 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/Ar8ih>.

48. “Chinese Lawyers Sue U.S. Over “Coronavirus Cover-up,” *Radio Free Asia* (26 Mar. 2020); “Civil Complaint, Lawsuits Led from Wuhan Against US Over Racist Terminology Hard to Proceed,” *Global Times* (29 Mar. 2020).



expressed support for the pro-democracy activists, as well as all those who did so on social media, and who were hesitant to return home in case the law could be retroactively invoked by the authorities to pursue them. Certain instructors in Chinese studies reacted quickly, adapting their courses to limit the risks for these students without making concessions on the content.<sup>49</sup> Certain universities, like Dartmouth College in the United States or Oxford University in the United Kingdom, took action: students are allowed to opt out from certain courses and to submit their work anonymously, which limits the risks of denunciation.<sup>50</sup>

This law applies not only to students but to everyone, everywhere: **all those who criticize the CCP, including this report's authors, can now be arrested and pursued if they travel to Hong Kong, mainland China, or even third-party countries that allow Chinese authorities to act on their soil.** Law Professor Donald Clarke concluded his analysis of Article 38 as such: "I do not recommend Thailand if you're in the PRC government's sights."<sup>51</sup>

More generally, the Chinese lawfare implies **"the use or threat of legal action – to intimidate, silence and impose financial and psychological costs" on anyone (including journalists and researchers) who work on topics Beijing hopes to dissimulate.**<sup>52</sup> In France, for example, the researcher Valérie Niquet is being sued for defamation by Huawei France because she said, during a television broadcast (whose host and production company are also being sued), that "Huawei is directly under the control of the state and the CCP, which has a real power strategy."<sup>53</sup> **In Taiwan,** judicial proceedings or threats thereof are common intimidation tactics: "the *Financial Times*, Taiwan's government-run Central News Agency (CNA), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Secretary-General Luo Wen-jia (羅文嘉), and He Qinglian (何清漣), the author of the book *Red Infiltration: The Truth About the Global Expansion of Chinese Media* (紅色滲透:中國媒體全球擴張的真相), were the object of such 'lawfare,'"<sup>54</sup> recounted **Canadian researcher J. Michael Cole,** one of the world's foremost experts on Chinese influence operations. He was himself pursued by the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC) for having taken an interest in the role that this self-proclaimed "non-governmental" organization played in Chinese "political warfare."<sup>55</sup> The same thing happened to several of his colleagues **in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the United States, and Australia.** There is another notable example: **the German researcher on social anthropology Adrian Zenz** was one of the first to demonstrate the depth of the repression that fell on the Uyghurs, confirming, for instance, the existence of internment camps and a forced sterilization campaign on women. Zenz has since been in "Beijing's visor" as the latter tries to "discredit the individual to deny the

49. Dimitar D. Gueorguiev, Xiaobo Lü, Kerry Ratigan, Meg Rithmire, and Rory Truex, "How to Teach China This Fall," *China File* (20 Aug. 2020).

50. Kyle Mullins, "Dartmouth Encourages Faculty to Safeguard Students as Chinese Law Targets Free Speech Globally," *The Dartmouth* (24 Sept. 2020); Bill Bostock, "Oxford is Asking Students Specializing in China to Submit Papers Anonymously so They Do not Fall Foul of Hong Kong's Draconian National Security Law," *Business Insider France* (29 Sept. 2020).

51. Donald Clarke, "Hong Kong's National Security Law: How Dangerous is Article 38?" *The China Collection* (3 Jul. 2020).

52. J. Michael Cole, "China is using our legal systems against us," *National Post* (12 Apr. 2021).

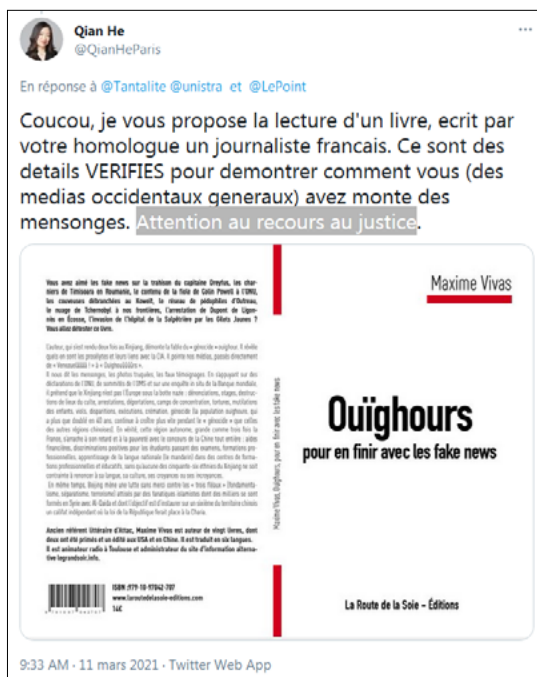
53. Brice Pedroletti, "Une chercheuse française poursuivie par Huawei France" ("A French Researcher Sued by Huawei France"), *Le Monde* (26 Nov. 2019).

54. Ketty W. Chen and J. Michael Cole, "CCP and Proxy Disinformation: Means, Practices, and Impact on Democracies," *Sinopsis* (26 Jul. 2019).

55. J. Michael Cole, "Unstoppable: China's Secret Plan to Subvert Taiwan," *National Interest* (23 Mar. 2015); "Chinese Propaganda: Coming Soon to a Conference Near You," *The Diplomat* (23 Sept. 2015).

repression.”<sup>56</sup> In March 2021, Chinese media revealed that Zenz was being sued in Chinese courts by individuals and firms from Xinjiang (not named in the article however, but they acted as the Party’s cover).<sup>57</sup> According to the *Global Times*, the BBC will be the next target of the legal warfare “for producing fake news [and] spreading rumors about Xinjiang.”<sup>58</sup>

**The aim of these charges is not to win but to “impose a cost.”** These companies, with enormous resources at their disposal, can recruit the best law firms and finance long-lasting procedures. On the other side, the journalists and researchers they attack are alone, with few resources. **The effect is dissuasive**, first of all for the targeted individuals. J. Michael Cole admitted that, even though his case won up to the nation’s highest court, “in a way they win because to this day I’m reluctant to write about them.”<sup>59</sup> The dissuasive effect also extends – which is in any case the desired goal – to the entirety of the field concerned: matters like this cause a sensation in journalistic and academic circles, reinforcing pre-existing tendencies toward self-censorship, as most do not wish to “have problems.” For that reason, it is not even necessary to go through with the lawsuits: the threat is sometimes enough. Hence, Chinese authorities and their mouthpieces, firms and media outlets, only mention the threat without following through. In France, for instance, the director of the digital version of the *People’s Daily* repeatedly threatened a number of journalists in March 2021.<sup>60</sup>



56. See for instance: Adrian Zenz, “Break Their Roots: Evidence for China’s Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, 7:7 (Jul. 2019); *Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control; Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfer Program: A Process-Oriented Evaluation*, The Jamestown Foundation (Mar. 2021).

57. Zhang Han and Fan Lingzhi, “Xinjiang Companies, Individuals Sue Rumormonger Adrian Zenz for Reputational, Economic Losses,” *Global Times* (9 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/0vMzo>).

58. “Xinjiang Residents to Sue BBC Over Fake News on Region,” *Global Times* (18 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/6uM2i>).

59. J. Michael Cole, “A Conversation About China’s Sharp Power and Taiwan,” Brookings Institution (11 Sept. 2018).

60. <https://twitter.com/QianHeParis/status/1369929474872016896>; <https://twitter.com/QianHeParis/status/1378181148459732994>. See also: <https://twitter.com/QianHeParis/status/1377822477284298757> and <https://twitter.com/QianHeParis/status/1373920150949273603>.

This well-known practice, known as a **gag lawsuit, or procedure**, but also called a “strategic lawsuit against public participation” by the United States during the 1980s, is a classic tool of legal warfare, obviously not limited to China. Yet, it is a growing problem, especially for journalists, researchers, NGOs, and whistleblowers who, in numerous countries, are regularly targeted by private companies or public institutions who wish to silence them.

The Chinese concepts of influence fit into a global framework. The CCP indeed sees itself as engaged in an ideological rivalry with the West, first of all with the United States. Competition with Washington is thus not only about material superiority, but also about the **imposition of values, norms, and institutions on the adversary**. This is where the struggle between Beijing and Washington differs from the Cold War: The United States and China share the same world, they cannot live separately in two worlds with divergent norms. The CCP’s aim is therefore to **impose a globalization under the aegis of Chinese norms**. It is precisely the essence of the Party’s leitmotif of “a common destiny for humanity” (→ p. 149).





## SUMMARY OF THE FIRST PART

**The two most important concepts in Chinese influence operations are:**

- **The United Front**, a CCP policy whose goal is to build up and reinforce its hegemony in shaping forces outside the Party and in “mobilizing the Party’s friends to strike its enemies.” The expression is relatively hard to define since it designates at once a dedicated organization (the United Front Work Department, UFWD, under the authority of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, CPPCC), an activity (the work of the United Front), and a system (the constellation of organizations, institutions, agencies, and individuals who carry out this work across all sectors: media, education and research, diaspora, economy, culture, etc.).

Concretely, its work consists in eliminating internal and external enemies, controlling the groups that could defy the CCP’s authority, building a coalition around the Party to serve its interests, and projecting its influence overseas to such an extent that even individuals and groups residing in liberal societies censor themselves or avoid taking a stance against the CCP. These operations – across a broad spectrum ranging from “open” public diplomacy to clandestine actions – generally aim at one of the following three objectives: to mobilize the diasporas, to control the narratives about China, and to create databases.

- **The Three Warfares**, which represent most of the “political warfare” carried out by the PLA, is a form of non-kinetic conflictuality aimed at winning without fighting by shaping an environment favorable to China (i.e. to the Party) and unfavorable to its enemies. Undertaken in times of war as well as peace, it is made up of three arms from the same body:

- **Public opinion warfare**, whose objective is to unite the target audiences, mold psyches (“cognitive orientation” of the masses), “rouse their emotions,” and “constrain their behavior”;

- **Psychological warfare**, used to demoralize enemy forces, dissuade, sow doubt, and even terrorize them to undermine their ability and will to fight, to weaken the bond of trust between rulers and citizens, but also to disrupt the decision-making process in the enemy country;

- **Legal warfare**, which is the use of law as a weapon of war, meaning to dissuade, attack, counter-attack, coerce, and discipline, as shown in the revisionist interpretation of maritime law, the 2020 Hong Kong national security law, and a growing number of judicial proceedings. The CCP goes after any individual opposed to its interests, and as frequently as possible, most often via accusations of defamation (gag lawsuits whose goal is not to win but to impose a cost and thus have a deterrent effect).

- **The other relevant concepts** to understand Chinese influence operations are the notion of **cognitive-domain operations**, which aim at “shap[ing] or even control[ing] the enemy’s cognitive thinking and decision-making” and manipulating “a country’s values, national spirit/ethos, ideologies, cultural traditions, historical beliefs, etc. to encourage them to abandon their theoretical understanding, social system, and development path”; the **discursive power**, which aims at reaching domination by imposing its language and narratives; the **political warfare**, which refers to the use of all means other than war available to a country to achieve its objectives; and the

concept of **active measures** which, unlike the preceding concepts, did not originate in the Chinese strategic thinking but in that of the Soviet Union. Notable components include disinformation, counterfeiting, sabotage, discredit operations, the destabilization of foreign governments, provocations, false-flag operations and other operations aimed at weakening the social cohesion of the enemy, as well as the recruitment of “useful idiots” and the creation of front organizations. Some experts have also included assassinations and terrorist actions in this.

Second Part

# ACTORS



Behind the public face of Chinese influence – the activities of the media (→ p. 172) and of the diplomats (→ p. 205) primarily – which are analyzed in detail in the following part, we found institutional actors whose role and nature need to be understood.<sup>1</sup> Their diversity, fragmentation, bureaucratic rivalries, and the occasional overlap in their missions support the understanding that, contrary to a widespread belief – generally assumed on authoritarian states – **“China” is not a unitary actor.**<sup>2</sup> Numerous observers have indeed shown “an excessive propensity to assess the Chinese state according to the single criteria of its political regime.”<sup>3</sup> But “the nature of the regime provides above all information on the foundations of its sovereignty and on the routes to power. Yet to build a more truthful image of the Chinese state, we must focus not on the regime but on the state as it constitutes a political center,”<sup>4</sup> in other words, a bureaucracy. To summarize: while the regime is strong, its political center suffers from a substantial fragmentation. **And this fragmentation can impact the nature of influence operations carried out by Beijing.**<sup>5</sup> This is why we sought to devote numerous pages to dissecting, as much as possible, the role and nature of the different actors involved in these operations. In other words, before analyzing in detail the different actions (Part Three → p. 143), we need to **understand who does what.** As Anne-Marie Brady explained, “CCP political interference activities draw on the resources of the Party, the Chinese state, the PLA, and the private sector in China, as well as on Chinese companies abroad – what I refer to as the **Party-State-Military-Market nexus.**”<sup>6</sup> We will therefore distinguish these four principal categories – Party, state, army, companies – and within each one, the agencies, departments and services most involved in influence operations abroad.

1. Antoine Bondaz, “Faire entendre la voix de la Chine : les recommandations des experts chinois pour atténuer la perception d’une menace chinoise” (“Make China’s Voice Heard: The Recommendations of Chinese Experts to Lessen the Perception of a Chinese Threat”), *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 115/3 (2019), 106.

2. See, for example, Mathieu Duchâtel, “La politique étrangère de la Chine sous Xi Jinping” (“The Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping”), *Hérodote*, 150/3 (2013), 172-190; Linda Jakobson, “Domestic Actors and the Fragmentation of China’s Foreign Policy,” in Robert Ross and Jo Inge Bekkevold, eds., *China in the Era of Xi Jinping: Domestic and Foreign Policy Challenges*, 2016; Huang Yanzhong, “The Sick Man of Asia: China’s Health Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov./Dec. 2011).

3. Paul Charon, “Pour une sociologie de l’Etat chinois ou comment interpréter les faiblesses d’un géant” (“For a Sociology of the Chinese State, or How to Interpret the Weaknesses of a Giant”), *Le Banquet*, 31 (2013), 15.

4. Ibid.

5. This fragmentation does not mean *eo ipso* that the Party is devoid of global ambitions or lacks the capacity to realize them. These fragmentations constrain the Party, influence its *modi operandi*, but without hindering its action.

6. Anne-Marie Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand, Gripping a Gun in the Other: China’s Exploitation of Civilian Channels for Military Purposes in New Zealand*, Kissinger Institute, Asia Program (Jul. 2020), 4.





## Chapter 1

# THE PARTY

At least five entities within the Party are important actors in influence operations: The Propaganda Department, the United Front Work Department, the International Liaison Department, the Communist Youth League, and the 610 Office.

## I. The Propaganda Department

The Propaganda/Publicity Department (中央宣传部)<sup>1</sup> oversees the **ideological work**,<sup>2</sup> as much in its conception as in the coordination between the structures that teach it to the members of the Party and diffuse it to the masses.<sup>3</sup> **It develops the training programs for Party members and for the national school curriculum**, establishes the propaganda policies to be implemented and plays a role in the nomination, promotion, and firing of the executives in the bureaucracies that make up the propaganda system. **The department also controls the entire media spectrum** – press, books, radio, television, Internet – to which it provides the news items to cover and those not to mention, both for a domestic audience and abroad.<sup>4</sup>

As the promoter of a unified thought, the Propaganda Department controls not only information but also the **entire cultural production of the country**, leaving as little space as possible for critique and creativity. With the 2018 reforms, the Party reclaimed certain prerogatives previously in the hands of the state, further reinforcing its control over the development of the Party's narrative strategies. The Propaganda Department notably inherited **supervisory and regulatory authority over the audiovisual industry**,<sup>5</sup> allowing the Party to promote patriotic movies or those presenting China as a responsible power for

1. The CCP modified the English translation of the department's name to replace propaganda with publicity, without changing the Chinese name, *xuanchuan* 宣传, which refers to communication, diffusion, announcement, public declarations.

2. In Chinese: *yishi xintai* (意识心态). The expression is commonly translated as “ideology,” but *yishi* refers to the conscience, to being aware of something, and *xintai* refers to the state, the mentality.

3. For further details on the Propaganda Department, see Anne-Marie Brady's benchmark work, which has unfortunately not been updated since its publication: *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008). See also David Shambaugh, “China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy,” *The China Journal*, 57 (2007).

4. “中共中央宣传部主要职能” (“Principal Functions of the Central Propaganda Department”), 人民日报 (*People's Daily*) (6 Jun. 2013), <http://archive.vn/nWZBK>.

5. “中共中央印发“深化党和国家机构改革方案”” (“The Central Committee of the Party Published the ‘Plan for Deepening Reforms of Party and State institutions’”), *Xinhua* (21 Mar. 2018), <http://archive.vn/qBoDP>. See the analysis and translation by David Bandurski, “When Reform Means Tighter Controls,” *China Media Project* (22 Mar. 2018).

INTRODUCTION

example,<sup>6</sup> but also to censor those that do not align with the Party's vision (→ p. 346).<sup>7</sup> This department is thus a powerful machine, allowing the Party to **shape the dominate discourse, control mass media, limit the freedom of expression and critical thought, orient – and manipulate – public opinion, defend its interests, justify its actions, and present itself in the best light.**

CONCEPTS

Created in 1924, eliminated during the Cultural Revolution, then reestablished in 1977, the Propaganda Department has been given a growing role since Xi Jinping came to power. Its current director, Huang Kunming (黄坤明), is a Politburo members, as his predecessors were, and is close to Xi Jinping with whom he worked for 20 years in Fujian and Zhejiang.<sup>8</sup> The Propaganda Department, whose offices are located at 5 West Chang'an Boulevard (西长安街5号) in Beijing, remains an opaque institution, but it is nevertheless known to employ 200 to 300 employees, all Party members, and to have about ten offices.<sup>9</sup> Its budget probably reaches RMB2.5 billion, or €317 million.<sup>10</sup>

ACTORS

The Propaganda Department is at the heart of the vast bureaucracy of the **propaganda system** (宣传系统). At its head are several small leading groups and commissions. The Secretariat of the Party's Central Committee serves as an intermediary between them and the Propaganda Department, whose director is usually a Secretariat member, as is the case with the current one.<sup>11</sup> The department then serves as an agency coordinating all the bodies in charge of implementing propaganda.

ACTIONS

The Central Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideology (中央宣传思想工作领导小组), formed during the 1980s, is the principal authority elaborating the policy whose implementation is coordinated by the Propaganda Department. It is currently run by Wang Huning (王沪宁), fifth member of the Standing Committee of the Party's Politburo, with Huang Kunming as deputy. **In 2018, the Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatization was elevated to the rank of commission** (中央网络安全和信息化委员会), **and it is now presided by Xi Jinping.** The Internet being an indispensable platform for the diffusion of propaganda, there is no doubt that the Propaganda Department follows this commission's directives. The General Affairs Office of this commission is, for that matter, run by the deputy director of the Propaganda Department, Zhuang Rongwen (庄荣文).<sup>12</sup> Likewise, the department seems to rely on another central leading group, which also became a commission in 2018, on Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作委员会) and dealing with questions of overseas propaganda. The Central Guidance Commission on Building "Spiritual Civilization" (中央精神文明建设指导委员会), similarly presided by Wang Huning with Huang Kunming as deputy, can also be mentioned; its office is run by the Propaganda Department. These leading groups ensure that the subordinate structures, in this case the Propaganda Department, correctly apply the directives passed down from higher Party authorities.

CASE

6. Such as, for example, *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017) or *The Wandering Earth* (2019).

7. James Griffiths, "The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party-Approved Blockbuster," *CNN* (1 Oct. 2019).

8. "黄坤明同志简历" ("CV of Comrade Huang Kunming"), 中央领导机构资料库 (*Database of Central Committee Bodies*), <http://archive.vn/MEzdz>.

9. In Chinese Yuan, or renminbi (RMB). For a (dated) introduction to the internal structure of the department, see Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System."

10. A rare source on the Party's finances, see: 杨志锦 (Yang Zhijin), "学习党部预算: 五部门公共预算支出37.68亿" ("Studying the Budgets of the Party Departments; Five Departments Publish Their Budget of 3.768 Billion"), 21 财经 (*21 Caijing*) (18 March 2015), <http://archive.vn/Oqqzm>. Cited in Damien Ma and Neil Thomas. "In Xi We Trust: How Propaganda Might Be Working in the New Era," *Macro Polo* (12 Sept. 2018).

11. Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System."

12. "CPC Releases Plan on Deepening Reform of Party and State Institutions," 人民网 (*People's Daily*) (22 Mar. 2018), <http://archive.vn/ahF8c>.

To ensure the implementation of the Party's policies on propaganda and ideology, the department of the same name exercises direct control or supervision over a broad range of organizations, each with its own means to influence society. The following non-exhaustive list presents the main ones:

- The **General Administration for Press and Publications** (国家新闻出版署) implements propaganda while supervising the entire press and publishing sector. Among other things, it manages the content and quality of publications, printings, royalties, and the import of printed works.

- The **State Council Information Office** (国务院新闻办公室) is in actually the same structure as the Central Committee's Foreign Propaganda Office (中央对外宣传办公室).<sup>13</sup> The deputy director of the Propaganda Department, Zhuang Rongwen, is also the deputy director of this office. It regularly organizes press conferences, ensures that Chinese media correctly present China abroad and accurately "explain" and "narrate" China, but also makes sure that foreign news is communicated to the national audience with an angle favorable to Party interests.

- The **Cyberspace Administration** (国家互联网信息办公室), another structure with two different names, corresponds to the office of the Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity previously mentioned. Its director is also Zhuang Rongwen, deputy director of the Propaganda Department. This administration executes propaganda policy on the Internet.

- The **Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization** (中央精神文明建设指导委员会办公室) is generally managed by the deputy executive director (常务副部长) of the Propaganda Department, currently Wang Xiaohui (王晓晖). The Propaganda Department and this commission's office manage the "Chinese Civilization" (中国文明网) portal together, presented as the principal platform for promoting propaganda and "spiritual civilization" efforts;<sup>14</sup> the latter refers to the promotion of the rules of good manners, morals, and hygiene for instance.

- The **Foreign Language Publishing Administration** (中国外文出版发行事业局), also known as the China International Publishing Group (中国国际出版集团), is the largest foreign-language publishing house in China.

- The Propaganda Department supervises numerous **newspapers and press agencies** such as the *People's Daily*, the bi-monthly *Qiushi*, the *Guangming Daily*, or even *Xinhua*, and heads the China Media Group – also called Voice of China – which brings together the major Chinese media outlets like CCTV, China National Radio, and Radio China International since 2018.

- The Propaganda Department is known to be influential in institutions such as the Ministry of **Culture** and of **Tourism**, the **Academy of Social Sciences**, but also with some **professional associations** such as the Association of Chinese Writers (中国作家协会) or that of journalists (中华全国新闻工作者协会).

- Finally, the Propaganda Department has **local ramifications** at the provincial, municipality, and district levels and extends even to neighborhoods or village committees. Local departments have been entrusted with a broad range of activities including the control of newspapers, media, and local cultural associations. They also manage education at their level and health policy through anti-epidemic centers and clinics.

13. “国务院关于机构设置的通知” (“Directive of the State Council on the Implementation of Structures”), 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 (*Website of the PRC Central Government*) (2018), <http://archive.vn/5AHU4>.

14. “关于我们” (“About”), 中国文明网 (*Chinese Civilization Portal*), <http://archive.vn/OXGpZ>.

The Propaganda Department therefore manages a **vast network of structures that control different vectors of information capable of influencing the Chinese and overseas populations**. The content they spread is the result of the department's propaganda policy and must conform to the Party's ideology. **The most commonly used method to make known what should be said or omitted is to issue spoken or written instructions**. These directives have a presumably higher status than national laws:<sup>15</sup> simply questioning them is liable to punishments including dismissals, firings (for journalists), closures (for media organizations), and even jail time; instructions can sometimes contain threats if the directives are not carried out.<sup>16</sup> Such directives are apparently adopted weekly by groups of five or six officials within the department and delivered during weekly meetings with editors in chief and journalists, followed by phone calls in subsequent days to check in on their implementation.<sup>17</sup>

The Propaganda Department is at the head of a **system that manipulates the information delivered to the Chinese each day, and which now dares to be more aggressive abroad**. The importance given to propaganda meant for overseas audiences is growing, even as it becomes less and less distinguishable from internal propaganda due to the increasing number of Chinese able to access news in a foreign language, to the size of the Chinese diaspora, and to the growing ability of foreigners to read the Chinese-language press.

## II. The United Front Work Department (UFWD)

The United Front Work Department (UFWD) of the Party's Central Committee (中央统一战线工作部) is the only department that constitutes the **bureaucratic embodiment of a political concept**, as introduced in the preceding section (→ p. 35). Emmanuel Jourda presented the UFWD as “a sort of permanent secretariat for **United Front issues**,” **although it does not have a monopoly on this political action**.<sup>18</sup> Since 2017, the UFWD has been run by You Quan (尤权), a member of the CCP's General Secretariat managed by Wang Huning, who oversees ideological activities and propaganda.<sup>19</sup>

15. Anne-Marie Brady, “China's Foreign Propaganda Machine,” *Wilson Center* (26 Oct. 2015), 17.

16. Dean Cheng, *Cyber Dragon: Inside China's Informational Warfare and Cyber Operations* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2017), 10-11.

17. Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*, 19.

18. Emmanuel Jourda, *Les usages post-révolutionnaires d'un canon orthodoxe: le Front uni et l'invention politique de l'après-révolution en Chine (The Post-Revolutionary Uses of an Orthodox Canon: The United Front and the Political Revolution of the After-Revolution in China)*, PhD Thesis, EHESS, 2012, 193.

19. A former professor at Fudan University, advisor to Jiang Zemin then to Hu Jintao, Wang Huning is today a member of the Party's Politburo Standing Committee and directs, within the Central Committee, the Secretariat and the Policy Research Office (中共中央政策研究室).

### A Brief History of the UFWD

- **In 1937**, at the beginning of the anti-Japanese United Front, the CCP sent a delegation to Wuhan to manage relations with the KMT; this was the first structural formalization of the United Front.<sup>20</sup>
- **In January 1939**, the General Secretariat of the CCP decided to create a central United Front department overseen by Wang Ming (王明) and, in March, ordered to all services, provincial committees, and special committees, to create a structure at their level and implement United Front efforts.<sup>21</sup>
- **From May 1944 to April 1945**, the CCP established the Central City Work Department (中央城市工作部), overseen by Peng Zhen (彭真), who took over leadership of United Front resistance against Japan. It ceased to function after the victory over the Japanese.<sup>22</sup>
- **In April 1946**, the Central Committee reactivated the Central City Work Department, with Zhou Enlai at its head.<sup>23</sup>
- **In September 1948**, the Central Committee renamed it the United Front Work Department. Lei Weihan (李维汉) took over management.<sup>24</sup>
- **In 1949**, the UFWD contributed to the preparation of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), set up in June.<sup>25</sup>
- **With the Cultural Revolution**, the activities of the UFWD were interrupted.<sup>26</sup>
- **In July 1968**, two PLA officers secretly restored the UFWD.<sup>27</sup>
- **In June 1973**, the Central Committee of the Party officially restarted the UFWD with the provisional nomination of Liu Youfa (刘友法) at its head.<sup>28</sup>
- **In 1979**, the 14<sup>th</sup> United Front Work Conference fully reestablished the UFWD structures.<sup>29</sup>
- **In March 2018**, the reforms launched at Xi Jinping's instigation resolved the issues of overlapping responsibilities and lack of coordination that interfered with the efficiency and implementation of the United Front policy. The UFWD notably recovered its authority over the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the The National Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. Its authority over attachés and consuls in charge of United Front activities aimed at the Chinese diaspora also increased, positioning the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a relatively subordinate position to the UFWD on these questions.

**The UFWD's offices highlight United Front targets.** Certain among them have long existed: in 1948, the young UFWD was already taking an interest in ethnic minorities and in the Chinese diaspora in KMT-controlled territories.<sup>30</sup> With successive reforms, the number of branches grew with the creation of offices for Xinjiang and the Chinese diaspora, rising to nine in 2017 and **twelve in 2018**. Chinese students abroad have also become an explicit target of the United Front policy.

20. “本部介绍” (“Presentation of our Department”), 中共中央统一战线工作部 (*The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee*) (10 Dec. 2010), <https://archive.vn/8ilPa>.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Jourda, *Les usages postrévolutionnaires*, 42.

26. Ibid., 55.

27. Ibid., 197.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 91.

30. Ibid., 196.



**The 12 Bureaus of the United Front Work Department (UFWD),  
with the names of the last known director in each of them**

<p><b>1. Party Work Bureau</b> 党派工作局 Dir: Sang Fuhua 桑福华 Targets: the “8 democratic parties” allied with the CCP<sup>a</sup></p>	<p><b>2. Ethnic Minority Work Bureau</b> 民族工作局 Dir: Ma Lihuai 马利怀 Targets: China’s 55 “ethnic minorities”<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>3. Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan United Front Work Bureau</b> 港澳台统战工作局 Dir: Wang Ping 王萍 Targets: “compatriots” of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan<sup>c</sup></p>
<p><b>4. Non-Public Economic Work Bureau</b> 非公有 制经济工作局 Dir: Zhang Tianyu 张天昱 Targets: Managers in private companies<sup>d</sup></p>	<p><b>5. Independent and Non-Party Intellectuals Work Bureau</b> 无党派、党外 知识分子工作局 Dir: Li Li 李莉 Targets: intellectuals who are not CCP members<sup>e</sup></p>	<p><b>6. New Social Class Members Work Bureau</b> 新的社 会阶层人士工作局 Dir: Zhang Ming 张明 Targets: Managers of foreign companies, NGOs, self-employed workers, “new media,”...<sup>f</sup></p>
<p><b>7. Tibet Bureau</b> 西藏工作局 (?) Dir: Zhang Dongliang 张东亮 Targets: Populations of Tibet<sup>g</sup></p>	<p><b>8. Xinjiang Bureau</b> 新疆工作局 (?) Dir: Yang Bingjian 杨丙见 Targets: Populations of Xinjiang<sup>h</sup></p>	<p><b>9. Overseas Chinese Affairs General Bureau</b> 侨务综合局 Dir: Liu Yujiang 刘玉江 Regional sub-bureaus (ex. America and Pacific)<sup>i</sup></p>
<p><b>10. Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau</b> 侨务事务局 Dir: Xu Yuming 许玉明 Responsibilities include: media, education, culture<sup>j</sup></p>	<p><b>11. Religious Affairs General Bureau</b> 宗教综合局 Dir: Han Song 韩松 General responsibilities, including supervision of religious schools<sup>k</sup></p>	<p><b>12. Religious Affairs Bureau</b> 宗教业务局 Dir: ? Division dedicated to Protestantism, Taoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Islam<sup>l</sup></p>

a. “中央统战部一局局长桑福华来我省 作专题辅导报告” (“Director of the 1<sup>st</sup> UFWD Bureau Sang Fuhua Visits Our Province”), 根在中原 (*Root in Henan*) (24 Oc. 2019), <http://archive.vn/OdCh1>; “中央统战部调研组来我区 调研” (“A UFWD Research Team Visits Our District”), 中共南京市鼓楼区区委统一战线工作部 (*UFWD Committee, Gulou District, Nanjing*) (9 Mar. 2017), <https://archive.vn/4ADS8>.

b. “中央统战部二局局长马利怀一行到我盟调研” (“Director of the 2<sup>nd</sup> UFWD Bureau Ma Lihuai Visits Our League”), 兴安盟委统战部 (*UFWD Committee, Xing’an League*) (17 Oct. 2019), <http://archive.vn/8cqlV>; “中央统战部调研组来我市调研民族工作” (“A UFWD Research Team Visits Our City as Part of Their Work on Ethnic Groups”), 中共张掖市委统战部 (*UFWD Committee, City of Zhangye*) (24 Jul. 2018), <https://archive.vn/0fKzD>.

c. “张荣顺出席第十届世界缅甸同侨联谊大会暨第二十四届澳门缅华泼水节开幕式” (“Zhang Rongshun Attends the 10<sup>th</sup> World Overseas Chinese Friendship Conference in Myanmar and the Opening Ceremony of the 24<sup>th</sup> Macau and Myanmar Water Festival”), 雪花新闻 (*Xuehua Xinwen*) (1 May 2019), <https://archive.vn/INBGd>.

d. “全国工商联十二届三次执委会议在南昌开幕” (“The Third Meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce Opened in Nanchang”), 人民网 (*People’s Daily*) (18 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/JL0DZ>.

e. “中央统战部副部长邹晓东来山东大学调研” (“UFWD Deputy Director Zou Xiaodong Visits Shandong University”), 山大视点 (*Shandashidian*), 5 May 2019, <http://archive.vn/zq5XQ>; “中央统战部五局调研组来鄞” (“The Director of the 5<sup>th</sup> UFWD Bureau Visits Yinzhou”), 鄞州新闻网 (*Yinzhou xinwenwang*) (8 Mar. 2019), <http://archive.vn/MnuoN>.

f. “中央统战部六局局长张明考察调研新城区民营企业新社会阶层统战工作” (“Director of the 6<sup>th</sup> UFWD Bureau Zhang Ming Inspects United Front in Xincheng District Toward the New Class of Private Entrepreneurs”), *Sobu* (31 Jul. 2019), <http://archive.vn/GTdJ4>; “中央统战部正式组建八局,全名叫“新的社会阶层人士工 作局”” (“The UFWD Officially Establishes an Eighth Bureau, Whose Full Name is the “New Social Class Members Working Bureau”), 澎湃 (*The Paper*) (4 Jul. 2016), <https://archive.vn/1TLVc>.

g. “近视防控工作委员会成立,陈楠华任主任、李格华任秘书长” (“Creation of the Working Commission on the Prevention and Control of Short-Sightedness, with Chen Nanhua as Director and Li Gehua as General Secretary”), 国际财经 (*Guoji caijing* (30 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/757sT>).

h. “鼓楼区2019年12月大事记” (“Events in Gulou District, December 2019”), 南京市鼓楼区人民政府 (*Civil government of Gulou District, City of Nanjing*), 22 January 2020, <http://archive.vn/eLwVW>.

i. “中央统战部侨务综合局(九局)巡视员张健青一行赴玉壶侨联调研侨务工作” (“Inspector of 9<sup>th</sup> UFWD Bureau Zhang Jianqing Visits the Yuhu Federation of Overseas Chinese”), 文成县人民政府 (*Wenchengxian Civil Government*) (12 Nov. 2018), <https://archive.vn/akoQU>. Liu Yujiang left his position in 2020 but the name of his replacement has not yet been made public, “中央统战部九局局长刘玉江转岗河南省政府党组成员” (“Director of 9<sup>th</sup> UFWD Bureau Liu Yujiang Named Member of the Party Committee of Henan Provincial Government”), 财新 (*Caixin*) (16 Apr. 2020), <http://archive.vn/4GPhH>. Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Work on Diaspora and Religious Affairs,” *Jamestown Foundation*, 19:9 (9 May 2019).

j. “2019中国·济南华侨华人创新创业大会隆重举行” (“The 2019 Jinan Overseas Chinese Innovation and Entrepreneurship Conference Occurred”), 中共中央统一战线工作部 (*The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee*) (3 Jul. 2019), <http://archive.vn/4ylt4>; “官方证实潘岳出任国侨办主任” (“Official Confirmation that Pan Yue Becoming Director of Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau”), 星島日報 (*Sing Tao Daily*) (5 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/JXy9R>. Joske’s hypotheses, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department.”

k. ““我国宗教治理体系和治理能力现代化”理论研讨会观点摘编” (“Looking Back on the Theoretical Seminar ‘Our Country’s System of Religious Governance and the Modernization of its Governance Capacities’”), 中央社会主义学院 (*Central Institute of Socialism*) (18 Jul. 2019), <http://archive.vn/UmVvi>; “卢献匾率队赴中央统战部和全国人大汇报工作” (“Lu Xianbian and His Team Report to the UFWD and the People’s National Congress”), 广西壮族自治区人大常委会 (*Permanent Committee of the People’s Congress of the Guangxi Autonomous Region*) (4 Mar. 2019), <https://archive.vn/sDODd>. See Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department.”

l. “文件16” (“Document 16”), 人民日报 (*People’s Daily*) (25 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/Xgn2i>; See Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department.”

### A Global Network of “Service Centers”

In 2014, the State Council’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (subsequently integrated into the UFWD) created “Overseas Chinese Service Centers” (华助中心) with the goal of setting them up in 60 countries. At the end of 2018, it had 45 in 39 countries.<sup>31</sup> Their *raison d’être* is the provision of services to the Chinese community, particularly newly-arrived migrants. For the most part, preexisting centers were simply labelled OCSCs. For example, in South Africa, 13 “Chinese Community and Police Cooperation Centers” in place since 2004 were certified as OCSCs. They are tasked with “protecting the lives and property of individuals of Chinese descent in South Africa by facilitating a more productive relationship with South African police.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, they had long been financed by the Chinese Embassy in South Africa. The heads of this network (currently Li Xinzhu (李新铸), and his predecessor Wu Shaokang (吴少康)) are two Chinese businessmen who made a career in South Africa, and who also head the African branch of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会) – which falls directly under UFWD supervision.

31. Matt Schrader, “Chinese Assistance Centers’ Grow United Front Work Department Global Presence,” The Jamestown Foundation (5 Jan. 2019).

32. Ibid.

### III. The International Liaison Department

The International Liaison Department (ILD, 中共中央对外联络部) is an organ of the Central Committee in charge of the Party's external work (党的对外工作). This work consists in **maintaining party-to-party relations, also called “party diplomacy,”** and is part of the PRC's “general diplomacy” (总体外交). A “quiet but effective diplomacy,” to use David Shambaugh's words,<sup>33</sup> the ILD's activities draw little attention for at least three reasons: when it comes to diplomacy, we think mainly of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; because party-to-party relations are not generally considered an important element of a country's foreign policy; and because the ILD voluntarily keeps a low profile.<sup>34</sup> Its actions are nevertheless not to be overlooked: the ILD has notably served as a **parallel diplomatic channel** to conduct sensitive and secret negotiations, promote the revolution (it has sent money and weapons to armed groups abroad), but also to act as a **propaganda agent** which can double as an **intelligence collector**.<sup>35</sup>

The ILD is the heir of several successive institutions: The Communications Office (交通局) created in 1927, the Overseas Work Commission (海外工作委员会) which seemingly replaced it in 1942, then the 3<sup>rd</sup> United Front Bureau which took over the liaison work in 1948.<sup>36</sup> In 1951, the International Liaison Department was created, making a break with United Front structures. It took the name “International Department” in its English version in 1995, while its Chinese name remained the same.<sup>37</sup> Originally, the IDL was in charge of the relations with other Communist parties worldwide: in the 1950s, it took an interest in Asian parties, on the one hand, and on Eastern European and Soviet parties on the other. With the 1955 Bandung Conference, the ILD also developed links with socialist parties in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>38</sup> It was only from the 1980s onward that the ILD enlarged its range of interlocutors to include all types of parties, whatever their political stripes. The goal of the ILD indeed evolved: it was no longer a matter of exporting the revolution. This goal was abandoned with the emergence of the “Three representations” theory under Jiang Zemin – a sort of Chinese Thermidor – but to contribute to **building a global consensus favorable to China**.<sup>39</sup> The ILD's current four objectives are to **maintain relations** with foreign political parties; to **serve as an analysis and observation platform** allowing the Party to better understand the world; **increase the number of “Chinese friends”** of all political stripes; and to **reinforce China's soft power and discursive power** abroad.<sup>40</sup>

Since Xi Jinping came to power, the Party has affirmed its will to further centralize the management of the general diplomacy and to strengthen a “new phase” (党的对外工作新局面) of party diplomacy,<sup>41</sup> which entails building a “new type of political

33. David L. Shambaugh, “China's ‘Quiet Diplomacy’: The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party,” *China: An International Journal*, 5:1 (2007), 54.

34. *Ibid.*, 28.

35. *Ibid.*, 27-38.

36. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

37. *Ibid.*, 29.

38. *Ibid.*, 35.

39. “Press Conference: CPC's United Front and International Relations,” *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China* (23 Oct. 2017), <https://archive.vn/TiDqv>; Julia G. Bowie, “International Liaison Work for the New Era: Generating Global Consensus?” *Party Watch Annual Report* (2018), 43-44; “How China's Communist Party Trains Foreign Politicians,” *The Economist* (10 Dec. 2020).

40. These objectives are cited on the ILD presentation page, archived at: <https://archive.vn/aFVh7>.

41. Bowie, “International Liaison Work for the New Era.”; “Xi Stresses Centralized, United Leadership of CPC Central Committee Over Foreign Affairs,” *Xinhua* (15 May 2018); “Xi Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country

party relations” (新型政党关系).<sup>42</sup> This “party diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” is meant to allow foreign political parties to “understand and respect Chinese values and interests”;<sup>43</sup> it serves as a vector to diffuse a positive image and history of the Party abroad.<sup>44</sup>

Based in Beijing, the ILD has been run since 2015 by Song Tao (宋涛), who graduated in economics and got some experience within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the former central leading group for Foreign Affairs. Internally, the ILD is currently made up of 16 bureaus, of which 8 are geographically specialized in the following regions: South and Southeast Asia; Northeast Asia and Indochina; Central Asia and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Latin America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and the CIS; North America, Oceania, Northern Europe; Western Europe. ILD attachés are sometimes posted in certain embassies – including Washington, London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin – without necessarily declaring themselves as anything other than staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>45</sup> **The ILD also manages a front organization** created in 1981, the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (中国国际交流友好协会) whose Chinese name means “Chinese Association for Friendly International Exchange”; a publishing house, “Contemporary World” (当代世界出版社) founded in 1993; and the China Center for Contemporary World Studies (当代世界研究中心), a think tank created in 1994.<sup>46</sup>

The ILD officially maintains **relations with over 600 parties or political groups in no less than 160 countries or regions**.<sup>47</sup> David Shambaugh delineates seven types of ILD activities: sending Party leaders abroad; receiving party leaders of foreign countries, especially from socialist countries; participating in, or organizing, international conferences of political parties; promoting China’s policies and achievements abroad; contributing to the “battle” against Taiwan on the diplomatic scene; working to advance China’s economic modernization; and visiting foreign countries to specifically study a subject, such as the causes of the USSR’s collapse.<sup>48</sup> Between 1983 and 2003, the ILD might have received some 4,500 delegations of foreign political parties for a total of 26,000 individuals and sent abroad more than 1,500 delegations for a total of 10,000 participants.<sup>49</sup> Since Xi Jinping, more than 158 “presentation sessions” (宣介会) to explain how China “succeeds” have been organized worldwide with foreign political figures; more than three-quarters of them have taken place since 2016.<sup>50</sup> In 2017, the ILD organized a global summit for the first time, the “High-Level Summit: The CCP in Dialogue with World Political Parties” (中国共产党

Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” *Xinhua*, (24 Jun. 2018).

42. “不断推进党的对外工作理论和实践创新” (“Continuously Promote Innovation in the Theory and Practice of the Party’s External Work”), *PRC Central Government Website* (28 Sept. 2019), <https://archive.vn/hm85K>.

43. 于洪君 (Yu Hongjun), 中国特色政党外交 (*Party-to-Party Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics*), (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, Jun. 2017), 36-37, cited by Bowie, “International Liaison Work for the New Era,” 43.

44. 金鑫 (Jin Xin), “国内外关于中国共产党对外交往的研究综述” (“Overview of Chinese and Foreign Research on Party Diplomacy”), *CPC News* (16 Mar. 2015), <https://archive.vn/8bf89>.

45. Shambaugh, “China’s ‘Quiet Diplomacy,’” 45.

46. *Ibid.*, 43; David Shambaugh, “China’s External Propaganda Work: Missions, Messengers, Mediums,” *Party Watch Annual Report* (2018), 32; Website of the China Center for Contemporary World Studies: <http://www.cccws.org.cn/list.aspx?clmId=89>.

47. “我部简介” (“Department Presentation”), 中共中央对外联络部 (*International Department. Central Committee of CPC*), <https://archive.vn/aFVh7>.

48. Shambaugh, “China’s ‘Quiet Diplomacy,’” 48-51.

49. *Ibid.*, 46.

50. According to the data collected by Macro Polo: <https://macropolo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ILD-Foreign-Briefings-List-Updated.xlsx>.



与世界政党高层对话会) which brought together more than 600 political leaders from 300 political parties in 120 countries (→ p. 256).<sup>51</sup>

## IV. The Communist Youth League

The Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL – 中国共产主义青年团) was founded in 1920 (before the CCP), under the name Socialist Youth League (社会主义青年团). Like the Communist Party, it was the product of three tendencies: it first emerged from the “Western iconoclasm”<sup>52</sup> of the 1910s. One of the leading figures of this movement, Chen Duxiu (陈独秀), also a founder of the CCP, attributed the failure of the 1911 Revolution to the position of the preceding generation that imagined saving China by employing “Chinese knowledge for fundamental principles and Western knowledge for practical application” (中学为体,西学为用). For Chen and the intellectuals who founded this “movement for the new culture” (Hu Shi (胡适), Li Dazhao (李大钊) and Lu Xun (鲁迅)), China could only be saved by the adoption of Western culture. They spread their ideas via the review *Xin Qingnian* (新青年) (*New Youth*) – whose sub-heading, *La Jeunesse*, was written in French – and they enjoyed a rapid success, especially among the youth. Then, the CYL emerged from the May Fourth Movement (in 1919), a vast protest movement resulting from the injustice felt by the Chinese youth faced with the Versailles Treaty’s decision to attribute the Shandong province (formerly under German domination) to Japan. This nationalist convulsion stimulated a germinating intellectual fervor and marked the birth of a form of activism among the educated youth. Finally, after 1920, the Komintern (created the previous year) sent advisors to China to facilitate the creation of a Chinese section of the Communist International: first Grigori Voitinsky (born Zarkhin), the deputy director of the Far East Comintern Bureau, then Hendricus Sneevliet (alias Hans Maring) whose efforts led to the creation of the CCP and the CYL. The League adopted its current name in 1925.

Like the CCP, the CYL presents **significant structural similarities with the Soviet system**, in this case the Komsomol. The CYL is a so-called mass organization which serves as a relay for the Party toward a fraction of the Chinese population. Officially, its role is to assist the Party and it also serve as its reserve force (后备军). It is thus designed to serve as a **go-between with the youth** – the CYL ensures the dissemination of the Party’s keywords and propaganda –, as an **incubator for future Party executives** (a quarter of CCP members comes from it<sup>53</sup>), and to be a **mobilizable force** if needed. An ideal arena to identify promising leaders, the CYL has long constituted a vehicle of social promotion for young people. It is nevertheless seen by some today as a decaying structure which no longer provides ambitious individuals with significant advantages.<sup>54</sup>

The CYL welcomes young individuals between 14 and 28 and it counts slightly more than 80 million members (compared to 90 million for the CCP). Around one young Chinese in five is a member. It thus represents a colossal force within this age group.

51. The event page is archived at: <https://archive.vn/HhyXW>.

52. Yves Chevrier, *La Chine moderne (Modern China)* (Paris: PUF, 1983).

53. Jérôme Doyon, *Rejuvenating Communism, The Communist Youth League as a Political Promotion Channel in Post-Mao China*, PhD Thesis, Sciences Po & Columbia University, 2016.

54. Ibid.

## A. Operation and organization

The operation and organization of the CYL resemble the CCP's. It is governed by a charter drafted in 1957. A national congress is held every four years, following the CCP's and whose themes it echoes. The congress traditionally opens with a speech by the Politburo member in charge of CYL relations,<sup>55</sup> a symbolic way to remind the participants of the Party's control and to convey its overall expectations regarding the mass organization. The Party also appoints the leaders of the CYL. The League is run by a first secretary, an executive secretary and five secretaries. It has only very limited autonomy in relation to the Party and no administrative power. It is not able to implement public policies. It is therefore above all **an organ for mobilizing people and distributing propaganda**. Like the Party, the CYL has local committees at each level of the Party-State apparatus, which are under the dual supervision of the higher-level CYL committee and of the same-level Party committee.

**The CYL supervises other Party-affiliated youth organizations:** The All-China Youth Federation (中华全国青年联合会) – a structure of the United Youth Front – Young Pioneers of China (中国少年先锋队) – children from 6 to 14 – and the All-China Student Federation (中华全国学生联合会<sup>56</sup>).

**The CYL has its own propaganda tools, including the *Chinese Youth Daily* (中国青年报<sup>57</sup>)** – relatively liberal and distributed at almost 600,000 copies – and the **Chinese Youth publishing house** (中国青年出版社<sup>58</sup>). The latter has published over 700 million copies of over 10,000 works since its creation in 1950.<sup>59</sup> **It also publishes a dozen magazines**, including *Chinese Youth* (中国青年) and *Youth File* (青年文摘), both with over 3 million copies distributed monthly. In 2007, the CYL publishing house set up shop in London. Its London branch (中国青年出版总社伦敦分社 – CYPI PRESS) was ordered to set up an **international English-language publishing platform** (in other languages as well) and an international marketing network. It is meant to “present a more genuine, modern, and beautiful China to the world.”<sup>60</sup> The CYL also manages a central school in which its leaders are trained.

Over the past two decades, the CYL has been marked by the rapid development of its affiliated structures. It thereby acquired units capable of acting on its behalf and has thus been able to develop the scope of its missions. The CYL has furthermore **strengthened its action regarding universities where it strives to better control students**.<sup>61</sup> Despite these developments the CYL remains a weakly-funded organization with a limited budget of RMB583 million in 2015 (€82.4 million at the time), far behind other mass organizations of the regime.

55. Ibid.

56. See the Federation's webpage: <https://qgxl.youth.cn/> and also the Baidu page: <https://urlz.fr/dvlO>.

57. The website of the newspaper: <http://www.cyol.net/>.

58. Website: <http://www.cyp.com.cn/>.

59. “中国青年出版社” (“Chinese Youth Press”), *Baidu*: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/中国青年出版社>.

60. Ibid. “中国青年出版社伦敦分社将逐步构建一个国际化的出版平台和面向全球的营销网络, 努力把一个更加真实、现代、美好的中国呈现给世界, 同时也将面向国际出版市场采购图书或版权, 把英国、欧洲乃至世界文化介绍给中国读者。”

61. Yan Xiaojun dates this regained influence to the 1990s, a consequence of the trauma of the Tian'anmen Square incidents. Yan Xiaojun, “Engineering Stability: Authoritarian Political Control over University Students in Post-Deng China,” *The China Quarterly*, 218 (Jun. 2014), 493-513.



## B. CYL influence operations

**Most of CYL-led influence operations clearly take places on PRC territory.** The mass organization participates first and foremost in the effort to legitimize the party in the eyes of the Chinese youth, which is why most of its resources are deployed in China. This mission obviously includes a defense against external aggressions. As such, it is useful to remember that between January 21 and 24, 2019, the CCP held a seminar at the Central Party School on risk and stability. In his opening speech on January 21, Xi Jinping underlined two essential objectives: the prevention of major risks and the protection of economic and social stability. The Party leader thereby urged managers to guard against eventual “black swans” and “gray rhinos” (警惕黑天鵝, 防范灰犀牛)<sup>62</sup> to ensure the regime’s political safety.<sup>63</sup> The seminar was likely motivated by unrests in Venezuela following the election in early January of Juan Guaidó as head of the National Assembly and his contestation of President Maduro’s power. These events thereby unearthed the **CCP’s fears of a Chinese color revolution presumably encouraged by Washington.** Although Xi Jinping had alluded to other types of black swans, linked to technology or finance for example, it is the risk of a color revolution that haunts the regime. The Party regularly accuses the United States of encouraging democratic revolutions worldwide and having such ambitions in China. The Party no doubt considered that the notion of a black swan offered an efficient means to remind Party leaders of the necessity to fight this insidious menace to ensure their monopoly on power.

Interestingly, the WeChat account named “Island of the Knights” (俠客島) run by *China Daily* and whose name refers to a swashbuckling novel, *Ode to Gallantry* (俠客行) by Jin Yong (金庸), echoed Xi’s 21 January speech, explaining that the ideological fight should be carried out online first and that the youth was its primary Internet audience.<sup>64</sup> **Activities targeting the youth are therefore a priority for the survival of the regime.**

To carry out this work, **the CYL has significantly increased its presence on social networks,** naturally favoring the outlets most popular among young people. A study conducted by Ma Xiaoxuan and Anna Strelkova,<sup>65</sup> shows the extent of this presence. It also shows the **overrepresentation of Bilibili** (哔哩哔哩),<sup>66</sup> a video-sharing platform which allows for content diffusion along with comments embedded in the videos. The two authors explained that this platform’s audience is very young, and belongs to Generation Z. No wonder then that the CYL is devoting significant efforts on it.

The CYL uses Bilibili as its vector of choice for the dissemination of very diverse narrative materials, but whose general aim remains **the promotion of the Party, the homeland, and criticisms of the United States.** On the latter, the platform distinguished itself

62. The term “Black Swan” refers to the idea of a low-probability, high-impact event or phenomenon; “Gray Rhinos” to a high-probability event unknown to decision-makers.

63. “习近平：警惕“黑天鵝” 防范“灰犀牛” (“Xi Jinping: Beware of ‘Black Swans’ and Protect Against ‘Gray Rhinos’”), *Renmin ribao* (22 Jan. 2019), [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2019-01/22/content\\_1905265.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2019-01/22/content_1905265.htm).

64. “習近平提七大風險 嚴防「灰犀牛」與「黑天鵝」” (“Xi Jinping Mentions Seven Major Risks to Prevent ‘Gray Rhinos’ and ‘Black Swans’”), *Radio Free Asia* (23 Jan. 2019), <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/risk-01232019082604.html>.

65. Ma Xiaoxuan and Anna Strelkova, “Chinese Communist Youth League: Your Next Influencer,” *Master of Media* (24 Oct. 2019).

66. Bilibili is the property of Shanghai Media Group (上海东方传媒集团), the second Chinese broadcasting company. The main shareholder of this publicly-owned company is the city of Shanghai.

throughout June 2020 with videos using the death of George Floyd to “denounce” the racism of the American government (→ p. 387).

The narratives spread by the CYL on Bilibili, as on other social networks, use rhetorical tactics to gain the youth’s support, especially **humor**. The messages disseminated are thus often **sarcastic** (→ p. 395).

To carry out its work, the CYL has also been equipped since 1993, through the newspaper of the communist youth, with a **public polling center**. Over the years, this center has carried out several studies on the attitudes of young Chinese toward the West. According to certain Chinese researchers,<sup>67</sup> a study published by the center after the United States bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade showed the United States as the most-hated country among the Chinese youth; it may have influenced Clinton’s China policy. It is not possible to establish the robustness of the survey in question but the case illustrates well how the **CYL tries to acquire tools to better understand and guide young people**.

The CYL thus plays a key role in the CCP’s propaganda work and provides important support to the department of the same name. While the CYL’s actions aim first and foremost at winning over the Chinese youth, turning them into an unfailing Party ally, they also look to **use young people to distribute narrative material produced by the Party to other segments of the society**.

CYL agents have thereby become true experts in the use of social networks, on the one hand, and in the use of subcultures likely to spread their message, such as rap, on the other. On August 4 2016, the Chengdu-based **rap group CD Rev** (天府事变) uploaded the **song “Watch Out for Color Revolutions”** (警惕颜色革命)<sup>68</sup> **which argued that the United States promotes democracy to better impose its power and control over the world**. The song was in fact a propaganda operation led by the CYL. **CD Rev regularly collaborates with the CYL** whose slogans and narratives are repurposed in its songs.<sup>69</sup> They claim a lineage to American rapper Eminem and they have adopted the codes of Gangsta Rap but the content – acting as CCP apologists – brings them far from the spirit of the American rap movement. The imitation of American codes also contrasts with the sharp critique of Washington, incapable of finding favors with the rappers. “Watch Out for Color Revolutions” was met with real success and quickly established itself as **one of the most effective instruments of the anti-American discourse in the Chinese youth**. It also shows the Party’s capacity to turn American cultural codes against the United States themselves.

67. Feng Huiyun, ed., *How China Sees the World: Insights from China’s International Relations Scholars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

68. The video clip is available at: <https://youtu.be/9NO9vXkCdLM>.

69. See “Red Power” (红色力量), for instance: <https://archive.vn/MTirN>.



Left, the singers of CD Rev<sup>70</sup>; Right, a screenshot of the song's video.

The CYL was also responsible for uploading, on August 1, 2016, a **video that accused the United States of fomenting a color revolution in China**, like those in Georgia, Ukraine, and the Arab spring.<sup>71</sup> The video, uploaded to the Weibo website of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, was **viewed more than 10 million times in only 24 hours**.<sup>72</sup> Its publication date, August 1, was not a coincidence, as it was the anniversary of the PLA's creation: as its author explained, the video was designed to support the army's development and its deterrent role in the face of US actions.<sup>73</sup> It was made by Lei Xiyang (雷希颖), then a doctoral student at the Australian National University. A CYL member, and a particularly active member in Australia, he was described by the CCP as "an outstanding youth representative of online ideological construction."<sup>74</sup> His thesis actually dealt with the representations of China in Australia's media. According to his Baidu biography page,<sup>75</sup> Lei was born in 1987 in Fujian province. Since 2014, he has distinguished himself in numerous "patriotic" activities aimed at uniting the Chinese people behind the Party's objectives: in 2014, he created a commemorative map of the patriotic war against Japan (抗战爱国纪念地图); in 2015, he produced his first propaganda video entitled "The Engine of My Country and Myself" (我和我的国家擎); finally, in July 2015, he participated in the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the 26<sup>th</sup> All-China Youth Federation Congress, where he declared:

I am very excited about the idea of returning to China to participate in the Youth League Conference. I feel truly invested by a mission from the executive committee. I have studied and lived abroad for a long time, and I now better understand the Chinese dream. Last year, I launched the event "Share a Photo with the National Flag" which sparked the unexpected participation of hundreds of millions of Chinese and foreign citizens, and showed that the Chinese dream is the common dream of hundreds of millions of people. As a foreign student, I am looking forward to learning and returning to China as soon as possible. Knowledge contributes to the development of our mother country.<sup>76</sup>

70. "Pump是谁 Lil Pump新歌辱华中国歌手回怼 美国说唱歌手Li" ("Who is Pump? Lil Pump's New Song Insults China, the Chinese Singer Responds to American Rapper Li"), 好查网 (18 Dec. 2018), <http://www.haocaa.com/2/32520.htm>.

71. The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uBXypPR1yI&feature=youtu.be>.

72. Philip Wen, "The Australian Connection Behind China's Ultra-Nationalist Viral Video," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4 Aug. 2016).

73. <https://archive.vn/0N67I>.

74. Tina Faulk, "China, Red in Tooth and Claw," *The Spectator Australia* (5 Apr. 2018).

75. "雷希颖" (Lei Xiyang), *Baidu*. The page is archived at: <http://archive.vn/0N67I>.

76. *Ibid.*





Left, Lei Xiyang with Brian Schmidt, Vice-President of the Australian National University<sup>77</sup>;  
Right, a screenshot of Lei Xiyang's video.<sup>78</sup>

In the previously-mentioned video published by the account of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, Lei Xiyang suggested that unrests in the Middle East were the direct result of American interventions and the revolutions they fomented. China was presented as a stable and prosperous country under an American threat. The stars and stripes (see the screenshot above) was portrayed as lingering behind Tibetan, Uyghur, Hong Kong and Taiwanese separatists, behind human rights activists, behind attacks against Chinese Blue Helmets, and behind the Japanese or Filipino actions in the South China Sea. According to this video, the U.S. aims to destroy Chinese harmony by all possible means. It presumably practices subversion and attempts to provoke existing tensions within the Chinese society. **The video played on pathos, showing numerous images of children and adults, victims of the unrest supposedly created by U.S. interventions.**<sup>79</sup> It was about inflicting real “commotion”<sup>80</sup> on the audience, hence designed to bend its will and gain support without recourse to the rational *logos*.<sup>81</sup> But this goal remains hidden behind a demonstration presented above all as “instructive” and well-argued. The persuasive process was further reinforced by an abundance of evidence (known in Latin rhetoric as *copiosus*) produced in a particularly embellished style.

The different actions carried out by Lei in the name of the CYL earned him, on May 4 2017, the May Fourth Medal of Chinese Youth.<sup>82</sup> Lei Xiyang was also a contributor to the Internet **website “April Internet”**<sup>83</sup> (四月网) whose original name was “Anti-CNN.” The website, launched in April 2008 and inaccessible since the end of 2020, was meant to counter the “arrogant” discourse “full of prejudice” coming from the American – and by extension Western – media.<sup>84</sup> It was the treatment by Western media of “incidents” in Tibet that seemingly motivated the creation of the website which offered articles that “demol-

77. Source: Baidu, reproduced in Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), 8 of the central booklet.

78. The video is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uBXypPR1yI&feature=youtu.be>.

79. The Greek verb *pathein* means “suffer.”

80. Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, “Portraits de l'orateur” (“Portrait of the Orator”), in Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani (ed.), *La rhétorique des passions (The Rhetoric of Passions)* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

81. “Nothing in fact is more important for the orator, Catulus, than to gain the favor of the listener, especially to arouse in him such emotions that instead of following judgment and reason, he yields to the drive of passion and the turmoil of his soul.” (Cicero, *De Oratore*).

82. Medal awarded to those having distinguished themselves for having made an “exceptional contribution” to the Party's benefit.

83. The website is accessible here: <http://www.m4.cn/>; See also the Weibo age of the website which appears to still be active: [https://www.weibo.com/acm4?is\\_all=1](https://www.weibo.com/acm4?is_all=1).

84. “四月网” (“April Internet”), *Baidu*, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9B%9B%E6%9C%88%E7%BD%91>.

ished” Western “centrism” (中心主义) and “Hegemony” (霸权). The website was created by Rao Jin (饶谨), who was also the producer of the hip hop group CD Rev – proof of **a certain level of coordination between the different information operations carried out by the CYL**. The target public, even more than Chinese living in China, was the Chinese living abroad (especially students) as well as people of Chinese ancestry (*huaqiao*). Rao Jin called on Internet users to **denounce cases of biased treatment of information tied to China in Western media**. The website also published articles echoing official propaganda narratives, for example about the coronavirus,<sup>85</sup> and reproduced all or part of the remarks of important foreign figures that could contribute to building a positive image of China, as was the case for example of an interview with the British Sinologist Martin Jacques who showed support for the measures taken by China in the fight against the coronavirus epidemic.<sup>86</sup>



The website “April Internet,” inaccessible since the end of 2020 (Screenshot taken on November 30, 2020).<sup>87</sup>

In terms of influence operations, **the CYL can therefore play two key roles: first, in manipulating the Chinese population** to shield them from actions carried out overseas that could destabilize the Party; **next, in mobilizing the Chinese youth, especially those living abroad,** to contribute to coordinated actions. This report will show examples of this type of operations undertaken by the CYL (→ p. 365).

## V. The 610 Office

The 610 Office (610 办公室) is a particularly secret structure **in charge of the fight against the Falun Gong movement (法轮功)** and by extension against all “religious sects.” Little corroborated information is available on its precise objectives, its chain of command and organization, on its number of employees, or even on its *modus operandi*. The office’s origin is traced back to 1999, when, on June 7, Jiang Zemin convened a special

85. 储贺军 (Chu Hejun), “中国是人类文明的吹哨人” (“China is the Whistleblower of Human Civilization”), 四月网 (*April Internet*) (29 Apr. 2020), <http://www.m4.cn/opinion/2020-04/1365314.shtml>.

86. <http://news.m4.cn/2020-05/1365445.shtml>.

87. <https://web.archive.org/web/20201130103833/http://m4.cn/>.

meeting of the Party's Politburo to take measures against the dramatic rise in power of the Falun Gong movement within the Chinese society.<sup>88</sup> Their activities of spiritual gymnastics were bringing together tens of thousands of practitioners, including at the highest levels of the CCP. Jiang Zemin saw a threat to the survival of the Party, unable to tolerate the existence of a social structure outside of its control.<sup>89</sup> Following the meeting, a directive established a small leading group directly connected to the Central Committee of the Party and under the leadership of Li Lanqing (李岚清), a Politburo member in charge of solving the Falun Gong "problem." On June 10, the 610 Office (whose name reflects its date of creation) was created to implement the directives formulated by the central leading group. No text appears to have been promulgated on the 610 Office and it literally remains an extra-legal structure.

In the months following the Party's decision, the 610 Office opened branches at all levels of the Party-State to structure a **tight network throughout the territory**. At each level, the local 610 Office director also occupies the role of secretary or deputy secretary of the Political-Legal Affairs Committee (政法委) of the same level.<sup>90</sup> The Party also created Maintaining Stability Offices (维稳办公室), especially in major coastal cities, which appear to work in close collaboration with local sections of the 610 Office and often share the same physical premises.<sup>91</sup> According to the *Epoch Times* – whose reporting should be approached with the utmost caution – in March 2010, the government of the Pingyang District, in Zhejiang Province, apparently announced the nomination of only one manager at the head of the local offices of the two administrations, thus proving their integration and common objectives. The 610 Office employs around **15,000 individuals across all Chinese and overseas territories**. The agents of this "administration" **act without any legal basis to eradicate the Falun Gong movement**.

We know more about this office, especially about its overseas activities, since the **defection of Chen Yonglin in 2005**, who was then a consul in Sydney and in charge of Falun Gong. In July 2005, he described in detail Beijing's practices for detecting, surveilling, and persecuting Falun Gong followers worldwide before a House sub-committee in Washington.<sup>92</sup> He explained that following the creation of the 610 Office, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs put in place an office on the Falun Gong question connected to the national measures taken to fight the "cult." In 2004, this service took the name of the Department of External Security Affairs. In February 2001, the Chinese consulate in Sydney created a special group in charge of the fight against Falun Gong. The group was run by the Consul General himself and convened twice a month.

According to the diplomat, similar groups were created in the United States and countries where the cult was active.<sup>93</sup> "The war against the Falun Gong was extended abroad in 2000. **In each Chinese diplomatic mission, there had to be at least one official responsible for the Falun Gong issue,**" explained Chen Yonglin, who occupied this precise position in Sydney, and whose mission was to "**monitor and persecute**" Falun Gong members in

88. Sarah Cook and Leeshai Lemish, "The 610 Office: Policing the Chinese Spirit," *China Brief*, 11:17 (16 Sept. 2011).

89. On the Falun Gong and its repression after 1999, see Maria Hsia Chang, *Falun Gong: The End of Days* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

90. 章洪 (Zhang Hong), "中共政法委黑幕: '610' 秘密机构内幕" ("The Intrigues of the CCP's Political-Legal Affairs Committee: Behind the Scenes of the Secret '610 Office'"), 大纪元 (*The Epoch Times*) (10 Jun. 2016).

91. Ibid.

92. "Falun Gong and China's Continuing War on Human Rights" (21 Jul. 2005). The report is archived here: <https://archive.vn/EzvOZ>.

93. Ibid.



Australia.<sup>94</sup> Chen furthermore confirmed that the system of intelligence gathering on Falun Gong in Australia relied on some “1000 agents and informers” at the time. Their number was apparently at least equivalent in the United States; the two countries are specifically targeted by the Party due to the strong presence of Falun Gong members. Surveillance and repression against the followers are accompanied by **significant propaganda aimed at foreign governments**, elected officials, media, universities, etc. to convince them of the legitimacy of Chinese actions and of the harmfulness of the Falun Gong. Diplomats are also tasked with **detecting and keeping a record on its members**, adding them to a blacklist that prevents them from returning to China. The Chinese authorities also try to reduce the broadcasting and circulation of media outlets created by the Falun Gong such as New Tang Dynasty Television – today called NTD – and they finance the broadcast of anti-Falun Gong radio and television shows. Finally, local relays of the 610 Office, as with other Party-State actors, rely on the Chinese diasporas in the West to muffle Falun Gong activities. Universities likely to support CCP actions are encouraged to take a public position against the cult.

Even if the 610 Office is not a leading actor in Chinese influence operations, its activities in countries with numerous Falun Gong followers constitutes a real interference.

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94. Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs. Enquête sur les activités d'espionnage au Canada, (Nests of Spies: The Startling Truth About Foreign Agents at Work Within Canada's Borders)* (Montréal: Stanké, 2009), 220.

## Chapter 2

# THE STATE

Within the state, two structures in particular are involved in influence operations: the Ministry of State Security and the Taiwan Affairs Office.

## I. The Ministry of State Security

In this assessment of the actors involved in Chinese operations, the Ministry of State Security (MSS中华人民共和国国家安全部), **the principal civil intelligence agency**, has two singularities: first, it is the most difficult institution to investigate with open source methods. If our research into the Chinese-speaking Internet allowed us to collect numerous details about the United Front, the Taiwan Affairs Office or even the PLA – all of them leave documents online containing valuable information – the MSS appears to be much more careful. Little information is thus openly available. Second, information manipulation does not appear to figure among the MSS's primary missions. To this day, no organization dedicated to these questions (modeled on the KGB's Service A) has been identified within the Chinese agency.

The MSS was founded on July 1, 1983. It resulted from the fusion of the Central Investigation Department (CID, 中共中央调查部) – an intelligence service created in 1955 and placed under the direct leadership of the Central Committee of the Party – with the first office of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS, 公安部) in charge of counter-espionage (反间谍), generally called the Political Security Bureau (政治保卫局) –, probably the second and third offices of the MPS, and finally several units of the United Front Work Department (统战部) as well as the Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (国防科工委). The deputy director of the MPS, Ling Yun (凌云)<sup>1</sup> became the first Minister of State Security.

Several factors may have hung over the MSS's creation and led to the decision to place this new service under the supervision of the State Council instead of the Party's Central Committee. The creation of the MSS first made it possible to eliminate the CID, whose head, Luo Qingchang (罗青长) was opposed to Deng's rise to power – he had endorsed Hua Guofeng (华国锋). Meanwhile, it was an opportunity to reduce the influence of the 2PLA, a branch of military intelligence, on the CID.<sup>2</sup> Other reasons also deserve mention: the MSS was tasked with developing operations under a non-diplomatic cover, an evolution

1. His real name is Wu Peilin (吴沛霖). After he joined the Yan'an base in 1939, Ling Yun entered the first intelligence service of the CCP, which was euphemistically named the Central Department of Social Affairs (中央社会部), and run by Kang Sheng (康生).

2. 翁衍庆 (Weng Yanqing), 中共情报组织与间谍活动 (*Intelligence Services and Espionage Activities of the Chinese Communist Party*), 新锐文创 (2018).

that the CID under Luo had refused, remaining faithful to the approach developed under Mao.<sup>3</sup> The transformation of China's international and security environment at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s could also explain the creation of the MSS.<sup>4</sup>

Officially placed under the supervision of the State Council, the work of the MSS is nevertheless overseen by two important commissions: The Commission for Political-Legal Affairs (政法委员会) – which supervises actors charged with implementing the law – and the Central National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会), created at the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2013 to strengthen the coherence of the CCP's security apparatus.

**The MSS's structure is only superficially known** and numerous interrogations remain as to the actual functions of its constituent offices. The MSS has 17 or 18 bureaus/divisions to which must be added the affiliated bodies (see infographics). Furthermore, all the bureaus/divisions have at their disposal **front organizations to carry out operations abroad**. For example, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division uses the cover of the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau Office of the Bureau of International Cooperation Chinese Academy of Sciences (港澳台办公室---中国科学院国际合作局). As for the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, it could be able to instrumentalize the CAS's Institute of Sciences and Development (中国科学院科技战略咨询研究院). The National Society of Taiwan Studies (全国台湾研究会) is also, according to certain sources,<sup>5</sup> a body answerable to the MSS and used both to gather intelligence and as a front organization. MSS agents can also take advantage of the covers offered by different public agencies such as the Xinhua and China News Service press agencies and the CITS travel agency (中国国际旅行社).<sup>6</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Division supervises the activities of several companies, including the Beijing Yanshan Hotel (北京燕山大酒店), which serve as façades during intelligence operations.

3. Ibid.

4. Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage, An Intelligence Primer* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

5. Russell Hsiao, "Changing of the Guard at the CASS-Institute of Taiwan Studies," *Global Taiwan Brief*, 2:7 (15 Feb. 2017).

6. 翁衍庆 (Weng Yanqing), *中共情報組織與間諜活動 (Intelligence Services and Espionage Activities of the Chinese Communist Party)*.

**Charter of the alleged MSS organization**

<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Secret actions</b> 机要局 (Manages agents under cover abroad)</p>	<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>International intelligence</b> 国际情报局 (Intelligence collection from abroad)</p>	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Economic, political, scientific and technical intelligence</b> 政经情报局</p>
<p><b>4<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao</b> 台港澳情报局</p>	<p><b>5<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Analysis and report</b> 情报分析通报局</p>	<p><b>6<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Operational orientation</b> 业务指导局 (Orients the work of local antennas)</p>
<p><b>7<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Counter-intelligence</b> 反间谍情报局 (Knowledge of and collection from adversary services)</p>	<p><b>8<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Counter-intelligence investigations</b> 反间谍侦察局 (In charge of investigations and arrests)</p>	<p><b>9<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Internal security investigations</b> 对内保卫侦察局 (Surveillance and prevention of spying activities of foreign entities in China)</p>
<p><b>10<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>External security investigations</b> 对外保卫侦察局 (Surveillance abroad of Chinese students and anti-communist activities)</p>	<p><b>11<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Intelligence data center</b> 情报资料中心局 (Collects and manages documents of the MSS)</p>	<p><b>12<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Social investigations</b> 社会调查局 (Social investigations and surveys. May be working for the United Front)</p>
<p><b>13<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Investigation techniques</b> 技侦科技局 (Research and development of investigation technologies)</p>	<p><b>14<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Technological investigations</b> 技术科技局 (Investigations on email mailboxes and other telecommunication means)</p>	<p><b>15<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Analysis synthesis</b> 综合情报分析局</p>
<p><b>16<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Image intelligence</b> 影像情报局</p>	<p><b>17<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Enterprises</b> 企业局</p>	<p><b>18<sup>th</sup> Bureau :</b> <b>Counter-terrorism?</b></p>
<p><b>Institute of international relations</b> 国际关系学院 (Trains the staff of the MSS)</p>		<p><b>Suzhou Institute of Sociology</b> 苏州江南社会学院 (May also be affiliated with the MSS)</p>

## II. Taiwan Affairs Office

The Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) is also involved in influence operations, although they do not constitute the heart of its activities. As is often the case in the Chinese bureaucracy, it is a dual body: at once the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council (国务院台湾事务办公室) and the Taiwan Work Office of the CPC Central Committee (中共中央台湾工作办公室). The current director of this two-faced body is Liu Jieyi (刘结一), who used to be a deputy director of the Central Committee's Liaison Department. The current minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi (王毅), held the position between 2008 and 2013.

Created in 1988, **the office implements the policy of the Party's Central Committee vis-à-vis Taiwan.** This is largely formulated by the CCP Central Leading Small Group for Taiwan Affairs (中央对台工作领导小组), now overseen by Xi Jinping with Wang Yang (汪洋) as deputy. As a coordinating agency, the TAO guides and inspects all central and territorial levels (autonomous regions, municipalities, and special administrative regions) organizations of the Party-State in their management of Taiwan affairs (对台工作).<sup>7</sup>

The TAO serves as the permanent secretariat for a broad range of policies linked to Taiwan. Cross-strait exchanges in all fields (culture, education, science, film, publishing, sports, health...) are organized, managed, and coordinated by the Exchanges Office of the TAO. The Economic Office coordinates economic questions, studies investment policies coming from or dedicated to Taiwan, but also manages the different cross-strait flows – land-based, maritime, and electronic. The Research Office follows and studies the evolution of the situation in Taiwan, the development of cross-strait relations, the policies vis-à-vis Taiwan and all the other major subjects concerning the island. The Liaison Office is responsible for welcoming important Taiwanese organizations and experts and operates as a liaison between all the actors involved. The TAO also coordinates all legal issues concerning Taiwan, manages the preparatory work for any negotiation or treaty signing with Taiwanese authorities and takes general responsibility for the management of any major event involving Taiwan.<sup>8</sup>

More particularly, **the TAO oversees propaganda bound to Taiwan.** Its Information Office plays an important role in this regard to the extent that it organizes the TAO's press conference, deals with Taiwanese journalists coming to China, manages cross-strait information cooperation, and trains the different local departments and echelons on questions related to Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> The TAO also has a website used to **circulate information addressed to the "Taiwanese compatriots"** (台湾同胞) who might wish to invest, start a business, study, travel, or live in mainland China.<sup>10</sup> The website finally relays news concerning the PRC's policies vis-à-vis Taiwan and the development of cross-strait relations.

**The TAO oversees different media outlets** – via the Jiuzhou Center for Cultural Communication (九州文化传播中心)<sup>11</sup> – such as the audiovisual company Jiuzhou (九州音像出版公司), the Jiuzhou Publishing House (九州出版社有限公司), the *Relations*

7. “主要职责” (“Principal Missions”), 中共中央台湾工作办公室 (*Taiwan Affairs Office*) (9 Jan. 2011), <http://archive.vn/6pose>.

8. “内设机构” (Internal structure), 中共中央台湾工作办公室 (*Taiwan Affairs Office*) (28 Jan. 2011), <http://archive.vn/USeQy>.

9. Ibid.

10. <http://www.gwytb.gov.cn>.

11. “直属事业单位” (Sub-bodies), 中共中央台湾工作办公室 (*Taiwan Affairs Office*) (9 Jan. 2011), <http://archive.vn/iBW7B>. “九州文化传播中心” (“Jiuzhou Center for Cultural Communication”), *Taiwan Affairs Office* (1 Sept. 2017), <http://archive.vn/sAiaC>.

*Across Taiwan Straits* newspaper (两岸关系), or the website [www.taiwan.cn](http://www.taiwan.cn) (中国台湾网) which relays news on Taiwan – all of them vectors of propaganda diffusion for the Party.

Finally, we can also note that **several organizations are affiliated with the TAO**,<sup>12</sup> including the Cross-Strait Relations Research Center (海峡两岸关系研究中心), the Cross-Strait Exchange Centre (海峡两岸交流中心), the Cross-Strait Economic and Scientific Cooperation Centre (海峡经济技术合作中心), and the National Training Centre for Taiwan Executives (全国对台干部培训中心).

While it remains difficult to identify the exact involvement of the TAO in influence operations in Taiwan, due to the lack of specific studies on this actor sometimes considered as of secondary importance, its role in this type of operation has been noticed by Taiwanese actors.<sup>13</sup>

12. “直属事业单位” (“Sub-Bodies”), 中共中央台湾工作办公室 (*Taiwan Affairs Office*) (9 Jan. 2011), <http://archive.vn/iBW7B>.

13. Interview conducted by the authors, Taipei (Jan. 2020).





## Chapter 3

# THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY

**The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is not the country's armed forces but the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).** As such, it participates in influence operations, a series of political maneuvers the CCP considers as part of its **“political warfare”** (政治战). Political warfare is defined as the repertoire of maneuvers seeking to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals (→ p. 33).<sup>1</sup> The PLA's role in the CCP's political warfare is based on the Gutian Conference resolution of December 1929, also known as *“On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party.”* In it, Mao criticized the “purely military viewpoint” of Zhu De:

They think that the task of the Red Army like that of the White army, is merely to fight. They do not understand that the Chinese Red Army is an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution. Especially at present, the Red Army should certainly not confine itself to fighting; besides fighting to destroy the enemy's military strength, it should shoulder such important tasks as doing propaganda among the masses, organizing the masses, arming them, helping them to establish revolutionary political power and setting up Party organizations. The Red Army fights not merely for the sake of fighting but in order to conduct propaganda among the masses, organize them, arm them, and help them to establish revolutionary political power.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the PLA plays a key role in creating the CCP's political power. It is within this conceptual framework that influence operations (and information operations in particular), must be understood. They are one of the PLA's tools in asserting political power.

**There is perhaps more public data available on the PLA than on any of the actors mentioned so far.** The research conducted for this report, as well as for previous studies, show that it is possible to recover significant amounts of information from the Chinese-speaking Internet.

## I. The PLA prior to the reform

**The former Liaison Department of the General Political Department (LD/GPD)** (总政治部联络部) was the primary organization in charge of political warfare within the PLA. It was previously known as the Enemies' Work Department (敌工部). According to the regulations on the PLA's political work, a liaison (联络工作) is more specifically

1. Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” Project 2049 Institute (2013), 4.

2. Mao Tsé-toung, *Écrits choisis en trois volumes (Selected Writings, in Three Volumes)*, I (Paris: François Maspero, 1969), 29-42. The text in Chinese: <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-192912.htm>. On the political context, see Alain Roux, *Le Singe et le Tigre. Mao, un destin chinois (The Monkey and the Tiger: Mao, A Chinese Destiny)* (Paris: Larousse, 2009).

concerned with maintaining contacts with allied forces, disturbing enemy forces, carrying out all Taiwan-related activities, studying foreign armed forces, enemy forces, assessing the secessionist forces of ethnic minorities, but also with conducting psychological warfare.<sup>3</sup>

Other PLA actors who likely played a role in influence operations were the second (2PLA) and third (3PLA) departments of the PLA's former General Staff Department and perhaps the fourth department (4PLA) as well. Amongst other things, these **military intelligence services** were in charge of human (HUMINT) and imagery intelligence (IMINT), for 2PLA, signals intelligence (SIGINT) for 3PLA, as well as electronic warfare (EW) and electronic intelligence (ELINT).<sup>4</sup>

## II. The PLA after the reform

The 2015 military reforms<sup>5</sup> restructured the four general departments of the PLA, including the General Political Department, into **fifteen departments, all under the direct authority of the Central Military Commission (CMC)**. Some of the missions of the former GPD/LD were given to the Liaison Department of the new Political Work Department (PWD/LD). The new Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission was tasked with human intelligence. The role of the two aforementioned institutions in influence operations is not studied in the report due to a lack of sources. Furthermore, a new branch of the PLA was created following the reforms: **The Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)** (解放军战略支援部队). This unit took over the cyber, electronic and spatial warfare domains, hence inheriting from 3PLA and 4PLA. The PLASSF may also have acquired part of the former 2PLA's technical competencies, though most of the human intelligence missions were transferred to the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission (中央军委联合参谋部), and perhaps parts of the missions of the former LD/GPD as well.

In addition to the four traditional administrative departments (General Staff, Equipment, Political Work, and Logistics), the PLASSF has a Network Systems Department (网络系统部) and a Space Systems Department (航天系统部). The **Network Systems Department**, formerly supervised by Commander Ju Qiansheng (巨乾生)<sup>6</sup> and Political Commissar Ding Xingnong (丁兴农)<sup>7</sup> (2019-2021) is said to have **inherited certain missions and responsibilities in the information domain**, on top of the cyber and electromagnetic domains.<sup>8</sup>

3. Article 14§14 of the PLA Political Work Regulations (中国人民解放军政治工作条例), in the 2010 Revised Edition. The text in Chinese is archived at the following address: <http://archive.vn/zzrmu>.

4. Peter Mattis, "China's Military Intelligence System is Changing," *War on the Rocks* (29 Dec. 2015).

5. For more information on the reforms of the PLA, see Juliette Genevaz, *La réforme de l'Armée populaire de libération, au coeur de la rénovation de l'État chinois* (The Reform of the People's Liberation Army, at the Heart of the Renovation of the Chinese State), Research Paper 29, IRSEM (16 Aug. 2016).

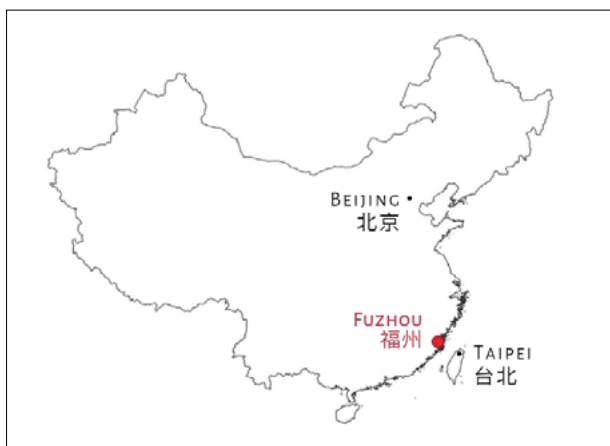
6. Ju Qiansheng was appointed to head the PLASSF in 2021, and the name of his successor as head of the Network Systems Department does not appear to have been revealed at this time. It is likely that Ding Xingnong has also been replaced. Marcus Clay, "General Ju Qiansheng Takes Command of the PLA Strategic Support Force," *The Diplomat*, July 27, 2021.

7. "2019年晋升中将军" ("List of Officers Promoted to Lieutenant-General Rank in 2019"), *Sina* (2 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.ph/d91VK>. The Network Systems Department ranks one step below the theater command (副战区职) and it shares its Military Unit Cover Designator (MUCD) with Unit 32069. See the transcript of Zhou Zhongyi's speech (周仲义), "追思丁石孙先生," ("In Memory of Mr. Ding Shisun"), *Peking University School of Mathematical Sciences* (11 Nov. 2019), <http://www.math.pku.edu.cn/docs/20191113155913480164.pdf>.

8. On the PLASSF, see John Costello and Joe McReynolds, "China's Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era," *China Strategic Perspectives*, 13 (2018); Mark Stokes and Rachael Burton, "The People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force: Leadership and Structure," Project 2049 Institute (2018).

The PLASSF is a service (军种), along with the Army, Air Force, Navy, and the new Rocket Forces. It benefits from a rank equivalent to a theater command (正战区级), which is the highest rank beneath the Central Military Commission (CMC).<sup>9</sup> Since 2021, the position of SSF commander has been held by General Ju Qiansheng (巨乾生),<sup>10</sup> the previous commander of the Network Systems Department (2019-2021) who succeeded General Li Fengbiao (李凤彪). The post of political commissar, meanwhile, has been held since 2020 by General Li Wei (李伟),<sup>11</sup> a former political commissar of the Xinjiang Military Region, succeeding Zheng Weiping (郑卫平).<sup>12</sup>

### III. Base 311



**PLA Unit 61716, also known as the “Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare and Legal Warfare Base” (舆论战心理战法律战基地), or Base 311, was created in 2005 in Fujian. The operational starting date, unavailable in public records, could be deduced from the date when the first known commanders and political commissars of this base took office. Before the 2015 military reforms, the Base 311 was part of the General Political Department Liaison Department (GPD/LD) (→ p. 87).**

After the reforms, **Base 311 may have been integrated into the PLA’s Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)**, based on the reassignment of some of its personnel.<sup>13</sup> Its place within the PLASSF internal structure remains unknown however. There are two plausible hypotheses: Base 311 could be attached to the PLASSF’s Political Department or to the Network Systems Department. Besides, the base is assumed to have a rank comparable to a deputy corps command (副军职), meaning it is led by a major general or a senior colonel. According

9. On the rank system: Kenneth Allen, “China Announces Reform of Military Ranks,” Jamestown China Brief, 17:2 (30 Jan. 2017).

10. “4名“60后”将军晋升上将！现役最年轻上将是他” (“Four ‘post-60’ generals are promoted! Here is the youngest general”), Sina (6 Jul. 2021), <https://archive.ph/pJHJs>. Marcus Clay, “General Ju Qiansheng Takes Command of the PLA Strategic Support Force,” *The Diplomat* (27 Jul. 2021).

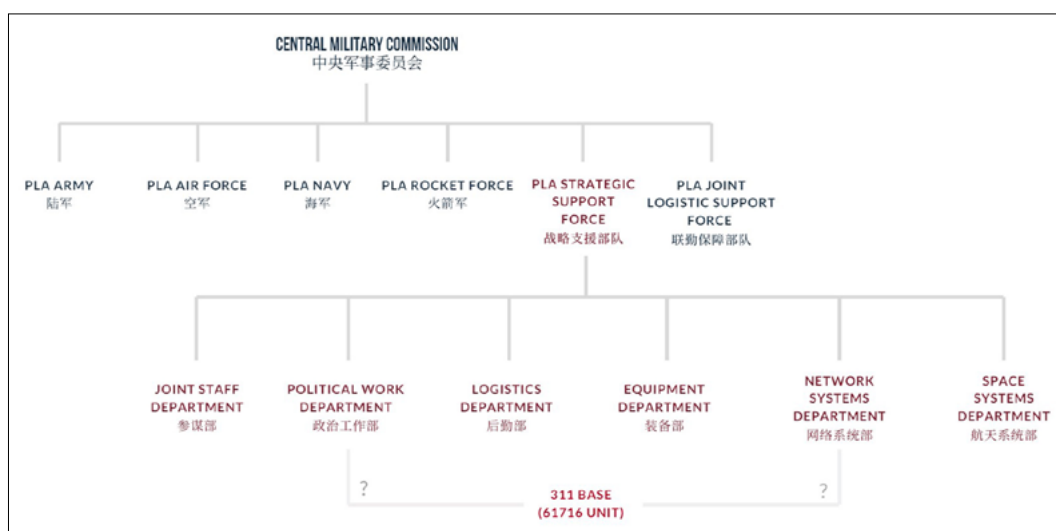
11. “2019年晋升中将军” (List of Officers Promoted to Lieutenant General in 2019), *Sina* (2 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.ph/d91VK>.

12. “5年晋升30名上将！中国最年轻“60后”上将纪录打破” (“In 5 years, 30 officers are promoted to general! Record of ‘post-60’ generals in China”), 凤凰网 (Ifeng) (19 Dec. 2020), <https://archive.ph/tVLHt>.

13. At least two people affiliated to the Base 311 (Unit 61716) were identified as working at the PLASSF concurrently: Mou Shan (牟珊) and Wu Gang (吴刚). For a reference to Mou Shan as an affiliate member of the PLASSF in 2016, see 牟珊 (Mou Shan), “北约战略传播策略探析” (“Analysis of NATO’s Communication Strategy”), *军事记者 (Junshi Jizhe)*, 6 (2016), <http://archive.vn/wGjpf>; For Mou Shan as an affiliate member of the Unit 61716, mentioned the same year, see 牟珊 (Mou Shan) and 左伊 (Zuo Yi), “菲律宾军队民事与军事行动探析” (“An Analysis of the Filipino Army’s Civil and Military Operations”), *军事政工理论研究 (Theoretical Studies on PLA Political Work)*, 17:1 (2016), <http://archive.ph/6RQRv>; On Wu Gang as an affiliate member of the PLASSF in 2016, see 吴刚 (Wu Gang), “基于大数据的新闻传播探析” (“An Analysis of Communication Based on Big Data”), *Junshi Jizhe*, 2 (2016), <http://archive.ph/bcjpg>; On his alleged affiliation to the PLASSF in 2019, see 吴刚 (Wu Gang), “联合作战中党委领导的时代创新” (“An Era of Innovation in Intra-army Operations Under the Direction of the Party Committee”), *政工学刊 (Zhengong Xue Kan)*, 9 (2019), <http://archive.ph/ceYv6>; For a reference to Wu Gang as an affiliate member of Unit 61716 in 2017, see 吴刚 (Wu Gang), “大数据在美军的运用探析” (“An Analysis of the Use of Big Data in the American Army”), *军事政工理论研究 (Theoretical Studies on PLA Political Work)*, 18:2 (2017), <http://archive.vn/F2u2o>.

to Mark Stokes, it “carries the status of six conventional missile brigades” of the PLA’s Base 52 of the Second Artillery.<sup>14</sup>

Irrespective of its specific position within the PLA, it is the only officially known base dedicated to the implementation of the “Three Warfares” strategy. As such, it is in charge of the operational side of political warfare. Starting in 2011, all psychological warfare efforts against Taiwan have presumably been centralized in Base 311.<sup>15</sup> And Taiwan is the most targeted country in terms of information manipulation coming from the PRC. In fact, Base 311 is suspected of having orchestrated the misinformation campaign that targeted the 2018 Taiwanese elections.<sup>16</sup> It also appeared that **Base 311 conducts research on the informational environment in the United States.**<sup>17</sup> Affiliated researchers have published reports on the US, notably on the potential effects of legislation passed to fight propaganda, the role of social media in American political life, such as their impact on the political polarization, and so on.



The Base 311 is under the authority of the PLASSF, probably of the Political Work Department or of the Network Systems Department.

This Base is an ideal case study to understand how the PLA conducts its influence operations, and more specifically information manipulation. While this unit keeps a low profile and remains relatively opaque, it is possible to find information and data about it on the Chinese Internet.<sup>18</sup>

**Its headquarters are in Fuzhou**, the capital city of Fujian, a province that faces Taiwan. Several recent official websites indicated that its address is 77 Meizhu Street, in the city’s

14. Mark Stokes cited in J. Michael Cole, *Convergence or Conflict in the Taiwan Strait: The Illusion of peace?* (London: Routledge, 2016), 68.

15. This information was relayed on multiple Chinese platforms, but the initial source is thought to be a Japanese media outlet. See “日媒称“高新七号”大幅提升解放军心理战能力” (Japanese media: The Y-8 GAoxin 7 Considerably Improves Psychological Warfare Activities), 参考消息 (Reference News) (17 Aug. 2013), <http://archive.ph/43797>. Extract: “2011年, 该基地被指定为所有对台心理战工作的焦点” (“In 2011, [the Base 311] Was Designated as the Focal Point for All Psychological Warfare Work Against Taiwan”).

16. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military’s Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 22.

17. Ibid., 97.

18. As demonstrated by Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department.”



Gulou District ((福州鼓楼区梅竹路77号) (Image 1).<sup>19</sup> This address seems to match a public pool (“the Dolphins’ Pool”) however, which was mentioned on a few Internet web-sites as being at 77 Meizhu Street as well;<sup>20</sup> it was seemingly confirmed by the presence of “pool” sign at the site’s entrance (Image 2). Furthermore, a picture from inside the building (Image 3) shows a roof that seems to correspond to the building on the satellite view of the neighborhood (Image 4). If 77 Meizhu Street is the address of a pool, but also listed as the address of Base 311, it could mean that **this is nothing but a postal address** and that the base is actually elsewhere. And yet, a careful analysis of the satellite pictures of the immediate environment of the pool shows a site several dozens of meters to the north that resembles a military site (Image 5). Several details reinforce this hypothesis: the inexistence of the Street View option on Baidu Maps for the entire perimeter (it stops at the supposed entrance of the base, see Image 6); and the presence of several vehicles – apparently military vehicles – in the courtyard of one of the buildings with, at its center, the shadow of what could be a flag pole (Image 7). Last but not least, the site is just around the corner from the Huaxin training center affiliated to Base 311 (→ p. 116) (Image 5).



1. 77 Meizhu Street (according to Baidu Maps), official address of Base 311 and of the Dolphins’ Pool.

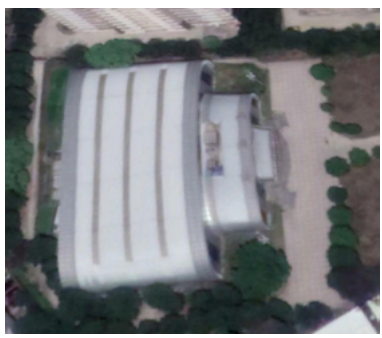


2. Entrance of 77 Meizhu Street: on the pole on the left, we notice the “pool” sign.

19. All one needs to do is type “61716部队” on the Internet. This query on Google, in January 2021, brought multiple pages of the Chinese government’s public market platform (中国政府采购网) confirming Unit 61716’s address at 77, Meizhu Street, in Fuzhou. See a June 5, 2019 call for tender, for example: <http://archive.fo/OSgWI>; or another released on June 11, 2019: <http://archive.fo/w81KV>.

20. For instance: <https://zi.media/@yidianzixun/post/8tNfCX>.





3 and 4. The building's roof (on the right) seems to correspond to that of the Dolphins' Pool (on the left<sup>21</sup>).



5. Approximate site of Base 311, with the Huaxin Training Center nearby – screenshot from Google Earth.



6. Screenshot from the street view mode on Baidu Maps at the presumed entrance of Base 311. It is impossible to get closer.

21. Source: <https://zi.media/@yidianzixun/post/8tNfCX>.



7. Zoom on a part of the site – screenshot from Baidu Maps (Image 6).

## A. An opaque structure

### 1. The commandment structure

	2005	2010	2015	2021
<b>POLITICAL COMMISSAR OF THE BASE 311</b>	<p>SONG HAIHANG 宋海航</p> 	<p>YIN HONGWEN 尹洪文</p> 	<p>MEI HUABO 梅华波</p> 	
<b>COMMANDER OF THE BASE 311</b>	<p>DENG CHANGYU 邓长宇</p> 	<p>WANG SHU 王树</p> 	<p>YUE LEI 岳雷</p> 	
⋮				⋮
<b>PRESIDENT OF CHBC</b>	<p>DENG CHANGYU 邓长宇</p> 	<p>WANG SHU 汪澍</p> 	<p>QIU YU 邱雨</p> 	

List of identified political commissars and commanders of the Base 311. Most of these individuals have cumulated the position with that of president of CHBC, often under an alias. It is likely that the Base’s leadership has changed, but without an official confirmation at this time.<sup>22</sup>

22. Photo of Song Haihang: <http://archive.vn/JkrgZ>. Deng Changyu (military officer): <http://archive.vn/Nu5jL>. Deng Changyu (civilian): <http://archive.ph/PjMkA>. Yin Hongwen: <http://archive.vn/yim1l>. Wang Shu (military officer): <http://archive.vn/nWXcS>. Wang Shu (CHBC): <http://archive.vn/RWGXN>. Mei Huabo: <http://archive.vn/3pX5q>. Yue Lei: <http://archive.ph/sYfww>. Qiu Yu: <http://archive.ph/0WrdF>. Contrary to Wang Shu and Qiu Yu’s photos, the photo of Deng Changyu as a civilian is not from a source referencing him as CHBC chairman: it is a simple illustration. We could not confirm Deng Changyu as chairman of CHBC between 2005 and 2010, either under his real name or with an alias. As such, we rely of the conclusions drawn by Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 68, note 184.

Despite a limited understanding of the Base's internal structure, which remains extremely opaque, it is possible to gather information on the individuals in leadership positions. No official data is available, but the triangulation of information from various online sources gives us a partial picture. Like in all PLA units, **there is a dual management**. At Base 311, **a commander and a political commissar** (traditionally a major general or senior colonel) form an executive duo, usually for a four- or five-year term. The first duo was made of Commander Deng Changyu (邓长宇) and Political Commissar Song Haihang (宋海航), and served from 2005 to 2010/2011. They were followed by Wang Shu (王树), alias Wang Shu (汪澍) and the Political Commissar Yin Hongwen (尹洪文), who served until 2014/2015. Afterwards, Commander Yue Lei (岳雷), alias Qiu Yu (邱雨), and Political Commissar Mei Huabo (梅华波) were appointed.<sup>23</sup> A new duo should soon be appointed to Base 311 – or may already have taken command without having been officially revealed.

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Internet provides little information on the background of these officers, even though most high-ranking PLA officials have a Baidu page outlining their professional trajectories. Except for Yue Lei, all of the aforementioned individuals have a Baidu page that only provides meager biographical facts. For example, Major General Deng Changyu, who was born in 1954 in Shandong, served as deputy political commissar in the Lanzhou military region, then as the secretary of the political department of the Lanzhou military region. He then commanded a unit attached to the General Political Department, which likely corresponds to Base 311, and is since thought to have returned to Xinjiang.<sup>24</sup> The most detailed Baidu page is that of Major General Song Haihang, born in 1955 in Henan. It describes all of the positions he held between 1969 and 2015, including political commissar for the Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare Base of the PLA's General Political Department (Base 311) between 2005 and 2011.<sup>25</sup> Song was also the president of the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC), a front organization for Base 311 (→ p. 103).<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Major General Wang Shu's Baidu page explains that he was born in 1958 in Hebei and graduated from PLA Nanjing Political College (中国人民解放军南京政治学院). Besides his position as commander at Base 311, he was the political commissar for the PLA National Defense University and a PLA delegate at the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> sessions of the National People's Congress.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, Major General Yin Hongwen's Baidu page does not mention his affiliation to Base 311.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the Baidu page of Major General Mei Huabo, which mentions an affiliation to a certain unit of the PLA's PLASSF (to avoid mentioning Base 311), adds that he used to be the political commissar for Chinese Air Force Airborne Academy (中国人民解放军空军空降兵学院).<sup>29</sup> A message that confirmed Mei Huabo's position as political commissar of Base 311 was posted on the *Sina* forum, but it has been erased since (see screenshot below).<sup>30</sup> He is the

23. All of these names, with the exception of Yue Lei, have already been identified in previous investigations, notably in Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," and Elsa B. Kania, "The Role of PLA Base 311 in Political Warfare against Taiwan (Part 3)," *Global Taiwan Brief*, 2:7 (15 Feb. 2017).

24. Deng Changyu's Baidu page: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/邓长宇>. See also Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," 68, note 184, for reference to Deng Changyu as the first commander of Base 311 and chairman of CHBC.

25. Song Haihang's Baidu page: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/宋海航>.

26. "纪念红军长征胜利七十周年采访报道活动胜利结束" ("End of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Red Army's Long March"), *Voice of the Strait* (31 Aug. 2006), <http://archive.ph/ZNbA1>.

27. Wang Shu's Baidu page: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/王树/7254233>.

28. Yin Hongwen's Baidu page: <https://bks0.baidu.com/item/尹洪文>.

29. Mei Huabo's Baidu page: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/梅华波>.

30. Webpage of the message (since deleted): [http://blog.sina.com.cn/a/blog\\_8c0e29aa0102vqei.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/a/blog_8c0e29aa0102vqei.html).



last officially identified political commissar of the base, though he is now likely to have been replaced.



Screenshot of the now-deleted message posted on *Sina* in July 2015, announcing the nomination of Mei Huabo as political commissar of Base 311.<sup>31</sup>



Images highlighting the link between the names Yue Lei and Qiu Yu.

Research conducted for this study revealed that Qiu Yu, president of CHBC, is in fact the MG Yue Lei, the last identifiable commander at Base 311. **Base 311 operates through façade civilian companies, notably the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC).** All commanders of Base 311 were also president of CHBC during their tenure. **Using an alias** allowed these officers to have their face publicly disclosed on websites that report on CHBC's activities. For outsiders, it is difficult to trace the actual person back to their alias, but not impossible given that aliases are always connected to their real name. For example, the Major General Wang Shu (王树) chose the alias Wang Shu (汪澍); the Chinese characters are read in the same manner, down to the tone, and are written almost identically.<sup>32</sup> Yet, and although the *Pinyin* spelling is the same, the difference in Chinese characters is enough to complicate any online search.

Regarding Wang Shu's successor, prior research<sup>33</sup> was only able to determine that a Qiu Yu (邱雨) became the president of CHBC in 2015<sup>34</sup> but it could not confirm the real name of the Base 311 commander. We did manage to find his real identity, or at least to propose a very likely hypothesis. The first clue came from a military forum.<sup>35</sup> A forum user answered

31. Ibid.

32. For a reference to Wang Shu as commander of the Base 311, see for example his Baidu page: <http://archive.fo/nWXcS>; for a reference to him as CHBC chairman under his alias, see “台湾文化人在大陆”报道活动圆满落幕发行同名图书” (“End of the Press Conference for the Event “Taiwanese Culture in Mainland China”), *China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation* (2 Dec. 2013), <http://archive.fo/0Ww8B>.

33. Kania, “The Role of the PLA Base 311.”

34. For a reference to Qiu Yu as CHBC president, see “大陆成台湾学子求学就业‘新选项’” (“China is Becoming the ‘New Option’ for Taiwanese Students in Terms of Academic and Professional Opportunities”), *Taiwan Affairs Office* (16 May 2015), <http://archive.md/qcUrH>.

35. Messages exchanged on July 29-30, 2019 on the military forum Xilu (西陆), archived here: <http://archive.fo/g9NqL>.

the question “who succeeded Wang Shu as Base 311 commander?” with the name of Major General Yue Lei (岳雷), whose Chinese characters are subtly linked to those for Qiu Yu. In each of these characters, a same “component” was retained. The “丘” is used to form the “邱” character (Qiu), along with the “雨” which constitutes a separate word in itself. This link was no longer a coincidence once **the photographs were compared**, evidencing that the two names refer to the same individual (see image above).

Very little information on Yue Lei’s professional trajectory are available from public sources. They only confirm that he became the political commissar for Unit 63650, a nuclear testing base in Xinjiang, in August 2018.<sup>36</sup> The last article we found that mentioned Qui Yu as CHBC president was published early September 2018.<sup>37</sup> If Yue Lei, alias Qui Yu, effectively changed position in 2018, after only 3 years, then Base 311 has been given a new commander.



Exchanges on a Xilu forum in July 2017:<sup>38</sup>  
Jst119: “who succeeded Wang Shu at Base 311?” Hdcdh: “Yue Lei.”



Our hypothesis: Major General Yue Lei (left) is the same person as Qiu Yu, president of CHBC (right).<sup>39</sup>

36. “63650部队政委换将：岳雷接棒孔令才” (“63650 Unit Changed Political Commissars: Yue Lei Takes the Mantle from Kong Lingcai”), *JSTV* (20 Aug. 2018), <http://archive.fo/sYfw>.

37. “第四届‘中华文化发展论坛’举行\_聚焦两岸青年传承中华文化\_” (“4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Chinese Culture Development Forum: Focus on the Heritage of Chinese Culture in Intra-Strait Youth”), 中国台湾网 (*Taiwan.cn*) (4 Sept. 2018), <http://archive.fo/6CAvT>.

38. <http://archive.frg9Nql>.

39. 2018 Photo of Yue Lei: <http://archive.ph/sYfw>. 2017 Photo of Qiu Yu: <http://archive.ph/0Wrd>.

## 2. An outline of the internal structure

While the Chinese government does not provide any details on the internal structure of PLA bases, it is possible to **determine part of Base 311's structure using open source data**. The majority of the following information was gathered from online articles written by individuals affiliated with the units in question. Most of these articles were referenced in the Chinese database CNKI (中国知网) and the content often available on the platform iXueshu (爱学术). Accessing the articles often provides the name of the organization the author was affiliated with. Sometimes an official position was specified, and on rare occasions some biographical details as well – like the date of birth, province of origin, type of diploma, and research interests. By perusing Unit 61716's CNKI page, a number of members attached to the unit were identified. Hence, we were able to piece together, albeit in an incomplete manner, Base 311's internal structure.

**At the very least, Base 311 has the following bodies:** A Political Department (政治部), a translation and edition office (编译室), an Information Research Office (信息研究室), an Equipment Department (装备保障),<sup>40</sup> as well as an Outpatient Department (门诊部). The political department supervises at least two bureaus (处), Secretary's Cluster Office (秘群处 or 秘书群联处) and Organizational Cadre Division (组干处 or 组织干部处), which are typically found inside political departments.<sup>41</sup> It can be assumed, insofar as the majority of the PLA's units have the same four departments, that Base 311 also contains Staff and Logistics departments. Additionally, the remainder of Unit 61716 appears to be divided into sub-units (分队). If we couldn't determine their exact number and functions, nine were identified: sub-units 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 61, 64, and 66.<sup>42</sup> A number of them have the same address as Base 311: 77 Meizhu Street.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that others do as well. It is difficult to conclusively ascertain the mission of each sub-unit, but a number of published public tenders point at their subject areas, such as video surveillance and network security.

40. The source did not specify whether it is a department or entity of another rank. We supposed that it is a department (部), given that there are typically four departments in each PLA unit: staff, political affairs, equipment, and logistics. 张学明 (Zhang Xueming) and 张书启 (Zhang Shuqi), “解读美国空军新版小型无人机发展路线图” (“A Study on the New SUAS Roadmap of USAF”), 国防科技 (*National Science and Defense Technology*), 37:4 (2016), <http://archive.ph/ZF1kE>.

41. 纪兵 (Ji Bing) and 房新印 (Fang Xinyin), “新型军事人才培养的几个着力点” (“A Few Notes on the Formation of New Military Talents”), 军队政工理论研究 (*Theoretical Studies on PLA Political Work*), 6 (2014), <http://archive.ph/iPwfs>.

42. Sub-Unit 4: “61716部队4分队网络安全防护设备采购项目公开招标公告” (“Tender from Sub-Unit 4 of Unit 61716 for the Acquisition of Protection Equipment for Network Security”), 中国政府采购网 (*Website for Chinese Public Markets*) (27 Jan. 2019), <http://archive.ph/pZpX0>. Sub-Unit 5: 陈泽欣 (Chen Zexin), “区域文化和亚洲经济发展相关性探析” (“Analysis of the Correlation Between Regional Culture and Economic Development in Asia”), 黑河学刊 (*Heihe Journal*), 4 (2019), <http://archive.ph/Yoyfb>. Sub-Unit 6: “中国人民解放军61716部队6分队LED屏幕采购项目询价公告” (“Request by Sub-Unit 6 of PLA Unit 61716 to Buy LED screens”), 国诚招标 (*Gnoucheng Zhaobiao*) (25 Apr. 2019), <http://archive.ph/FCD2H>. Sub-Unit 8: “作战研究资料室、图形视频工作站、技术士官训练室家具及电子设备采购询价公告” (“Request for Sub-Unit 8 of Unit 61716 to Acquire a Research Room for Combat, a Video Work Position, a Training Room for Technical Troops with the Necessary Accompanying Electronic Equipment”), 中国政府采购网 (*Website for Chinese Public Markets*) (2 Apr. 2018), <http://archive.ph/SbnTP>. Sub-Unit 9: “福建灿鑫工程管理中国人民解放军61716部队九分队设备采购项目中标通知” (“Tender for Sub-Unit 9 of Unit 61716, via the Fujian Canxin Gongcheng Guanli for the Purchase of Equipment”), 中国工程建设招标网 (*Zhongguo Gongcheng Jianshe Zhaobiao wang*) (16 Apr. 2018), <http://archive.ph/x9LG7>. Sub-Unit 10: 张作农 (Zhang Zuonong), “军队律师条例的立法构想” (“Legislative Conception for the ‘Regulations on Military Lawyers’”), 西安政治学院学报 (*Journal of Xi'an Politics Institute*), 22:1 (2009), <http://archive.ph/66HrO>. Sub-Unit 61: 胡建华 (Hu Jianhua), 张晓西 (Zhang Xiaoxi), “浅析对外汉语口语课教学存在的问题与对策” (“Analysis of Difficulties and Solutions in Oral Chinese Language Education”), 河南教育 (*Henan Jiaoyu*) (Dec. 2010), <http://archive.ph/ypUtf>. Sub-Unit 64: “2015年度‘全国五四红旗团委(团支部)’名单” (“2015 List of ‘National League of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Red Flag Youth’”), 中国共产党新闻网 (*CPC News*) (4 May 2016), <http://archive.ph/n4Gnl>. Sub-Unit 66: “王云会” (Wang Yunhui), Baidu, <http://archive.ph/PjkdI>.

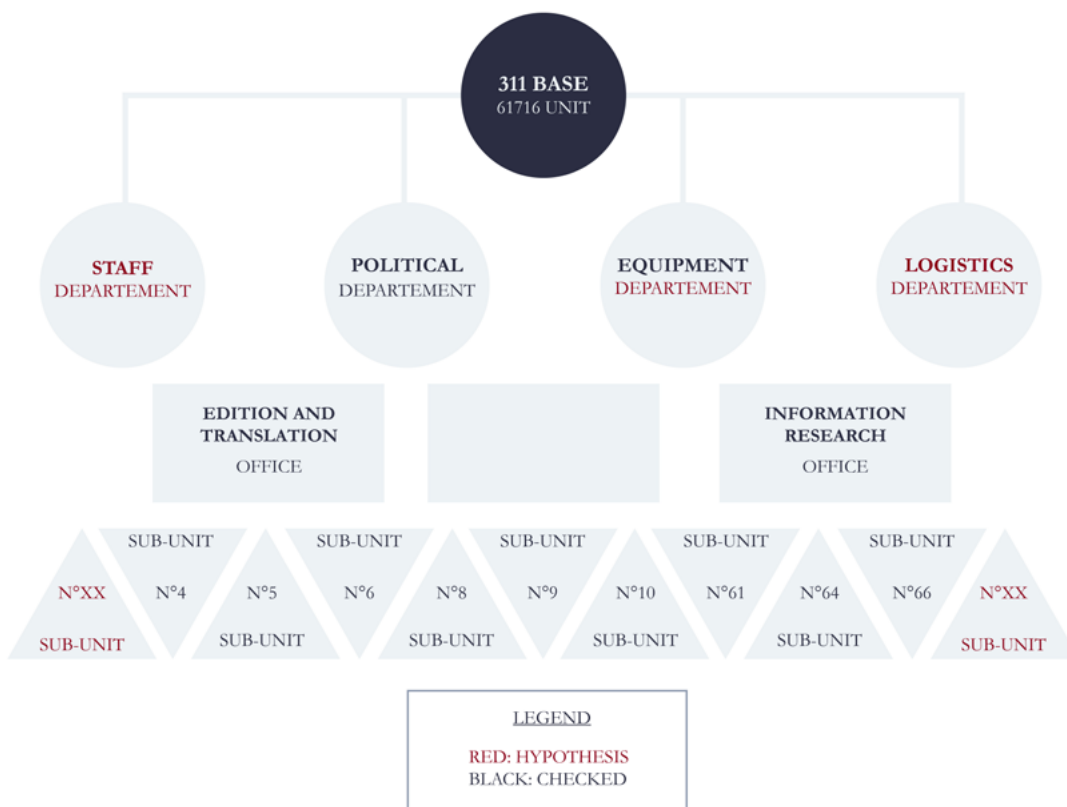
43. For example, this is the case for Sub-Units 4, 6, and 8.



A member of sub-unit 10, Zhang Zuonong (张作农), published multiple articles on legal topics, indicating that this sub-unit plays a role in the “legal warfare” component of the “Three Warfares” for instance.

**Individuals affiliated with Unit 61716 were typically presented as researchers or engineers.** Engineers located there have written about information security, communication networks, and other technical subjects. Researchers have written about **public opinion and psychological warfare, usually focusing on the US or Taiwan.**<sup>44</sup> Some of the researchers were identified as military personnel like Colonel Zhang Xueming and Lieutenant Colonel Zhang Shuqi (Equipment Department), as well as Senior Colonel Zhang Zuonong (sub-unit 10).<sup>45</sup> Not all Unit 61716 members are assumed to be members of the military however. Engineers, like researchers, are hierarchically organized within the unit. At least three tiers were detected for researchers and engineers: researcher, adjunct researcher, and research assistant, as well as senior engineer, engineer, and assistant engineer.

Internal structure of the 311 Base



Their articles allow researchers to better understand what are the topics of interest to Base 311, and to have a better idea of its operating mode. For example, a 2019 article illustrated how Base 311 attempted to use the Internet as a tool for public opinion warfare. It was based on the observation that traditional influence methods targeting public emotions on the Internet (网络舆情引导) were inefficient. The authors advocated for the use of

44. The members of the consultation service write about medical topics, and as such are outside the scope of this study.

45. Zhang, Zhang, “A Study on the New SUAS Roadmap of USAF”; Zuonong, “An Analysis of the Practices of Military Justice Among the Taliban in Afghanistan.”

artificial intelligence to win the public opinion warfare on the Internet (网络舆论斗争), sometimes also known as the “consensus war.” **They considered that AI could lead to a presumably intelligent way to move public opinion.**<sup>46</sup> This article was signed by Hu Huaping, affiliated to Unit 61716 and previously a member of Unit 61070 (a subordinate unit to Base 311), and by two members of Huaqiao University, which is under the direct supervision of the United Front Work Department.<sup>47</sup> Altogether, three key findings were drawn from the articles published by Base 311 affiliates.

- Firstly, the articles pointed at Base 311’s interest in **information and communication technologies**. Almost all the engineers identified as members of the base researched network communication or communications security.
- Secondly, information and communication technologies must be **wielded in service of public opinion warfare**. This war is waged on all platforms, notably on the Internet, social media, and via the “new media.”
- Thirdly, the purpose of public opinion warfare is **to persuade and rally the population** around Beijing’s narratives, **especially in Taiwan**.

To implement the “Three Warfares,” **Base 311 uses three types of organizations: front media companies, subordinate PLA units, and relaying platforms** with which the links are more distended and blurry. Together, they form a **sprawling web**, difficult to untangle and analyze from the outside.

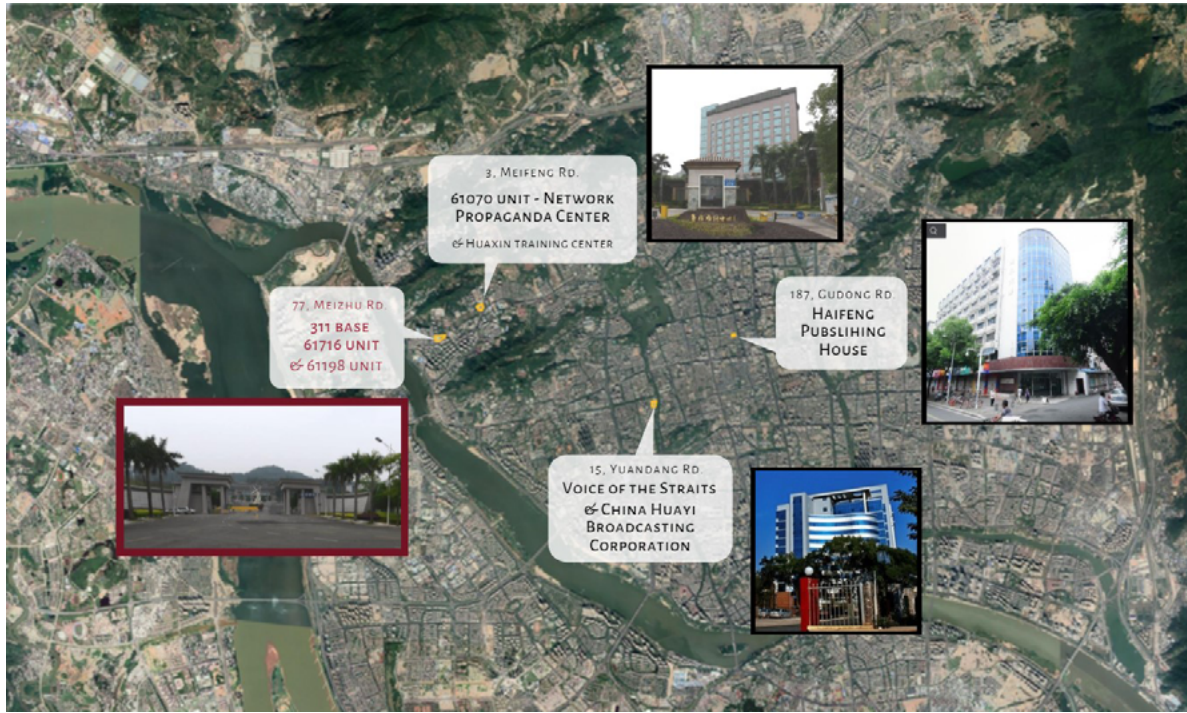
**The front media companies** are civilian organizations unofficially controlled by Base 311. They allow the Base to operate publicly while remaining in the shadows. We have already mentioned **Voice of the Strait (VTS)** and **China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC)**. They were both former PLA radio stations, and are presently multichannel media targeting the Taiwanese population. Our research found a third front-company: **The Haifeng Publishing House**. All of these companies are **potentially able to influence populations through radio and television channels, the Internet, social media, and books**.

**Multiple PLA units** were discovered to be subordinates, or affiliates, of Base 311, such as **Units 61070 and 61198**. Their official missions and activities are unknown, but it is possible to identify their members and sometimes access their published articles. We can then piece together the units’ areas of focus.

**A group of platforms, such as the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC, 中国国际友好联络会)** operate in the orbit of Base 311. These platforms, many of which have former PLA members as executives, serve as relays for the Base 311’s operations. By examining these three types of organizations, we can outline the base’s activities, interests, and priorities.

46. Two different terms are used here to refer to the concept of public opinion 舆情 and 舆论. We translated them respectively as “public emotion” and “public opinion.” See the first section (→ p. 30).

47. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 李弼程 (Li Bicheng), and 熊尧 (Xiong Yao), “网络舆情引导智能代理模型” (“An Intelligent Model to Guide Public Emotion on the Internet”), 国防科技 (*National Defense Science and Technology*), 3 (2019), <http://archive.ph/DQ4Xw>.



Google Earth satellite view of Fuzhou,<sup>48</sup> focused on Gulou District, where Base 311, its sub-units, and affiliates are located.

The first three images of building façade are from Baidu Maps' street view (screenshot from Feb. 2020), and the last image is from VTS's Baidu page.

## B. VTS and CHBC: Two PLA media outlets used to influence Taiwan

Voice of the Strait Broadcasting Station (**VTS**, 海峡之声广播电台) and China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (**CHBC**, 中国华艺广播公司) are actually **cover names for two PLA units**. Evidence of this fact is easily traced online. The Fujian frontline broadcasting station (中国人民解放军福建前线广播电台) was created in 1958 in Xiamen, by the Fujian province Party committee and the Fuzhou military region. In 1984 its name was changed to Voice of the Strait.<sup>49</sup> CHBC was originally a subordinate station of the Fujian frontline broadcasting station.<sup>50</sup> On November 1, 1991, it officially became China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation, creating another public front organization for the PLA.

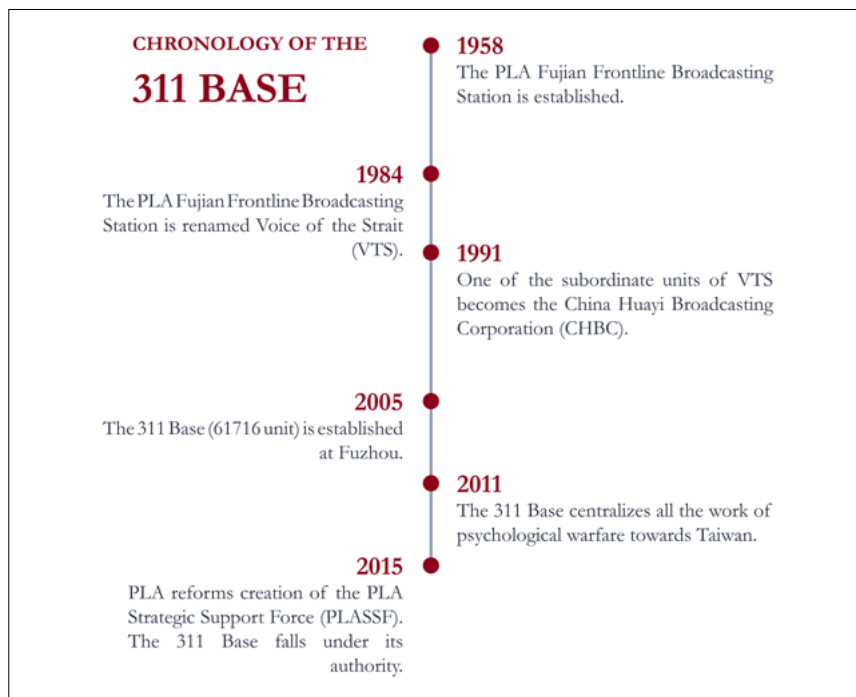
VTS and CHBC are both PLA units tasked with “communication toward Taiwan” (对台广播), and whose ultimate goal is its reunification with mainland China. They began as simple radio stations before evolving to more diverse methods of communication, seeking to reach the widest possible number of Taiwanese. After the creation of their

48. <https://earth.google.com/web/@26.09195319,119.28017382,17.12812488a,18058.19351457d,35y,-0h,0t,0r>.

49. See for example VTS's presentation by *Taiwan.cn* (中国台湾网) in 2006: <http://archive.vn/2kbP1>; or VTS's Baidu page: <http://archive.ph/THkSb>.

50. The link between CHBC and VTS was confirmed by the minutes of a trial that involved both companies in 2013. The document, “董卫强与中国华艺广播公司、海峡之声广播电台劳动争议 纠纷一案一审民事判决书” (“First Instance Civil Judgment In Labor Disputes Between Dong Weiqiang, CHBC, and VTS”) is accessible on the website: <http://bit.ly/chbcvts2013> archived here: <http://archive.is/R2Sks>. Here is an extract: “证据A8. 《聘用合同书》证明被告中国华艺广播公司是被告海峡之声广播电台的下属机构 (...) 被告中国华艺广播公司的前身是中国人民解放军海峡之声广播电台调频台” (“Proof A8. The Work Contract Proves CHBC is Subordinate to VTS [...] CHBC Was Previously an FM Radio Station for the PLA's Voice of the Strait”).

respective Internet websites, VTS and CHBC gained access to and employed a variety of tools, such as text, audio, image, video, and social media, to achieve their goals. In an effort to adapt to the local contexts, they have offered programs in local dialects, in addition to Mandarin Chinese, Taiwan's official language. More specifically, they have devised programs in Minnan and Hakka Chinese, which are spoken in Fujian (by 20% of the population) and Taiwan (by 70% of the population).



Two sides of the same coin, CHBC and VTS apparently share the same offices in Fuzhou. They are located at 15 Yuandang Street, in a building nicknamed “the Building of the Strait” (海峡大楼), likely in reference to its inhabitants. Also, the unit behind VTS seems to have obtained a rank equivalent to that of a division (正师级).<sup>51</sup> We found in the report of a lawsuit against VTS and CHBC that CHBC is still administratively subordinate to VTS. Yet, its exact rank is unknown. Consequently, it is plausible that the PLA unit behind CHBC holds a rank equivalent to that of a deputy head of division.

## 1. Voice of the Strait (VTS)

The Fujian frontline broadcasting station, known as Voice of Strait (VTS) since 1984, was created during the Chinese attack on the Kinmen Islands. Initially under the authority of the PLA's former General Political Department, it sought to support the offensive.<sup>52</sup> This 1958 military operation marked the beginning of the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, a continuation of the Communist China's attempt at retaking Taiwan from the nation-

51. This information is unconfirmed, but relayed by the Wikipedia page, <https://archive.vn/b7Ak9>, and by VTS's Baidu page.

52. “第四节 解放后军事机构和驻军” (“Chapter 4: Structure of Military Organizations and Post-Liberation Garrisons”), 厦门市地方志 (*Website for the Local History of Xiamen*) (7 Oct. 2012), <http://archive.ph/3ygvj>.



INTRODUCTION

alists. In August 1964, VTS officially received an official military designation.<sup>53</sup> With the 2015 PLA reforms, and the dissolution of the former General Political Department, it is difficult to ascertain who has authority over VTS at the moment. What is certain is that Base 311 has been responsible for centralizing all psychological warfare activities against Taiwan since 2011. It is also assumed that the base participates in the development of VTS programs.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, **it is plausible that VTS now falls under the authority of Base 311.**

CONCEPTS

Since 2016, commander Ran Jiye (冉继业) and political commissar Wang Shuangyang (王双阳) have led VTS. Wang Shuangyang has been affiliated to Unit 61716 (hence to Base 311) since at least 2013.<sup>55</sup> As for Ran Jiye, he worked as a political commissar at VTS under the previous commander, Zhong Zhigang (钟志刚).<sup>56</sup> Because Ran and Zhong were announced as the new heads of Unit 61023 in 2016, it is possible that VTS is Unit **61023**.<sup>57</sup> Unit 61023 is actually registered at the same address as VTS.<sup>58</sup> Yet, **61985** is also tied to VTS. Its former general manager, Liu Linlan (柳林岚), was identified as the commander of Unit 61985 in 2013.<sup>59</sup> For that reason, Stokes and Hsiao defended that VTS's designation might be Unit 61985.<sup>60</sup> According to them, Unit 61023 oversees the editorial (编辑部) and technical (技术部) departments and it presumably maintains an office in Beijing (北京记者站).<sup>61</sup> As such, either **both MUCDs are tied to VTS**, or a new designation was issued in recent years. Further research also suggested that VTS has **two local branches: Unit 61275 in Gutian and Unit 61839 in Xiamen.**<sup>62</sup>

ACTORS

ACTIONS

53. “1964年8月，解放军总部正式授予上述番号。” The Information is Available on VTS's Baidu webpage and was relayed by the CNR website, see: “海峡之声广播电台简介” (“Presentation of Voice of the Strait”), 央广网 (*China National Radio*), n.d., <http://archive.ph/vv6LJ>.

54. See “日媒称‘高新七号’大幅提升解放军心理战能力” (“Japanese Media: The Y-8 Gaoxin 7 Considerably Improves the PLA's Psychological Warfare Capacities”), 参考消息网 (*Reference News*) (17 Aug. 2013), <http://archive.ph/43797>.

55. “廉政短信” (“Compleat Text Message”), 新浪军事 (*Sina Military*) (17 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.ph/XYw6G>.

56. Hong Yanan (洪亚男), “‘闽台走亲乡镇行’大型图片展在泉州举办” (“Photography Exhibit ‘Fujian and Taiwan Roams the Cities’ Took Place in Quanzhou”), 搜狐 (*Sohu*) (11 Jun. 2016), <http://archive.ph/to9jk>.

57. 丁蕾 (Ding Lei), “钟声副厅长走访慰问61023部队” (“Deputy Director Zhong Sheng Visits the 61023 Unit”), 中国海洋在线 (*China Ocean News*) (1 Feb. 2016), <http://archive.md/JiGQL>.

58. “中国人民解放军61023部队通用设备采购公开招标公告” (“Tender of 61023 Unit for the Purchase of General Equipment”), 中国政府采购网 (*Website for the Chines Public Markets*) (27 Mar. 2018), <https://archive.ph/KS9E1>. “第四节 解放军后军事机构和驻军” (“Chapter 4: Structure of Military Organizations and Post-Liberation Garrisons”).

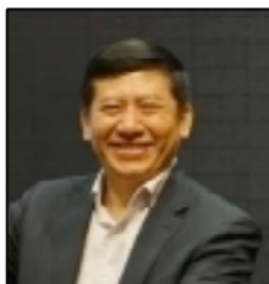
59. “五、拟表彰拥政爱民模范” (“5. Honor Model Citizens Who Support Government”), 搜狐 (*Sohu*) (5 Jul. 2013), <http://archive.ph/Ndz6z>.

60. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army,” 68, note 185.

61. *Ibid.*, 68, note 183.

62. For a reference to 61275 Unit as an antenna of VTS in Gutian, see “罗华中心小学 古二小入围2017年国家国防教育特色学校” (“Central Luohua Primary School: The Second Primary School in Gutian was Pre-Selected from a List of Special Education Schools for National Defense in 2017”), 古田新闻网 \_ (*Gutian xinwenwang*) (31 Jul. 2017), <http://archive.ph/YcUBA>. For additional evidence of a link between the 61275 Unit and the Base 311 see also “2016年全县工作会议召开” (“District Work Conference in 2016”), *Gutian xinwenwang* (17 May 2017), <http://archive.fo/T1hk4>. For a reference of 61839 Unit as an antenna of VTS in Xiamen, see “林长泉等与中国人民解放军61839部队物权保护纠纷上诉案” (“Lin Changquan and Others' Appeal Record Against the PLA's 61839 Unit Concerning Property Rights Litigation”), 东方律师 (*Shanghai Bar Association*) (2011), <http://archive.md/9bb2j>. For ties between 61839 Unit and 61023 Unit, see: “61839部队营区机房改造工程项目施工招标招标公告” (“61839 Unit Tender for The Renovation of IT Rooms”), 中国政府采购网 (*Website for the Chines Public Markets*) (19 Nov. 2018), <http://archive.ph/gnMg7>.





VTS executives. From left to right: Zong Zhigang, Liu Linlan, Ran Jiye, and Wang Shuangyang.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, **VTS is affiliated to CHBC**. Liu Linlan, the former director of VTS, served as the executive director of the CHBC Television Center (电视总经理) between 2010 and 2014.<sup>64</sup> Ran Jiye, the current VTS director, is also an executive manager at CHBC. He has been affiliated with CHBC since at least 2010, when he was director of the Network Centers at CHBC.<sup>65</sup> In 2012 he became one of its executive directors (总经理)<sup>66</sup> and in 2013 he was already president of its executive committee (董事).<sup>67</sup>

## 2. China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC)

Like VTS, CHBC was initially a radio station, and it remains one. According to the CHBC website, its radio programs are still accessible in Fuzhou (headquarter of Base 311), and in a handful of other cities in Fujian province like Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Zhangzhou. The programs are also available in the Taiwanese cities of Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Alishan. Other cities where the station broadcasts include Beijing, Shanghai, and foreign cities such as Bangkok and Toronto. CHBC's geographical range shows that it targets Chinese citizens, both in mainland China and abroad, as much as the Taiwanese population. CHBC radio programs are even available online since the development of its website in 2009.<sup>68</sup> **Within a few years, CHBC has become, like VTS, far more than a simple radio station. It is now a multichannel company that produces podcasts and news reports, runs forums and is available on social media platforms.** One of its members wrote in 2009 that CHBC was a successful example of the integration of the “new media” as CHBC was able to use them to increase the level of public interaction with its programs.<sup>69</sup>

63. Photos of Zhong Zhigang: <http://archive.ph/F6mW8>; Liu Linlan: <http://archive.vn/W0IWN>; Ran Jiye: <http://archive.ph/IC0pW>; Wang Shuangyang: <http://archive.ph/U7a5a>.

64. For a reference to Liu as a member of the CHBC as early as 2010, see Liu Linlan, “‘钻石体系’与中国广播竞争力” (“The ‘Diamond Model’ and the Competitiveness of the Radio Industry in China”), *声屏世界 (Voice and Screen World)*, 10 (2010), <http://archive.vn/NjFMc>. For a reference to Liu as a member of the CHBC in 2014, see: Liu Linlan, “中国电视娱乐节目季播制模式之分析” (“An analysis of the Diffusion Methods of Chinese Television Entertainment Programs”), *Voice and Screen World*, 5 (2014), <http://archive.vn/PoZNA>.

65. “2010年两岸互联网发展论坛嘉宾” (“List of guests for the Intra-Strait Internet Development Forum in 2010”), 中国台湾网 (*Taiwan.cn*) (2 Sept.2010), <http://archive.ph/nIRUM>.

66. “中国华艺广播公司参访团拜会台湾中评” (“The China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation Visits the Taiwanese Media CRNTT”), 中国评论通讯社 (*China Review News Agency*) (6 May 2012), <http://archive.ph/2gbyc>.

67. “我校台湾学生参加 ‘少年西北行 盛世中国梦’两岸大学生唐诗朗诵会” (“Our Taiwanese Students Participated in the Tang Intra-Strait Poem Recital), 福建中医药大学 (*Fujian University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*) (3 Oct. 2013), <http://archive.ph/KFp92>.

68. “中国华艺广播公司网站改版 ‘华广网’正式开通” (“CHBC Website if Officially Online”), *Voice of the Strait* (29 Apr. 2009), <http://archive.vn/iFZNj>.

69. 张扬 (Zhang Yang), “浅谈媒体融合变革下的广播节目互动——以中国华艺广播公司的娱乐节目为例” (“On the Interaction of Radio Programs During the Media Fusion Period: The Case of the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation”), *东南传播 (Southeast Communication)*, 5 (2009), <http://archive.vn/26pUe>.

Information collected from articles by CHBC members showed that the organization has, at the very least, a News Department (新闻部),<sup>70</sup> an Art and Literature Department (文艺部),<sup>71</sup> a Networks Center (网络中心),<sup>72</sup> a Television Center (电视中心)<sup>73</sup> associated with PLA Unit 61590,<sup>74</sup> and a Research Center on Policies (政策研究中心).<sup>75</sup> Among the individuals affiliated with CHBC, we found editors, television or radio journalists, researchers, and engineers.



On the left, the entrance to CHBC and VTS's offices, on Yuandang Street.<sup>76</sup> VTS' logo and name (海峡之声) are visible. On the right, a Google Earth view of the building (Jan. 2021).<sup>77</sup>

CHBC claims that its mission is to develop and promote the Chinese culture, as well as to reinforce the sentiment of belonging to the same homeland (弘扬中华文化, 凝聚同胞情感).<sup>78</sup> As such, **culture is used as a vehicle for a rapprochement between the two nations**.<sup>79</sup> this is a recurring theme in the articles of people affiliated to VTS.

#### *a. Executives specialized in psychological warfare*

As mentioned, **the president of CHBC is in fact the commander of Base 311**. The Major General Yue Lei, who uses the alias Qiu Yu in public (for CHBC-related activities), is the last confirmed president of CHBC (→ p. 95). He was far from being the only dual-hatted military officer. Chen Guojun (陈国军), the executive director of CHBC, is also an officer at Base 311. In 2015, he was confirmed to be the deputy chief of staff for Unit

70. 施会毅 (Shi Huiyi) and 韦冀宁 (Wei Jining), “微博在广播节目中的应用及其影响探析” (“An Analysis of Weibo Use by Radio Programs”), *东南传播 (Southeast Communications)*, 2 (2012), <http://archive.ph/zvnA1>.

71. 张扬 (Zhang Yang), “浅谈媒体融合变革下的广播节目互动——以中国华艺广播公司的娱乐节目为例” (“On the Interaction of Radio Programs During the Media Fusion Period: The Case of the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation”), <http://archive.vn/26pUe>.

72. 艾然 (Ai Ran), “台湾微博的发展特点及对两岸新闻交流的启示” (“The Development Characteristics of Weibo in Taiwan and Their Significance for Intra-Strait Information Exchanges”), (*Southeast Communications*), 9 (2011), <http://archive.vn/TAUps>.

73. 何志华 (He Zhihua), “从‘京杭运河·两岸行’拍摄看两岸电视媒体的合作” (“Intra-Strait TV Media Cooperation Through the Production of the Film *Canal Pékin-Hangzhou – Crossing the Strait*”), *东南传播 (Southeast Communications)*, 2 (2011), <http://archive.ph/rkkMc>.

74. Stokes and Hasio, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 68, note 183.

75. 黄晓伟 (Huang Xiaowei) and 牟珊 (Mou Shan), “台军招募文宣广告及其效果评析” (“Commentary on Advertisements Used to Recruit in the Taiwanese Army and Their Efficacy”), *现代台湾研究 (Modern Taiwan Studies)*, 1 (2014), <http://archive.vn/KSVw5>.

76. VTS's Baidu page: <https://archive.vn/Kbhpw>.

77. <https://earth.google.com/web/@26.08266593,119.28521175,10.91894476a,307.41277471d,35y,0h,0t,0r>.

78. “华广概况” (“Presentation of CHBC”), *China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation*, <http://archive.vn/Nhezlm>.

79. 艾松如 (Ai Songru), “两岸心灵契合要靠文化引领” (“Intra-strait Spiritual Harmony Must be Based on Culture”), *台声 (Taisheng)* (2015), <http://archive.vn/R1zhK>. Accessible on *Huaxia* (华夏经纬网): <http://archive.vn/3Nztj>.

61716.<sup>80</sup> His promotion in 2018 from deputy chief executive (副总经理)<sup>81</sup> to chief executive (执行董事)<sup>82</sup> at CHBC likely reflects a promotion inside Base 311 as well. An article he wrote in 2015, which is freely accessible online, examined the US psychological warfare. It was commissioned by the Liaison Department of the General Political Department and published in the PLA's *Review of Theoretical Study of Political Work*.<sup>83</sup> In it, Chen Guojun analyzed the evolution of the US doctrine, showing how **psychological warfare had become a crucial component of its information warfare**. In fact, these psychological operations were referred to as “support to military intelligence” for a few years. According to Chen, information should then be exploited as a weapon. He also pointed at the pre-eminent role of **the Air Force** in this type of warfare, focusing first on the dissuasive effects of military demonstrations, and then on the possibility of **using aircrafts as means of communication** (which has been illustrated by the numerous intrusions in Taiwan's air defense identification zone). Chen's interest in the US, along with others, highlights the PLA's perception of the US as the primary practitioner of psychological warfare, as well as its desire to avoid falling behind.



On the left, Chen Guojun;<sup>84</sup> on the right, Ai Songru, alias Ai Ke.<sup>85</sup>

Ai Songru (艾松如), also known as Ai Ke (艾克), is another officer who served at CHBC for almost a decade and took a particular interest in psychological warfare. He has been the legal representative of the CHBC's Television Center since 2010, and he has concurrently served as CHBC managing director and chief executive (执行董事兼总经理) since 2012.<sup>86</sup> According to Stokes and Hsiao, Ai Songru previously served in the Unit 6530's Political Department, also known as the Ground Force's 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>87</sup> He presumably left CHBC, after nearly eight years serving there as the last trace of his name, in association with CHBC, was in 2017.

His publications indicate he is a specialist in psychological warfare. He co-wrote a book about the use of psychological warfare during the Iraq War, in which he laid out the strategies on the Americans and Iraqis, as well as the role of communication technologies. The book also analyzed the other two elements of the “Three warfares”: legal warfare and

80. 陈国军 (Chen Guojun), “美空军军事信息支援行动力量体系建设” (“The Construction of the U.S. Air Force Military Information Support Operations (MISO)”), 军队政工理论研究 (*Theoretical Studies on PLA Political Work*), 16:4, (Aug. 2015), <http://archive.vn/m7KqA>.

81. “第五届中华文化发展论坛圆满落幕” (“5<sup>th</sup> Chinese Culture Development Forum Ends in Success”) (30 Dec. 2017), <http://archive.fo/pItRi>.

82. “中国华艺广播公司执行董事陈国军致辞” (“Speech by CHBC CEO Chen Guojun”), *China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation* (7 Jun. 2018), <https://bit.ly/2OXveLD>.

83. Chen Guojun, “The Construction of the U.S. Air Force Military Information Support Operations (MISO).”

84. Photo from 2018, Chen Guojun appears as a CHBC executive: <https://bit.ly/2Q1V9SB>.

85. Photo from 2016, Ai Songru appears as the CHBC chairman: <https://bit.ly/38EKLm0>.

86. “重要地点” (“Important Locations”), *China Daily* (26 Nov. 2010), <http://archive.fo/TfRZQ>.

87. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army,” 69, note 187.



public opinion warfare.<sup>88</sup> **In it, the United States is painted as a key player in psychological warfare.** Ai Songru's publications showed that **the Chinese are studying and learning everything they can from the latest wars in which the US was involved.**<sup>89</sup> In an article about the War in Kosovo, Ai Songru concluded that "in future conflicts, the enemy will use all possible methods, including propaganda and starting rumors to initiate psychological warfare." Consequently "we must be prepared to enact counter-propaganda and more importantly to strengthen our internal communication system during times of war to keep the initiative."<sup>90</sup>

Ai Songru stated in another article that the soldiers of the Taiwanese Army were profoundly unsettled when Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) took power in 2000.<sup>91</sup> He was the first president from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and his presidency ended decades of Kuomintang (KMT) governments. According to Ai Songru, Taiwanese soldiers, the majority of whom were against Taiwan's independence, no longer knew "who or what they [were] fighting for" after the DPP took power (不知为谁而战, 为何而战), an idea espoused by others, including Zhong Zhigang (→ p. 430). Ai Songru **painted a picture of confused and fearful Taiwanese soldiers.** Their confusion supposedly stemmed from the removal of the "anti-independence education" in the army and from the split between those who supported reunification and those against it, which then divided, even paralyzed the army, according to the author. They remained fearful of a real confrontation with the PLA, which they saw as a superior force. They ultimately doubted the abilities of the Taiwanese Army against mainland China and did not want to be the "first sacrificed." Songru believed that the DPP's political tenure had altered the Army's "political mentality" (政治心态), as it had become more confused, more complicated, and as a result, more difficult to control.

### C. Haifeng, the Base 311's publishing house

**Base 311 has its own publishing house: Haifeng** (海风出版社), also known as Haifeng Publishing House; it is located at 187 Gudong Street (鼓东路187号), near Gulou District in Fuzhou (where the base is) (→ p. 100).<sup>92</sup> Haifeng is a common name and could

88. 艾松如 (Ai Songru), 胡凤伟 (Hu Fengwei), and 杨军强 (Yang Junqiang), 伊拉克战争心理战 (*Psychological Warfare During the Iraq War*), 白山出版社 (Baishan Publishing, 2004), <http://archive.vn/ULJGV>.

89. Other articles by Ai Songru, signed with Yang Junqiang (杨军强): "心理战: 美军又有新动作" ("Psychological Warfare: Novelty Within the US Army"), 环球军事 (*Global Military*) (2004), <http://archive.vn/SqV89>; "美国'倒萨'心病多" ("The US Operation to Depose Saddam Hussein Created Anxiety"), 环球军事 (*Global Military*) (2003), <http://archive.vn/P07Aj>; "大战在即, 美军没有好心情" ("Faced with Imminent War, the US Army is Depressed"), 世界军事 (*World Military Affairs*) (2003), <http://archive.vn/nu0g2>.

90. 艾松如 (Ai Songru), "从科索沃危机看现代战争心理战的运用" ("An Analysis of Psychological Warfare Since the Kosovo War"), (知远战略与防务研究所) *Knowfare Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies* (22 Apr. 2005), <http://archive.fo/snRPY>.

91. "台军乱了精气神" ("The Taiwanese Army is Disarray"), 环球军事 (*Global Military*) (2002), <http://archive.vn/mF7tg>.

92. Haifeng profile, updated on 20 Dec. 2019: <https://www.tianyancha.com/company/270887829>. See also "海风出版社企业信用报告-天眼查" ("Tianycha Report on Haifeng Publishing House"), 度文库 (*Baidu Wenku*) (27 Nov. 2018), <https://archive.vn/0mbcP>. Tianyancha (天眼查) is a free Chinese platform that aggregates open source information on Chinese companies, such as the name of the legal representatives, coordinates, names of the shareholders, or the description of their activities. This is meant to improve transparency for the investors. Tianyancha is blocked outside of China, but its content is sometimes archived on other websites like Baidu Wenku, as is the case here.

easily be confused with namesake companies.<sup>93</sup> While the connection between the PLA, VTS and CHBC was uncovered years ago, **to our knowledge, the link between this publishing house and Base 311 is delineated here for the first time.** And yet, the PLA's "Three Warfares" base – or Unit 61716 – was the company's only shareholder until 2019 and it is believed to have invested RMB480 million (€61 million) in the publishing house.<sup>94</sup> Haifeng's former editor in chief, Jio Honghui (焦红辉), was identified as the head of a PLA propaganda publishing center (解放军某部宣传品编辑中心主任) in 2016.<sup>95</sup> It likely corresponds to the publishing center for PLA propaganda support aimed at Taiwan, located at the same address as the Haifeng publishing house in Fuzhou (福州73720部队中国人民解放军对台湾宣传品编辑部).<sup>96</sup> This center is the former PLA Unit 73720, but currently of unknown military designation.<sup>97</sup> 73 referenced all units attached to the former military region of Nanjing, which was redrawn by the 2015 reforms. **Like VTS and CHBC, which are fronts for PLA units, Haifeng is almost certainly a cover for a unit affiliated to Base 311.** Although established in 1993, the publishing house did not immediately become a front for Base 311. Its affiliation began either in 2005, when the base was created, or in the early 2010s, when the base became the central organ for psychological warfare against Taiwan.



Excerpt from Haifeng's Qichacha profile (accessed 25 Jan. 2021).

93. Not to be confused with Haifeng Publishing House – Hong Kong “海風出版社 – 香港” (“the Haifeng Publishing House – Hong Kong”), *HKTDC*, <http://archive.vn/W#IN>; Haifeng Publishing House – Taiwan “马建著作出版年表” (“Ma Jian Publications”), 独立中文笔会 (*Independent Chinese Pen Center*), <http://archive.vn/wAyip>; or Haifeng Publishing House – Korea “中国五位诗人诗集在韩国出版” (“An Anthology of Poems from Five Chinese Authors Published in Korea”), 中文书刊网 (*Zhongwen shukan wang*) (12 Sept. 2019), <http://archive.vn/4AFya>.

94. According to the last version of the Haifeng's Tianyancha profile, the 7<sup>th</sup> Office of the Fujian provincial government has been the sole shareholder of the company since 2019 (福建省政府第七办公室). Rather than a move away from Base 311, this change, which attaches Haifeng to an office that oversees Unit 61716, suggests that the transformation was only a façade. For a reference to the ties between Haifeng and the 7<sup>th</sup> office before 2019, see: “2015国内出版社信息\_附2008年ISBN出版社代码” (“Information on Chinese Publishing Houses from 2015 with the ISBN codes from 2008”), *Douban* (18 Nov. 2015), <http://archive.ph/ccKhD>. Table extract: “ISBN出版社代码: 978-7-80597; 出版机构名称: 海风出版社; 地区: 总政; 主管单位: 福建省政府第七办公室” (“ISBN code: 978-7-80597; Publishing House: Haifeng; Territory: General Political Department of the PLA; Parent Organization: 7th Office of the Fujian provincial government”).

95. “姓焦的军事将领有哪些 焦姓军事将领大全” (“Who are the Generals with Family Name Jiao?”), *Wenxuehui* (11 Oct. 2016), <http://archive.md/ZMXUK>.

96. Message posted on March 15, 2010 on the forum *Tiexue*: <http://archive.md/ETYdM#selection-1313.0-1317.19>. For the address, see “73720部队中国人民解放军对台湾宣传品编辑部183号邮政信箱” (“Mail Box n° 183 for 73720 Unit PLA Propaganda Destined to Taiwan Support Center”), *Youbian*, <http://archive.ph/eTTJp>.

97. *Ibid.*



## 1. The directors of Haifeng

The former director, Jiao Honghui appeared to be a photographer.<sup>98</sup> His work as a photographer was easily traced, notably in a twenty-minute YouTube video posted by China Southeast TV in November 2018, in which he showcased his work on the preservation of the traditional Hakka culture.<sup>99</sup> A number of articles on his work for the Haifeng publishing house could also be found. It includes the “Cross-Strait Photographers – Cross-Strait Tour” (两岸摄影家·两岸行) project, which has brought together photographers from Taiwan and China since 2002 in joint trips to capture and showcase the richness of the Chinese culture.<sup>100</sup> Further inquiries showed that someone named Jiao Honghui – presumably the same person – is **a military officer and member of the CCP, who graduated in economics and management from the Central Party School of the CCP** and was a PLA delegate for the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Nation People’s Congress.<sup>101</sup> He was director of Haifeng since at least 2010,<sup>102</sup> but likely worked there since the early 2000s. But Jiao is thought to have left his posting around 2014, when Fu Guoqiang (傅国强) was first identified as the new director. Since then, Jiao Honghui has been deputy president of the Photographers’ Association of Fujian (福建省摄影家协会)<sup>103</sup> and has repeatedly participated in the publishing house’s projects.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the latest version of Haifeng’s Tianyancha profile, in December 2019, listed him as the legal representative of the publishing house.

Little information is available on his successor, Fu Guoqiang. Born in 1964, Fu studied communication and specialized in “radio” (无线电共专业) before studying literature, and becoming the director of Haifeng around 2014.<sup>105</sup> Someone named Fu Guoqiang was however affiliated with the Assembly and Inspection Office (装检所) of the PLA ballistic force, located in Baoji, in Shaanxi – but namesakes are common in Chinese, and for lack of sufficient evidence, we cannot say for certain that this is the same person.<sup>106</sup>

98. “焦红辉 讲师” (“Jiao Honghui, Conference Participant”), 海峡摄影艺术培训学校 (*Straits Photographic Arts Training School*) (5 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.ph/8Jjan>.

99. “海峡艺术名家 焦红辉 用镜头守护传统文化” (“The Famous Artist Jiao Honghui Uses his Camera Lens to Preserve Tradition Culture”), 中国东南卫视官方频道 (China Southeast TV Official Chanel) (11 Nov. 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9Q8Jx8CRpA&t=274s>.

100. “两岸光影 星辉相映” (“Shadows and Light on Two Banks”), 凤凰网 (*Ifeng*) (21 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.ph/Fq3NY> and “重走茶马古道，探寻人类千年文明的记忆 6月，海风与您相约台湾” (“Borrow the Ancient Tea and Horses Route – in June, Haifeng Will Meet you in Taiwan”), 搜狐 (*Sobu*) (19 Jun. 2017), <http://archive.ph/esljz>.

101. “姓焦的军事将领有哪些 焦姓军事将领大全” (“Who are the Generals with Family Name Jiao?”).

102. “两岸摄影家聚焦世博：将盛会之美展示给更多民众” (“Photographers of the Two Shores”), *Taiwan.cn* (7 May 2010), <http://archive.vn/RugOU>. Jiao Honghui has likely been the editor-in-chief of Haifeng since 2007, see “请问福建省有哪些出版社” (“What are the Publishing Houses in Fujian?”), 百度知道 (*Baidu Zhidao*), (25 Jul. 2007), <http://archive.vn/WHzSn>.

103. Jiao was identified as holding this position as early as 2007: “副主席 焦红辉” (“Deputy Director Jiao Honghui”), 福建省摄影家协会 (*Fujian Photographers Association*), <http://archive.vn/ASApS>. He was still in this position in 2019: “省摄协副主席焦红辉到光泽县指导摄影工作” (“The Deputy Director of the Provincial Photography Association Jiao Honshu Visited Guangxian to Oversee Photographical Works”), 南平文艺网 (*Nanping Wenyi wang*) (16 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/IBNII>. See also “焦红辉 讲师” (“Jiao Honghui, Conference Participant”), 海峡摄影艺术培训学校 (*Straits Photographic Arts Training School*) (25 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.ph/8Jjan>.

104. “传播文化 增进情谊” (“Diffusing Culture and Promoting Friendship: End of the Journey to Hakka Territory, Photographs of Two Banks”), *China News* (30 Jul. 2019), <http://archive.vn/SE7ba>.

105. “海風出版社社長傅國強：推動兩岸交流更深入” (“Editor in Chief of the Haifeng Publishing House, Fu Guoqiang: it is Important to Expand the Promotion of Inter-Strait Exchanges”), *China Review News Agency* (24 Apr. 2014), <http://archive.vn/WmknI>.

106. Mark A. Stokes, “China’s Nuclear Warhead Storage and Handling System,” Project 2049 Institute (2010), 9.

This unit had the pre-reform designation 96411.<sup>107</sup> Elsewhere, a Fu Guoqiang was identified as a PLA delegate at the 13<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress.<sup>108</sup> Setting aside the two aforementioned references, it is very likely that the former director of Haifeng was the same Fu Guoqiang who held a position within Unit 61839 because Unit 61839 is a VTS affiliate in Xiamen.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, his tenure as director must have been short as all references to Fu Guoqiang in this position date from 2014. And Lü Fengtang became editor-in-chief in 2015.

Few biographical facts could be found on Lü Fengtang (吕凤堂), and there has been no online mention of him in this position since 2018.<sup>110</sup> Thus, he may no longer be holding this position at Haifeng. The only reference to Lü Fengtang, cited on multiple Chinese websites, mentioned a namesake PLA officer, affiliated to the former General Political Department.<sup>111</sup> If this reference were to be about the same Lü Fengtang, it could strengthen our hypothesis that **the director of the Haifeng publishing house is a PLA officer.**



Identified Haifeng directors.<sup>112</sup>

107. 吴凡 (Wu Fan), 王国庆 (Wang Guoqing), and 傅国强 (Fu Guoqiang), “基于人工智能的机电设备智能保障系统研究” (“Research on Intelligent Guarantee System of Mechanical Electronic Equipment Based on Artificial Intelligence”), *计算机测量与控制* (*Computer Measurement and Control*), 14:8 (2006), <http://archive.vn/5mBya>

108. “市领导参加解放军代表团和思明区代表团分组审议” (“The Municipal Authorities Participated in The PLA delegation and Siming District Exam”), *厦门人民政府* (*Municipal Government Of Xiamen*) (21 Jan. 2010), <http://archive.vn/G6Qg3>.

109. “福建省厦门市中级人民法院民事判决书” (“Civil Judgment by the Intermediate People's Court in Xiamen, Fujian”), *汇法网* (*Huijfa Wang*) (2011), <http://archive.vn/cahgf>.

110. “两岸摄影家作品联展亮相台北” (“Inauguration of The Exhibit: Photographs of The Two Rivers”) *Huanqui* (20 Jun. 2015), <http://archive.vn/rnmum>. “两岸大学生共话丝路征文大赛评审结束” (“End of the Writing Contest on the Silk Road for Students of the Two Rivers”), *Sohu* (24 Nov. 2016), <http://archive.vn/fzbf>. “两岸交流30周年影像记忆’ 交流创作活动在湄洲岛启动” (“Project Launch ‘Portrait of 30 Years of Inter-Strait Exchanges’ on Meizhou Island”), *华夏经纬网* (*Huaxia Jingwei Wang*) (30 Oct. 2017), <http://archive.vn/hcg0C>.

111. “解放军四总部表彰全军优秀指挥军官和参谋人才” (“Exceptional PLA Officers”), *华夏经纬* (*Huaxia Jingwei*) (15 Feb. 2011), <http://archive.vn/Ro7Xs>.

112. Photo of Jiao Honghui: [https://www.sohu.com/A/219482503\\_178999](https://www.sohu.com/A/219482503_178999). Photo Of Fu Guoqiang: <Http://Archive.Vn/Wmkni>. Photo of Lü Fengtang: <https://www.meipian.cn/855299V>.

## Part of Haifeng team members in 2016



Hu Guoxian (胡国贤)  
Deputy director



Liang Xiyi (梁希毅)  
Deputy editor



Zhao Qiming (赵启明)  
Exchange department  
deputy director



Wan Suhang (万苏杭)  
Editing office deputy  
director



Xiong Ye (熊烨)  
Editor



Liu Yidan (刘一丹)  
Editor

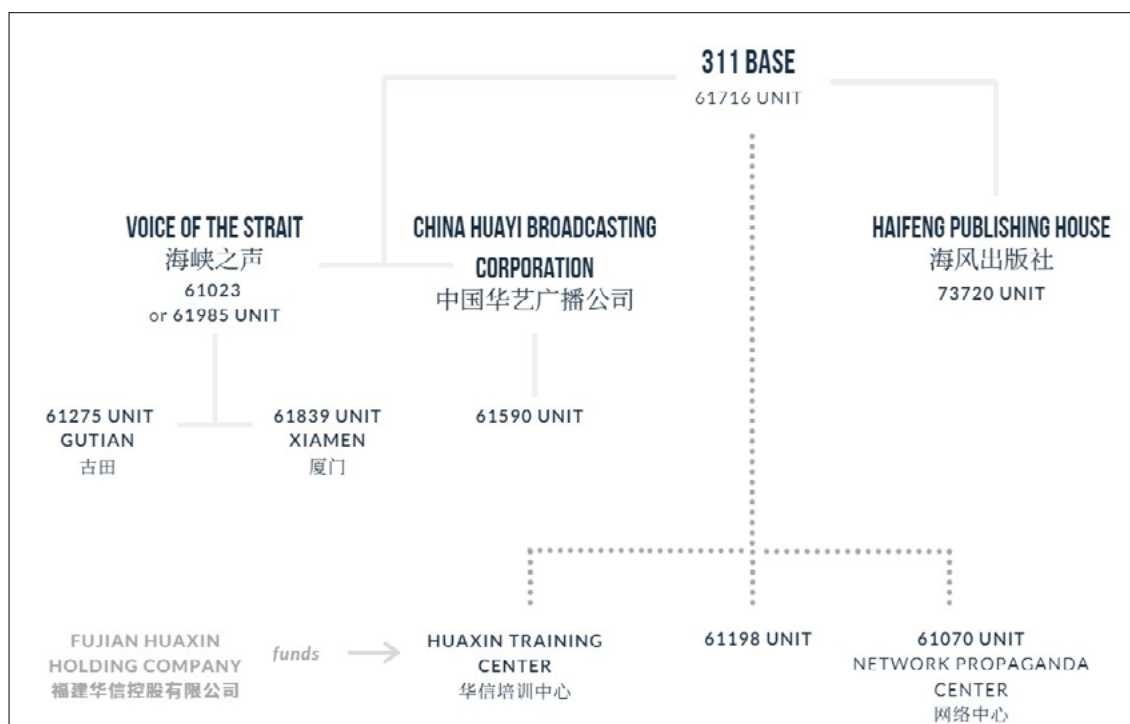
Haifeng members who participated in the 2016 trip “Photographs of the Two Shores.”<sup>113</sup>

## D. Other subordinate units affiliated with the Base 311

At least two other units are subordinate to Base 311, Unit 61070 and Unit 61198. Like the others mentioned before (61716, 61023, 61985, 61275, 61590), these have a Military Unit Cover Designator (MUCD – 部队代号) beginning with 61, in reference to their pre-2015 reform affiliation to the PLA General Staff Department.<sup>114</sup> The reform has not yet led to a complete revision of the military designator system. As a result, it is unclear whether a specific number was attributed to the PLASSF. The Huaxin Training Center, which is connected to CEFC China Energy, is affiliated to Base 311 as well.

113. “两岸摄影家·两岸行风采录，看看有没有你” (“Photographs of the Two Shores. Recording Journeys along the Strait, Observe If you are Present”), *Meipian* (30 Oct. 2016), <https://www.meipian.cn/855299V>.

114. Stokes and Hsiao identified six regiments subordinated to Base 311, the four other units were cited in previous section, Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 29, and note 183 p. 68.



Units affiliated with the Base 311.

## 1. The Unit 61070: A center for network propaganda

Unit 61070 is located a few buildings down from Base 311, at 3 Meifeng Street.<sup>115</sup> It has been identified as a **Center for Network Propaganda for Base 311** (311基地网络中心), and its director was Zhu Leiming (朱磊明) in 2009.<sup>116</sup> According to Stokes and Hsiao, in addition to leveraging the Internet for propaganda, the unit may have launched cyber-operations.<sup>117</sup> The research of **Professor Hu Huaping** (胡华平), who is apparently affiliated to this unit, supports this hypothesis. Born in 1967, he was the chief engineer (总工) of Unit 61070 between 2007 and 2017. His articles described his expertise in information network security, cryptography, and communication networks.<sup>118</sup> Known for his participation in multiple national research projects, like the 863 Program, he won second prize at the National Science and Technology Award from the State Council, and first prize at the Military and Technology Progress Award.<sup>119</sup>

His publications available in open source showed that his research led to the development of a full text retrieval system aimed at improving the detection of relevant content

115. “实验室揭牌成立” (“Inauguration of a Laboratory”), 福建省网络安全与密码技术重点实验室 (Fujian Provincial Key Lab of Network Security and Cryptology), [Http://archive.md/Rsnfp](http://archive.md/Rsnfp).

116. “全省网络新闻宣传干部培训班在连城开班” (“The Propaganda Training on the Internet for Executives in the Province was Launched in Liancheng”), *Fjsen* (5 Nov. 2009), <http://Archive.Ph/S8Dms>.

117. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 68, note 182.

118. For a reference to Hu Huaping as a Unit 61070 affiliate in 2007, see 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 胡光明 (Hu Guangming), 董攀 (Dong Pan), and 陈新 (Chen Xin), “大规模移动自组网络安全技术综述” (“Survey Of Security Technology For Large Scale Manet”), *计算机研究与发展 (Journal Of Computer Research And Development)*, 44:4 (2007), [Http://Archive.Ph/O4Hjy](http://Archive.Ph/O4Hjy); In 2017, see: “学术报告” (“Presentation of Scientific Works”), *经管之家 (Jingguan Zhi Jia)* (11 Dec. 2017), <http://Archive.Ph/Zv8Fz>.

119. “国防科技大胡华平教授来我校进行学术交流” (“Professor Hu Huaping of the National University of Defense Technology Visited our University during an Academic Exchange”), 兰州理工大学 (*Lanzhou University of Technology*) (20 Nov. 2009), <http://Archive.Ph/Kycvd>.



INTRODUCTION

in the era of Big Data;<sup>120</sup> an algorithm capable of detecting a denial-of-service attack;<sup>121</sup> an intrusion detection system;<sup>122</sup> a computer worm detection system;<sup>123</sup> and a network security alert system.<sup>124</sup> He also produced a study on media access control (MAC) spoofing,<sup>125</sup> and another on mobile ad hoc networks.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, Hu Huaping's interests exceeded the technical aspects of informational warfare: in a 2009 conference at Lanzhou University of Technology, he spoke about the psychological warfare waged on networks, specifically by the US and by the Taiwanese Army.<sup>127</sup>

CONCEPTS

Unit 61070 seems to have a particularly close relationship with **the National University of Defense Technology (NUDT) in Changsha**. Hu Huaping is a professor there and co-wrote most of the papers written by his colleagues at the university. It is not a random Chinese university: **NUDT in Changsha is one of the PLA's primary scientific research institutes, and one the best funded**, according to the China Defense Universities Tracker. This tracker was developed by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) to trace the links between universities and the Chinese industrial military complex (→ p. 296). The University is classified “very high” risk because of its affiliation to the PLA.<sup>128</sup> According to the ASPI, the NUDT is directly subordinate to the CMC, **it has been involved in espionage activities** and is connected to foreign universities and private companies in the defense sector. Hu Huaping has also collaborated with colleagues at the **Huazhong University of Science and Technology,<sup>129</sup> located in Wuhan province**, another “very high” risk university (according to the ASPI tracker), due to its ties to the Chinese industrial military complex.<sup>130</sup> Since 2012, the university has been supervised by the State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND – 国家国防科技工业局), which supports universities and supervises the defense industrial base.

ACTORS

120. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 周敬才 (Zhou Jingcai), and 岳虹 (Yue Hong), “基于Lucene 全文检索系统的设计与实现” (“Design and Implementation of Lucene-based Full-Text Retrieval System”), *计算机工程与科学 (Computer Engineering and Science)*, 37:2 (Feb. 2015), <http://archive.ph/ndzvB>.

121. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 张静 (Zhang Jing), 刘波 (Liu Bo), and 肖枫涛 (Xiao Fengtao), “基于ASPQ的LDoS攻击检测方法” (“Detecting LDoS Attacks Based on ASPQ”), *通信学报 (Journal on Communications)*, 33:5 (May 2012), <http://archive.ph/zSWRE>.

122. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 蒋少华 (Jiang Shaohua), “IDS警报危急度的定义与建模” (“Modeling and Definition of Alert Urgent Degree in IDS”), *计算机工程与应用 (Computer Engineering and Applications)*, 45:15 (2009), <http://archive.ph/yxdeK>.

123. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 肖枫涛 (Xiao Fengtao), 刘波 (Liu Bo), and 陈新 (Chen Xin), “HPBR: 用于蠕虫检测的主机报文行为评级模型” (“HPBR: Host Packet Behaviour Ranking Model Used in Worm Detection”), *通信学报 (Journal on Communications)*, 29:10 (Oct. 2008), <http://archive.ph/GCHjT>.

124. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 何利民 (He Limin), 肖枫涛 (Xiao Fengtao), and 张怡 (Zhang Yi), “网络安全预警模型的研究” (“Study of a Network Security Fore-Warning Model”), *计算机研究与发展 (Journal of Computer Research and Development)*, 43 (Suppl.) (2006), <http://archive.ph/pMtKj>.

125. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 陈信男 (Chen Xinnan), and 岳虹 (Yue Hong), “基于MAC欺骗技术的嗅探器原型设计与实现” (“Design and Implementation of the Sniffer Prototype Based on the MAC Spoofing”), *计算机工程与科学 (Computer Engineering & Science)*, 32:12 (2010), <http://archive.ph/7f7dQ>.

126. 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 胡光明 (Hu Guangming), 董攀 (Dong Pan), and 陈新 (Chen Xin), “大规模移动自组网络安全技术综述” (“Survey of Security Technology for Large Scale MANET”).

127. “国防科技大胡华平教授来我校进行学术交流” (“Professor Hu Huaping of the National University of Defense Technology Visited our University during an Academic Exchange”).

128. “National University of Defence Technology,” *China Defence Universities Trackers*, ASPI (25 Nov. 2019), <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/national-university-of-defense-technology/>.

129. 蒋少华 (Jiang Shaohua) and 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), “IDS警报危急度的定义与建模” (“Modeling and Definition of Alert Urgent Degree in IDS”), *计算机工程与应用 (Computer Engineering and Applications)*, 45:15 (2009), <http://archive.ph/yxdeK>.

130. “Huazhong University of Science and Technology,” *China Defence Universities Tracker* (18 Nov. 2019), <https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/universities/huazhong-university-of-science-and-technology/>.



Many of the research mentioned in these articles were financed by the national 863 Program,<sup>131</sup> launched in March 1983. Its goal is to support and foster the development of cutting-edge technologies in seven key sectors, including computer science. Hu Huaping's research was also funded by other bodies, notably key laboratories in network security and cryptology in Fujian province,<sup>132</sup> as well as the National Foundation for Natural Sciences.<sup>133</sup>

**Hu's papers helped identify the names, and sometimes profiles, of additional Unit 61070 members.** For example, Dong Hailiang (董海) and Liu Jianfeng (刘建锋), both born in 1984, were confirmed as working on information security and cryptography. Lead engineer (高级工程师) Yu Xinping (虞欣平), born in 1963, works on network insurance (网络工程与保障). All three were affiliated to Unit 61070 in 2010.<sup>134</sup> More recently, four additional people were identified as members of Unit 61070: Zhou Jingcai (周敬才), Yue Hong (岳虹), Zhang Zhi (张智), and Yang Ke (杨科).<sup>135</sup> Zhou Jingcai, born in 1982, and Yue Hong, born in 1980 are both from Hubei and work on network information security.<sup>136</sup> Yue Hong is a PhD, lead engineer, and member of the China Computer Federation (中国计算机学会).<sup>137</sup> Ai Ran (艾然), another member of Unit 61070, appears to be working on communication techniques and propaganda. For example, he has worked on topics tied to the use of specific writing styles for external communication, using the overseas edition of *People's Daily* as a case study,<sup>138</sup> as well as on the effectiveness of narrative processes in military affairs reporting. For the latter, he studied how the media covered the national holiday military parade.<sup>139</sup>

131. Name of the program in Chinese: 国家高技术研究发展863计划. On the subject, see Emmanuel Puig, "Le techno-nationalisme chinois: évaluation des grands programmes de développement scientifique et technologique en chine" ("Chinese Techno-Nationalism: Evaluation of the large scientific and technologic development programs in China"), *AFRI*, XIII (2012).

132. Name of the funding in Chinese: 网络安全与密码技术建省高校重点实验室开放课题基金资助项目. Hu, Chen, Yue, "Design and Implementation"; Hu, Jiang, "Modeling and definition."

133. Name of the foundation in Chinese: 国家自然科学基金委员会. Hu, Xiao, Liu, Chen, "HPBR: Host Packet Behaviour"; Hu, Hu, Dong, and Chen, "Survey of Security."

134. 董海量 (Dong Hailiang), 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), 刘建锋 (Liu Jianfeng), and 虞欣平 (Yu Xinping), "基于大规模网络信息发送的任务调度策略的研究" ("The Study of Strategy for Task Scheduling Based on Large-Scale Message Group Sending"), *微电子学与计算机 (Microelectronics and Computer)*, 27:8 (Aug. 2010), <http://archive.ph/1c4dO>.

135. Hu Huaping, Zhou Jingcai, and Yue Hong, "Design and implementation"; 岳虹 (Yue Hong), 张智 (Zhang Zhi), and 杨科 (Yang Ke), "基于磷虾群免疫神经网络的微博僵尸粉检测" ("Detecting Microblogging Zombie Fans Based on Krill Herd Immune Neural Network"), *计算机应用与软件 (Computer Applications and Software)*, 32:12 (Dec. 2015), <http://bit.ly/2tZ47Wi>.

136. In Chinese: 网络信息安全.

137. 岳虹 (Yue Hong), 王蕾 (Wang Lei), 邓宇 (Deng Yu), and 刘磊 (Liu Lei), "一种基于软硬件协同的程序安全关键数据动态保护机制" ("A dynamic mechanism of critical data protection based on hardware-software cooperation"), *计算机工程与科学 (Computer Engineering and Science)*, 38:2 (Feb. 2016), <http://archive.ph/BeaTC>.


138. 艾然 (Ai Ran), "对外传播评论写作风格初探——以《人民日报·海外版》“望海楼”栏目为例" ("Preliminary Analysis of the Writing Style and Commentary on the Internal Communication: the Wanghailou Tribune Example, Overseas Edition of the *Quotidien du peuple*"), *东南传播 (Southeast communication)*, 11 (2010), <http://archive.ph/L5cvw>.

139. 艾然 (Ai Ran), "新闻故事化在军事报道中的运用" ("The use of Narrative Processes in Military Affairs Reporting"), *东南传播 (Southeast communication)*, 12 (2009), <http://archive.ph/Ajcx>.


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Biographical note for the authors of the article “Design and Implementation of Lucene-based Full-Text Retrieval System” (2015). The authors are members of Unit 61070.<sup>140</sup>

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Biographical note for Yue Hong, member of Unit 61070.<sup>141</sup>

Finally, it is notable that the address referenced for a number of these articles is 77 Meizhu Street (Base 311), and not 3 Meifeng Street (Unit 61070), which confirms **the link between Unit 61070 and Base 311.**<sup>142</sup> The research of Unit 61070 members, briefly described in this section, align with the focus of Base 311. More specifically, they address topics related to public opinion warfare, and to a lesser extent psychological warfare.

## 2. Unit 61198

**Unit 61198 is registered at the same address as Base 311, 77 Meizhu Street.** It is thought to be affiliated to the Unit 61716’s translation bureau.<sup>143</sup> Similar to Unit 61070, a number of articles written by individuals affiliated to Unit 61198 helped the authors iden-

140. This article is available here: <http://archive.ph/ndzvB>.

141. <http://archive.ph/BeaTC>.

142. Hu Huaping, Zhou Jingcai, Yue Hong, “Design and implementation”; Yue Hong, Wang Lei, Deng Yu, Liu Lei, “A dynamic mechanism.”

143. Stokes and Hsiao hypothesis in “The People’s Liberation Army,” 68, note 183.

tify its members and research areas. Wang Wei (王维), born in 1970, was a lead engineer for Unit 61198 from 2011 to 2017 at least. Like many others from Unit 61070, he worked on **network security**. His papers, often co-written with NUDT researchers, explored communication architecture,<sup>144</sup> computer worm detection systems,<sup>145</sup> a trust model to choose a cloud computing service,<sup>146</sup> or a research algorithm.<sup>147</sup> His work was funded by the same bodies that supported Unit 61070's research: the national 863 Program, the National Foundation for Natural Sciences, and laboratories on network security and cryptology in Fujian province. Another member affiliated to Unit 61198 published a 2015 article on satellite positioning,<sup>148</sup> and a 2016 article on the benefits of computerizing military financial services.<sup>149</sup>

Moreover, some topics are less technical. A 2010 article, for instance, written by four unit members, explored a trust mechanism that could foster trust and better military relations between China and Taiwan.<sup>150</sup> Other papers studied Japan's method of "integration to the empire" during its occupation of Taiwan,<sup>151</sup> and two others detailed the American use of psychological warfare outside of armed conflicts.<sup>152</sup> More recently, in 2016, three unit members co-wrote an article that called for the development of a strong army capable of winning wars.<sup>153</sup> To conclude, **Unit 61198's research interests, like those of Unit 61070, include network communication, psychological warfare, and Taiwan. The subjects are thus aligned with the interests of Base 311.**

144. 陈新 (Chen Xin), 王维 (Wang Wei), 刘波 (Liu Bo), 肖枫涛 (Xiao Fengtao), and 黄遵国 (Huang Zunguo), "一种 匿名等级按需可调的分层匿名通信架构" ("An Anonymity-Level Selectable Hierarchical Anonymous Communication Framework"), 计算机工程与科学 (*Computer engineering and science*), 33:2 (2011), <http://archive.vn/mvL6G>.

145. 肖枫涛 (Xiao Fengtao), 王维 (Wang Wei), 刘波 (Liu Bo), and 陈新 (Chen Xin), "一种基于进程流量行为的蠕虫检测系统" ("A Worm Detection System Based on Process Traffic Behaviors"), 计算机工程与科学 (*Computer engineering and science*), 33:4 (2011), <http://archive.ph/Abimc>.

146. 廖子渊 (Liao Ziyuan), 王维 (Wang Wei), 陈明志 (Chen Mingzhi), "一种用于云计算系统安全强度评估的信任模型研究" (Research on Trust Model for Security Strength evaluation of Cloud Computing), 信息安全 (*Netinfo security*), 16:7 (2016), <http://archive.ph/kG8dy>. 王维 (Wang Wei), 肖传奇 (Xiao Chuanqi), 冯映燕 (Feng Yingyan), and 陈明志 (Chen Mingzhi), "一种基于AIFS权重计算的信任模型的研究" ("Research on a Trust Model Based on AIFS Weighting"), 信息安全 (*Netinfo security*), 16:12 (2016), <http://archive.ph/rZLip>.

147. 林要华 (Lin Yaohua) and 王维 (Wang Wei), "基于逐维策略的布谷鸟搜索增强算法" ("An Enhanced Cuckoo Search Algorithm Based on Dimension by Dimension Strategy"), 计算机工程与科学 (*Computer engineering and science*), 1 (2017), <http://archive.ph/7Gsg3>.

148. 钦焱磊 (Qin Yaolei), "基于统一参考卫星的多星座融合伪距差分定位方法" ("A Satellite Positioning Method"), *Industry A* (工业A), 8 (2015), <http://archive.ph/Y2q69>.

149. Liao Ziyuan, Wang Wi, and Chen Mingzhi, "Research of Trust Model", <http://archive.ph/kG8dy>.

150. 万苏杭 (Wan Suhang), "论建立两岸军事互信机制的问题" ("The construction of a Mutual Military Inter-Strait Trust Mechanism"), 新一代 (*New Generation*), 420 (Aug. 2010), <http://archive.ph/V9PCh>.

151. 张力 (Zhang Li), "日据时期台湾 '皇民化运动' 及其影响" ("The integration of Taiwan Into the Empire Movement During the Japanese Occupation, and its Consequences"), 经营管理者 (*Manager Journal*), 23 (2010), <http://archive.ph/ZhOEm>.

152. 夏蒙山 (Xia Mengshan) and 吴刚 (Wu Gang), "试析美军非战争军事行动中的心理战" ("An Analysis of Psychological Warfare Used by the American Army During Military Operation Outside of Armed Conflict"), 南京政治学院学报 (*Journal of PLA Nanjing Institute of Politics*), 26 (2010), <http://archive.ph/iFaZy>. We found that Xia Mengshan is the director of section 22 (22分队主任) and Wu Gang, assistant researcher for section 61 (61分队助理研究员).

153. 夏蒙山 (Xia Mengshan), 李强 (Li Qiang), and 赵启庸 (Zhao Qiyong), "聚焦能打胜仗加强部队建设" ("Focusing on the Capabilities to Win the War and Reinforcing the Construction of our Army"), 政工导刊 (*Handbook on Political Work*), 2 (2016), <http://archive.ph/djn8s>.



### 3. The Huaxin Training Center

Stokes and Hsiao claimed that **Base 311 is supported by the Huaxin Training Center** (华信培训中心)<sup>154</sup> which is located at the same address as Unit 61070, 3 Meifeng Street (梅峰路3号).<sup>155</sup> Little is known about the training center, or about the type of support it provides to Base 311. Research on the name returned a **namesake hotel** at the address (see above), with 74 rooms over 13 floors. The Huaxin Training Center Hotel is said to have opened in 2011.<sup>156</sup> In conducting the research for this report, the authors found that it was **impossible to reserve a room** at this hotel, regardless of the reservation website used. There were no client reviews,<sup>157</sup> nor is the hotel closed because of the Covid-19 (other hotels in the neighborhood were partly open). Moreover, the hotel's website was rather unprofessional and its map located it in the wrong Fuzhou neighborhood. These facts suggest that **the Huaxin Training Center was not what it claimed to be, and that it was most likely affiliated to a PLA unit**, something we already know.



Entrance to the Huaxin Training Center. The main building can be seen in the background (from Baidu Maps).<sup>158</sup>

154. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 29. For a reference to the Huaxin Center’s affiliation to the Unit 61716, see “企业简介” (“Company Presentation”), 福州市鼓楼区金海阁餐饮会所 (*Jinhaige restaurant, Gulou district, Fuzhou*), <http://archive.vn/q2TGj>.

155. “福州市鼓楼区金海阁餐饮会所” (“Jinhaige Restaurant, Gulou District, Fuzhou”), 福建新工商名录 – 名录集 (New Directory of Companies in Fuzhou), <http://archive.ph/5GIlj>. Note: the numbers 3 and 302 Meifeng Street seem apparently correspond to the same address.

156. Home page for the website 福州华信培训中心酒店 (Huaxin Training Center Hotel in Fuzhou), <http://archive.vn/qqApe>.

157. “福州华信培训中心酒店” (“Huaxin Training Center Hotel in Fuzhou”), 价格线 (*Jiagexian*), <http://archive.vn/UAtj3>.

158. Photo: <http://archive.vn/qqApe>.

The Huaxing Training Center may belong to the former Fujian-based company Huaxin Holdings Co. Ltd (福建华信控股有限公司),<sup>159</sup> and it was perhaps funded by it. Huaxin Holdings was founded in September 2005 – the same year as Base 311 – by **CEFC China Energy Co. Ltd** (中国华信能源有限公司) and nicknamed Huaxin. In 2014 Lan Huasheng (兰华升) took over the company, renaming it Fujian Dasheng Holdings Co. Ltd. (福建大生控股有限公司).<sup>160</sup> Yet, the company retains ties to CEFC China Energy; Lan Huasheng used to collaborate with Ye Jianming (叶简明) the founder and chairman (独立董事) of Huaxin and he has been an independent board member of the company since 2006.<sup>161</sup> **One of the most important private companies in China**, Huaxing Holdings was created by Ye Jianming when he was only 20 years old.<sup>162</sup> Lan is also the executive director of the China Academy of Culture (中国文化院).<sup>163</sup> This organization, founded by the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC, 中国能源基金委员会) – the CEFC’s think tank – is part of the “Huaxin nexus.”<sup>164</sup>

**The CEFC think tank was identified as a platform for political warfare**, affiliated to the former General Political Department. Its links to the PLA and the Party have been well documented.<sup>165</sup> For instance, J. Michael Cole explained that **the CEFC China Energy think tank rented office space in Base 311’s offices**.<sup>166</sup> Ye Jianming, founder of Huaxin, was also known for his membership to another organization linked to the former General Political Department during the 2000s: the CAIFC.<sup>167</sup> Besides, Huaxin’s think tank made headlines on multiple occasions. In 2011, a former PLA officer who worked there gained attention after he published a piece in the *Global Times* about the need for greater demonstrations of force in the South China Sea.<sup>168</sup> In 2017, its former director Patrick Ho (何志

159. For a reference to the Huaxin Training Center’s affiliation to CEFC China Energy, see the bi-monthly review of the company, 华信新视野 (*CEFC China New Vision*), such as issue 4 (2011), p. 26, <https://bit.ly/3cFhN9v>. See also Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 29; and Cole, *Convergence or Conflict in the Taiwan Strait: The illusion of peace*, 68.

160. Between 2005 and 2014, the principal shareholder of Fujian Huaxin Holdings was the CEFC (Shanghai) Group Co. Ltd. (上海石油集团有限公司 then上海华信国际有限公司), a subsidiary of CEFC China Energy created in 2003. Since 2014, the principal shareholder of Fujian Huaxin Holdings, which became Fujian Dasheng Holdings is 90% owned by Lan Huasheng. Its named cane be translated as Shanghai Zhongmao Chuangfu Equity Investment Fund Co., Ltd. (上海中茂创富股权投资基金有限公司); the Tianyancha profile of the company, last updated April 7 2020: <https://www.tianyancha.com/company/339639036>. The current address of Fujian Dasheng Holdings is 318 Wushangxi Street, Gulou district, Fuzhou (福建省福州市鼓楼区乌山西路318号洪山科技园创业中心大厦第2层213). The Tianyancha profile of Fujian Dasheng Holdings from February 26 2020: <https://www.tianyancha.com/company/2344250825>. The Tianyancha profile of CEFC (Shanghai) Group Co. Ltd – or CEFC Shanghai International Group Limited – since April 7, 2020: <https://www.tianyancha.com/company/149845647>. Please also see “‘神秘富豪’兰华升旗下版图扩张遇阻” (“Obstacles on the Path of the Mysterious and Powerful Lan Huasheng”), *Xinbuanet* (26 Jun. 2018), <http://archive.vn/upJGY>.

161. “‘神秘富豪’兰华升旗下版图扩张遇阻” (“Obstacles on the Path of the Mysterious and Powerful Lan Huasheng”), <http://archive.vn/upJGY>.

162. In 2016, Ye Jianming ranked 2 in *Fortune*’s “40 under 40” – the 40 largest fortunes in the world owned by people under 40. Scott Cendrowski, “The Unusual Journey of China’s Newest Oil Baron,” *Fortune* (28 Sept. 2016), <http://archive.vn/LSd8f>.

163. Stokes and Hsiao prefer the translation “China Institute of Culture.” We use the Chinese translation in this report.

164. “中国文化院” (“China Academy of Culture”), *Baidu*, <http://archive.vn/4biGL>.

165. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 26-29; Anne-Mary Brady, “Submission to the Inquiry on Foreign Interference,” New Zealand Parliament, Select Committee on Justice (2019), 2, <https://bit.ly/2ywdOgO>; Anne-Marie Brady, “On the Correct Use of Terms,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 19:9 (9 May 2019); J. Michael Cole, “Unstoppable: China’s Secret Plan to Subvert Taiwan,” *National Interest* (23 Mar. 2015).

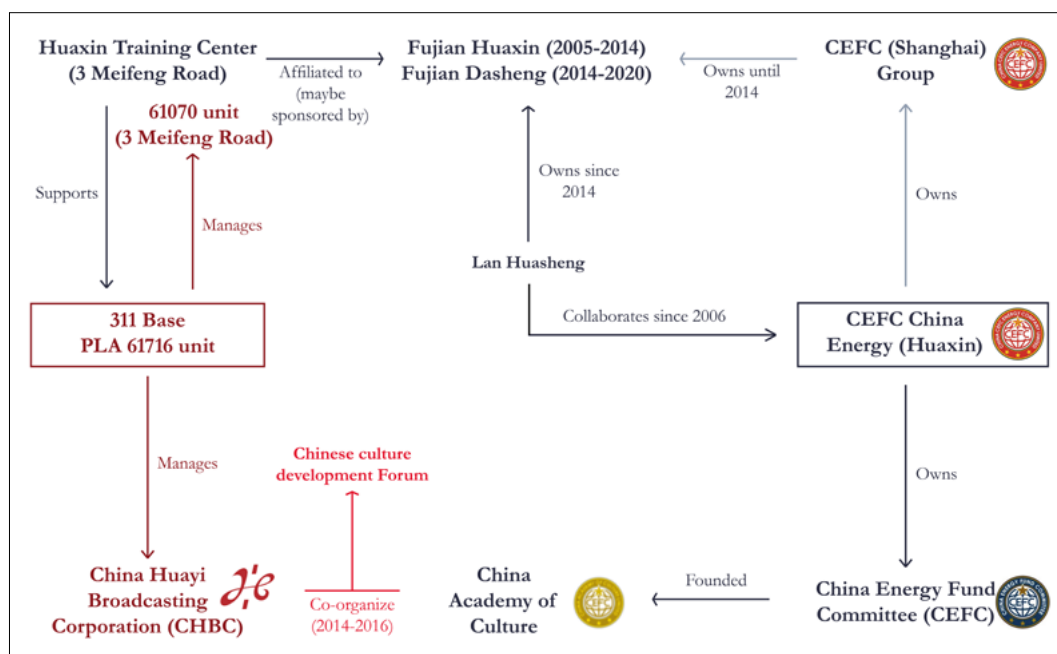
166. J. Michael Cole, “A conversation about China’s sharp power and Taiwan,” Brookings Institute, (11 Sept. 2018), 15.

167. Stokes and Hsiao believed Ye Jianming was the deputy secretary general of the CAIFC or to CAIFC Shanghai between 2003 and 2005 (“The People’s Liberation Army,” 26).

168. Andrew Chubb, “‘A Golden Opportunity to Use Force:’ Mysterious China Energy Fund Committee Attackdog,” *South Sea Conversations* (29 Sept. 2011).



平) was arrested and found guilty of conspiracy, money laundering, and of violating the law against corruption abroad.<sup>169</sup> This businessman and former Secretary of Internal Affairs in Hong Kong (2002-2007), was accused of bribing foreign officials, allegedly giving two million dollars to the president of Chad in 2014, through the CEFC's non-governmental and non-profit branch, the China Energy Fund Committee, to facilitate the conglomerate's development abroad.<sup>170</sup> **The important number of scandals in Africa and Eastern Europe** – the Czech president Miloš Zeman named Ye Jianming as his “economic advisor” in 2015<sup>171</sup> (→ p. 265) – and at the UN<sup>172</sup> finally convinced the NGO Committee to cancel the CEFC think tank's special consultative status at the ECOSOC<sup>173</sup> it had received in 2011, in 2019. **Ye Jianming's arrest**, which closely followed Patrick Ho's, sealed the fate of one of China's most powerful conglomerates,<sup>174</sup> as **the CEFC officially declared bankruptcy in March 2020**.<sup>175</sup>



Evidence of the connection between Base 311 and CEFC China Energy (Huaxin).

While Huaxin Holdings in Fujian was founded in 2005, the same year as Base 311, we ignore when it was affiliated to Base 311. But Huaxin and the CHBC began collaborating in 2014, when they co-organized the Chinese Culture Development Forum (→ p. 433).<sup>176</sup>

169. Mathieu Olivier, “Justice: le Hongkongais Patrick Ho déclaré coupable de corruption au Tchad et en Ouganda” (“Justice: Hong Kong Patrick Ho Found Guilty of Corruption in Chad and Uganda”), *Jeune Afrique* (6 Dec. 2018).

170. Alvin Lum, “Patrick Ho US Bribery Case: CEFC China Energy Identified in Evidence Against Ex-Hong Kong Minister,” *South China Morning Post* (29 Apr. 2018); Jenni Marsh, “How a Hong Kong millionaire's bribery case exposes China's corruption problem in Africa,” *CNN* (10 Feb. 2018).

171. Martin Hála, “United Front Work by Other Means: China's ‘Economic Diplomacy’ in Central and Eastern Europe,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 19:9 (2019).

172. Jichang Lulu, “United Nations with Chinese Characteristics: Elite Capture and Discourse Management on a global scale,” *Synopsis* (25 Jun. 2018).

173. “Withdrawal of the consultative status of the non-government organization China Energy Fund Committee,” UN Economic and Social Council (6 Jun. 2019), E/DEC/2019/217.

174. Eric Ng and Xie Yu, “China detains CEFC's founder Ye Jianming, wiping out US\$153 million in value off stocks,” *South China Morning Post* (1 Mar. 2018); Don Weinland, “Chinese state brokerage takes over CEFC securities arm,” *Financial Times* (15 Nov. 2019).

175. “Fallen Energy Conglomerate CEFC Declared Bankrupt – Caixin Global,” *Caixin* (25 Apr. 2020).

176. “第二届‘两岸四地文化沙龙’将于福州召开” (“The Second Edition of the Two Banks Cultural Fair Inaugurated in Fuzhou”), *Taihainet* (13 Oct. 2014), <http://archive.vn/cLMU>; “第二届‘两岸四地文化沙龙’在榕开

The China Academy of Culture, which emanated from the CEFC think tank, was originally behind the forum.<sup>177</sup> The relationship between Huaxin and CHBC likely began a few years prior. In a 2012 speech, CHBC executive Ai Songru thanked Huaxin for its support during an event the CHBC was invited to.<sup>178</sup> Besides, the hotel named after the Huaxin Training Center opened its doors in 2011, which could be identify the start of the collaboration between Huaxin and CHBC.<sup>179</sup> In addition, Zheng Yong (郑永), an executive at the Dasheng group (大生) owned by Lan Huasheng, held a position at CHBC between 2012 and 2014.<sup>180</sup>

## IV. A web of relaying platforms

**A nexus of associations, non-profit NGOs, and other civilian facades** – with blurry links to the Chinese authorities – plays a role in the implementation of influence operations. The organizations that make up this web of actors, irrespective of their proximity to the central government, **are all platforms conducting to PRC influence operations. They serve the government to varying degrees, at times only facilitating its operations.** As such, they are referred to as “relaying platforms.” This report does not aim to create an exhaustive list of these organizations, but rather to present the main organizations with direct links to the PLA, the China Association for International Friendly Contact (**CAIFC**), the China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture (**CAPCC**), as well as the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (**CCPPNR**), which has ties to the Party, and the China-United States Exchange Foundation (**CUSEF**). The latter is an example of an organization orbiting at a distance from the nexus, but that still deserves a particular attention.

**This nexus is sprawling. Many people accumulate or consecutively occupy key positions in a number of these organizations.** The former vice president of the National People’s Congress (NPC), **Xu Jialu** (许嘉璐), is one of them. A respected intellectual known for promoting Chinese values and culture around the world, Xu Jialu has served as president of the CAPCC, honorary president of the CCPPNR, founder and president of the Nishan Forum on World Civilizations’ organizing committee, principal advisor to the CAIFC, president of the CEFC advisory committee, and president of the China Academy of Culture.<sup>181</sup>

A number of officers from the former General Political Department’s Liaison Department (GPD/LD) have held positions in these organizations. This is particularly the case of the CAIFC, which was under the direct authority of the GPD/LD.<sup>182</sup>

幕” (“Inauguration of the Second Edition of the Two Banks Cultural Fair”), *Voice of the Strait* (26 Oct. 2014), <http://archive.vn/RWGXXN>.

177. “首届‘中华文化发展方略——两岸四地文化沙龙’形成共识” (“First Edition of the ‘Chinese Culture Development Strategy – the Two Banks Cultural Fair’ Initiative, Which Resulted in a Consensus”), 网易 (Wang yi) (7 Nov. 2013), <http://archive.vn/Pyg3X>.

178. “中国华艺广播公司执行董事总经理艾松如的讲话” (“Speech by Ai Songru, Senior Director of the China Huayi Broadcasting Company”), 五缘文化 (Sina Blog of Wuyuan Wenhua) (19 May 2012), <http://archive.vn/mSf1O>

179. Home page of the website “福州华信培训中心酒店” (“Fuzhou Huaxin Training Center Hotel”), <http://archive.vn/qqApe>

180. “大生农业金融：高管简介” (“Shanghai Dasheng: Executive Presentation”), 同花顺 (*Tonghuashun*), <http://archive.vn/o5cH2>.

181. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 20-29.

182. *Ibid.*

- **Jin Li** (金黎) was director of the LD/GPD (1985-1990), deputy chief executive of CAIFC, deputy secretary general of the China Japan Association for Friendly Contact (中日友协), and a member of the Foreign Affairs Association (外交学会).<sup>183</sup>
- **Ye Xuanning** (叶选宁), alias Yue Feng (岳枫) was GPD/LD director following him (1990-1998), deputy director of the CAIFC, and he supervised the newly-established Carrie Enterprise Corporation (中国凯利实业有限公司). This company allows the GPD to operate from Hong Kong and works as liaison conducting operations against Taiwan.<sup>184</sup> He is the son of Marshall Ye Jianying (叶剑英).
- **Liang Hongchang** (梁宏昌), alias Liang Shi (梁澍) became director of the GPD/LD subsequently (1999-2007), and also executive director of the CAIFC, and the first president of the CAPCC.<sup>185</sup>
- **Xing Yunming** (邢运明) was the director of the GPD/LD (2007-2015), deputy director of the CAIFC, director of the CAPCC, vice president of the Nishan Forum's organization committee in 2008, and executive director of the China Philanthropy Forum (中国公益论坛) – the product of a collaboration between the GPD/LD and the magazine *Caijing*.<sup>186</sup>
- **Xin Qiu** (辛旗) has been deputy director of the GPD/LD since at least 2011 and deputy director of the CAPCC. He was affiliated to the China Painting Academy for Friendly Contact (中国友联画院), the Tsinghua International Broadcasting Research Center (清华大学国际传播研究中心), and the National Society of Taiwan Studies (全国台湾研究会). This last organization gathers Chinese experts working on Taiwan, and supports the TAO and UFWD.<sup>187</sup> He is still vice president of the CAIFC.<sup>188</sup>
- **Li Xiaohua** (李晓华) served as deputy director of the GPD/LD, CAIFC, Chinese Association for South Asian Studies (中国南亚学会), and of the White Jade Research Association (中国白玉研究会).<sup>189</sup>
- **Du Rubo** (杜汝波) was the deputy director of the GPD/LD, honorary president of the China Red Cultural Institute (中国红色文化研究会), a member of the United Front Theory Research Association (中国统一战线理论研究会), and deputy secretary general of the CAIFC. He also managed the activities of the Dongfang Yi Cultural Expansion Association (东方毅拓展文化协会), which is considered a neo-Maoist, anti-American platform that supported the former General Political Department in developing the “Three Warfares.” Du Rubo’s writings in particular are said to have contributed to the “Three Warfares” strategy, notably his 1990 book *Introduction to psychological warfare* (心理战概论), co-written with Wen Jinquan (温金权) and Zhou Min (周敏).<sup>190</sup>
- **Chen Zuming** (陈祖明) served as the director of the GPD/LD, CAIFC general secretary, executive director of the Nishan Forum, and deputy director for both the China

183. Ibid., 52, note 53.

184. Ibid., 11-12

185. Ibid., 14 and note 141, p. 63.

186. Ibid., 26

187. Ibid., 21, 34.

188. <http://www.caifc.org.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=25>.

189. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 21.

190. Ibid., 29.

Association of Southeast Asian Studies (中国东南亚研究会) and the China Painting Academy for Friendly Contact.<sup>191</sup>

• **Zheng Jian** (郑剑) was secretary general of the CAPCC and director of the China Strategic Culture Promotion Association (中国战略文化促进会), a member of the CAIFC board of directors, and a member of the Center for Peace and Development (CPSD, 和平与发展研究中心), the National Society of Taiwan Studies, and the Cross-Strait Relations Research Center (海峡两岸关系研究中心).<sup>192</sup>

## A. CAIFC – China Association for International Friendly Contact (中国国际友好联络会)

Modeled after the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, 中国人民对外友好协会),<sup>193</sup> the CAIFC was created in 1984. According to Stokes and Hsiao, **it is one of the most important platforms relaying PLA and CCP influence operations.** It was a direct subordinate to the GPD/LD, probably its Investigation and Research bureau.<sup>194</sup> This is why multiple GPD/LD officers held positions at the CAIFC. Today, the association is presumably under the authority of the new Liaison Department in the Political Work Department (PWD/LD). Moreover, Chen Yuan (陈元) is its current director. Xin Qi and Deng Rong (邓榕), the daughter of Deng Xiaoping, and Yi Xian (乙先), who is also vice president of CAPCC, are the CAIFC’s vice presidents. Finally, Liang Hongchang, is also still a member of the CAIFC board of directors, under the alias Liang Shi.<sup>195</sup>



The CAIFC’s mode of operation consists in **making contact and cultivating relationships with foreign elites**, in the defense sector especially, but also with lawmakers and other influential actors in target countries. Its aim is to diffuse a positive image of China through them.<sup>196</sup> **Henry Kissinger is an “old friend” of the CAIFC**<sup>197</sup> for instance. And the US-China Sanya Initiative is an example of a CAIFC project that was created to foster better relations with the US military elite (see section below).

At the provincial level, there are Associations for International Friendly Contact (AIFC) as well. And the Liaison Department directors of the former military regions’ political departments served as deputy directors of these AIFCs.<sup>198</sup> It can be assumed that these

191. Ibid., 21.

192. Ibid., 61, note 131.

193. Ibid., 37. The website: <https://www.cpaaffc.org.cn/>. Their “About” page is archived here: <http://archive.vn/J4hdc>.

194. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 24.

195. CAIFC member pages can be found in the archives here: <http://archive.ph/ftfEX>.

196. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 24.

197. “President Chen Yuan Meets with Former US Secretary of State Dr. Kissinger,” *CAIFC* (11 Nov. 2011), <http://archive.ph/cCymZ>.

198. Stokes and Hsiao hypothesis, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 27.



INTRODUCTION

overlaps were reproduced with the new command theaters of the post-2015 reform structures. For example, the Jiangsu Association for International Friendly Contact was tied to the Nanjing military region.<sup>199</sup>

CONCEPTS

The CPDS, created in 1984, is also affiliated to the CAIFC.<sup>200</sup> According to Stokes and Hsiao, the CPDS functioned as the principle former GPD/LD think tank, and has likely reprised its role with the current PWD/LD; it apparently supports the MSS as well.<sup>201</sup> Finally, the CPDS publishes a bimonthly review about international relations, called *Peace and Development* (和平与发展).

## 1. The US-China Sanya Initiative: how to influence US generals

ACTORS

Since 2008, the CAIFC has organized the US-China Sanya Initiative (中美高级退役将领交流活动), officially named the “US-China High-Ranking Retired Generals Exchange Initiative,” in partnership with the EastWest Institute (EWI). The EWI is an NGO that promotes international dialogue and acts as a platform for informal diplomacy. The initiative’s English name refers to the city of Sanya, in Hainan province in China, where the first dialogue was held in 2008. The event is sponsored by the CUSEF (→ p. 125) and, in 2018, the program celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

According to the organizers and participants, the goals of the initiative are to improve communication and mutual understanding, as well as to create a space for cooperation in case of a crisis.<sup>202</sup> **These dialogues often take place in Beijing over the course of a day or two of informal discussions.** The Chinese and American delegations typically discuss a variety of topics of interest, including Chinese-American military relations, conflicts in the South and East China seas, the Korean peninsula, counter-terrorism, cyber security, or Taiwan and its relationship with China. These exchanges always coincide with current events, such as Xi Jinping’s visit to the US, the US elections, or the 2016 arbitration of the South China Sea dispute by the Permanent Court of Arbitration.<sup>203</sup>

ACTIONS

During the day, the participants meet with one or multiple important American or Chinese figures. In fact, **the delegations were invited to meet with GPD directors on multiple occasions:** General Zhang Yang (张阳) in 2013 and 2015 and General Miao Hua (苗华) in 2017 and 2018. They met **other important Chinese military figures** like General Xu Qiliang (许其亮), vice president of the CMC in 2015, and Lieutenant General Li Zuocheng (李作成) in 2013, at the time commander of the Chengdu military region but now a general and the Joint Chiefs of Staff director. **In 2016, the 7<sup>th</sup> dialogue took place in Washington, D.C. and New York.** This allowed participants to meet high ranking American officials like Senators John McCain and Tom Cotton, Representative Rick Larsen, then-Deputy Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel, and Maurice R. Greenberg, president of CV Starr & Co. Inc.

CASE

The US delegation was led by (retired) **Admiral William A. Owens**, a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Owens has publicly pushed for better US-China relations, opposed the *Taiwan Relations Act* which he considered detrimental to the US, advocated for

199. Ibid., 30.

200. “和平与发展研究中心简介” (“Presentation of the Center for Peace and Development Studies”), 和平与发展, 3 (1996), <http://archive.ph/I7iZd>.

201. Stokes and Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army,” 27.

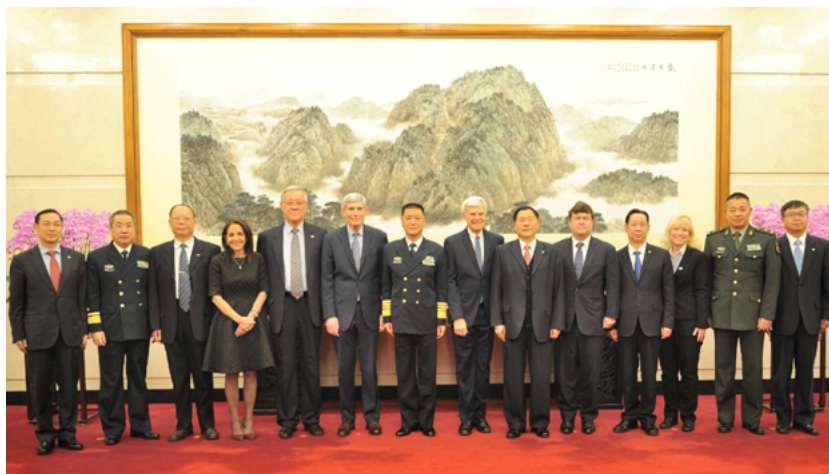
202. “A Briefing on the Sanya Initiative,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (6 Jun. 2008).

203. The minutes of the dialogue, with a list of participants and subjects discussed, are accessible on the EastWest Institute website. For example, the minutes of the 2018 meeting can be found here: <https://www.eastwest.ngo/idea/us-china-sanya-initiative-dialogue-report-10th-anniversary-meeting>.



the end of US weapon sales to Taiwan, and encouraged the development of US-Chinese economic relations – positions that Beijing favors.<sup>204</sup> Since his retirement, Admiral Owens is believed to have defended Chinese interests through his appointment to various boards of directors. With the help of Amerilink, a firm he created in 2009, he tried to help his first client, Huawei, enter the American market, by winning a contract with the telecommunications company Sprint Nexel. Probably to quell concerns regarding Huawei's connection to Beijing, he enlisted the help of former congressman Richard Gephardt and former World Bank president James Wolfensohn. While Alcatel and Samsung were eventually awarded the contract, Owens' efforts resulted in Huawei being one of the final six companies considered.<sup>205</sup>

Among the influential officers who participated in these dialogues were General Ronald R. Fogleman, former Air Force Chief of Staff, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, former commander of the Pacific Command (PACOM), General Charles H. Jacoby, former commander of the Northern Command (NORCOM), General John Abizaid, former commander of the Central Command (CENTCOM), and General Walter L. Sharp, former commander of the US forces in Korea. On the Chinese side, the US-China Sanya Initiative is managed by three people, Xin Qi and Yi Xian, both vice-presidents of the CAIFC, and Li Haoyu (李浩宇), secretary general of the CAIFC. Stokes and Hsiao hypothesized that Haoyu was also the former director of the GPD/LD investigation and research bureau.<sup>206</sup>



Official photograph from the 10<sup>th</sup> US-China Sanya Initiative dialogue (2018). From the left: Xin Qi (1<sup>st</sup>), Li Andong (5<sup>th</sup>), Miao Hua (7<sup>th</sup>), Willian A. Owens (8<sup>th</sup>), Yi Xian (11<sup>th</sup>), Li Haoyu (14<sup>th</sup>).<sup>207</sup>

204. Bill Owens, "America must start treating China as a friend," *Financial Times* (17 Nov. 2009), <http://archive.ph/bKX10>. "Admiral Bill Owens: Leadership, 'Togetherness' and What is Required for China and the U.S. to Avoid the Thucydides' Trap," *China-US Focus*, video published on January 9, 2020, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/videos/interview-with-admiral-bill-owens>.

205. William Lowther, "Owens' links to PRC firm ring alarm," *Taipei Times* (9 Sept. 2010), <http://archive.ph/on53P>; Spencer E. and Shayndi Raice, "Dignitaries Come on Board to Ease Huawei Into U.S.," *The Wall Street Journal* (21 Sept. 2010), <http://archive.ph/Dqy5w>; Winter Nie and William Dowell, *In the Shadow of the Dragon: The Global Expansion of Chinese Companies and How It Will Change Business Forever*, AMACOM American Management Association (2012).

206. Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," 24.

207. Jace White, *US-China Sanya Initiative Dialogue: Report from the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting*, EastWest Institute (17 Jan. 2019), <https://www.eastwest.ngo/idea/us-china-sanya-initiative-dialogue-report-10th-anniversary-meeting>.

## B. CAPCC – China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture (中华文化发展促进会)



According to Stokes and Hsiao, the Central Military Command (CMC) was the driving force behind the creation of the CAPCC in 2001. The CAPCC was apparently founded to become the **principal PLA platform for political work dedicated to Taiwan**, under the authority of the former GDP/LD.<sup>208</sup> It should not be confused with the Chinese Culture Promotion Society (中华文化促进), which has an almost identical name in Chinese. In 2020, for unknown reasons, the CAPCC's website was no longer accessible even though it had still been working in the summer 2019.<sup>209</sup> The CAPCC is one of the organizers of the Chinese Culture Development Forum (→ p. 433), alongside the CEFC China Energy's China Culture Academy, CHBC, the UFWD-affiliated All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots, the *Want Daily* and the *China Review News*.<sup>210</sup> The CAPCC is apparently managing the commercial company Huayi Audio Visual ((中国华艺音像实业有限公司), the CEO of which, Bao Lixian (鲍立衍), was deputy director of the CAPCC.<sup>211</sup> The association also appears to have a close working relationship with the *China Review News* and the PLA Academy of Military Science.<sup>212</sup> The last identified CAPCC president was Wang Zhengwei (王正伟) who had spent the majority of his career in his native autonomous region of Ningxia before becoming vice president of the CPPCC and deputy director of the UFWD.<sup>213</sup>

## C. CCPNR – China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会)



Created in 1988, the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR) has a **very close working relationship with political authorities**. Members of the CCPPNR bureau hold positions in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the standing committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), and the United Front Work Department (UFWD).

Each year during the NPC, the CPPCC gathers and consults with various political parties, representatives of ethnic groups, and other organizations. Wang Yang (汪洋), the current CPPCC president, is also the president of the CCPPNR. In fact, **the presidents of**

208. Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," 15.

209. The website's address: <http://www.chinaapc.org/>. See also the Baidu page: <http://archive.vn/8oY8D>.

210. "中评现场：叶克冬谴责‘去中国化’行径" ("Ye Kedong Denounces Practices of 'De-Sinicization'"), *China Review News Agency* (18 Dec. 2016), <http://archive.vn/FQKOp>.

211. Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," 62, note 133.

212. *Ibid.*, 26.

213. See Wang Zhengwei's Baidu page: <http://archive.vn/8U8R3>.

**the eight democratic parties that are allowed to exist alongside the CCP are vice presidents of the CPPCC and of the CCPPNR.** Some are members of the NPC's standing committee as well. The eight parties are:

- Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang (RCCK, 中国国民党革命委员会) – President: Wan Exiang (万鄂湘);
- China Democratic League (CDL, 中国民主同盟) – President: Ding Zhongli (丁仲礼);
- China National Democratic Construction Association (CDNCA, 中国民主建国会) – President: Hao Mingjin (郝明金);
- China Association for Promoting Democracy (CAPD, 中国民主促进会) – President: Cai Dafeng (蔡达峰);
- Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party (CPWDP, 中国农工民主党) – President: Chen Zhu (陈竺);
- China Zhi Gong Party (CZGP, 中国致公党) – President: Wan Gang (万钢);
- Jiusan Society (JS, 九三学社) – President: Wu Weihua (武维华);
- Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (TDSGL, 台湾民主自治同盟) – President: Su Hui (苏辉).

Among the other political personalities who jointly held vice presidential positions at the CPPCC and the CCPPNR, we noted Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai (帕巴拉·格列朗杰), president of the Autonomous Region of Tibet, Zheng Jianbang (郑建邦), RCCK member, and Gao Yunlong (高云龙), CDNCA member.<sup>214</sup>

The National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会) is made up of some 3,000 representatives, indirectly elected for five years, who meet once a year in session. Most seats are held by CCP members, but there are also independent representatives and members of the eight authorized parties. The NPC does not have any real legislative or executive power as it remains under the authority of the CCP. Its role is largely symbolic. The NPC's standing committee is composed of 175 people, including multiple CCPPNR vice-presidents: Wan Exiang (RCCK), Chen Zhu (CPWDP), Ding Zhongli (CDL), Hao Mingjin (CDNCA), Cai Dafeng (CAPD), or Wu Weihua (JS).

Finally, You Quan (尤权), the CCPPNR secretary general and second in command, and Tan Tianxing (谭天星), are respectively the director and deputy director of the CCP's Central Committee UFWD. You Quan is also secretary of the CCP Secretariat.

The CCPPNR has developed a network of offices on all continents. According to a 2019 study by the Jamestown Foundation, it is **present in 91 countries**, including France, the United Kingdom, the US, Canada, and Australia.<sup>215</sup>

## **D. CUSEF – China-United-States Exchange Foundation (中美交流基金会)**

The China-United-States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), which sponsors numerous CAIFC events, like the US-China Sanya Initiative, has also funded a variety of **dialogues, programs, and exchanges between the US and China**. Created in 2008 in Hong Kong,

214. To consult the list of CCPPNR members: <http://archive.vnwmk12>.

215. John Dotson, "The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China," Jamestown Foundation (9 May 2019).

the CUSEF describes itself as an “independent, non-profit, privately funded, and non-governmental foundation... [that] builds platforms to encourage constructive dialogue and diverse exchanges between the people of the US and China.” But it functions as a *de facto* **front organization for the PRC government**<sup>216</sup>: it is **one of the most active United Front relays working in the US. Links between the CUSEF and UFWD are well-established.** The founder and president of the CUSEF, Tung Chee-Hwa (董建華), a former executive chief of Hong Kong (1997-2005), was also the vice president of the CPPCC’s 21<sup>th</sup> National Committee. Besides, the CUSEF board of directors includes known UFWD and CCP members.<sup>217</sup> Liu Changle, the CEO of Phoenix Media Investment (Holdings) Ltd. and founder of Phoenix Television, is on the board of directors for instance. Phoenix Television is a rare non-governmental stations authorized in China, pointing to Liu Changle’s close relationship to the CCP.<sup>218</sup> Finally, **Henry Kissinger is CUSEF’s honorary advisor.**<sup>219</sup>



CHINA-UNITED STATES  
EXCHANGE FOUNDATION  
中美交流基金會

Apart from the US-China Sanya Initiative, which it has supported since its inception, the CUSEF sponsors a number of high-level dialogues. Similarly to the Sanya dialogue, but with non-military participants, the **US-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue** (中美政党对话) brings together political leaders. Organized with the CCP’s International Liaison Department (ILD) and the EastWest Institute, this dialogue offers a delegation of American politicians (Democrats and Republicans) the opportunity to meet with CCP members and discuss current events. The 10<sup>th</sup> dialogue, which took place in 2017 in Beijing, was led by Song Tao, the ILD minister, Martin O’Malley, former Democratic governor of Maryland, and Alphonso Jackson, the former Republican Housing and Urban Development Secretary.<sup>220</sup>

Additionally, alongside the EWI and the China Institute of International Studies, the CUSEF organizes the **US-China High-Level Security Dialogue**, which allows scholars, former and current government representatives, military officers, and Chinese and American CEOs to exchange and produce recommendations for decisionmakers in both countries, hence fostering mutual understanding.<sup>221</sup> Among its other events, the CUSEF sponsored the Conference on US-China Infrastructure Cooperation (中美基础设施建设合作研讨会) in 2017 with the EWI and the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), a think tank believed to be an office of the MSS.<sup>222</sup> It also supported the Forum on China-US Relations, organized in Suzhou in 2016 with the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, and the Carter Center (a US think tank). **They have also sponsored “China Forums” in elite US universities** like New York University, the University of Chicago, and Johns Hopkins. In 2019, the CUSEF and the China Center for International

216. John Dotson, “The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front ‘Lobbying Laundering’ in American Politics,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 20:16 (16 Sept. 2020), 9.

217. *Ibid.*, 4.

218. Complete list of CUEF directors on their website: <http://archive.vn/LSxD9>.

219. According to the CUSEF 2019 Annual Report.

220. Alex W. Schulman, “10th U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue,” EastWest Institute (12 Dec. 2017), <http://archive.ph/uESaZ>.

221. “9th U.S.-China High-Level Security Dialogue,” EastWest Institute (2015), [https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/ideas-files/HLSD9\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/ideas-files/HLSD9_FINAL.pdf).

222. “Profile of MSS-Affiliated PRC Foreign Policy Think Tank CICIR,” *Open Source Center* (25 Aug. 2011), <https://fas.org/irp/dni/osc/cicir.pdf>.



Economic Exchanges jointly organized the “US-China Trade and Economic Exchanges: What Now, What Next” (中美经贸关系现状与前景) in Hong Kong.<sup>223</sup>

Despite being registered as a “foreign agent” in the US, **the CUSEF funds research center and projects in American universities and think tanks, including at some influential institutions in Washington.** This funding became controversial when it was revealed in 2017 that the CUSEF partially funded a new chair in China Studies at the prestigious School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of John Hopkins University.<sup>224</sup> The foundation’s academic projects are only “the tip of the iceberg” however. The CUSEF is involved **“in a much larger, multi-faceted effort to exert influence on US policy,” notably as a sponsor of lobbying activities directed at Congress, as well as to local and federal authorities.**<sup>225</sup>

To do so, it uses **intermediaries, including American PR firms** (at least 7 since 2010).<sup>226</sup> For instance, these firms manage a website funded by the CUSEF, chinausfocus.com, created in 2011 (with a Chinese version in 2015), in addition to other publications.<sup>227</sup> John Dotson explained that “this practice – of using a public relations firm to manage synthetic think tank publication, which in turn published material that aligns with PRC propaganda narratives – matches a pattern seen elsewhere in the world, as with the *Sinoskop* website launched in the Czech Republic in 2019.”<sup>228</sup> These activities **“represent a sort of ‘lobbying laundering’ in which a nominally independent third-party organization acts as a primary agent for funding and managing lobby efforts on behalf of the PRC.”**<sup>229</sup>

In 2015 and 2016, the CUSEF also brought delegations from the Center for American Progress, a Washington-based think tank, to China. In 2016, the delegation met with “Zhang Gaoli (张高丽), then-PRC Vice Premier and a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee; Jin Liqun (金立群), president of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; and Admiral Sun Jianguo (孙建国), deputy chief of the PLA Joint Staff Department.”<sup>230</sup>

The CUSEF’s exchange programs target more than military and political leaders: many are geared toward students. These programs offer students the opportunity to visit China and they are usually organized in collaboration with the CPAFFC. Students from Columbia University, the University of Chicago, Harvard (Kennedy School of Government), UC Berkeley, Georgetown, and Johns Hopkins (SAIS) have already been invited to visit China for instance. Other programs target **American media** representatives. Staff members from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Chicago Tribune*, the National Public Radio, Vox, Bloomberg, Reuters, and *Forbes* have participated in CUSEF programs.

223. See the full list on their website: <https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/what-we-do/high-level-dialogues/us-china-trade-economic-relations-what-now-what-next#article-header>.

224. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “This Beijing-Linked Billionaire is Funding Policy Research at Washington’s Most Influential Institutions,” *Foreign Policy* (28 Nov. 2017).

225. Dotson, “The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front,” 3.

226. *Ibid.*, 4.

227. The *China-US Focus Digest* review was created in 2014, and in 2017 the Chinese version was launched; the weekly podcast “At Large,” hosted in English by the famous journalist and goodwill UN ambassador James Chau was created in 2018; finally, the “storytelling dynamic” platform “China Current with James Chau” was launched in 2019.

228. Dotson, “The China-U.S. Exchange Foundation and United Front,” 5.

229. *Ibid.*, 9.

230. *Ibid.*, 7.





## Chapter 4

# PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMPANIES AS DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

**Influence operations require massive amounts of data, on which they depend to know whom to influence, when, and how.** Beijing uses “two combined approaches: ‘bulk data collection’ and targeted data collection.”<sup>1</sup> Bulk data collection refers to the use of numerous sensors to harvest large amounts of data, and Chinese services – due to their large workforce and advanced algorithms – are particularly well equipped to analyze it. **Data collection is done through espionage and cyber-attacks** (the 2018 data breach at the Australian National University and the 2019 cyberattack on the Australian parliament for instance, likely in order to build detailed profiles of individuals), **but also by co-opting regimes, building infrastructures, developing new technologies. It heavily relies on public and private companies.** According to Samantha Hoffman, “[to] get access to global data, the Party uses state-owned enterprises, Chinese and foreign technological firms, and others partners such as university researchers. The CCP [is] using capitalism as a vehicle to access data that can help it disrupts democratic processes and create a more favorable global environment for its power.”<sup>2</sup>

The nature of the Chinese regime, a one-party state where the state is an institutional façade with no real power, forces all sizable companies to closely engage with the Party. These ties provide Party executives with access to companies – many they help fund through Chinese banks, which are primarily politically-minded. In fact, **no important company in China can prosper without aligning itself with the Party. Since Xi Jinping came to power, this trend has only increased** with the adoption of the Made in China 2025 program, the Belt and Road Initiative, and AI development plans. The Party’s growing control over the strategy of high-tech companies has led Chinese firms in this sector to hire Party members, to expand the companies’ network, obtain political protection, and consequently become more competitive.

In 2015 China elevated the **military-civil fusion** (军民融合) as a national strategy.<sup>3</sup> In January 2017, the government established the Central Military-Civil Fusion Development Committee (中央军民融合发展委员会) and the publication of the Special Plan for Scientific & Technological Military-Civil Fusion (科技军民融合发展专项规划). The goal was to **facilitate innovation in dual technologies in key sectors, such biology, the space industry, artificial intelligence, and information technologies.**<sup>4</sup> To do

1. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 147.

2. Samantha Hoffman, in Rohan Thomson, “How China surveils the world,” *MIT Technology Review* (19 Aug. 2020).

3. “习近平谈军民融合: 关乎国家安全和发发展全局” (“Xi Jiping Discusses Civil-Military Fusions: Matters of National Security and Development”), *Qiusbi* (16 Oct. 2018). The archived page is available here: <https://archive.vn/KHdPz>.

4. Elsa B. Kania, “In Military-Civil Fusion, China is Learning Lessons from the United States and Starting to Innovate,” *The Bridge* (27 Aug. 2019), <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/8/27/in-military-civil-fusion-china-is-learning-lessons-from-the-united-states-and-starting-to-innovate>.

INTRODUCTION

so, the government pushes private sector companies and research centers to collaborate with the public-sector defense industry. This program came from a desire to **accelerate the PLA's modernization** and to **convert civilian technological innovations into military gains**.

CONCEPTS

These efforts were also part of a larger strategy aimed at **strengthening the Party's control over the private sector**. In 2016, Xi Jinping argued for a modernization of the management of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) by integrating “CCP objectives in all aspects of corporate governance,” which led many SOEs to amend their internal structure to include a role for the Party in daily corporate matters.<sup>5</sup> Then, in 2017, **Article 7 of the National Intelligence Act mandated all Chinese companies, public or private, as well as all citizens to “support, aid, and cooperate with national intelligence efforts**, in accordance with the law, and protect national secrets, related to intelligence activities, they are aware of.”<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) explained that this law “applies to Chinese companies and individuals abroad [...] pointing to the judicial cooperation between the CCP and Chinese companies and citizens.”<sup>7</sup> On September 15, 2020, this trend was reinforced when the CCP issued the **“Opinion on Strengthening the United Front Work of the Private Economy in the New Era,”**<sup>8</sup> which institutionalized the Party's influence over Chinese companies. For Scott Livingston, “the fact that China has released this opinion at a time of heightened US scrutiny over the government's links to Huawei [...] suggest that China feels confident enough in its system that it is now prepared to advance and defend it on the global stage.”<sup>9</sup> In the end, the Party seems ready to openly assume these links and **the lack of autonomy of the private sector** with regard to the best interests of the Party.

ACTORS

## I. Infrastructure

### A. Buildings (the example of Africa)

ACTIONS

In January 2018, *Le Monde* revealed that **the headquarters of the African Union (AU)** had been bugged, which was confirmed by the *Financial Times* three days later.<sup>10</sup> The building, constructed in Addis-Ababa in 2012 by the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), was filled with microphones. Backdoors were discovered in the IT system, which was installed at the time of the construction of the building, and Chinese intelligence was able to capture “all of the organization's exchanges and internal produc-

CASE

5. Lin Yu-Hsin and Curtis Milhaupt, “Party Building or Noisy Signaling? The Contours of Political Conformity in Chinese Corporate Governance,” European Corporate Governance Institute – Law Working Paper 493 (2020), Stanford Law and Economics Olin Working Paper 545, City University of Hong Kong Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law Research Paper Series Paper 2020/005, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3510342>.

6. “任何组织和公民都应当依法支持、协助和配合国家情报工作，保守所知悉的国家情报工作秘密。” The text of the law is archived here: <https://archive.vn/6zb0B>.

7. CSIS, cited in the Canadian Parliament, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *2019 Annual Report* (2020), §126, 68.

8. “中共中央办公厅印发《关于加强新时代民营经济统战工作的意见》，Document archived here: <https://archive.vn/6LN93>.

9. Scott Livingston, “The Chinese Communist Party Targets the Private Sector,” CSIS (8 Oct. 2020).

10. John Aglionby, Emily Feng and Yuan Yang, “African Union Accuses China of Hacking Headquarters,” *Financial Times* (29 Jan. 2018).

tions.”<sup>11</sup> The AU uncovered the hack in 2017 when it noticed high levels of traffic on its servers at night, when the offices were empty. **Every night AU data was transferred to servers in Shanghai.** This scandal made the headlines globally, highlighting the risks associated with Chinese-built infrastructure, particularly (yet not only) in Africa, where they are particularly numerous.

A 2020 report pointed out that **Chinese companies built or renovated at least 186 government buildings in Africa since 1966**, including “at least 24 presidential or prime minister residences or offices; at least 26 parliaments or parliamentary offices; at least 32 military or police installations; and at least 19 ministries of foreign affairs buildings.”<sup>12</sup> **The Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE have set up at least 14 sensitive government telecommunication networks**, including systems used by police and armed forces. **The Chinese government also provided office equipment, like computers, to at least 35 African governments.** The majority of these companies are SOEs, though even private sector companies are now beholden to the CCP collaboration law, specifically in terms of data collection. **The information harvested through infrastructure and equipment can be used to recruit potential intelligence assets or compromise and coerce leaders** – including personal information on the habits and preferences of numerous political actors. **They also “facilitate Beijing’s influence operations** on the continent” as the data is used to tailor operations according to the targets.<sup>13</sup> It is plausible that Beijing specifically sought to secure these construction projects, or even fund them entirely, in order to further its influence operations. **At least 40 of the 54 African countries have infrastructure built by Chinese companies**, including Namibia (25 governmental buildings), Angola (15), Equatorial Guinea (11), Ghana (11), Uganda (11), Sierra Leone (8), Mozambique (7) and Zambia (7).<sup>14</sup>

## B. Submarine communications cables

Submarine communications cables are responsible for close to **95% of global communications**, being faster than satellite communications (40 milliseconds for fiber optic cables compared to 540 ms. for satellites).<sup>15</sup> Along with data centers, these cables are **the backbone of the Internet’s physical layer**. As such, they are an important geopolitical asset.

The map of submarine communication cables reflects the historically advantaged position of the United States and United Kingdom. These two countries remain the two primary communication nodes, despite recent network developments in other parts of the world. Indeed, the UK is connected to 49 of the existing 265 cables, and ensures nearly all of the exchanges between Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup> And the US is a practically inescapable communication node, due not only to the density of American connections,

11. Joan Tilouine and Ghalia Kadiri, “À Addis-Abeba, le siège de l’Union africaine espionné par Pékin” (“In Addis-Abeba, the African Union Headquarters Spied on by Beijing”), *Le Monde* (26 Jan. 2018).

12. Joshua Meservey, *Government Buildings in Africa Are a Likely Vector for Chinese Spying*, The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder, 3476 (20 May 2020), 6.

13. *Ibid.*, 1.

14. *Ibid.*, 2.

15. Camille Morel, “Protéger nos infrastructures vitales pour assurer notre résilience: les câbles sous-marins, entre invisibilité et vulnérabilité” (“Protect Vital Infrastructures to Ensure Resilience: Submarine Cables between Invisibility and Vulnerability”), *Les Champs de Mars*, 30 (2018), 419-426.

16. David Fayon, “Trafic au fond des océans,” *Reliefs*, 4 (2019).

INTRODUCTION

but also the quality of the network. In fact, routers dictate the trajectory of the data based solely on speed; and given that American network infrastructures are the most proficient, an enormous amount of data is “diverted” through the US. This occurs even if a “geographically” shorter trajectory is available, for instance, in the case of data transferred from Europe to Asia.<sup>17</sup>

CONCEPTS

**Controlling submarine communication cables is an enormous political and strategic asset.** It allows those in control to capture information transferred by these cables, similarly to what the NSA (the “Upstream” program) and the GCHQ (the “Tempora” program) did, and to cut communications during times of political tensions or armed conflict. During World War I, telegraph cables were used in this manner. Initially developed as trading tool, telegraph cables were converted into a weapon immediately after the war began, as British authorities were able to interrupt and cut a significant share of German communications. At the time, London controlled over three fourths of all telegraph cables, holding a quasi-monopoly over the use, installment, and upkeep of the cables.<sup>18</sup>

ACTORS

Given the political stakes, China made submarine cables **a priority for the digital Silk Road.** Multiple companies, including Huawei Marine Networks, were encouraged to invest heavily in the sector. **China’s progress in this endeavor has been extremely quick.** Although China owns only 11.4% of existing submarine cables, it owns 24% of cables under construction. In Asia, 30% of installed cables, as well as more than 50% of cables in development, are controlled by China. Besides, Huawei “completed a cable stretching nearly 4,000 miles from Brazil to Cameroon. The cable is partly owned by China Unicom.”<sup>19</sup>

ACTIONS

The Chinese authorities want to **improve their capacity to capture data transiting through submarine cables. This will allow them to exert greater pressure** in case of a political or economic conflict, particularly in its neighboring countries. In fact, China’s investment in submarine cables has strengthened its operational ability to **cut the cables** it acquired and it could then turn it against Taiwan. Countries like Taiwan could easily have their international communication crippled due to Chinese cable domination.<sup>20</sup> These developments are congruent with Beijing’s deployment of an underwater surveillance system aimed at improving submarine detection, notably targeting American submarines in the South China Sea.<sup>21</sup>

CASE

China’s political expansion and cable capacity development faces serious obstacles. In 2013, the US government defeated a transatlantic cable project between New York and London in which Huawei was a stakeholder.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Washington’s efforts to slow Huawei’s rise on 5G led Huawei to sell its shares of Huawei Marine Systems (which owns Huawei Marine Networks) to another Chinese company, Hengtong Optic-Electric.<sup>23</sup> Huawei’s strategy was to avoid the deceleration of the Chinese penetration in this key market.

CONCLUSION

17. Amaël Cattaruzza, *Géopolitique des données numériques* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2019).

18. Jonathan E. Hillman’s intervention during the conference “China’s Digital Silk Road,” CSIS, (5 Feb. 2019).

19. James Stavridis, “China’s Next Naval Target is the Internet’s Underwater Cables,” *Bloomberg Opinion* (9 Apr. 2019).

20. In accordance with the “Three Warfares” doctrine. See Eli Huang, “China’s cable strategy: exploring global undersea dominance,” *The Strategist*, ASPI (4 Dec. 2017); 吴杰明 (Wu Jieming) and 刘志富 (Liu Zhifu), *舆论战心理战法律战概论 (Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare)*, National Defense University Press, 2014; Stefan Halper, ed., *China: The Three Warfares*, Report for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense (May 2013).

21. James Griffiths, “Beijing plans underwater observation system in South China Sea,” *CNN* (30 May 2017).

22. Félix Blanc, “Géopolitique des câbles: une vision sous-marine de l’Internet” (“Geopolitics of Cables: a Submarine Vision of the Internet”), *Les carnets du CAPS* (Jun. 2018).

23. Yang Yuan and Louise Lucas, “Huawei to offload undersea telecoms cable business,” *Financial Times* (3 Jun. 2019).



## II. New technologies

The use of the Chinese digital platforms **WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok** for data collection is discussed in other sections of the report (→ p. 196). The following section discusses Beidou, Huawei, and two database companies.

### A. Beidou

The navigational system BDS (Beidou Navigation Satellite System), developed by Wuhan Optics Valley Beidou Holding Group, has been operational since 2012. The development of BDS added China to **the very exclusive group of international powers with global navigation systems** (Global Navigation Satellite Systems, GNSS) to which the US (GPS), the EU (GALILEO), and Russia (GLONASS) belong. By the end of 2020, the Chinese company had presumably **close to fifty satellites**, covering all New Silk Road countries. This system allows China to penetrate all of these markets.

With Beidou, China has gotten independent from the US-owned GPS system.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the development of Beidou, the US could **cut China off** from certain zones in case of a conflict. China in turn could **exert the same pressure on any country using the Beidou system (instead of the GPS)**. Beidou provides then both **autonomy and influence**, a central element in the construction of the digital Silk Road.<sup>25</sup> Besides, the Taiwanese minister of Science and Technology argued that the Beidou system creates **a risk of espionage**. He explained that the Chinese government could use Beidou to track smartphone users through embedded malware or navigation signals.<sup>26</sup> Currently, it does not appear that Beidou has the technological ability to do so however.<sup>27</sup> Regardless, the “spatial information corridor,” defined by Beijing, should *in fine* accelerate **the partition of the planet into two spheres of influence, American and Chinese**.<sup>28</sup>

### B. Huawei

Since the arrest of Meng Wanzhou (孟晚舟, the chief financial officer of Huawei and daughter of CEO Ren Zhengfei 任正非), in Canada at the behest of the US government, and the retaliatory measures adopted by Beijing (including the arrest of two Canadian citizens, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor → p. 546), **the dispute between the US and China regarding Huawei** has gone public. Beyond a play for power, this conflict has highlighted Beijing’s 5G ambitions, pushing its potential partners around the world to re-evaluate the security risks attached to Huawei.

**China made 5G a primary objective** in the development of the digital Silk Road, heavily investing in national telecommunication companies. They rapidly propelled China in this very competitive sector. Among all Chinese companies, Huawei has benefitted the most

24. Pratik Jakhar, “How China’s GPS ‘rival’ Beidou is plotting to go global,” BBC (20 Sep. 2018).

25. Echo Huang, “China is building its new Silk Road in space, too,” *Quartz* (18 Jun. 2018).

26. Lo Tien-pin and Jake Chung, “China Can Track Mobiles through Satellite System,” *Taipei Times* (5 May 2016).

27. Jordan Wilson, *China’s Alternative to GPS and its Implications for the United States*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Research Report (5 Jan. 2017).

28. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, “Vers une bipolarité fluide États-Unis/Chine?” (“Toward a USA-China Fluid Bipolarity”) *Revue Défense Nationale*, 781 (Jun. 2015), 58-63.

INTRODUCTION

from China's rapid ascension in the telecoms sector. It not only conquered the Chinese market, but successfully penetrated markets around the world.<sup>29</sup> And unlike its main competitors Nokia and Ericsson, who primarily make phones, **Huawei is an integrated society, present across the entire value chain.** For example, Huawei is Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone, and Telefonica's supplier in Europe.<sup>30</sup>

CONCEPTS

The Meng Wanzhou affair, and the US oppositional stance vis-à-vis Chinese companies operating in sensitive sectors, have led to a debate in the West about security risks associated to Huawei and 5G. But concerns about the proximity of Chinese companies with the CCP's defense and intelligence apparatuses, and increasingly frequent cases of corporate espionage, had also paved the way for this debate.

Obviously, the US position does not only stem from a desire to protect its scientific and industrial property, but also from a desire to slow, or even halt, the rise of Chinese companies in strategic sectors. While this threat can be exaggerated at times, **Huawei does raise security questions for countries that allow the company to build all, or part, of their 5G infrastructure.**<sup>31</sup>

ACTORS

There are multiple security concerns. Is one of them. For example, when the Dutch telephone operator KPN installed Huawei technology in 2009, despite repeated warnings from the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) about, it asked Capgemini to conduct a risk analysis. The report produced by the consulting firm found that Huawei had the ability to **listen in on "KPN's mobile numbers in an unlimited, uncontrolled and unauthorized manner," including those of the Prime Minister and ministers,** and had access to the database of all telephone numbers. The report concluded that "authorities and companies could withdraw their confidence in KPN if it became public that the Chinese government could tap KPN's mobile numbers and paralyze the network."<sup>32</sup> This report remained secret until the *Volkskrant* newspaper, which had access to it, reported the findings in April 2021.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in Poland, a former Huawei official was arrested in January 2019: he is accused of being a "Chinese intelligence officer placed under a commercial cover at Huawei Polska" and to have "provided information to these services that could have been detrimental to the Republic of Poland."<sup>34</sup>

ACTIONS

Another concern is **the nature of the company and its ties to the PLA's intelligence services.** Several articles have mentioned the collaboration between Huawei and the PLA, which dates back to the company's inception. In fact, Ren Zhengfei presumably contributed to the construction of a network of communication infrastructure during the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> This initial contract may have created a privileged relationship between Huawei and the military. Moreover, the recent military-civil fusion effort has specifically targeted telecommunications. As such, it is highly likely that Huawei is involved in defense programs. In 2013, the Indian Intelligence Bureau (domestic intelligence) affirmed that Huawei and ZTE

29. "China's Digital Silk road", roundtable organized by the CSIS (5 Feb. 2019).

30. Laurens Cerulus and Lauren Bishop, "Europe's 5G Stumbles," *Politico* (18 Jul. 2019).

31. Mathieu Duchâtel and François Godement, "l'Europe et la 5G: le cas Huawei. Partie 2" ("Europe and 5G: The Case of Huawei. Part 2"), Institut Montaigne (May 2019).

32. "Pays-Bas: Huawei a pu écouter les conversations des clients de l'opérateur KPN" ("Netherlands: Huawei may have Listened to the Conversation of clients of the KPN Provider"), RTBF (17 Apr. 2021).

33. "Huawei kon alle gesprekken van mobiele KPN-klanten afluisteren, inclusief die van de premier" ("Huawei was able to Eavesdrop on all Calls from KPN Mobile Customers, including those of the Prime Minister"), *De Volkskrant* (17 Apr. 2021).

34. "Pologne: procès d'un ex-responsable de Huawei accusé d'espionnage" ("Poland: Trial of a Former Huawei Manager Accused of Espionage"), *Le Figaro* (1 Jun. 2021).

35. Keith Johnson and Elias Groll, "The Improbable Rise of Huawei," *Foreign Policy* (3 Apr. 2019).

were part of the PLA's 863 Program, which apparently involved Ren Zhengfei in the development of routers and switches. Indian intelligence services were notably concerned about the possibility of embedded malware China could then exploit during future conflicts.<sup>36</sup> *Forbes* claimed that Huawei worked with Bo Yu Guangzhou Information Technology Co, considered to be one of the groups of hackers working for the Chinese government.<sup>37</sup> The company was listed in an indictment for attacks on US firms by the US Justice Department. Huawei never denied its links to Boyusec, but claimed that they simply conducted an evaluation of Huawei systems.

Evidence has already shown that the company, which provides “surveillance systems for entire cities,” **“has knotted a partnership with the police,”** in Xinjiang for instance. Because Huawei signed “a strategic cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Public Security of Xinjiang,”<sup>38</sup> the German researcher Adrian Zenz described “this region [as] a laboratory for the Police State of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to which Huawei closely collaborates.” He thought it probable that “Huawei’s technology had already been used to identify Uyghur people and to contribute to their internment.” He then concluded that **“Huawei is a strategic tool used by the Chinese state to repress the Uyghurs, and probably a major Trojan Horse threatening the security of telecommunications elsewhere in the world.”**<sup>39</sup>

In a July 2019 article, Christopher Balding discussed the intimate ties between Huawei and the Chinese state security services, seemingly confirming the fears expressed by the US government and its allies.<sup>40</sup> Balding’s research was based on the analysis of the CVs of Huawei employees, which revealed prior professional affiliation to Chinese intelligence. While this method is innovative and interesting, 3 CVs are not enough to support Balding’s conclusion. Even the case of Li Jingguo, who supposedly worked as a representative for the Ministry of State Security (MSS), cannot confirm extensive ties between the institutions, nor the instrumentalization of Huawei by the MSS.

In fact, intelligence services have little to gain from establishing a direct control over Huawei and installing covert agents. The 2017 intelligence law already provided a legal framework for the government to coerce Chinese companies into collaborating with its intelligence services. On that note, Huawei hired the law firm Zhong Lun to defend the company, stating that Beijing can only ask for their assistance in specific and clear cases of counterespionage.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, they defended that no existing law mandates Huawei to implant backdoors in IT system, because Chinese law protects the interests of companies. Finally, they argued that Huawei branches and subsidiaries abroad are not subjugated to Chinese law. **The nature of the Chinese regime severely undercuts Huawei’s defense: it actually offers no real protection to citizens or companies against the regime.** Rule of law does not exist in China. The system can more accurately be described as what the German doctrine refers to as a police state. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine Huawei executives refusing a request from the intelligence ser-

36. Joji Thomas Philip, “NSC points to Huawei, ZTE’s links with Chinese military,” *The Economic Times*, (15 May 2013).

37. Thomas Brewster, “Chinese Trio Linked to Dangerous APT3 Hackers Charged with Stealing 407 GB of Data from Siemens,” *Forbes* (27 Nov. 2017).

38. The author refers to the provincial branch of the MPS.

39. Adrian Zenz, “Huawei est une arme stratégique de l’Etat chinois pour réprimer les Ouïgours?” (“Huawei is a Strategic Weapon of the Chinese State to Repress the Uyghurs”), *Le Monde* (4 Mar. 2021) (for the last six quotes).

40. Christopher Balding, “Huawei Technologies’ Links to Chinese State Security Services,” SSRN (5 Jul. 2019).

41. Declaration of Jihong Chen and Jianwei Fang Before the Federal Communications Commission (27 May 2018), <https://thechinacollection.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Huawei-Declaration.pdf>.

INTRODUCTION

vices. Notable in Huawei's defense is their law firm's link to the CCP. Zhang Xuebing, the managing partner of Zhang Lun law firm, is also the secretary of the Beijing Lawyers' Association. The law firm made waves after Xi Jinping's election as it participated in subduing civil liberties defense lawyers.

CONCEPTS

Furthermore, Christopher Balding and Donald Clarke have questioned **Huawei's financial structure**, highlighting that it was impossible to determine its real owner. Ren Zhengfei, the official owner, only possesses a fraction of the company. Huawei, whose full name is Huawei Technologies Inc., is entirely owned by Huawei Investment & Holding, a much smaller company of about one hundred employees. This holding is co-owned by the founder Ren Zhengfei ("about 1.01%") and a CCP-aligned union, called the Huawei Investment & Holding Company Trade Union Committee (HHTUC), which owns the remaining 98.99%. According to the two authors, the opaque nature of the system deflects any attempt to understand the articulation of the respective responsibilities of the different structures.

ACTORS

Finally, two former managers of Huawei's Czech branch anonymously reported, to a local radio, that they were required to enter the information of private client into **the company database**, such as number of children, their preferences, and financial situation. The database was managed by the headquarters, and they did not know who could access it. The collected data was routinely discussed with Chinese embassy officials. Data regarding top Czech officials was also collected, with some of them subsequently invited to China.<sup>42</sup>

## C. Databases

ACTIONS

Chinese authorities understood long ago that in order to **"guide" or "channel" a people— with a quasi-hydrological approach to public opinion**,<sup>43</sup> it first needed to know it. Surveillance, **through a massive data collection and analysis** of habits and individual preferences, is essential in that endeavor. And automated tools are needed, which leads to a tight link between the control of public opinion and **big data technologies** in China, as well as between the Party-State and private companies.<sup>44</sup> Initially (and mostly) a technique to control domestic public opinion, the Chinese authorities are increasingly using this tactic to shape public opinions abroad. According to Jessica Blake and Mareike Ohlberg, "the emergence of the public opinion service sector **offers a glimpse of what [Chinese] techno-authoritarianism might actually look like [...]:** The Party-state's use of, and reliance on, private technology companies to manage the volatile interaction between ideas, speech, and society."<sup>45</sup> **An increasing number of studies have focused on China's "digital authoritarianism."**<sup>46</sup> In this context, Beijing's use of databases to feed into and prepare influence operations abroad can be illustrated by the following two examples.

42. "Huawei's Czech Employees Share Sensitive Information with Chinese Embassy," *Kafkadesk* (23 Jul. 2019).

43. David Bandurski, "How China's Government Controls the News: A Primer," *Foreign Policy* (21 Jul. 2015).

44. Rogier Creemers, "Cyber China: Upgrading propaganda, Public Opinion Work and Social Management for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26:103 (2017), 85-100.

45. Jessica Blake and Mareike Ohlberg, "Message Control," *ChinaFile* (Dec. 2020).

46. Alina Polyakova and Chris Meserole, "Exporting Digital Authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese Models," *Policy Brief*, Brookings Institute (Aug. 2019). This article compares the Chinese and Russian models.



## 1. GTCOM

Global Tone Communications Technology Co. Ltd (GTCOM) is a **big data and artificial intelligence company affiliated to the Propaganda Department**. One of its products “claims to collect 10 terabytes of data per day, or two to three petabytes per year, from Web pages, forums, Twitter, Facebook, WeChat, and other sources. In terms of size, it is the equivalent of 20 billion Facebook photos. The company describes its work as directly contributing to China’s national security, including military intelligence and propaganda,<sup>47</sup>” explained Samantha Hoffman, author of an ASPI report on the company.<sup>48</sup> GTCOM has an agreement with Alibaba Cloud, for instance, which uses its translation services and authorizes GTCOM to collect any data its services generate.

## 2. OKIDB

A report published in September 2020 provided for the first time “**direct evidence of data collected by China on its monitoring and data collection on foreign individuals and institutions for purposes of intelligence and influence operations.**”<sup>49</sup> The authors were able to access the Overseas Key Information Database (OKIDB), a database created by the company Shenzhen Zhenhua Data Information Technology Co. It contained information on “2.4 million individuals, 650 thousand organizations, 2.3 billion news articles, and 2.1 billion social media posts.”<sup>50</sup> The data was siphoned from a variety of other databases, including Factiva, as well as social networks, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others. China Revival appeared to be using these websites to build **personal profiles that included family relationships and work histories**. Additionally, the database contained photographs of the individuals in question. The study estimated that the majority of the information compiled came from open sources, but around 10% to 20% did not. The authors believed that “**some of the data comes from unauthorized data access such as hacking.**”<sup>51</sup> Among the individuals found in the database, many were public sector employees: “everyone from known politicians to political aides to low level military personnel.”<sup>52</sup> The database also contained information about the business world, academic and scientific communities, think tanks, and even organized crime. The common element among them was that “**all are individuals and institutions Chinese security, intelligence, and influence operations are known to be interested in targeting.**”<sup>53</sup>

The database was used for analysis: “designed to assist the Chinese government, security, and intelligence services, OKIDB adds in multi-layered functionality to help target and link individuals. Though not extensive, we found analyst notes about certain targets. Certain indexes had classifiers for individuals or institutions such as importance.”<sup>54</sup> It also enabled the mapping of personal and professional relationships.

47. Samantha Hoffman, in Rohan Thomson, “How China surveils the world,” *MIT Technology Review* (19 Aug. 2020).

48. Samantha Hoffman, *Engineering Global Consent: The Chinese Communist Party’s Data-Driven Power Expansion*, ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report 21 (2019).

49. Christopher Balding, “Chinese Open Source Data Collection, Big Data, And Private Enterprise Work For State Intelligence and Security: The Case of Shenzhen Zhenhua,” SSRN (13 Sept. 2020).

50. *Ibid.*, 2.

51. *Ibid.*, 3.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 4.

54. *Ibid.*, 3.



OKIDB does not appear to be the only database of this kind. In fact, the authors found “links in the database [linking] to other databases” and that institutions and individuals seemed to be classified in separate bases. They affirmed that “the Chinese state is using OKIDB data,” a fact Shenzhen Zhenhua did not deny. **The company admitted having close ties to the PLA and MSS. It is likely that OKIDB helped these structures plan their intelligence and influence operations by collecting information on possible targets.** The authors concluded that “the unique blend of civil-military fusion pushed by China that works with private firms to engage in state policy activities such as intelligence gathering should be concerning. Foreign individuals and institutions working in sensitive or influential sectors need to be aware of how China is targeting them for influence operations. China is using a variety of firms and channels to gather data to inform its influence and intelligence operations.”<sup>55</sup>

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55. Ibid., 5.

## SUMMARY OF THE SECOND PART

Contrary to the prevalent assumption generally made about authoritarian regimes, **“China” is not a unitary actor. In fact, the relative fragmentation of the regime** can impact the nature of its influence operations. **These operations are implemented by four major institutional actors: The Party, the state, the army, and the companies.**

- **Within the Party**, there are five main bodies implementing influence operations:

- **The Propaganda Department**, in charge of ideology, controls all media and the cultural production in the country. It is a powerful machine that aims to shape the dominant discourse, control mass media, restrict freedom of speech and critical thought, guide and manipulate public opinion, defend its interests, justify its actions, and present the state positively. The Propaganda Department also controls a vast network operating within China and abroad. It commands a variety of vectors of information and is increasingly aggressive in its data collection efforts.

- **The United Front Work Department (UFWD)**, has twelve offices which reflect its principal targets: political parties; ethnic minorities; Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan; the private sector economy; non-CCP intellectuals; new social classes; Tibet; Xinjiang; overseas Chinese (two offices); and religious affairs (two offices as well).

- **The International Liaison Department (ILD)** engages with foreign political parties, through “party diplomacy,” with dual objectives. It aims to build a global consensus that favors Beijing (supporting China’s “friends,” reinforcing its soft power and its discursive power) and it serves as an analysis and observation platform (and possibly also intelligence gathering).

- **The Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL)** is simultaneously a breeding ground for future Party members, directly funneling the youth into the CCP system and ideology, and a disposable reserve of manpower (over 80 million members aged 14 to 28). The CYL has its own propaganda methods, in Chinese and English. It is increasingly present on social media, where it promotes the Party, glorifies the state, and criticizes the US through humor and sarcasm. The rap group CD Rev is an example of a CYL agent: it is one of the most effective anti-American discourse tools targeting the Chinese youth around the world. Several examples of CYL actions demonstrate its ability to manipulate the Chinese population and mobilize the Chinese youth, particularly those living abroad, with the purpose of contributing to coordinated operations.

- **The 610 Office**, an entity with presumably around 15,000 members in China and abroad, operates outside of any legal framework to eradicate the Falun Gong movement. There are 610 Office members in every Chinese diplomatic mission, in charge of detecting, reporting, and persecuting followers of the movement. They are also involved in propaganda activities aimed at dissuading foreign governments of engaging with the followers.

• **Within the state, two main structures are involved in influence operations:**

- **The Ministry of State Security (MSS)** is the main civilian intelligence agency. Composed of 17 or 18 divisions, some of them use covers to conduct operations abroad (for instance, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division uses the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau Office of the Bureau of International Cooperation Chinese Academy of Sciences as a cover).

- **The Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO)** is in charge of propaganda targeting Taiwan. It supervises multiple media as part of this effort.

• **Within the Popular Liberation Army (PLA)**, which is the military branch of the Party rather than a national army, the **People’s Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)**, and especially the Network Systems Department, has probably inherited the capacities and missions in the information, cyber, and electromagnetic domains since the 2015 reforms.

PLA Unit 61716 is a key actor also known as the “public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare unit,” or **Base 311**. Dedicated to the implementation of the “Three Warfares” strategy, it centralizes all psychological warfare efforts against Taiwan. Other activities of the base include research on the US informational environment. The base’s headquarters are in the city of Fuzhou. It is headed by a duo, a commander and a political commissar. And most of its members are researchers and engineers specialized in information and communication technologies, that can be used for public opinion warfare, notably artificial intelligence.

Base 311 also manages front companies like Voice of the Strait (VTS), the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (whose chairman has always been the Base 311 commander), and the Haifeng publishing house (we believe the director is also a PLA officer) – all branded as civilian organizations. These companies have the potential to influence people through radio, television, the Internet, social media, and books. The base supervises other PLA units as well, notably Unit 61070 and Unit 61198 which focus on network communications, psychological warfare and Taiwan. Finally, the base maintains a close relationship with a nexus of platforms like the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), whose mission is to foster relationships with foreign elites. Within the base, a training center uses a fake hotel as a cover.

• **Private and public companies** play a central role in the data collection essential to influence operations, as it is necessary to know whom to influence, when, and how. There are multiple mechanisms involved in data collection, including espionage, hacking, co-opting regimes, constructing infrastructures, and setting up new technologies. The Party uses firms for these activities. The Party-State has implemented different strategies to expand its control over the private sector. The first is the military-civil fusion aimed at converting innovative technologies into military gains. The second is Article 7 of the National Intelligence Law, which forces all Chinese companies, private and public, as well as citizens, to “support, help, and cooperate with national intelligence efforts.” **The following tools are specifically used for data collection:**

- **Infrastructures, including buildings**, were discovered to be data collection tools following the scandal over the African Union headquarter. Built by a Chinese company, it was filled with microphones, and its IT system riddled with backdoors, allowing Chinese intelligence services to absorb all exchanges between staff members. Chinese companies have built or renovated at least 186 government buildings in Africa and created at least 14 sensitive government telecommunication networks, all of which are at risk of similar security breaches. The siphoned information can be used to recruit potential intelligence assets, coerce leaders, and facilitate Beijing’s influence operations. Another tool used for Beijing’s influence operations are the **submarine communications cables**. A priority of the CCP’s digital Silk Road, these cables allow China to increase its data capturing capacity, expanding its ability to exert pressure over other actors during political or economic conflicts.

- **New technologies, including** the platforms WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok (discussed in another portion of this report); **Beidou**, which not only allows China to exert pressure on states who adopted the navigational system, but also poses espionage risks; and **Huawei**, an integrated company with a presence across the value chain, which raises concerns because of the nature of the company and the relationships it may have with the security services and the PLA. Finally, databases offer a glimpse of what researchers refer to as Chinese “techno-authoritarianism” or “digital authoritarianism.” These databases feed and prepare influence operations abroad, as exemplified by GTCOM (a big data and artificial intelligence company affiliated to the Propaganda Department) and OKIDB. The latter is a database company that acknowledges its ties to the PLA and MSS. It created millions of personal profiles detailing the family networks and work histories of individuals “Chinese” security, intelligence, and influence operations are known to be interested in targeting.”





Third Part

# ACTIONS



While not exhaustive, this part is the longest of the report. It shows the number and diversity of actions undertaken by the Party-State as a part of its influence operations abroad. They can be classified into **two approaches: Beijing attempts to seduce and subjugate while, at the same time, infiltrate and coerce.** These two categories are relevant for analysis and to understand that Chinese influence operations stand on two legs. Yet, these two categories are often difficult to distinguish in practice; they are far from mutually exclusive. For example, language and culture are an integral part of the Party's seduction efforts, but education in the Confucius Institutes, pressures exerted on the film industry and on museum are also methods of infiltration and coercion. As such, the distinction we made is debatable and could have been different. More important than the exact categorization of methods, as many overlap, is to acknowledge the extraordinary diversity of methods Beijing uses to seduce, subjugate, infiltrate, and coerce.

At first glance, these two approaches are complimentary. In practice, however, the second has clearly become the dominant approach in recent years. This reality is reflected in the imbalance between the two chapters of this section, the latter being fifteen times longer than the former. This parallels the widespread and globally-shared representation that China is becoming increasingly aggressive. Beijing's seduction efforts have not ceased, but the Party now uses coercion in a systematic and uninhibited manner. We will address this choice, which may prove counter-productive, in the conclusion (→ p. 638).



## Chapter 1

# SEDUCE AND SUBJUGATE

The first type of political warfare strategy enacted by the CCP is to seduce foreign populations. Not unlike the United Front, which aims to eliminate Party enemies by rallying them to its cause, this strategy is built on a **positive historical narrative on China**, an ameliorative story-telling of its past and present successes. These narratives intend to spark sympathy, if not adhesion, to China and its political goals. In certain cases, they can lead to a complete subjugation (from the Latin *jugare* which means “attach”) of the targets of these operations of seduction. Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya explained that “what Chinese strategists understood long ago is that **influence is far more efficient than control. Ultimately, control is the end result of strategically deployed influence.** Rather than launching a frontal attack to gain control over an opponent, it is better to be strategic and patient in order to gain influence over them. [...] To do so, silver-tongued emissaries will initially dangle the benefits of a good relationship, notably lucrative economic markets and privileged partnerships.”<sup>1</sup>

The following section will demonstrate the Chinese seduction strategy through **four easily identifiable narratives** that highlight intrinsically Chinese qualities, values, or achievements. They are **the “Chinese model,” tradition, benevolence, and power.** These narratives can aim to build a positive image of China (positive strategies<sup>2</sup>) or to “rectify” erroneous representations on China by debunking negative narratives like the Chinese threat theory. As demanded by Xi Jinping, it is primordial to “tell China’s story well and let China’s voice be heard.”<sup>3</sup> **Not all of these narratives are intended for the same audience**, and specific channels target different groups. Some target entire populations and other specific groups within a population (the Chinese diaspora, the journalist or academic community, etc.). On rare occasions, these narratives may target one person (a politician, for instance), or a small number of people.

1. Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs. Enquête sur les activités d'espionnage au Canada*, Montréal, Stanké, 2009, 149. All subsequent quotes from this book were translated from the French version, none withstanding the English version published by Harpercollins Canada in 2009.

2. James Pamment, Howard Nothhaft, Henrik Agardh-Twetman, and Alicia Fjällhed, “Countering Information Influence Activities: The State of the Art,” Lund University (Jul. 2018).

3. “Raconter correctement l’histoire chinoise et faire entendre la voix de la Chine” (“Telling the Chinese history and make China’s voice heard”), *China.org* (5 Dec. 2018), <https://archive.vn/ykA7e>.



# I. The “Chinese model”

China’s seduction strategy relies on the model it implicitly offers to the world, an alternative to the liberal democracy. **The attractiveness of this model rests primordially on a spectacular economic growth,<sup>4</sup> an alleged political and administrative efficiency** (a “Chinese way” of operating that is supposedly more efficient than the endless palavers of democracies – illustrated by the lightning fast, though controversial, construction of hospitals in China to deal with Covid-19 patients), **and a political system based on meritocracy and the wisdom of its leaders rather than on elections.<sup>5</sup>**

During a congressional hearing, in March 2020,<sup>6</sup> Daniel Tobin noted that the CCP should not be considered a “reactive, defensive, and besieged” archaic organization that is on the defensive trying to hold together the relics of a communist heritage, and slowly dissipating after the fall of the Eastern bloc, as it develops a modern capitalist economy. In fact, the Party’s approach reveals **revisionist ambitions. Beyond remaining in power, it seeks to reconfigure the international order to fit Chinese norms, values, and institutions.** It is on the basis of this literature, as well as the memoirs of party leaders, that Rush Doshi shows that China is indeed endowed with global ambitions constituting a true grand strategy.<sup>7</sup> Jean-Pierre Cabestan notes that China has become the most important revisionist power in the world.<sup>8</sup> This is significantly different from the Kremlin’s approach, explained Jean-Maurice Ripert, who served as ambassador of France in both countries. He noted that “China does not believe itself beholden to human rights standards, as defined by the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It advocates for ‘Chinese values’ instead. Russia, on the other hand, pretends to uphold human rights.”<sup>9</sup> “China wants to impose an alternative international order that can be defined as ‘multi-bilateralism.’ In a word, like a bicycle wheel, it presents the states act as spokes, leading toward a central point, China! Officially, China claims to defend multilateralism, but its actions are in direct contradiction to this claim. They push forth a system where countries define themselves in relation to China, where juxtaposing these relationships shapes a new international order, founded on Chinese values.”<sup>10</sup> **Beijing aspires to fashioning new international order, which it has the resources to do. Because Moscow is unable to fashion such a new order, it has opted for a “strategy of chaos.”<sup>11</sup>** We will address this comparison further in the conclusion (→ p. 620).

4. China experienced an average GDP growth of 9.8% per year for over 30 years. While not unique, this growth is comparable to that of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. From 1950 to 1980, South Korea experienced an annual GDP growth of 9.1%, Japan of 7.7%, and Taiwan (between 1960 and 1990) of 8.8%. China’s growth is only slightly better. Their average annual GDP growth in purchasing power parity is: 11.7% (China, 1978-2004) 11.1% (Japan, 1950-1980) 11.1%, 9.5% (South Korea, 1953-1983) and 12.4% (Taiwan, 1960-1990). The Chinese growth is no exception: it is close to the overall regional growth.

5. See the response to Daniel Bell, a Canadian intellectual supportive of the Chinese meritocratic model: Paul Charon and Guillaume Dutournier, “Le confucianisme, un modèle politique? Une réponse à Daniel A. Bell,” (“Confucianism: A Political Model? A Response to Daniel A. Bell”), *La Vie des idées* (15 Jun. 2010).

6. Daniel Tobin, “How Xi Jinping’s ‘New Era’ Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing’s Ambitions,” *A ‘China Model?’ Beijing’s Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (13 Mar. 2020).

7. Doshi, *The Long Game*.

8. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Demain la Chine: guerre ou paix* (China Tomorrow: War or Peace), Paris, Gallimard, 2021.

9. Jean-Maurice Ripert, “Interview: Chine, Russie: rivaux ou complices?” (“Interview: China, Russia: Rivals or accomplices?”), *Open Diplomacy* (30 Jul. 2020).

10. Jean-Maurice Ripert, cited in Louis Hausalter, “Pour l’ancien ambassadeur de France à Pékin, ‘la Chine tente d’imposer un autre système international’” (“For the Former French Ambassador to Beijing: ‘China Tries to Impose Another International System’”), *Marianne* (25 May 2020).

11. Isabelle Mandraud and Julien Théron, *Poutine, la stratégie du désordre* (Paris: Taillandier, 2021).

Since Xi Jinping's arrival to power, the promotion of this model has been incarnated in **two main concepts: “the Chinese solution”** (中国方案) and **“the community of common destiny”** (人类命运共同体). The former illustrates China's opposition to Francis Fukuyama's famous *End of History* thesis,<sup>12</sup> which was refuted by Xi Jinping during the Party's 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016: “history never ended.” The Communist Party is confident it can offer humanity an alternative and better social system – in other words, a substitute for liberal democratic institutions.<sup>13</sup> This was the meaning of the statement made by He Yiting (何毅亭), vice president of the Central Party School, in May 2020: “Xi Jinping's New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is the Marxism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century [...] China's development transcends national geographical boundaries and acquires global historical significance, meaning that China is qualified to be the ideological and theoretical pinnacle guiding the innovative development of world Marxism.”<sup>14</sup>

Then, the “community of common destiny” is based on the idea of a global community conscious of its shared destiny that needs to cooperate to face current challenges. The concept already had a place in the Party's rhetoric before Xi Jinping. Hu Jintao referred to it in his speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, on November 8, 2012, when he said that it was necessary to make other countries aware that we are all part of the “community of common destiny.”<sup>15</sup> Despite this mention, the concept was not central to Hu's leadership. Hu focused more on the concept of a “harmonious society,” respecting the diversity of systems. Xi Jinping subsequently broke from Hu's vision, using the concept of a “community of common destiny” to urge the adoption of the Chinese model. Besides, the idea of a community of common destiny has ties to the Confucian notion of *Tianxia* (天下- “all-under-heaven”), recently re-popularized by Zhao Tingyang (赵汀阳); it has become a subject of intense debates within the Chinese academic community. For now, the Party has seldom used the term however.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of “community of common destiny” was added to the Party's statutes in 2017, and in the preamble of the PRC's constitution in 2018.<sup>17</sup> On multiple occasions, Xi Jinping introduced the subject abroad, such as during his African visit, at the Bo'ao Forum, and to ASEAN members in 2013, to the 2017 Davos Forum, and to the United Nations. In 2015, the term “destiny” was replaced by “future” in the official English translation in order to reduce the expansionist character of the formula and thus avoid suspicion from foreign audiences.<sup>18</sup> The established English formula thus became the “community of shared future for mankind,” but the Chinese expression remains unchanged. The rhetorical enterprise thus aims at distorting the liberal vocabulary in favor of the CCP's vision, as Stella Chan points out: “the phrase incorporates traditional elements of Chinese foreign policy

12. David Kelly, “The ‘China Solution: Beijing responds to Trump,” *The Interpreter* (17 Feb. 2017).

13. Xi Jinping, “中国共产党人和中国人民完全有信心为人类对更好社会制度的探索提供中国方案” (Speech at the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCP, 1 Jul. 2016), <https://archive.vn/W6E5L>.

14. He Yiting (何毅亭), “学习时报: 习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想是21世纪马克思主义” (“Study Times: Xi Jinping's Socialist Thought with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is 21<sup>st</sup> Century Marxism”), *学习时报* (Study Times), June 15, 2020. Quoted in Cabestan, *Demain la Chine*.

15. Hu Jintao's speech is available here (in English and Chinese): <https://archive.vn/TT1ya>.

16. Ji Zhe, “Tianxia, retour en force d'un concept oublié. Portrait des nouveaux penseurs confucianistes” (“Tianxia, the Strong Return of a Forgotten Concept. Portraits of New Confucian Thinkers”), *La Vie des idées* (3 Dec. 2008).

17. The entire text of 2017 edition of the CCP Statutes is available at: <http://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/#zonggang> (in Chinese). The text of the PRC Constitution, with the 2018 revisions, can be found here (in Chinese): [http://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2018-03/22/content\\_5276318.htm](http://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2018-03/22/content_5276318.htm).

18. Stella Chan, “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind 人类命运共同体,” *China Media Project*, August 25, 2021.

INTRODUCTION

that prioritize a state-centered approach to human rights, while subordinating individual rights to the basic question of national interest.”<sup>19</sup>

CONCEPTS

Unlike Hu Jintao, **Xi Jinping has a plan to implement his vision: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI consists in building platforms and infrastructures to help create this “community of common destiny.”** The propaganda campaign on behalf of the “community of common destiny” is supported by a plethora of ameliorative slogans – “win-win” cooperation, “equality among states,” “pacific development,” “prosperity,” “mutual respect,” “friendship between peoples,” and others that foster adhesion to the concept. The **lexical field** used to promote the BRI is similar: **vague, positive, but hollow.** The BRI is often presented as an innocent and “inclusive” project, seeking “connectivity,” or “cooperation.” The Chinese vision, as represented in the media, is associated to ideas like the “extended family” or a “global village,” working “hand in hand,” dialogue, justice, peace, human progress, a rejection of the Cold War mentality, a rejection of hegemonic tendencies, the defense of “small” states, and other appealing ideas.

ACTORS

The first results of a 2020 Google search which included the words “Belt and Road” and a Chinese media reporting on international news, like the *Global Times*, *China Daily*, or CGTN, illustrates the domination of this positive rhetoric. The articles found are entitled: the BRI “...best hope for globalization’s rebound,” “...route of life and opportunity,” “... beacon for gloomy global recovery”; it “...helps build lasting economic and trade relations,” “...boosts cultural exchanges, mutual understanding,” “...brings major benefits to four continents,” and asks “...Why is it important to Europe?” and “...Why is not the BRI a strategy of China?”<sup>20</sup>

ACTIONS

This propaganda, diffusing the **image of a beneficial-to-all, even altruistic, Chinese project**, has proven fruitful for Beijing. Yet, the Chinese government does not hide its concrete intention: **The Party-State wants to impose a new international order, with “Chinese characteristics,” that serves its interests.** It does not just seek to replace the US as head of the current international system, but rather to **become the leader of a new and different global order.** Beijing is not satisfied with the current global order; it does not ensure the safety of its political regime nor does it recognize it as its “fair” value. The Party does not only seek a world order in which its political regime can survive, it seeks a world order in which its political regime is glorified.<sup>21</sup> This is the ambition of the “Chinese dream” for the “great national renaissance.” Only the creation of the “community of common destiny” could bring this “great national renaissance.”

CASE

The “community of common destiny’s” propaganda campaign seeks to **convince other states to adhere to the Chinese model, as an alternative to the Western liberal model.** It is presented as a superior, more efficient model that ensures economic development while preserving political stability. Based on China’s “five millennia of glorious civilization,” nearly “one century of CCP rule,” and “forty years of miraculous development,” Xi Jinping asserts that China has the legitimacy and capacity to become

CONCLUSION

19. Ibid.

20. Alfred Romann, “Belt and Road Best Hope For Globalization’s Rebound,” *China Daily* (6 Jul. 2020); Wu Ken, “BRI: Route of Life and Opportunity,” *Global Times* (6 Jul. 2020); Huang Yongfu, “Belt and Road Initiative is a Beacon for Gloomy Global Recovery,” CGTN (14 May 2020); Liu Zhihua, “Belt and Road Helps Build Lasting Economic and Trade Relations,” *China Daily* (12 Dec. 2019); “China’s Belt and Road Initiative Boosts Cultural Exchanges, Mutual Understanding Among Participants: Chinese Scholar,” *Global Times* (27 Jun. 2019); You Yang and Li Shiyu, “70 Years of Diplomacy: BRI Brings Major Benefits to Four Continents,” CGTN (4 Oct. 2019); Nilay Syam, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Why is it Important to Europe?” CGTN (13 Nov. 2019); Ding Gang, “Why is not the BRI a Strategy of China?” *Global Times* (22 Jan. 2020).

21. Daniel Tobin, “How Xi Jinping’s ‘New Era’ Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing’s Ambitions.”

the leader of the new world order and to ensure international security.<sup>22</sup> In his speech at the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress, Xi Jinping defended the argument that “Chinese socialism [...] blaz[es] a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”<sup>23</sup>

**The Chinese congratulate themselves that their concept of a “community of common destiny” was used verbatim in multiple UN resolutions.** They see it as evidence that Chinese ideas are gaining ground in the international community, which recognizes China’s position as a responsible world power.<sup>24</sup> **The UN now considers the BRI as a project aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. And the UN secretary general personally promoted the BRI to other member states,**<sup>25</sup> inciting them to participate. The UN presents the initiative like Chinese propaganda does: a global development project rather than a Chinese influence strategy looking to build an international order based on CCP ideals.<sup>26</sup> François Godement acknowledged that **“even the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, whose mission and mandate is far from the BRI’s objectives, felt the need to sign a memorandum of action on the BRI with Beijing.”**<sup>27</sup>

The participation of countries to the BRI and the adoption of the “Chinese solution” by others – whether or not they are blind to the revisionist Chinese ambitions, sincerely believe the altruistic propaganda narrative, or are simply not resisting the Chinese expansion – show the success of the Chinese propaganda campaign. However, during the drafting of the document celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations in June 2020, the Five Eyes states and India refused the inclusion of the term “community of destiny” on the grounds that it would be an expression of CCP ideology.<sup>28</sup>

## II. Tradition

**Traditional Chinese culture**, which is particularly well perceived in many countries (a wisdom that is more than a thousand years old, technical and scientific inventions and innovations, martial arts, graphic arts, ceramics, etc.), is now exploited by the Party. It has become a central component of the Chinese narrative used to create a positive image of the country, and of the political party leading it. **The promotion of traditional Chinese medicine** abroad, and within international bodies, is a good example of the Party’s narrative strategy to expand its influence.

22. “习近平首提 ‘两个引导’ 有深意” (“The first mention of the “two guides” by Xi Jinping Has a Profound Meaning”), *Sina* (20 Feb. 2017), <https://archive.vn/E3dIr>.

23. Xi Jinping’s speech at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is available here (in French): <https://archive.vn/QrvzM>.

24. Charlotte Gao, “‘A Community of Shared Future’: One Short Phrase for UN, One Big Victory for China?” *The Diplomat* (5 Nov. 2017).

25. “United Nations Poised to Support Alignment of China’s Belt and Road Initiative with Sustainable Development Goals, Secretary-General Says at Opening Ceremony,” Press release, SG/SM/19556, United Nations (26 Apr. 2019).

26. Antonio Guterres, “Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation,” United Nations (26 Apr. 2019).

27. François Godement, “La Chine aux Nations unies – le cas de l’Organisation mondiale de la propriété intellectuelle,” (“China at the United Nations – the Case of the World Intellectual Property Organization”), Institut Montaigne (23 Mar. 2020).

28. Chan, “Community of Common Destiny.”



## A. The example of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

The Party initially focused on the recognition, by international organizations, of the intrinsic value of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This process occurred relatively quickly. In 2015, TCM was recognized in the medical world for the first time when Tu Youyou (屠呦呦) received the Nobel Prize in Medicine for her research on the role of the molecule Artemisinin, traditionally present in Chinese herbs, in the fight against malaria.<sup>29</sup> When Xi Jinping became president, he initiated **two strategies to promote the use of TCM around the world: obtaining its recognition by the World Health Organization (WHO) and integrating it into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).**

### 1. TCM and the WHO

The Chinese Margaret Chan was director general of the WHO from 2006 to 2017. During her term, she promoted TCM within the organization. In 2016, she gave a speech praising Chinese medical advances, and traditional medicine in particular: “by mobilizing doctors, barefoot doctors, traditional practitioners, sanitary inspectors, and medical personnel in factories, this country, despite its size, eradicated smallpox twenty years before the rest of the world. [...] This feat gave China a reputation within the WHO: China can accomplish anything it sets out to do.”<sup>30</sup>

That same year, Xi Jinping **forced local governments to praise and promote TCM within their health care systems.**<sup>31</sup> The following year, he visited the WHO for the first time, gifting the organization with a bronze statue representing acupunctural points,<sup>32</sup> a symbol of the Party’s desire to have the traditional practice recognized.

The CCP also **took advantage of the Covid-19 crisis to reinforce the legitimacy, recognition, and upholding the efficiency of TCM abroad.** After developing an entire network of TCM-affiliated hospitals as early as January 2020, to help prevent Covid-19,<sup>33</sup> the CCP multiplied declarations on TCM’s efficiency in fighting the disease.<sup>34</sup> On March 9, 2020, Yu Yanhong (余艳红), deputy director of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, declared in a press conference that the majority of the 50,000 cured Covid-19 patients had benefited from a mixture of TCM and Western medicine.<sup>35</sup> For the Chinese administration, this was enough to prove the efficiency of Covid-19. Chinese teams of TCM experts were also deployed around the world to assist countries affected by Covid-19.<sup>36</sup>

29. David Cyranoski, “Why Chinese medicine is heading for Clinics around the world,” *Nature* (26 Sept. 2018); Ewen Callaway and David Cyranoski, “Anti-parasite drugs sweep Nobel prize in medicine 2015,” *Nature* (5 Oct. 2015).

30. Margaret Chan, “La contribution croissante de la Chine à la santé publique sur la scène nationale et internationale” (“The Growing Contribution of China to Public Health Nationally and Globally”), World Health Organization (18 Nov. 2016); Nathan Vanderklippe, “Margaret Chan reshaped the WHO and brought it closer to China,” *The Globe and Mail* (12 Jun. 2020).

31. Viola Zhou, “Beijing city plans to punish people for ‘defaming’ traditional Chinese medicine,” *South China Morning Post* (4 Jun. 2020).

32. “Visit by the President of the People’s Republic of China to WHO,” *WHO* (25 Jan. 2017).

33. “China Tightens Preventive Measures to Curb Novel Coronavirus,” *Xinhua* (23 Jan. 2019).

34. The country has nearly 20,000 TCM clinics nowadays (compared to only handful three years ago). See “China Seeks to Increase Supply of Traditional Chinese Medicine Services,” *Xinhua* (26 Aug. 2020).

35. “Majority of Over 50,000 Recovered COVID-19 Patients in China Receive TCM treatment: Official,” *Xinhua* (9 Mar. 2020).

36. “Chinese Medical Experts Arrive in Kuwait to Help Fight COVID-19,” *Xinhua* (28 Apr. 2020).



The following month, the **World Health Assembly (the decision-making body of the WHO) included TCM in chapter 26 of the organization's 11th edition of the *Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems – ICD***, which could be applicable to member countries by 2022.<sup>37</sup> The ICD is the main document used by health actors because it allows them to compare the collection, analysis, and classification of data internationally. China's influence campaign hence succeeded.

The inclusion of TCM in the ICD was controversial however; many health actors remain opposed to the decision. Much of the criticism stems from the inconclusive results of clinical trials, unable to determine the TCM's efficiency. Some studies even suggested TCM could be dangerous.<sup>38</sup> Many practitioners remain confused as to why the WHO shows leniency toward TCM (and China in general) (→ p. 213), given its goal of imposing stricter health regulations. China's recognition campaign is likely driven by its ambition to **place Chinese actors on a huge global market and use TCM as a vector for Chinese influence**. In fact, the development of TCM propagates a noble, wise, and benevolent image of China.

In May 2020, the Healthy Sciences Authority of Singapore authorized the pharmaceutical laboratory Yiling Pharmaceutical (石家庄以岭药业股份有限公司) to sell its Lianhua Qingwen capsules as a treatment for Covid-19. Seven other countries have allowed this treatment on their territory: Canada, Brazil, Thailand, Romania, Indonesia, Ecuador, and Mozambique.<sup>39</sup> These advances can be tied to the international recognition of Chinese university medical diplomas in June 2020. The next step will be the recognition of academic specializations in the traditional medicine.<sup>40</sup>

While the promotion of traditional medicine abroad is primarily done through seduction, domestic promotion can be more menacing. In June, a new municipal regulation in Beijing, pressed by the Party, declared that **any defamation of TCM could result in a lawsuit**.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. TCM and the BRI

In 2016, Xi Jinping announced a strategy for the development of TCM<sup>42</sup> that would guarantee universal access by 2020, and a flourishing industry by 2030. In addition to the development of zones of medical tourism, **China wants to build at least 30 TCM centers abroad**. 17 have already been built in Hungary, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, and the UAE.<sup>43</sup> China hopes to increase the use and adoption of TCM in health services around the world,

37. "ICD-11," *World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/>.

38. "The World Health Organization Gives the Nod to Traditional Chinese Medicine. Bad Idea," *Scientific American* (1 Apr. 2019).

39. Mo Hong'e, "Giving World's COVID-19 Fight the Invaluable Benefit of TCM," *China Daily* (17 Jun. 2020).

40. Liao Shumin, "Chinese Medical Qualifications to Be Recognized Worldwide, Ministry Says," *Yicai* (23 Jun. 2020).

41. Viola Zhou, "Beijing City Plans to Punish People for 'Defaming' Traditional Chinese Medicine," *South China Morning Post* (4 Jun. 2020).

42. "Full text: Traditional Chinese Medicine in China," The State Council the Republic of China (6 Dec. 2016), [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2016/12/06/content\\_281475509333700.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2016/12/06/content_281475509333700.htm).

43. "TCM further Incorporated into Medical Systems of B&R Countries," The State Council the Republic of China (19 Dec. 2019), [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/201912/19/content\\_WS55dfab0a1c6d0\\_bcf8c4c1915d.html](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/201912/19/content_WS55dfab0a1c6d0_bcf8c4c1915d.html).

INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTS

ACTORS

ACTIONS

CASE

CONCLUSION

ying for a share of **an estimated 50-billion-dollar global market**.<sup>44</sup> In 2016, \$3.42 billion's worth of TCM products were exported in 183 countries.<sup>45</sup>

The vast majority of TCM practitioners are trained in China. There are only a handful of TCM programs in modern medicine universities and hospitals, including in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. In France, only one academic institution (Sorbonne University, in partnership with the Pierre and Marie Curie Medical University) appears to offer a university diploma in mind-body practices associated with TCM (*Diplôme universitaire des pratiques corps-esprit en médecine traditionnelle chinoise* (DUPRAC)).<sup>46</sup> Other non-degree trainings do exist however.

The campaign promoting TCM in Europe, especially to the European Commission, is coordinated by the European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association (ETCMA). This association brings together national actors from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Romania, Greece, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, the UK, and Ireland.<sup>47</sup>

**But the penetration of TCM is most potent in Africa.**<sup>48</sup> Numerous countries in Africa have TCM clinics by now. While many patients are Chinese expatriates, local populations are increasingly going to these clinics as well. African states are somewhat favorable to Chinese TCM investments, some having included TCM in their public health systems. And multiple TCM material producers are present on the continent.<sup>49</sup> The extraordinary China-Africa Summit on solidarity against Covid-19, which took place online on June 17, 2020, was likely an opportunity for Beijing to further promote tradition medicine in Africa.<sup>50</sup>

44. Zhuang Pinghui, "Traditional Chinese Medicine Closes on US\$50 Billion Market with Long-Awaited Nod from WHO," *The Morning Post* (29 Sept. 2018); David Cyranoski, "Why Chinese Medicine is Heading for Clinics Around the World," *Nature* (26 Sept. 2018).

45. Zhang Dongmiao, "China Focus: Traditional Chinese Medicine Gaining Popularity Through Modern Approach," *Xinhua* (1 Jul. 2017), <https://archive.vn/CahR9.a>.

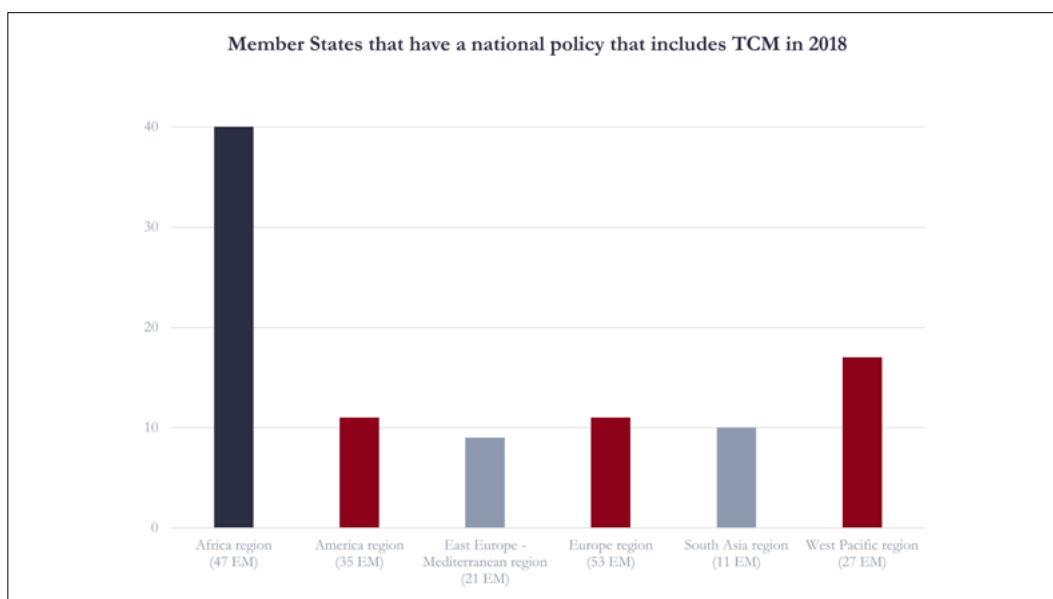
46. "Diplôme universitaire des pratiques Corps-esprit en médecine traditionnelle chinoise" ("University Diploma on Mind-Spirit Practices in Traditional Chinese Medicine"), Sorbonne Université. [http://www.fc.upmc.fr/plugins/upmc-fc/fc/\\_content/program-diplome-universitaire-des-pratiques-corps-esprit-en-medicine-traditionnelle-chinoise-duprac-2-2.pdf](http://www.fc.upmc.fr/plugins/upmc-fc/fc/_content/program-diplome-universitaire-des-pratiques-corps-esprit-en-medicine-traditionnelle-chinoise-duprac-2-2.pdf); "DUMETRAC," Sorbonne Université. <http://pitialespetriere.aphp.fr/wp-content/blogs.dir/134/files/2014/06/D386.pdf>.

47. "Full members of ETCMA," ETCMA, <https://www.etcma.org/find-a-member/>.

48. Laurent Ribadeau Dumas, "La médecine traditionnelle chinoise connaît un grand succès en Afrique," ("Traditional Chinese Medicine Receives a Wide Success in Africa"), *Franceinfo* (22 Nov. 2018); C. Kantai, "Why Traditional Chinese Medicine is China's Fastest-Growing Export to Africa?" *Pandaily* (21 Apr. 2019).

49. "WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy: 2014-2023," *World Health Organization* (9 July 2020), <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/95009>.

50. See the archived statement here: <http://archive.vn/IEjwB>.



Although rarely mentioned, and relatively under the radar, TCM is a clear vector for Chinese influence in the world, supporting the CCP's overall narrative strategy.

### III. Benevolence

Also falling under the category of “seduce and subjugate” are China's efforts to **build an image as a benevolent power**. This new position first led to the reappropriation of Confucian concepts – after the CCP had scorned the figure of the sage for decades. The Party now draws its inspirations from the concepts of *ren* (仁) and *shu* (恕). *Ren* is the affection one feels for one's fellow man, what Anne Cheng called “the human sense”;<sup>51</sup> it is as much a spontaneous feeling as a moral value which must be cultivated by way of example. Being a model of benevolence would therefore be at the heart of China's “mission.” The concept of *shu* on the other hand refers to an idea of benevolence more “abstract” and “universal” than *ren*.<sup>52</sup> While some have seen similarities with *agape*, divine love for Christians, *shu* is exempt of any divine dimension and is to be found in the reciprocity of human relations.<sup>53</sup>

However, it is not always easy to **distinguish in the Chinese strategy what is a sincere belief** – that China's foreign policy is part of a more than millennia-old approach of benevolence and pacifism toward its neighbors as asserted by Li Anshan (李安山)<sup>54</sup> – **and what is a mere rhetoric of covert domination, authoritarian paternalism, and a feeling of civilizational superiority**.<sup>55</sup>

51. Anne Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise* (History of Chinese Thought) (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

52. Nicolas Zufferey, *La pensée des Chinois* (*The Chinese's Thought*) (Paris: Marabout, 2012).

53. Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise*.

54. Li Anshan, “Cultural Heritage and China's Africa Policy,” in Jing Men, Benjamin Barton, eds., *China and the European Union in Africa: Partners of Competitors?* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 41-60. On this point, see also: Merriden Varrall, *Chinese Diplomacy and the Social Imaginary of Chineseness*, PhD Thesis, Free University Amsterdam, 2013.

55. The same idea of benevolence animates Chinese leaders and justifies, among certain Chinese and Western thinkers, a rejection of liberal democracy and a conservative framing of the masses. Charon and Dutournier, “Le confucianisme, un modèle politique? Une réponse à Daniel A. Bell.”

Beyond the positive image of Confucius and his morality, which the Party tries to embody, the construction of the image of a benevolent China also serves to **discredit the theory of the “Chinese threat” which hinders the implementation of the Party’s foreign policy.** To this end, the Party has promoted counter-narratives emphasizing China’s absolute pacifism and the harmless and beneficial nature of its growing international footprint: this is particularly the case with the **theory of the peaceful rise**<sup>56</sup> “meant to reassure Beijing’s partners by encouraging “engagement” strategies.”<sup>57</sup>

**This theory formally became a national strategy with the adoption of white papers** in 2005<sup>58</sup> and in 2010.<sup>59</sup> Proposed in 2003 by Zheng Bijan (郑必坚)<sup>60</sup> – an intellectual figure of the Party that served in numerous structures including the Academy of Social Sciences, the Central Party School and the Department of Propaganda– this theory maintains that China is developing peacefully without threatening other powers, without looking for a territorial expansion, and all of this thanks to its labor and a peaceful international environment. This rhetoric has continued to be employed since Xi Jinping came to power,<sup>61</sup> even though the use of force is now a possible option in the event of a threat against China’s interests.<sup>62</sup> The central idea remains unchanged: **to contradict all those who foresee an inevitable war between China and the United States** (the famous “Thucydides trap”<sup>63</sup>) **and those who see the international system as a zero-sum game** – i.e. the rise of China leading to an inevitable decline of the United States. In its last Defense White Paper, which is more of a communication tool than a real doctrinal document, China presented itself as a leader in regional and global security. It also publicized its defense budget in it to prove its efforts in terms of transparency and explain that all its expenses are justified, which once again illustrated its desire to display itself as a benevolent and responsible country.<sup>64</sup>

The Party accompanies this narrative with meaningful actions that aspire to give substance to benevolence. **The Peace Ark**, also know under the name of *Daishan dao* (岱山岛), **is one of the most visible symbols of Chinese benevolence manipulated by the Party.**

56. In Chinese, 和平崛起 means “peaceful rise” and 和平发展 “peaceful development.”

57. Valérie Niquet, “La Chine: une modernisation des pratiques de guerre de l’information” (in “China: The Modernization of Information War Practices”) Céline Marangé and Maud Quessard, eds., *Les Guerres de l’information à l’ère numérique (Information Wars in the Digital Era)* (Paris: PUF, 2021), 152.

58. “中国的和平发展道路” (China’s Path to Peaceful Development), text (in Chinese) archived here: <http://archive.vn/8cQkP>.

59. “中国的和平发展” (China’s Peaceful Development), text (in Chinese) archived at <http://archive.vn/upsDK>.

60. On the origin of the concept of “peaceful rise” see Robert L. Suettinger, “The Rise and Descent of “Peaceful Rise,” *China Leadership Monitor*, 12, Hoover Institution (30 Oct. 2004). For a compilation of Zheng Bijian’s speeches on the subject, translated into English, see *China’s Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian. 1997 – 2005*, Brookings Institution Press (14 Oct. 2005).

61. “Speech by President Xi Jinping at the United Nations Office at Geneva: Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind,” *Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Iraq* (23 Jan. 2017), <http://archive.vn/vZ2QX>. Original version of this speech archived at: <http://archive.vn/HL22W>.

62. Jian Zhang, “China’s New Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping: Toward ‘Peaceful Rise 2.0?’” *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 27:1 (2015).

63. Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

64. Paul Charon and Carine Monteiro Da Silva, “Le Livre blanc sur la Défense chinois 2019: un effort de communication lacunaire” (The White Book on Chinese Defense 2019: A Deficient Communication Effort”), Research Note, 76, IRSEM (26 Jul. 2019).





“Chinese Navy hospital ship *Peace Ark* (866) departs [U.S. base] Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam [in Hawaii] following the conclusion of the Rim of the Pacific 2016 military exercises” (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Rebecca Wolfbrandt/RELEASED – public domain).

This hospital ship of the PLA South Sea Fleet naval forces has undertaken a dozen humanitarian missions and cared for around 180,000 patients around the world since its commissioning in 2008. These missions allow China to assume the best intentions and **“conquer the hearts” of local populations** who benefit from free health care. Chinese media regularly report on the “achievements” of *Peace Ark* sailors, for example the Bangladeshi patient who gave birth to her baby on the ship and decided to name her daughter “Ciin” – “China” in Bengali – as a tribute to the team which had taken care of her; as for the newborn, she was quickly erected as “a symbol of the friendship between China and Bangladesh.”<sup>65</sup> The *Peace Ark* also engages in cultural exchanges with local populations to reinforce the “connections of friendship” between peoples and thus serve as an instrument of public diplomacy to create economic opportunities and enlarge the influence of the country.<sup>66</sup> Several countries, like Fiji and Tonga have praised these missions.<sup>67</sup> **The Chinese navy’s hospital ship actually kills three birds with one stone: it not only improve the image of China (generous, humanitarian) but also discredit local governments (China is helping you because your government is incompetent) and scout to find out where they can go with large ships** (to potentially military ends).

Finally, China has a **development aid program** to present itself to the world as a benevolent power. At the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Xi Jinping promised \$60 billion in aid to African countries. The Chinese government reportedly funded more than three thousand projects between 2000 and 2014, worth more than \$270 billion.<sup>68</sup> Even if the promises are not always followed by action, and a significant part of the “donations” are actually loans,<sup>69</sup> this **rhetoric presenting China at the bedside of the developing world** allows the Party to portray itself as a benevolent country.

65. Ma Zhenhuan, “Peace Ark Carries Cargo of Goodwill,” *China Daily* (12 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/Nz8Te>.

66. Zeng Ziyi and Lan Haowei, “A look at China’s ‘Floating Hospital’ Peace Ark,” CGTN (19 Apr. 2019), <http://archive.vn/ObcbR>.

67. Jiang Shan and Shi Kuiji, “Fiji Prime Minister Highly Praises Hospital Ship Peace Ark’s Second Visit,” *China military online* (7 Aug. 2018), <http://archive.vn/70hpc>; Zhang Yongxing and Jiang Shan, “Chinese Hospital Ship Peace Ark Wins Praise from Tongans,” *China Military Online* (2 Aug. 2018), <http://archive.vn/ImWM3>.

68. “AidData’s Geocoded Global Chinese Official Finance, Version 1.1.1,” *AidData*, <https://www.aiddata.org/data/geocoded-chinese-global-official-finance-dataset>.

69. On this subject see the enlightening work of Thierry Pairault: <https://www.pairault.fr/sinaf/>.



The flagship project contributing to this image is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) whose discourses insists on the isotopies of “sympathy” and “altruism”: the Chinese champion a “win-win” cooperation and propose the idea of a “community of common destiny” working together for a better future, concepts that are supposed to construct a “Chinese vision” of international relations.

Hence, the rhetoric of benevolence has been established, in recent years, as a structuring dimension of the discursive power of China on the international scene.

## IV. Power

Seduction cannot only rest on the Chinese “model,” tradition and benevolence. These qualities make it possible to appeal to a certain part of the international public but they are not enough to establish its ability to influence actors. This is why Beijing also relies on **the image of power. For the last two decades, we can even say that it has been the main driving force behind Chinese seduction.** In this respect, it is quite significant to note that the curve for the number of Chinese language learners is very strongly correlated with that of the development of this image of power: Chinese language learners admit to being mainly motivated by commercial prospects that they imagine to be monumental.

The Party wants to acquire all of the attributes of power to signify to the world that this is now China’s status. This strategy is carried out through a narrative, and even more so, through an image of this power that must, moreover, be variagated; because the Party admits no weakness, **China must be the embodiment of power in all domains.** Evidently, **military power**<sup>70</sup> which is expressed nowhere better than in the military parades – whose pageantry is just as good as that of the Soviet Union – an undeniable element but always liable to disrupt the message of peace and benevolence that the Party wishes to carry. This is why Beijing also relies on other images of power capable of fascinating without giving rise to a sentiment of fear.



Left, truck-mounted version of the Dongfeng 41 nuclear missile during the October 1, 2019 parade for the 70-year anniversary of the communist regime (photo: Xinhua). Right, Beijing National Center for the Performing Arts (photo: Flickr user Hui Lan).

**Visually, the image of power is foremostly reflected in architectural achievements.** The promotion of the architectural heritage of China –the Great Wall and the Forbidden City are undoubtedly the best-known symbols in this case – reminds us that, historically, China has always been **a refined and powerful country.** And more modern buildings support the idea that China still is. Situated in the center of the historic capital, the

70. This was a reason the nascent PRC, battered by decades of war, developed one of the most iconic symbols of power status – nuclear weapons – which, once developed in the 1960s, led to a wave of admiration in the Third World.

Beijing National Center for the Performing Arts, also called “Peking Opera” (国家大剧院), is a symbol of the modernity of the Chinese power. Designed by the French architect Paul Andreu, the center is covered by an elliptically shaped titanium and glass dome, which appears to be delicately laid on water formed by the artificial lake that surrounds it.

Many other architectural projects have been showcased for their beauty, their originality or their technological feats, and they are used by the media as symbols of the Chinese power. These include the Beijing National Stadium (北京国家体育场) – nicknamed “the Bird’s Nest” (鸟巢) – built for the 2008 Olympic Games, the CCTV headquarters with its unusual shape, the Huoshenshan hospital in Wuhan built in ten days to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>71</sup> or even the many skyscrapers that have multiplied in the country; five of them are among the ten highest buildings in the world.<sup>72</sup>

**China also promotes its scientific and technological achievements**, some of which are visually striking and conducive to media coverage. This is the case for example of the spherical radio telescope with an opening of 500 meters that was built in a crevasse in Wuxi, in Jiangsu, which is the largest of its kind, the most sensitive in the world and whose aerial photos have quickly spread around the planet.<sup>73</sup> The many transport infrastructures that have broken records are also easy to “publicize”: the bridge connecting Hong Kong, Macao and Zhuhai (Guangdong province), which is the longest maritime bridge in the world;<sup>74</sup> the Beipanjiang Bridge in Guizhou province which crosses the highest precipice (565 meters);<sup>75</sup> the railway line that connects the Tibetan plateau to the rest of China, while breaking altitude records (4,500 meters);<sup>76</sup> or the Fuxing bullet train<sup>77</sup> and the magnetic levitation “Shanghai Transrapid” (Maglev), which are among the fastest trains in the world.

**Achievements in the space sector** are also widely publicized to reinforce the image of a technologically advanced China and to stir up feelings of national pride. To name a few recent examples, China was the first to put a quantum satellite, the Micius, into orbit in 2016;<sup>78</sup> the first to successfully land an exploration module, the Chang’e-4, on the far side of the moon in 2019;<sup>79</sup> it finalized its global coverage satellite positioning system, BeiDou, a competitor to American GPS and Galileo in 2020 (→ p. 135);<sup>80</sup> in July 2020 it sent its first probe to Mars, Tianwen-1, which, if successful, would be the first mission to achieve this feat.<sup>81</sup> **As the image of power is synonymous with cutting edge technologies,**



71. Zhang Ni and Chen Xi, “Wuhan’s Huoshenshan Hospital a Symbol of Chinese Spirit,” *Global Times* (26 Mar. 2020), <http://archive.vn/ThL3o>.

72. The Shanghai Tower (632 m.), the Ping An Finance Center in Shenzhen (599 m.), the Guangzhou CTF Finance Center (530 m.), the Tianjin CTF Finance Center (530 m.), and the China Zun in Beijing (528 m.).

73. “Le FAST, le plus grand radiotélescope du monde, entre officiellement en service” (“The FAST: the largest radio telescope in the world, officially comes into service”), *China.org* (12 Jan. 2020).

74. “World’s Longest Sea Bridge Outperforms,” *Quotidien du peuple* (24 Oct. 2019), <http://archive.vn/Yc12v>.

75. “The World’s Highest Bridge Locates in Southwest China,” CGTN (27 Jul. 2017).

76. New China TV, “Breathtaking Scenery: Aerial View of Qinghai-Tibet Railway in SW China,” *YouTube* (26 Oct. 2017).

77. Huang Jinjing, “Fuxing High Speed Trains Restore Confidence in Chinese Tech at Home and Abroad,” *Global Times* (19 Jul. 2017), <http://archive.vn/DB5pT>.

78. Yang Sheng and Xing Xiaojing, “China Launches First Quantum Satellite,” *Global Times* (17 Aug. 2016), <http://archive.vn/ucIop>.

79. “China’s Lunar Rover Travels 367 Meters on Moon’s Far Side,” *Global Times* (4 Feb. 2020), <http://archive.vn:oxQU6>.

80. Deng Xiaoci, “China Completes BDS Navigation System, Reduces Reliance on GPS,” *Global Times* (23 Jun. 2020).

81. Deng Xiaoci, “China’s Successful Launch of Mars Mission Heralds New Era of Deep-Space Probes Beyond the Moon,” *Global Times* (23 Jul. 2020), <http://archive.vn/LSqD0>.

China wants to be the leader in this sector and is proud, among other things, of having developed the Taihu Light, the fastest super-calculator in the world when it was commissioned in 2016, in Wuxi (Jiangsu). Still very well-ranked today, despite the lead taken by the Americans and the Japanese, China has the clear intention of reclaiming first place in this ranking.<sup>82</sup>

**Finally, China looks to host world-class events to showcase its power**, such as the Olympic Games it organized in 2008, or the Winter Olympics that it will host in 2022, the World Exhibition held in Shanghai in 2010, and the G20 summit, which it held for the first time in 2016 in Hangzhou.

**Sometimes, the Party does not hesitate to take credit for innovations which were actually developed elsewhere.** The spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a campaign in September 2020 to highlight China's inventiveness. As part of the campaign, they presented four "new inventions": self-service bicycles, high-speed trains, online shopping and mobile payment. However, as several accounts on Twitter have pointed out, all of these inventions were created outside of China: the self-service bicycle in the Netherlands in 1965, the high-speed train saw its beginnings in Germany before it boomed in Japan, online shopping is an American invention, while mobile payment originated in Kenya with its M-Pesa system.



82. "China Races to Regain First Place in World of Supercomputers," *Global Times* (1 Apr. 2019), <http://archive.vn/hpiF2>.

## Chapter 2

# INFILTRATE AND COERCE

The first category of operations focuses on discursive strategies that rely on the production and dissemination of positive narratives about China, in order to shape foreign perceptions and eliminate potential threats to the Party. This first category is not mere propaganda, but is already part of the repertoire of active measures (→ p. 33). As we have seen, these speeches are not only disseminated by the Party's own means, but also through local intermediaries who act as propaganda “whitewashers,” masking the true source of the narrative.<sup>1</sup> What also characterizes the operations in the first category is that they call for voluntary local support, whose motivations are not always altruistic.

The second category consists of **“stronger” operations that do not try to seduce the adversary, but rather, to make it bend.** Two types of tools must be distinguished in this category: infiltration and coercion. To infiltrate (from the Latin *filtrum*, “filter”) refers to the idea of “gradually penetrating” a society or a government to influence decision-making mechanisms. To coerce (from the Latin *constringere* which means “tighten with” or “tighten against”) is to impose something on someone against their will, through the use of threats, intimidation, blackmail, or other forms of pressure.

In the first case, these are **infiltration operations** which aim to slowly penetrate adverse societies in order to hinder any possible action against the Party's interest. These operations take extremely varied forms according to the nature of the “threat” and are deployed simultaneously in several sectors in order to circumscribe the targets: diasporas, media outlets, diplomacy, the economy, politics, education, think tanks, culture, and so on.

In the second case, we speak of **“punitive”<sup>2</sup> or “coercive”<sup>3</sup> diplomacy.** Originally, the CCP used it only to **defend its fundamental interests** (核心利益). Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪), China's foreign policy coordinator, recalled that, for the CCP this notion included “issues concerning Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang.”<sup>4</sup> On these subjects the Party does not tolerate any interference and will draw from the repertoire of coercive diplomatic actions to prevent a state from maintaining relations of any kind with Taiwan or to prohibit a head

1. Some authors consider that the dissemination of misleading information falls within the scope of active measures, but we, for our part, consider that the element of concealment or, at the very least, of obfuscation on the part of the sponsor is an essential dimension that makes it possible to distinguish propaganda from active measures.

2. Jamil Anderlini, “China is Escalating its Punishment Diplomacy,” *Financial Times* (22 Sept. 2020).

3. On the concept of coercion (discussed in the field of international relations since Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966)). See the synthesis: Charles-Philippe David and Olivier Schmitt, *La guerre et la paix. Approches et enjeux de la sécurité et de la stratégie* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2020), 136-150. The concept of “coercive diplomacy” was theorized in: Alexander George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1991). It was often applied to China, for example by: Fergus Hanson, Emilia Currey, and Tracy Beattie, *The Chinese Communist Party's coercive diplomacy*, ASPI, Policy Brief, Report 36 (2020).

4. The citation in Chinese: “台湾、涉港、涉藏、涉疆问题涉及中国主权和领土完整，事关中方核心利益” See: “杨洁篪署名文章：尊重历史 面向未来 坚定不移维护和稳定中美关系，新华网，” (7 Aug. 2020).



of state from receiving the Dalai Lama. But, **gradually, the CCP has broadened the scope of coercive diplomacy beyond its core interests**, to include claims in the South China Sea or the attainment of market economy status for instance. In recent years, coercive diplomacy has been directed at an increasing number and variety of issues, so much so that a simple speech that could be interpreted as the beginning of a criticism and as a public questioning of China's behavior, or as even the recognition of the talent of an artist not endorsed by the Party, could lead to a surge of coercive measures in order to bring the offender back in line with the CCP's interests.

The Party's use of these coercive means seems to be largely accepted by Chinese experts in international relations. For instance, Fergus Hanson, Emilia Currey, and Tracy Beattie mentioned Jian Jisong (简基松), a specialist in international law at Zhongnan University (中南大学)<sup>5</sup> who supports China's unilateral sanctions, or the CICIR, a think tank of the MSS – because they all defend the implementation of Chinese economic sanctions against anyone who threatens its interests.<sup>6</sup> State media accept and help diffuse this policy of systematic sanctions; hoping to establish a form of deterrence, as illustrated by the reaction of the *Global Times*'s editor-in-chief to a call of some British MPs to boycott the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing (see screenshot below).<sup>7</sup>



The day after Joe Biden's inauguration, on January 21, 2021, the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced sanctions against 28 people, including many Trump administration officials (Michael R. Pompeo, Peter K. Navarro, Robert C.

5. See his page on the university's website: <https://www.hanspub.org/journal/DetailedInforOfEditorialBoard.aspx?personID=20715>.

6. Hanson, Currey, and Beattie, *The Chinese Communist Party's coercive diplomacy*.

7. [https://twitter.com/HuXijin\\_GT/status/1358387752459411458](https://twitter.com/HuXijin_GT/status/1358387752459411458).



O'Brien, David R. Stilwell, Matthew Pottinger, Alex M. Azar II, Keith J. Krach, Kelly D. K. Craft John R. Bolton and Stephen K. Bannon). These “anti-Chinese American politicians” were accused of having “seriously violated the country’s sovereignty” and were deemed “responsible for a series of foolish American actions on issues related to China.”<sup>8</sup> They and their immediate family members are now prohibited from entering Chinese territories and doing business with China. The announcement of these sanctions in the midst of Washington’s political transition is a way for Beijing to kill two birds with one stone: **punish the Trump administration and warn the Biden administration**. It sent a message to the new U.S. president’s entourage that those who pursue anti-CCP policies will have a hard time being recruited by U.S. businesses when they leave the administration (as most of them have interests in China). Here, Beijing skillfully exploited the vulnerabilities of the U.S. revolving doors system.

If the scope has worryingly widened, as a number of states have recently realized, Evan Feigenbaum noted nevertheless that the CCP has not yet established a hierarchy in its response that would specify the actions likely to be taken, from the most limited to the most coercive.<sup>9</sup> The type of response that Beijing will use remains thus relatively uncertain, even if experience seems to show an **increasingly multifaceted use of coercion**. The Party adapts its response to the local reality by identifying the weaknesses of target countries. The vagueness maintained by Beijing could stem from a hesitation over the approach or from the desire to dissuade its opponents from any action, as the nature of the Chinese reaction remains unknown to them. The idea being that **more is often achieved when the threshold of intolerance is not clearly defined**.

One of the most evident manifestations of coercion is **retaliation**, which Beijing practices extensively as we will see in this chapter and in the case studies. States, companies, and individuals who criticize or oppose the CCP are targeted by all kinds of diplomatic or trade sanctions (such as those currently imposed on Australia): expulsions from the Chinese market, including some targeting artists (Beijing canceled contracts with South Korean actors and singers as a retaliation against the THAAD) and cultural products (radio stations in Beijing have been ordered to stop broadcasting Swedish music). Imposing a financial cost can also be accomplished by reducing the number of Chinese tourists and students on which some countries depend (→ p. 405 and 271), or by refraining from broadcasting NBA games to punish one of its leaders for his critical comments (→ p. 250), for example. It can also mean legal actions (*lanfane* → p. 53); refusing visas (some Swedes who were refused Chinese visas were told that it was because of Stockholm’s attitude, for which China demanded a change); the disclosure of personal data to assist in the online harassment of certain people (notably pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong → p. 397); cyber-attacks, intimidation, even physical attacks and kidnappings (Beijing, like some pariah states, practices a “hostage diplomacy” → p. 411), etc.

The CCP uses **an incredibly wide range of retaliatory measures, in all domains and against all actors**. An ASPI report studying 152 cases that affected 27 countries as well as the EU between 2010 and 2020, noted “a sharp escalation in these tactics since 2018.”<sup>10</sup>

8. “La Chine annonce des sanctions contre 28 Américains dont Mike Pompeo” (“China Announces Sanctions Against 28 Americans, including Mike Pompeo”), *Xinhuanet* (21 Jan. 2021).

9. Evan A. Feigenbaum, “Is Coercion the New Normal in China’s Economic Statecraft?” *Macro Polo*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (25 Jul. 2017).

10. Hanson, Currey, and Beattie, *The Chinese Communist Party’s coercive diplomacy*, 3.

In any case, whether to infiltrate or coerce, we will see in the following pages that the Party-State usually goes through a nexus of intermediaries – individuals, associations, companies, institutions, and various organizations. These connections are generally based on **“secrecy, compartmentalization, and deniability,”** an approach that has several advantages as Matt Schrader reminded us: not only are the intermediaries force multipliers but the fact that the relationship with the Party-State is not often assumed – that they may “plausibly deny” it – **contributes to “obscure[ing] the Party’s objectives” to “generat[ing] uncertainty about the extent of party influence,” making it difficult or impossible to “establish proof required for enforcement of actions” against such practices, and this ambiguity also contributes to “erod[ing] social trust in target societies.”**<sup>11</sup>

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11. Matt Schrader, *Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries*, Alliance for Securing Democracy, German Marshall Fund (22 Apr. 2020), 13.

## I. The Diasporas

According to the official Chinese media, there are between 40 and more than **60 million “overseas Chinese”** (海外华人, OCs).<sup>12-13</sup> The estimate contrasts with that of the U.S. Census Bureau (nearly 10 million).<sup>14</sup> In fact, it all depends on the reach given to the term, whether it refers to citizenship or, as Beijing does, descent. In any case, according to a U.N. estimate, the number presumably doubled between 1990 and 2017.<sup>15</sup> They have settled in around 180 countries, and more than 80% of these “Chinese” have taken the citizenship of their host country.<sup>16</sup>

Overseas Chinese, the overwhelming majority of whom live in countries freer than China, have the particularity of having access to many uncensored sources of information. They are thus constantly exposed to criticism of the CCP, and even to the outright hostility of certain communities, including the famous “five poisons” and certain foreign governments. **From Beijing’s point of view, this population is a danger because, on the one hand, it is harder to reach and more exposed to negative influence and, on the other, it is likely to return to China or simply communicate with (and thus influence) relatives who remain in China.** It is therefore logically one of its priority targets in its influence efforts. **The objective of the Party is twofold: to control these diasporas so that they do not represent a threat to the ruling power, but also to mobilize them to serve its interests.**

### A. Ethnic Nationalism

In its broadest definition, the Chinese diasporas – the plural is justified given their heterogeneity – are composed of the *Huaqiao* (华侨) i.e. Chinese nationals (Hong Kong, Macanese and Taiwanese nationals are included from Beijing’s point of view) who live or stay abroad; the *Huaren* (华人), who have abandoned their Chinese passport and obtained the nationality of their country of residence; and the *Huayi* (华裔), the descendants of Chinese born abroad.<sup>17</sup> From Beijing’s point of view, all are “Chinese” “sons and daughters of the motherland,” regardless of their citizenship status.<sup>18</sup> Originally, Beijing drew a relatively clear distinction between them, particularly the *Huaqiao* and the *Huaren*, but – “especially under Xi Jinping’s vision of the “one big China Family” and his project of a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” – the line of demarcation has tended to become more blurry.<sup>19</sup>

12. “Premier Calls on Overseas Chinese to Contribute to Economy,” Xinhua (6 Jul. 2015).

13. Since China does not have overseas territories, it is preferable to speak of overseas Chinese (OCs) to refer to Chinese residing abroad or of Chinese descent. One could speak of “foreign Chinese” but this would not be a literal translation of the Chinese term. On this point, see the work of Pierre Trollet in particular.

14. Daniel Goodkind, “The Chinese Diaspora: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Trends,” United States Census Bureau (Aug. 2019), 4.

15. Ibid.

16. James Kynge, Lucy Hornby and Jamil Anderlini, “Inside China’s Secret ‘Magic Weapon’ for Worldwide Influence,” *Financial Times* (26 Oct. 2017).

17. James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 108.

18. John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia And How Democracies Can Push Back,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Mar. 2018).

19. Laura Grunberg, “Business Moguls and Chinese (Soft) Power: The ‘Huaren’ of Southeast Asia,” *The Diplomat* (4 May 2021).

The goal is to **blur the line between Chinese nationals and overseas Chinese and to create and maintain a sense of belonging to the same nation by homogenizing very heterogeneous communities**, including in their relation with China, since a large part of these “Chinese” claimed by Beijing are dissidents who fled the regime, particularly after Tian’anmen, who come from elsewhere (Hong Kong or Taiwan), or who are the descendants of immigrants. Sometimes they no longer have any ties to the country, the language, or the culture of their ancestors. But it is by mixing as much as possible these diverse trajectories that Beijing tries to establish – or even artificially manufactures – a “Chinese community” in a given country to generate a sense of pro-Chinese identity. Most of the time, this creates a significant gap in perception between the way Beijing sees “the” Chinese community in Thailand, for example, or in Canada, and the Chinese Thai and Chinese Canadians who do not feel that they belong to a defined Chinese community. This can lead to odd situations, such as that anecdote reported by a Chinese-American member of the U.S. Air Force. During a banquet with a Chinese delegation, he was toasted by the head of the delegation, a senior general in the PLA air force, who invited him to “remember that blood is thicker than water. Chinese blood runs through you. You understand us, and know that no matter what flag you wear on your shoulders, you are Chinese first and foremost.”<sup>20</sup> This episode is a reminder that **the most likely targets of Chinese influence operations, whether based on seduction or coercion, are first and foremost those who are considered by Beijing to be ethnically Chinese**. The experts at the RAND Corporation, in a report commissioned by the U.S. Air Force, are therefore right to believe that “one of China’s first targets of disinformation on social media will be ethnic Chinese U.S. military officers and service members” – not only on social networks but also in the physical world, through various means.<sup>21</sup>

This vision based on “blood” is symptomatic of the fact that the Chinese foreign policy, especially its actions against those considered as “overseas Chinese”, is first and foremost **an identity policy**, and an **ethnic nationalism** which is also reflected in the integration of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) into the United Front Work Department in 2018 (→ p. 168), and in initiatives such as the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing in May 2019.<sup>22</sup>

## B. The largest campaign of transnational repression in the world

The first priority for the Party-State is to ensure that these diasporas – which by definition include many dissidents and opponents who have fled China, or simply people who grew up in a liberal environment critical of the Chinese communist regime – do not pose a threat. Its main targets in this regard are ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols (from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) and Falun Gong followers, but also Taiwanese independence fighters, political opponents, and pro-democracy activists, including Hong Kong nationals (who, since 2019, have been the focus of particular attention), human rights defenders, journalists, and former officials wanted for

20. Eric Chan, “Fifth Column Fears: the Chinese Influence Campaign in the United States,” *The Diplomat* (24 Sept. 2019).

21. Scott W. Harold, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media*, RAND Corporation (2021), 5

22. Russell Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Singapore,” *China Brief*, 19:13 (16 July 2019).

“corruption.” Against these categories of “overseas Chinese,” Beijing is deploying a **campaign of transnational repression which, according to the NGO Freedom House, is “the most sophisticated, global and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world.”**<sup>23</sup> Concretely, it includes monitoring these communities and individuals, regardless of their citizenship (since the Party-State has an ethnic approach), to **identify and infiltrate them, maintain constant pressure on them, intimidate, threaten, harass, and coerce them, one way or another, or even to physically assault them** (no less than 214 cases recorded by Freedom House between 2014 and 2020). It also involves putting pressure on the states where they reside **to have them arrested and possibly extradited** (which happened in India, Thailand, Serbia, Malaysia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, UAE, Turkey and Nepal at least).<sup>24</sup>

The case studies in Part 4, particularly Sweden (→ p. 521) and Canada (→ p. 539) provide **specific examples of the tactics employed**, which range from death threats, or rape, to physical assault, and include cyber-attacks, pressures on family or relatives still in China, travel restrictions (confiscated passports, revoked visas), surveillance, searches, harassment campaigns on social networks, and so on.

#### Women victims of particularly virulent hate campaigns

A somewhat visible voice that is critical of the Party is systematically targeted by a more-or-less organized campaign of hatred. Those “ethnically” Chinese, whatever their citizenship, suffer from attacks all the more violent as they are perceived as “traitors.” Among them, women are subjected to particularly violent insults.

**Vicky Xu**, an Australian journalist of Chinese origin, has been the subject of an online harassment campaign since she published an ASPI report on the repression of the Uyghurs in March 2020.<sup>25</sup> Insulted daily on social networks, she has been called “**a race traitor**,” “**a female Han traitor**,” “**a female demon**,” and “**a slut**”<sup>26</sup> “bewitched by the anti-China forces in the West,” according to the *Global Times*, which quoted one of her alleged former classmates at the University of Melbourne (describing her as “a person who pursues personal interests by selling out her own country”).<sup>27</sup> A video uploaded on YouTube – but deleted since – speculated on her obviously-unrestrained **sexual life**<sup>28</sup> (that she presumably “has sex simultaneously with 15 men and doesn’t pay”<sup>29</sup>). She received **death threats** (an Internet user insisted on the need to “kill a traitor”<sup>30</sup>), while some of her colleagues received **rape threats** and others were **detained and interrogated in China**.<sup>31</sup>

**Tzu-I Chuang**, the Taiwanese wife of an American diplomat (a consul general at Chengdu) was also targeted by a campaign of online hatred in July 2020. For instance, one social network user **mentioned her 7- and 9-year-old sons: “I hope your two little dogs get bitten to death and knocked down by a car.”** Trolls have released pictures of her home in Maryland (where the family was repatriated due to the Covid-19 crisis), of her family and herself to ridicule them. Several pro-Beijing Taiwanese and Hong Kong newspapers published articles hypothesizing that she was **a prostitute paid by the Taiwanese government** to harvest

23. Nate Schenkkan and Isabel Linzer, *Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The Global Scale and Scope of Transnational Repression*, Freedom House (Feb. 2021), 15.

24. *Ibid.*, 17.

25. Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, *Uyghurs for sale*, ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report No. 26/2020 (Mar. 2021).

26. Zeyi Yang, “The anatomy of a Chinese online hate campaign,” *Protocol* (9 Apr. 2021).

27. “‘Bewitched’ Vicky Xu who Fabricates Xinjiang Story Stokes anti-China Sentiment in Australia: Observer,” *Global Times* (11 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/tca4F>.

28. [https://twitter.com/xu\\_xiuzhong/status/1379206536287772676](https://twitter.com/xu_xiuzhong/status/1379206536287772676).

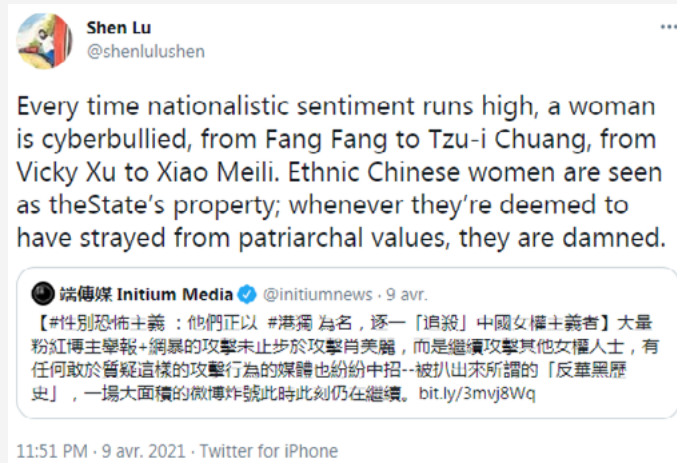
29. [https://twitter.com/xu\\_xiuzhong/status/1376500795785445381](https://twitter.com/xu_xiuzhong/status/1376500795785445381).

30. Lily Kuo and Gerry Smith, “China Researchers Face Abuse, Sanctions as Beijing Looks to Silence Critics,” *The Washington Post* (7 Apr. 2021).

31. Paul Johnson, “Q+A panelist Vicky Xu Says Chinese Government Agents have Detained her friends over her Reporting on Uyghurs and Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang,” ABC News (15 Apr. 2021).



intelligence on American diplomats. Furthermore, Chinese media, such as the *Global Times* and the *Hubei Daily* – but also the CYL – were involved and amplified the campaign as it lasted for months. She eventually stopped leaving her house and thought about committing suicide.<sup>32</sup> The reader can find additional examples in this report, such as the case of **Sheng Xue**, a Canadian activist targeted by a similar campaign which delved into speculations on her sexual life and led to **the publication of doctored images of her on Twitter** (→ p. 551). These sexist and misogynistic attacks against foreign personalities echo the way feminist activists are treated in China.<sup>33</sup> This structural problem is well-summed up by the journalist Shen Lu in the following tweet:



## C. The mobilization of the diasporas to serve the Party’s interests

Diasporas are not only a potential threat to the Party-State: they are also an opportunity, a powerful relay to defend its interests around the world. As such, various actors are in charge of “diasporic affairs” (华侨事务 工作), including the former Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), which now reports to the UFWD, but also the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, and State Security.

Chinese diasporas can bring many benefits to the Party. Located abroad, OCs can serve as promoters of Chinese soft power: **they are in the best position to disseminate the Chinese culture to the communities whose codes they have adopted.** They can play the role of a “vanguard” or at least a “bridge” between China and their countries of residence to improve mutual understanding and even promote the PRC’s diplomatic and economic objectives.<sup>34</sup> The PRC can **also benefit from their knowledge of their countries of residence** to better understand the local political systems and decipher current events.<sup>35</sup> This is all the more feasible as OCs are increasingly able to secure a high social status in their respective countries in various fields such as trade, scientific research, and politics.

However, more than mere facilitators of exchanges between China and other countries, **OCs can be instrumentalized by the PRC for political purposes to influence their**

32. Liza Lin, “A U.S. Diplomat’s Wife Was a Social Media Star – Until Chinese Trolls, Aided by State Media, Came After Her,” *The Wall Street Journal* (29 Mar. 2021).

33. Sui-Lee Wee, “Women Are Battling China’s Angry Trolls. The Trolls Are Winning,” *The New York Times* (24 Apr. 2021).

34. Hua To, *Qiaowu*, 40.

35. *Ibid.*, 41.

**local political life.** This is thus **a form of interference.** In a book based on his PhD thesis on extraterritorial policies toward OCs, James Jiann Hua To cited, for example, the case of the unofficial protection of the PLA granted by Beijing to members of the Chinese diaspora in the United States for their commercial interests, in exchange for channeling funds for Democratic Party election campaigns during the Clinton era.<sup>36</sup> The investigation into illegal and improper activities in connection with the 1996 federal election by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs identified at least six individuals involved in these donations who allegedly had some direct connection with the PRC, including John Huang, Maria Hsia and Yah Lin “Charlie” Trie.<sup>37</sup> The PRC can also organize, notably through United Front organizations, the mobilizations of OCs in support of China’s interests, such as what the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (CPPRC, 中国和平统一促进会) does on behalf of the reunification with Taiwan (→ p. 124), or to protest against topics that anger Beijing, such as the Dalai Lama’s visits abroad, for which the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs, 中国学生学者联合会) have repeatedly mobilized Chinese students (→ p. 280).<sup>38</sup> To hinder a rally in support of Hong Kong, on August 23, 2019, the Chinese Embassy in Lithuania, in coordination with the Chinese intelligence services, organized a counter-demonstration in Vilnius; a majority of the participants were members of the Association of Chinese Expatriates in Lithuania.<sup>39</sup>

#### Chinese embassy involved in counter-protests in Lithuania

On August 23, 2019, as hundreds of Lithuanians formed a human chain in solidarity with the Hong Kong protesters (several tens of thousands of people were doing the same thing at the same time in Hong Kong), pro-Beijing activists burst in and disrupted the chain by shouting “Hong Kong is part of China.” The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry established that **“the staff of the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China were involved in organizing the unlawful actions undertaken by the Chinese citizens during this incident.”** The ambassador himself, Shen Zhifei (申知非), was seen at the protest, where he was observing and “directing” the counter-protesters. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also said to be relying information from the Department of State Security regarding “the role the PRC Embassy performed in the organization, or coordination of the counterprotest.”<sup>40</sup> It would be a first example of Chinese interference in a demonstration in Lithuania.

In countries where OCs also represent a significant portion of the electorate, managing to **influence them to vote for candidates who are favored by the Party is another form of interference.**<sup>41</sup> A study of OC participation in U.S. elections produced by the OCAO

36. Ibid., 41-2.

37. “The China Connection: Summary of the Committee’s Findings Relating to Efforts of the People’s Republic of China to Influence U.S. Policies and Elections,” Investigation of Illegal or Improper Activities in Connection with 1996 Federal Election Campaigns, Final report of the Committee on Governmental Affairs Senate Rept. 105-167 – 105<sup>th</sup> Congress 2d Session (10 March 1998), available on the website of the *Federation of American Scientists*, [https://fas.org/irp/congress/1998\\_rpt/sgo-sir/2-18.htm](https://fas.org/irp/congress/1998_rpt/sgo-sir/2-18.htm).

38. John Doston, “The United Front Work Department in Action Abroad: A Profile of The Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 18:2 (13 Feb. 2018); Josh Horwitz, “A Visit by the Dalai Lama is Dividing a US Campus Where 14% of Students are from China,” *Quartz* (15 Jun. 2017).

39. “National Threat Assessment 2020,” Second Investigation Department Under the Ministry of National Defence and State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius (2020), 67.

40. Alvin Lum, “Chinese Ambassador Summoned in Lithuania over ‘Deplorable Behaviour’ by Officials During Vilnius’ Show of Support for Hong Kong Protesters,” *South China Morning Post* (3 Sept. 2019).

41. Hua To, *Qiaowu*, 42-3.

in 2004 called for the development of a Chinese voting bloc and support for Chinese candidates running for office.<sup>42</sup> In 2015 the *Globe and Mail* reported that, since 2010, Canadian intelligence services have been concerned about the Chinese government's influence on Michael Chan, Ontario's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who immigrated to Canada at age 18, and who had presented himself as wanting to serve as a "bridge" between the two countries, having not forgotten his origins (→ p. 557).<sup>43</sup> In 2017, the election of two Italian deputies of Chinese origins, but perfectly integrated into the local political culture, was celebrated by the Chinese media as a "victory for China's participation in Italian political life."<sup>44</sup>

In order to persuade the diaspora and push it into action, the Party uses **more or less "soft"**<sup>45</sup> **methods of cooptation**. Sometimes it is enough to **appeal to the sense of national or ethnic pride**, of love for the motherland to seduce some of them, including those who have abandoned their Chinese passport and those who never had it. **The "diplomacy of assistance"** consists in assisting the *Huaren* and *Huayi* as much as the *Huaqiao*. The PRC has adopted this approach particularly since the 1998 riots in Indonesia that claimed the lives of over a thousand ethnically Chinese people.<sup>46</sup> This diplomacy aims to maintain a sense of belonging to the same nation across all members of the diaspora. **Scholarships to come and study in China, exchange programs with high schools and universities abroad, but also all "back to your roots" summer camps** (寻根之旅), open to all *Huayi*, show that the PRC is ready to invest in the long term to build this sense of belonging into the future generations.<sup>47</sup>

**Religion is another powerful vector of influence** on the diaspora, many members of which have converted to Christianity.<sup>48</sup> The PRC seeks to infiltrate these religious groups to influence and mobilize OCs who are more likely to be receptive in these circles of sociability.<sup>49</sup> **Financial incentive-such as the promise of a job or a house**-is obviously another lever used to persuade, as are **intimidations and even threats**.<sup>50</sup> For example, MSS agents have reportedly forced OCs to cooperate by threatening not to grant or renew visas, to attack their relatives residing in China, or to consider them subjects of Chinese law even if they hold a passport of another nationality.<sup>51</sup>

Beijing also knows how to **use traditional media** to reach Chinese diasporas. In France, the embassy uses the Mandarin TV channel, which is a real source of transmission for the Party's official discourse toward the Chinese diaspora in France. On March 14, 2020, for example, the Chinese ambassador in Paris, Lu Shaye (→ p. 235) spoke on the channel and accused the French media of malice and of using "propaganda" methods to inflict "real brainwashing" on public opinion. The ambassador criticized the biased treatment by the French media of the coronavirus crisis in China.<sup>52</sup>

42. Ibid., 42.

43. Craig Offman, "CSIS Warned this Cabinet Minister Could be a Threat. Ontario Disagreed," *The Globe and Mail* (16 June 2015); Gerry Groot, 175.

44. Interview with an Italian researcher (Mar. 2020).

45. Hua To, *Qiaowu*, 200-2.

46. Ibid., 232-4.

47. Ibid., 136-40, 172-3.

48. Ibid., 149.

49. Ibid., 150.

50. Ibid., 45.

51. Ibid.

52. The transcript of the interview was published on the website of the embassy on March 15. "Entretien de l'Ambassadeur Lu Shaye sur l'émission "Parole d'Ambassadeur" de Mandarin TV" ("Interview of Ambassador Lu Shaye during the "Parole d'Ambassadeur" TV show on Mandarin TV") <https://archive.vn/D5pYP>.

In France, the *Association pour la paix et la réunification de la Chine* (Association for the Promotion of China's Peaceful Reunification (法国中国和平统一促进会)) plays a leading role. It was established on July 5, 2000 by the Association of Chinese Residents in France.<sup>53</sup> It is now headed by Wang Jiaqing (王加清), its executive director, and by Yang Ming (杨明), its president. As the organizer of the promotional association, Yang Ming lent his business premises for the inaugural festivities: 78 associations were invited.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of the Association is to unite all Chinese throughout the world who support the reunification of China and oppose the independence of Taiwan.<sup>55</sup> To this end, it organizes seminars and visits that showcase the Chinese culture.<sup>56</sup> It also maintains important links with other Franco-Chinese associations. Ultimately, it is supervised by the Chinese Embassy in France, the consular department, and by the Chinese Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification (中国和平统一促进会), which is its parent association.<sup>57</sup>

The mobilization of the Chinese diaspora in France was completed by the creation, on July 14, 2020, of the Association of Chinese Writers in France (AECF), whose stated goal is to “coordinate activities between members and associated institutions and to promote the development of literary activities; to develop exchanges between Chinese and French literary circles.”<sup>58</sup> The association, based in L’Haÿ-les-Roses, is chaired by Liang Yuanfa (梁源法), also known as François Leung (pictured below).<sup>59</sup> Liang is the former editor-in-chief of the daily *News of Europe* (欧洲时报), which belongs to the Guang Hua Media Group based in nearby Gentilly (→ p. 171). The association’s board presumably also include Wu Qin, general manager of *Hipotel*, a group of 17 hotels in Paris, and president of the France-China Shenzhen Association, as well as Huang Guanjie and Tang Tiehua, respectively journalist for *News of Europe* and cameraman for Phoenix TV.<sup>60</sup>



Liang Yuanfa. Source: 今日中欧.

53. <https://archive.vn/y3OUZ>.

54. <https://archive.vn/LECHh>.

55. <https://archive.vn/ckB7k>.

56. <https://archive.vn/C0Bxn>.

57. <https://archive.vn/ckB7k>. The association’s website in Beijing can be reached here: <https://archive.vn/KJHjF>.

58. See the announcement in the *Journal Officiel*: [https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/associations/detail-annonce/associations\\_b/20200030/1593](https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/associations/detail-annonce/associations_b/20200030/1593). It uses the name of another association created in 1991 in Aulnay-sous-Bois.

59. “梁源法先生《岁月的记忆》新书发布会在巴黎举行” (“Book Launch for “Memory of the Ages” by Mr. Liang Yuanfa in Paris”), 今日中欧 (*Europe-Chine Today*) (11 May 2019), <https://archive.vn/H4ett>.

60. “Le service spécial chargé des campagnes d’influence de Pékin à l’étranger est derrière la nouvelle Association des écrivains chinois de France, présidée par le journaliste François Leung” (“The special department in charge of Beijing’s influence campaigns abroad is behind the new Association of Chinese Writers in France, chaired by journalist François Leung”), *Intelligence Online*, 862 (28 Sep. 2020); Marie Nicot, “Wu Qin, l’hôtelier aux quatre bras” (“Wu Qin, the Four-Armed Hotelier”), *Le Journal du Dimanche* (21 Jun. 2017).



## II. The Media

“To shape media content and narratives around the world, affecting every region and multiple languages,” Beijing uses a combination of “widely accepted forms of public diplomacy with more covert, corrupt, and coercive activities that undermine democratic norms, reduce national sovereignty, weaken the financial sustainability of independent media, and violate the laws of some countries,” wrote Freedom House.<sup>61</sup>

Since the mid-2000s, the Chinese authorities have been trying to raise the profile of some of their “news” organizations to the level of the largest international media with a global influence, in order to make the Chinese vision of current affairs heard. **The turning point came in 2008:** as it noted the uncontrolled communication around the Beijing Olympic Games, which “just as much served as a sounding board for the regime’s opponents,” Beijing **drafted a ten-year plan to better control its image in the world and, to this end, invested “10 billion RMB (€1.3 billion per year).”**<sup>62</sup> Over the past decade, the CCP has thus made unprecedented efforts to establish **“a new world media order,”** to use the expression coined by Li Congjun, the former president of Xinhua and now a member of the Party’s Central Committee.<sup>63</sup> RSF noted that, “in his speeches, Li Congjun (李从军) constantly uses such terms as ‘media industry’ and ‘mass communications’ **but has never used the word ‘journalism.’** This is not insignificant. By treating the media as an industry whose mission is to exercise influence on the state’s behalf, his ‘new world media order’ abolishes the watchdog role the media are meant to play.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, **official press releases mention “media workers”** rather than “journalists” – including, which is telling of this paradox, for the members of the All-China Journalists Association (ACJA).<sup>65</sup>

The Xinhua news agency, the CCTV television network, the *China Daily* newspaper, the *Global Times* and China Radio International (CRI) are among the first media organizations to have benefited from government support for their international development. In February 2016, after visiting the three main Chinese media organizations in Beijing (*People’s Daily*, Xinhua, and CCTV), Xi Jinping chaired a symposium of around 180 representatives of state media who were instructed to strictly follow the CCP’s instructions and focus on the “positive coverage” of the country. “All news media run by the party must work to speak for the party’s will and its propositions, and protect the party’s authority and unity,” he declared.<sup>66</sup>

61. Sarah Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone: The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence Since 2017*, Freedom House special report (Jan. 2020), 1.

62. Reporters sans frontières (RSF), *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order* (2019), 29.

63. Li Congjun, “Toward a New World Media Order,” *The Wall Street Journal* (1 Jun. 2011).

64. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 9.

65. *Ibid.*, 23.

66. Edward Wong, “Xi Jinping’s News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party,” *The New York Times* (22 Feb. 2016).





Xi Jinping applauded in the press room of the *People's Daily* in Beijing on February 19, 2016 (photo Xinhua, via AP).<sup>67</sup>

These major outlets have gradually multiplied their foreign-language content, developed branches abroad, established partnerships with foreign media and recruited local journalists to better convey their message to different audiences. As such, **Chinese media greatly benefit from the asymmetry that characterizes the relationship between an autocracy and democracies**, as RSF reminded us: “The values of tolerance and openness that characterize liberal democracies give Beijing considerable freedom of movement, for which nothing is demanded in return. The asymmetry is striking. The state news agency Xinhua plans to have opened 200 bureaux around the world by 2020 but Beijing is extremely sparing in the accreditations it gives to foreign reporters. State-owned China Global Television Network (CGTN) is extending its influence in more than 100 countries but international TV channels and radio stations such as France’s TV5, America’s VOA and the UK’s BBC are banned in China outside luxury hotels.”<sup>68</sup>

**In addition to using these major media outlets to project itself in the world, Beijing is influencing local media in a growing number of countries, starting with those hosting the largest diasporas**, with tactics that have long been well-known. In the American case, for example, it was found as early as in 2001 that “[four] main tactics characterize the Chinese government’s effort to influence Chinese media in America. First is the attempt to directly control newspapers, television stations, and radio stations through complete ownership or owning major shares. Second is the government’s use of economic ties to influence independent media who have business relations with China. This leverage has had major effects on the content of broadcasting and publishing, effectively removing all material deemed “unfavorable” by the Chinese government. Third is the purchasing of broadcast time and advertising space (or more) from existing independent media. Closely related to this is the government’s providing free, ready-to-go programming and content. Fourth is the deployment of government personnel to work in independent media, achieving influence from within their ranks.”<sup>69</sup>

67. Ibid.

68. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 45.

69. Mei Duzhe, “How China’s Government is Attempting to Control Chinese Media in America,” *China Brief*, 1:10 (21 Nov. 2001).

## A. Chinese mainstream media

Efforts over the past decade to strengthen the capacity and overseas presence of official state media have paid off: CGTN, CCTV, *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, China Radio International (CRI), Xinhua and China News Service **have a global presence, in multiple languages, and on multiple continents**. CRI has more than 70 stations in 65 languages and is the majority shareholder of 33 other stations in 14 countries; CGTN has 10,000 employees in 70 offices and broadcasts in 140 countries; *China Daily* claims to have a circulation of 900,000 and a readership of 150 million; Xinhua has 230 offices in the world (a 40%-increase since 2017);<sup>70</sup> the agency communicates in 19 languages<sup>71</sup> and has increased its spending in the United States tenfold between 2009 (\$500,000) and 2019 (\$5 million).<sup>72</sup> Since 2018, several of these major media outlets have been combined into a conglomerate, the China Media Group (CMG), nicknamed “Voice of China” and subordinate to the State Council. CMG will soon open an “imposing office” in Brussels, in addition to the eight others it already has elsewhere in the world, and in December 2020, the group advertised 264 new positions, 82 of which are dedicated to “international propaganda.”<sup>73</sup>

These media’s approach for their international development is always the same: the diffusion of their products abroad is facilitated by the **establishment of local offices** and the **recruitment of local journalists, the content is calibrated to local news, communication formats** (text, image, video, audio) and media (paper, radio, television, Internet) are diversified, with an emphasis on the **presence on social networks** and formats adapted to cell phone screens in order to reach a wider audience, more directly. The website “China Internet Information Center” ([china.com.cn](http://china.com.cn) or [china.org.cn](http://china.org.cn)) is an example of a platform specifically dedicated to an international audience seeking to establish itself as a reference news website on China.

Chinese media have difficulties generating as much appeal as mainstream Western media however. Many viewers, listeners, and readers of foreign-language content are Chinese who wish to improve their English. Despite the efforts made to rebrand and to promote themselves as independent media, **the lack of credibility of the information presented and the propagandistic tone of the Chinese media undoubtedly play a key role in their difficulties to compete with Western media and to establish themselves on the global market.**

### 1. Xinhua

Xinhua is **one of the largest news agencies in the world**. Based in Beijing, it manages more than 30 national branches and some 180 overseas offices in more than 100 countries. It is one of the Party’s largest and oldest news agencies. Created in 1931 under the name “Red China News Agency” (红色中华通讯社), it changed its name to Xinhua in 1937, which is literally “New China.” Its first foreign broadcast of an English program dates back

70. Sébastien Falletti, “La propagande chinoise à l’assaut du monde,” *Le Figaro*, 2 Jun. 2021, 11.

71. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 30.

72. China Daily Distribution Corporation, “Supplemental Statement Pursuant to Section 2 of the Foreign Agents Registration Act,” US Department of Justice (19 Jun. 2009), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3457-Supplemental-Statement-20090619-9.pdf>; China Daily Distribution Corporation, “Supplemental Statement Pursuant to Section 2 of the Foreign Agents Registration Act,” US Department of Justice (15 Nov. 2019), <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3457-Supplemental-Statement-20191115-31.pdf>.

73. Falletti, “La propagande chinoise à l’assaut du monde.”

to 1944 and the establishment of its first overseas branch in 1948. Today, Xinhua covers Asia, North America, Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and offers content in a dozen languages – including English, French, Arabic, Russian, German, Portuguese and Tibetan – on topics ranging from politics, economics and international relations to culture, health and sports. The agency also publishes some two dozen newspapers and magazines, including *Reference News* (参考消息) which is one of the most widely distributed newspapers in the world and is the most distributed newspaper in China. In the same logic of multiplying communication formats to broaden its audience, Xinhua has also developed its own television channel, China Xinhua News Network Corporation (CNC), offering content in Chinese and English, and broadcasting 24/7 in different countries around the world. The agency also sought to develop videos for phones, a format more suited to directly reach social network users. Its website, xinhuanet.com, is one of China’s most important information platforms available in a dozen foreign languages.

**Under the direct supervision of the State Council, Xinhua relays information and the propaganda designed by the Party.** For two years, between 1980 and 1982, the agency was incidentally under the authority of the Propaganda Department. The arrival of Xi Jinping was also perceived by Xinhua’s journalists as marking the entry into a new era in which the Chinese media “should no longer be ashamed of being communist media.”<sup>74</sup>

The agency aims to establish itself as a world leader in the sector and to be able to compete with major media outlets such as CNN, Bloomberg, AP, AFP, and Al Jazeera, in order to bring the voice of China abroad and present its “true” nature to the rest of the world. In 2010, Xinhua signed a 20-year contract to set up its premises in Times Square in New York; all the more symbolic of its internationalization is the gigantic 18 x 12 meter LED screen it rents there with the brand’s logo.<sup>75</sup> Eventually, the goal is to turn Xinhua into a conglomerate comparable to News Corp, Viacom or Time Warner. In March 2021, the “China Xinhua News” account was followed by more than 12 million users on Twitter and more than 89 million on Facebook – probably artificially-inflated figures as we will see (→ p. 182). In order to better adapt its content to foreign audiences, the agency does not hesitate to recruit local staff members who are fluent in the language and cultural codes.<sup>76</sup> **Local “journalists” are generally only tasked with translating dispatches (稿子) previously written by Chinese employees.** In the case of Xinhua’s broadcasts in French, 80% of the dispatches are translations from English and the remaining 20% from Chinese.<sup>77</sup> Xinhua has a specific service for the administration of foreign journalists: The State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs. The dispatches translated, and more rarely written, by French journalists are all proofread by an experienced Chinese journalist who speaks fluent French and is familiar with the Party’s expectations as well as with its “preferred stories.”<sup>78</sup>

The agency’s partnerships with several UN international organizations, including UNESCO, UNEP, UNICEF, UNAIDS, FAO, and UNDP, serve to strengthen its legitimacy and trustworthiness in the eyes of the international audience.<sup>79</sup> The former FAO Director

74. Interview with a French journalist working for Xinhua (2018).

75. Stuart Elliott, “Sign of Arrival, for Xinhua, is 60 feet tall,” *The New York Times* (25 Jul. 2011).

76. Example of an advertisement for the recruitment of a native English speaker publicized on the China Xinhua News Facebook account, archived at: <https://archive.vn/owxyl>.

77. Interview with a French journalist working for Xinhua (2018).

78. Ibid. During this period, the French were paid around RMB 20,000 per month (approximately €2,500). Anglophones seemingly received somewhat higher salaries.

79. “UNESCO and Xinhua Deepen Partnership,” UNESCO (2 Jun. 2014); “UNEP and Xinhua Heads Sign Agreement on Promotion of Environmental Issues,” UNEP (5 Jun. 2015); “UNICEF and Xinhua Join Forces to Promote Children’s Rights,” UNICEF (5 Nov. 2019); “UNAIDS and Xinhua Renew Their Partnership Toward Ending

General, José Graziano da Silva, described the partnership between his organization and Xinhua as “one of the most important media partnerships for FAO.”<sup>80</sup>

Since the late 2000s, Xinhua has also been **focusing on the African continent**. This strategic shift is notably reflected in the multiplication of training offers for media professionals on the continent (→ p. 202).

## 2. CCTV/CGTN

Another Chinese media organization that has also been given the mission to compete with major international media outlets is China Central Television (CCTV). This situation has incidentally created tensions between the media groups CCTV and Xinhua. **CCTV is the main network of public television channels in China**. Beijing TV was established in 1958 and changed its name to CCTV in 1978. Today, CCTV operates about 40 channels and it is owned by the China Media Group, since 2018, which is itself under the authority of the State Council. CCTV’s international development has unfolded gradually. In 1992, CCTV broadcast its first Mandarin-language program abroad to the diaspora. Its first news channel entirely in English, CCTV-9, was launched in 2000. By signing an agreement with News Corp in 2002, CCTV ensured its presence on American cable. From 2004 to 2010, five other channels in French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Portuguese were launched. And with a production center set up in Nairobi in 2012, CCTV intended to increase its audience in Africa, which is becoming a new target for Chinese media (→ p. 202). Two other production centers are also being developed in London and Washington DC, the latter becoming the main center for processing and disseminating information around the world.

**CCTV wants to differentiate itself from Xinhua by changing its tone and offering content that looks less manifestly like state propaganda**. The objective is, once again, to succeed in imposing the “good” image of China abroad and to “correct” the misrepresentation to which it feels subjected to. With that in mind, CCTV-9, the international division of CCTV, was given a new look in 2016 by changing its visual identity and taking the name China Global Television Network (CGTN). **CGTN now operates a number of news channels in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian, available in more than 170 countries and regions around the world.**<sup>81</sup> According to its official website, CGTN has “over 150 million followers across the globe” (for its website, mobile applications and social network accounts).<sup>82</sup>

To increase the attractiveness of its content, CCTV has increasingly used star journalists to present its shows, such as Yang Rui, who has adopted a dynamic style and does not hesitate to push his guests out of their zone of comfort. Yang Rui was the co-host of Focus, CCTV’s first English-language news magazine. Emphasis is also put on Chinese culture and history, with many channels broadcasting documentaries, films, and TV series highlighting the richness of the Chinese civilization. Regional adaptations employ local presenters and journalists. On the other hand, Chinese television channels seem less concerned than the Russians about recruiting Western “stars” to give credibility to their content, as RT America did with Larry King for example.

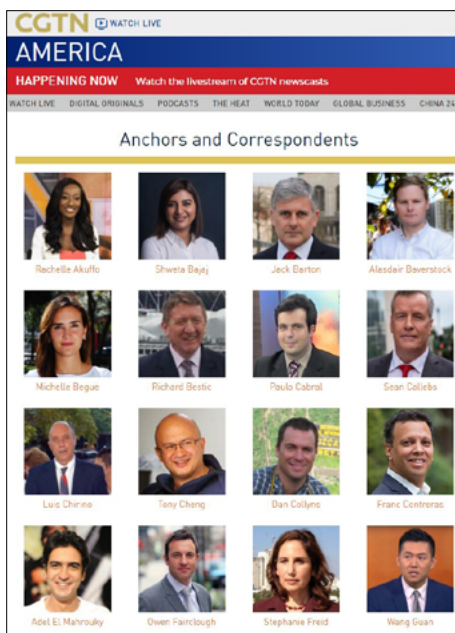
the AIDS Epidemic by 2030,” UNAIDS (18 Mar. 2016); “FAO and Xinhua News Agency Sign Global Communication Partnership,” FAO (14 Oct. 2015); “Xinhua, UNDP Sign MOU to Forge Strategic Partnership,” UNDP (7 Apr. 2011).

80. “FAO and Xinhua News Agency Sign Global Communication Partnership,” FAO (14 Oct. 2015).

81. Merriden Varrall, “Behind the News: Inside China Global Television Network,” Lowy Institute (16 Jan. 2020).

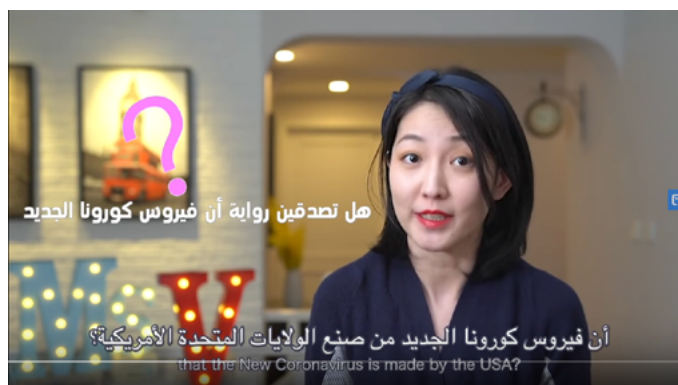
82. “About us – China Global Television Network,” CGTN.





Sources: on the left, <https://america.cgtn.com/anchors-corresp>;  
on the right: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_aZSHxR2qb0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aZSHxR2qb0).

CGTN plays a key role not only in spreading a positive discourse on China, but also in propagating counter-narratives that can discredit criticisms circulating in Western media, as well as in acting as a relay for Party-constructed narratives. On this last point, during the Covid-19 crisis, CGTN in Arabic made significant efforts to make plausible the hypothesis of a virus manufactured by the American army, notably by using the channel's star presenter, MsV, who speaks perfect Arabic.<sup>83</sup> She eventually used arguments broadcast by other Chinese vectors (→ p. 595).



83. Link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLgJ1RdUHUM>. Page also archived here: <https://archive.vn/vm2QE>.



## The “Laurène Beaumont” affair

**Context** is important: first, on March 3, 2021, the French CSA (*Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel*, the French media regulatory authority), authorized CGTN to broadcast in Europe<sup>84</sup> – although the preceding month, its British counterpart (Ofcom) cancelled its broadcasting rights in the UK and, several days later, fined the channel for its “partiality,” “invasion of privacy,” and “unfair treatment” in four different cases.<sup>85</sup> The fact that the media outlet “found a refuge in France,” did not fail to elicit criticism.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, the relationship between China and France grew more tense in March, due to the Chinese embassy’s decision to pressure French senators to cancel their planned trip to Taiwan, the insult thrown at researcher Antoine Bondaz (→ p. 237), and the Chinese sanctions against ten European citizens, including the French MEP Raphaël Glucksmann(→ p. 637).

In this context, **on March 27 and 28, CGTN Français published two somewhat offensive articles from a “Laurène Beaumont”**: “Visit of French MPs at Taiwan: the (true) reasons for the crispatation,”<sup>87</sup> and “‘My’ Xinjiang: Putting a Stop to the Tyranny of Fake News.”<sup>88</sup> The author was described as “an independent journalist based in France, [who had] lived in Beijing for seven years and was an editor, reporter, and news TV host who, with “her diplomas in art history and archeology from the University of Paris Sorbonne-IV and her masters’ in journalism, [had] worked in several Parisian editorial offices before settling in Beijing.” **Her article on Xinjiang was written as a testimony: “I am French and I have lived for 7 years in China.** The fortunes of my life made it that I have some relatives living in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. I had the opportunity to visit the region many times between 2014 and 2019, and I do not recognize the Xinjiang described to me as the one I know.” This article was largely relayed by pro-Beijing networks, starting with the Embassy of China.

**On March 31, the researcher Antoine Bondaz questioned CGTN on Twitter, asking whether “Laurène Beaumont” was a “fake profile” or not.**



84. “La chaîne CGTN relève, pour sa diffusion en Europe, de la compétence de la France” (“To Broadcast in Europe, CGTN is Now the Responsibility of France”), CSA Press Release (3 Mar. 2021). According to Pierre-Antoine Donnet, who quotes a member of the CSA, this authorization was “purely technical and automatic,” as CGTN was transmitting from a European satellite: the CSA could not have prevented it even if it had wanted to. See: Pierre-Antoine Donnet, *Chine, le grand prédateur (China: The Great Predator)* (Paris: éditions de l’Aube, 2021), 217.

85. Ofcom, “Broadcasting and on Demand Sanction Decisions, Decision – Star China Media Limited” (fairness and privacy), “Decision – Star China Media Limited” (due impartiality) (8 Mar. 2021), <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/bulletins/content-sanctions-adjudications>.

86. Jérémy André, “CGTN, la mystérieuse télé chinoise qui trouve refuge en France” (“CGTN, the Mysterious Chinese TV who Found Refuge in France”), *Le Point* (10 Mar. 2021).

87. <https://archive.vn/imo9t>; covered by CRI on March 31: (<https://archive.vn/ODIOX>).

88. <https://archive.vn/MnMwQ>.

**This hypothesis was taken up by Nathalie Guibert in an article published by *Le Monde* several hours later**, in which she confirmed that “no one with that name was found in the database of the Commission of identity cards of French professional journalists.”<sup>89</sup> This hypothetical deception—CGTN’s the fabrication of a fake person—was largely covered by international media in English and led to a flurry of mocking comments and parodic accounts on Twitter.

**The following day, on April 1, the topic was discussed in Beijing during a press conference of the spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.** Answering a question from the AFP, Hua Chunying defended that “this person exist[ed],” and that she was “a French citizen who has lived in China for years,” but that she could not reveal her identity because “now, in some European countries and in the United States, every time someone says something true about China, he or she will be viciously attacked.”<sup>90</sup> Hence, the spokeswoman implied that “Laurène Beaumond” was in fact a pseudonym used to protect another person. It was also the idea defended by CGTN Français that same day, insisting that **“Laurène Beaumond” did exist** (“CGTN Français has concrete evidence of the several trips made by Laurène Beaumond in Xinjiang, many photos and even a copy of her marriage license as she was married in Urumqi in 2014 with someone from the city”) but that the name was a **“nom de plume”**—while castigating Nathalie Guibert for her “total lack of professionalism” as she did not conceive that possibility “for a single instant.”<sup>91</sup> Why a pseudonym? **“To protect herself,”** answered the media: “Laurène Beaumond wishes to use a pseudonym and we respected her decision, because we understand the risk that it represents, for some French journalists, to express their opinion about China”—mentioning Christian Mestre (→ p. 409) and Maxime Vivas (→ p. 335).

One day later, on April 2, this version was confirmed by *Le Figaro*, which published an interview with “Laurène Beaumond, the alias of a very real person.”<sup>92</sup> The editorial decision of *Le Figaro* to publish this exclusive interview is interesting, not only because it is the great rival of *Le Monde* but also because *Le Figaro* has been a partner of *China Daily* between 2015 and 2021 (→ p. 188).<sup>93</sup> But that did not prevent the article from being both serious and critical of Beijing. It provided more details about “Laurène Beaumond,” the pseudonym of a forty-year-old woman from the Sarthe, former CGTN TV host who had lived in China between 2011 and 2017, where she married a man from Urumqi. **With this information, and what was initially provided by CGTN, we easily found her real identity**, her name and birth name, as well as a wedding picture. That said, we will not disclose her identity because we respect her decision to remain anonymous. Several days later, **CGTN rubbed it in as it published an article penned by Zheng Ruolin** (→ p. 628) who, using *Le Figaro*, accused *Le Monde* and Antoine Bondaz of “lies” and **asked for an “apology” from them.**<sup>94</sup> The demand was later renewed in English by the *Global Times*.<sup>95</sup>

Now, and **even if “Laurène Beaumond” is the pseudonym used by a real person, several elements remain troubling.** First, this “alias” **had already been used between October 15 and November 25, 2020, in five articles published by Radio China International (CRI** → p. 181).<sup>96</sup> CGTN and RCI are both owned by China Media Group and regularly share articles. Moreover, when she wrote for RCI five months earlier, “Laurène Beaumond”

89. Nathalie Guibert, “Quand la télévision chinoise CGTN invente une journaliste française” (“When Chinese TV CGTN Invents a French Journalist”), *Le Monde* (31 Mar. 2021).

90. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on April 1, 2021,” PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://archive.vn/PiV57>.

91. “Chine et “fake news”: ce manichéisme qui perdra les intellectuels français” (“China and ‘Fake News’: the Manicheism that will Doom French Intellectuals”), CGTN (1 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/soFiK>.

92. Sébastien Falletti, “Les confidences de la plume mystère au service de la Chine” (“The Confidences of the Mysterious Alias that Services China”), *Le Figaro* (2 Apr. 2021).

93. Tuo Yannan, “China Daily Starts First French Edition with Le Figaro,” *China Daily* (29 May 2015).

94. Zheng Ruolin, “Chers *Le Monde* et M. Bondaz, il serait peut-être temps de présenter vos excuses?” (“Dear *Le Monde* and Mr. Bondaz, maybe It’s Time to Hear Your Apology?”), CGTN (4 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/rEkiL>.

95. Chen Qingqing, “Le Monde Owes an Apology for Accusing Chinese State Media of Creating a Fake French Journalist to Speak the Truth about Xinjiang: Scholar,” *Global Times* (7 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/7YCAT>.

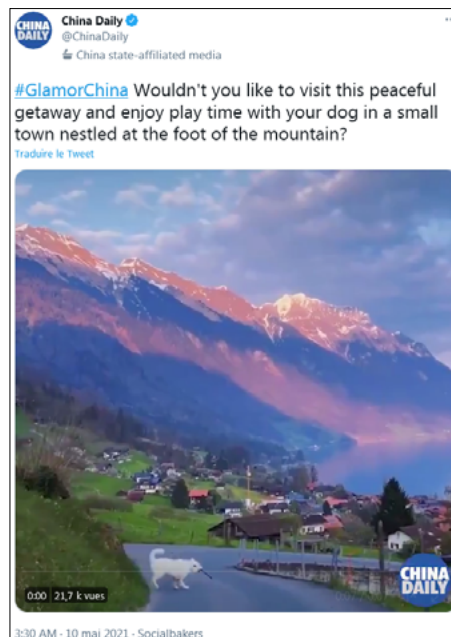
96. “Égalité des sexes en Chine: la montée en puissance des femmes” (“Sex Equality in China: The Rising Power of Women”), *CRI* (15 Oct. 2020), <https://archive.vn/hEeGe>; “La Chine rejoint COVAX: la décision que le monde attendait” (“China Joins COVAX: The Decision the World was Waiting For”), *CRI* (19 Oct. 2020), <https://archive.vn/xASUZ>; “Lutte contre la COVID-19: autant de pays que de méthodes” (“Fight Against COVID-19: As Many Methods as Countries”), *CRI* (4 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/WVufZ>; “CIIE 2020: opération séduction pour les firmes étrangères” (“CIIE 2020: Seduction Operation for Foreign Firms”), *CRI* (16 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/MuR83>; “Jour des célibataires, Black Friday: à vos marques, prêts... Achetez !” (“Day for Single People, Black Friday: On Your Marks, Set... Buy”), *CRI* (25 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/nBtF2>.

was not introduced as a “journalist” but as a “commentator,” and **none of her publications suggested that she would need to “protect” herself from a French popular vendetta.** If “Laurène Beaumont” really is the woman from Sarthe who, for years, showed her face on television as a TV host for CCTV, why would she suddenly need to hide herself to write anodyne articles on sex equality in China or Black Friday? Furthermore, **CGTN’s mention of the cases of Mestre and Vivas is anachronistic:** events from 2021 cannot be invoked to justify the use of a pseudonym dating back from October 2020. Finally, the “journalist’s” title is misleading for someone who admitted she had not “conduct a journalistic investigation” in Xinjiang during her “touristic” trips that took place “before the massive internment policy [...] was implemented full-speed.”<sup>97</sup> In a way, as *Le Figaro* explained, “Laurène Beaumont’s” testimony only illustrated **the CCP strategy which, to defend itself on Xinjiang, “uses ‘testimonies’ from Westerners ostensibly presented as professional ‘journalists’ or experienced ‘researchers’”<sup>98</sup> – even when they are not.**

### 3. *China Daily*

*The China Daily* (中国日报) is **the first Chinese newspaper in English.** Created in 1981 and operating **under the authority of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee,** it redesigned its layout in 2010 to boost its international development and now manages about 40 offices and printing centers abroad. An American version was launched in 2009, a European version in 2010, an Asian version in 2010, and an African version in 2012. The *China Daily* also distributes a free supplement, “China Watch,” in many major foreign newspapers in English (→ p. 187).

Like its Chinese state media counterparts, *China Daily* has a rather distant relationship with the truth, as illustrated by this Twitter message which used a video shot in Brienz (Switzerland) to promote Chinese landscapes:<sup>99</sup>



Source: <https://twitter.com/ChinaDaily/status/1391566387185782785> (deleted since).

97. Falletti, “Les confidences de la plume mystère.”

98. Ibid.

99. The original video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AOmuBUIE7w&t=104s>.

## 4. Global Times

The *Global Times*, created after the *China Daily*, is another Chinese English-language newspaper that is gaining influence even though it does not belong to the group of media outlets designated by the government to compete with the world's largest media companies. Established in 1993, and owned by the *People's Daily*, its first English-language version dates back to 2009. The intent is still to offer another way to get news about China, to present the country from its best angle and to defend the interests of those in power. The newspaper's editorials often adopt an aggressive and threatening tone on certain sensitive subjects such as Taiwan,<sup>100</sup> and its editor-in-chief, Hu Xijin, is present on Twitter, which is ironic knowing that the network is banned by Chinese authorities.<sup>101</sup>



## 5. China Radio International

China Radio International (CRI) is one of the oldest and **the most important Chinese radio broadcaster dedicated to an international audience**. Created in 1941 first under the name Radio Peking, it took its current name in 1978 and now belongs, like CCTV, to the China Media Group which is under the authority of the State Council. Its stated objective is to “promote good relations between China and the world” and to increase the Chinese soft power. With some thirty offices abroad, the CRI now produces content in more than sixty languages.

## 6. Their presence on social networks

Chinese state media are present on all social networks, including those blocked in China (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram), and they invest a lot of money in trying to amplify their online audience, with notable success. They started to create Facebook pages in English for their international versions in 2013.<sup>102</sup> Today, they are by far the ones with the most subscribers: CGTN has more than 116 million, *China Daily* 103.2, Xinhua 86.7, *People's Daily* 86, etc., much more than CNN (34 million), which remains

100. “Tsai authorities Deserve a Stern Warning from Beijing: Global Times Editorial,” *Global Times* (31 Aug. 2020), <https://archive.vn/ZVPJS>.

101. This is the Twitter account: @HuXijin\_huanqiu.

102. Vanessa Molter and Renee DiResta, “Pandemics & Propaganda: How Chinese State Media Creates and Propagates CCP Coronavirus Narratives,” *The Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (1 Jun. 2020), 1.



a much better-known English-language medium however. The same observation can be made in French, where the Facebook page of CGTN Français (20.4 million fans) is in the top 5 of the most followed pages, with music stars, soccer stars and a cooking website – far ahead of all the other French media, which are also *a priori* much better known: CGTN has twice as many subscribers as France 24 (10 million) and five times more than *Le Monde* (4.6), RFI (4.3), TF1 (4.2), *L'Équipe* (4), etc.<sup>103</sup>

Studies conducted in both languages<sup>104</sup> concluded that **these spectacular numbers have little credibility**, pointing to several indicators, including **an exceptional growth rate** (37.8% on average for the eight main Chinese state media outlets in English, 5,000 times higher than the average growth rate of mainstream U.S. media websites) but **an extremely low interaction rate compared to their size** (0.006%, 68 times lower than U.S. media websites).<sup>105</sup> In other words, there is **a suspicious gap** between the huge number of subscribers and the much smaller number of views on content or comments on posted messages. A study on French-language Chinese state media<sup>106</sup> reveals other clues. For example, some Facebook posts generated far more engagement than others (more than 150 times the page's average, while in general the difference does not exceed x20) which could not be explained by differences in their content. For example, a CGTN post on the Guangzhou Fair presented as “a new impetus to world trade” – news that is not of particular interest to a French-speaking audience – received 165 times more engagement than the average post on the same page. There are also suspicious discrepancies, on the one hand, between the number of subscribers to these pages on Facebook compared to other platforms (20 million subscribers to CGTN Français on Facebook but only 100,000 to CGTN Français on YouTube) and, on the other hand, between the number of subscribers to these pages on social networks and the traffic on their websites (between 60,000 and 80,000 visits per month only for *francais.cgtn.com*).<sup>107</sup> Moreover, many subscribers to these accounts on Twitter and Facebook (who post only in French) are clearly not French speakers themselves.

Taken together, these clues suggest that, as a December 2019 study noted, **China's state media “may have artificially inflated their numbers of subscribers and ‘likes.’”**<sup>108</sup> This is not new: the practice has been observed since at least 2015,<sup>109</sup> and, in 2018, *The New York Times* had already revealed that Xinhua had paid the Devumi company to gain “hundreds of thousands of followers and retweets on Twitter.”<sup>110</sup> Concretely, this means that a substantial part of the subscribers could actually be bots and fake accounts. It is estimated for example that “the top 20 Xinhua re-posters are either broadcast or spam bots.”<sup>111</sup>

103. Audience numbers (8 Apr. 2021); See <https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/france>.

104. Molter and DiResta, “Pandemics & Propaganda”; Damien Leloup and Harold Thibault, “Comment la Chine impose sa propagande sur les réseaux sociaux en France” (“How China Imposes Its Propaganda on Social Networks in France”), *Le Monde* (28 Jul. 2020).

105. Molter and DiResta, “Pandemics & Propaganda,” 19.

106. *French-Language Chinese State Media: Strategies and Social Media Accounts Analysis*, EU Disinfo Lab, October 2020.

107. Average between May and October 2020, according to *similarweb.com*.

108. Mareike Ohlberg, “Propaganda Beyond the Great Firewall,” *MERICUS* (5 Dec. 2019).

109. Tom Grundy, “Did China's StateRun News Agency Purchase Twitter Followers?” *Hong Kong Free Press*, (14 Apr. 2015); Alexa Olesen, “Where Did Chinese State Media Get All those Facebook Followers?” *Foreign Policy* (7 Jul. 2015).

110. Nicholas Confessore, Gabriel J. X. Dance, Richard Harris and Mark Hansen, “The Follower Factory,” *The New York Times* (27 Jan. 2018).

111. *Beyond Hybrid War: How China Exploits Social Media to Sway American Opinion*, Recorded Future, Insikt Group (6 Mar. 2019), 19. On the different categories of bots, see Richard J. Oentaryo, Arinto Murdopo, Philips K. Prasetyo and Ee-Peng Lim, “On Profiling Bots in Social Media,” *Social Informatics: 8th International Conference Proceedings* (2016), 92- 109.



This was confirmed by the SparkToro tool, which estimates the proportion of fake accounts among Twitter account subscribers. While Twitter accounts are followed by between 5 and 30% of fake accounts on average (“bots, spam accounts, inactive users, propaganda or other non-engaged/non-real users”),<sup>112</sup> the *People’s Daily* (@PDChina) reportedly had 34%, *China Daily* (@ChinaDaily) 36.9%, CGTN (@CGTNOfficial) 37.3%, Xinhua (@XHNews) 38.4%, *Quotidien du peuple* (French\_renmin) 55%, Xinhua in French (@XHChineNouvelle) 55.4%, China Radio International (@CriFrancais) 57.2% and @CGTNFrancais 62.8%.<sup>113</sup> The difference between the English and French accounts is notable, the latter being followed by many more false accounts.

### A network of young French-speaking Chinese women



Profile photos of the Facebook pages listed below.

French-language Chinese state media also rebroadcast videos produced by a large number of young French-speaking Chinese women, presented as “journalists,” “presenters,” “video creators,” or “bloggers,” who promote China. Their Facebook pages were created in 2019 or 2020 (they generally have accounts on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram as well);<sup>114</sup> Tiantian Studio;<sup>115</sup> CocoStudioenChine;<sup>116</sup> Emilia\_ChinaTube;<sup>117</sup> Monpekinexpress;<sup>118</sup> JYPenseChine;<sup>119</sup> Jie Lynn;<sup>120</sup> LechinoisavecXuLi;<sup>121</sup> Chloe Zhou;<sup>122</sup> Lena Studio;<sup>123</sup> Jessica Chen.<sup>124</sup>

These pages that appear to be devoted to apolitical subjects (the beauty of Chinese nature, the richness of Chinese culture, its way of life, cooking, etc.) sometimes also slip messages with political overtones – following the method identified by Graphika as “Spamouflage”, i.e. a form of camouflage.

Finally, in terms of content, an automated text analysis of posts published on the Facebook pages of Chinese state media showed that “a significant share of coverage [focused] on positive stories, adjusting narratives retroactively, and using ads to spread messaging” as well as [showing] “a willingness...to spread misinformation that is overtly conspiratorial.”<sup>125</sup> It also revealed that the Chinese state media not only praised the Chinese government and showed its achievements in a positive light on these pages, but also “revised, eliminated,

112. <https://sparktoro.com/tools/fake-followers-audit>.

113. Results (as 23 Nov. 2020) on <https://sparktoro.com/tools/fake-followers-audit>.

114. Identified in French-Language Chinese State Media: EU Disinfo Lab.

115. <https://www.facebook.com/TiantianStudio/>.

116. <https://www.facebook.com/CocoStudioenChine/>.

117. [https://www.facebook.com/Emilia\\_ChinaTube-109737260611743](https://www.facebook.com/Emilia_ChinaTube-109737260611743).

118. <https://www.facebook.com/Monpekinexpress/>.

119. <https://www.facebook.com/JYPenseChine/>.

120. <https://www.facebook.com/Jie-Lynn-107834970840514/>.

121. <https://www.facebook.com/LechinoisavecXuLi/>.

122. <https://www.facebook.com/Chloezhou93> (Originally created under the name @Chloezhouan).

123. <https://www.facebook.com/Hanyingya>.

124. <https://www.facebook.com/Jessica-Chen-103639557755163>.

125. Molter and DiResta, “Pandemics & Propaganda,” 2.

and fabricated aspects of narratives to bolster the image of the CCP”.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, a study published in June assessed that, since January 2020, more than 33% of the content posted on the Facebook pages of Chinese state media was linked to Covid-19.<sup>127</sup>

## B. Control of Chinese-language media abroad

Aware that a significant proportion of overseas Chinese speak Chinese at home and consume Chinese-language media, the CCP has set out to win over this population, relying in particular on newcomers. In the United States, Australia, and Canada (→ p. 539), the same situation occurred: in the 1980s, the Chinese-speaking media in these countries was pluralistic and critical because migrants came mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and those from mainland China, especially after Tian’anmen, were often dissidents. Since then, waves of immigration from mainland China have changed not only the profile of local communities, but also the influence of the Chinese-language media, which are more or less controlled by the CCP, in each of these countries, especially in places where the Chinese diaspora is significant.

**The conquest of Chinese media abroad was conducted through various means – including buyouts and cooptation and/or pressure by local Chinese associations –** examples of which will be given in the case studies (→ p. 440 and 563). In this way, Beijing has achieved **a virtual monopoly on the world’s Chinese-language media market**. In the United States, “the market for independent Chinese-language information [is] monopolized by the Qiaobao (China Press) and the SinoVision channel, two media outlets that have been under the control of the Chinese authorities since their launch and whose content comes directly from the Chinese state media”; in Australia, “Beijing is said to have infiltrated around 95% of the Chinese-language newspapers,”<sup>128</sup> as the editor-in-chief of a pro-Chinese government publication acknowledged.<sup>129</sup> The same happened in Canada (→ p. 563) and elsewhere in the world. Even countries that do not have a large diaspora have received special attention: Chinese media in Germany, mostly based in Frankfurt, were also “harmonized,” i.e. they have become very homogeneous and predominately pro-Beijing.

The Australian case was the subject of an ASPI<sup>130</sup> report which showed that **the main problem is not direct financing** (only one company, out of the 24 analyzed, is officially owned by the CCP – Global CAMG Media, 60% of which is owned by China Radio International (CRI), itself a subordinate of the Propaganda Department; two other companies – Pacific Media Group and Nan Hai Culture and Media – have indirect financial ties to the CCP, because they are owned by Australians who also own joint ventures with Chinese companies subordinate to the UFWD).<sup>131</sup> The main problem – **the most effective lever available to the CCP to control the editorial content of Chinese media abroad – is the social network WeChat**, which will be presented below (→ p. 196). WeChat, which is estimated to have between 700,000 and more than 3 million daily users in Australia, has become “the most important medium for [disseminating] Chinese news in the coun-

126. Ibid., 10.

127. Ibid., 1.

128. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 39.

129. Kelsey Munro and Philip Wen, “Chinese Language Newspapers in Australia: Beijing Controls Messaging, Propaganda in Press,” *Sidney Morning Herald* (8 Jul. 2016).

130. Alex Joske, Lin Li, Alexandra Pascoe and Nathan Attrill, *The influence environment: A survey of Chinese-language media in Australia*, ASPI’s International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report 42 (Dec. 2020).

131. Ibid., 18.

try.”<sup>132</sup> In fact, there are two versions of WeChat, which the company itself describes as “sister apps” (they are interoperable): Weixin (微信), for users based in mainland China, and subject to Chinese law, where censorship is stricter; and WeChat, the international version which, as we will see later, is also the subject of censorship (but to a lesser extent). However, **WeChat only allows “official” accounts, such as those used by the media, to publish four times a month, each time with a maximum of eight articles, whereas these limitations do not exist on Weixin – as long as the accounts are registered in the name of an individual or organization domiciled in China. These rules therefore encourage Australian Chinese media to register in China, via Weixin, where they fall under direct CCP censorship. As they are unaware of the exact form of these rules and what can be said, they tend to censor themselves in order to avoid being suspended** (a phenomenon found elsewhere, such as among Hollywood productions hoping to access the Chinese market → p. 350). In 2020, an editor of one of Australia’s most followed WeChat accounts explained that in order to not unintentionally cross a “red line,” she followed the editorial line set by the *People’s Daily* and Xinhua.<sup>133</sup>

More generally and independently of WeChat, the ASPI report showed that the Australian Chinese-language media largely censor themselves, avoiding any criticism of the Chinese government and the CCP but also avoiding the “five poisons” (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners, pro-democracy activists and Taiwanese independence activists). Other levers that allow Beijing to exert influence on Australian Chinese-language media include business ties (especially if the groups that own these media have financial interests in China, potentially in other sectors), infiltration by the United Front (the executives of 12 of the 24 media groups analyzed were members of United Front organizations) and advertising, which is the main source of income for most of these media organizations (critical publications are boycotted, therefore financially drained, while complacent publications are rewarded). These methods are not specific to Australia, as ASPI demonstrated efficiently: they can be found everywhere in the world where Beijing has an interest in influencing the media in Chinese. The fourth section of the report will give other examples in the Taiwanese (→ p. 423) and Canadian (→ p. 539) cases.

In Europe, there may be about one **hundred Chinese media channels**, mainly in Germany, France, in the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain. In Paris, the *European Times* (欧洲时报 → p. 333), founded in 1983 with the help of the Chinese Embassy in France, and printed in four languages (Chinese, French, English, and German), serves as an “umbrella” for many other European Chinese-language media and it organizes numerous events.<sup>134</sup> Chinese-language media in Europe have their own association founded in 1997, the European Chinese Media Association (欧洲华文传媒协会), and they frequently meet at events in Europe or China (the Global Chinese Language Media Forum (世界华文传媒论坛) or the Overseas Chinese New Media Forum (海外华文新媒体高峰论坛) for instance). According to a study by the *People’s Daily* Overseas Edition Online Data Research Center (人民日报海外网数据研究中心) which evaluated the influence of 400 Chinese media abroad, two European media are in the top 20: www.dolc.de (德国热线), based in Germany, and xineurope.com (新欧洲), based in France.<sup>135</sup>

132. Ibid., 13.

133. Ibid., 16.

134. Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Mapping China in Germany,” *Sinopsis* (2 Oct. 2019), 11.

135. Ibid., 12.



## C. Influence on mainstream media

Beijing uses several means to reach a wider audience, beyond the diasporas, and thus influence the non-Chinese-language media in a large number of countries.

### 1. Infiltration

#### a. Through its diplomats

Chinese diplomats are regularly **present in the local press** through op-eds, articles and interviews. Liu Xiaoming (刘晓明), the previous Chinese ambassador in London, who had set a record for his time spent at this position (2010-2021), was known to have established close relations with the media, even though he was one of the most vehement Chinese diplomats. In France, the ambassador Lu Shaye (卢沙野) published several op-eds and interviews in the newspaper *L'Opinion* – an apparently privileged relationship that is beginning to raise some questions.<sup>136</sup>



Source: *Evening Standard*, May 16, 2019; *The Sunday Telegraph*, April 28, 2019; and *The Daily Telegraph*, March 20, 2019 / *L'Opinion*, December 1, 2019, September 23, 2019, April 27, 2020, 17 juin 2021 and 31 juillet 2021.

136. Frédéric Lemaître and Nathalie Guibert, “L’ambassadeur de Chine en France et ‘la guerre de l’opinion publique’” (“The Chinese ambassador to France and ‘the war of public opinion’”), *Le Monde* (17 Jun. 2021). “BFM, *L’Opinion* et *Le Figaro* jouent les discrets relais des médias d’Etat chinois” (“BFM, *L’Opinion* and *Le Figaro* play the discreet relays of the Chinese state media”), *La Lettre A* (13 Sep. 2021).

b. Through the “China Watch” of the *China Daily*

The *China Daily* publishes a free supplement, “China Watch,” with a circulation of more than 13 million copies in some 30 daily newspapers worldwide, with a particular focus on targeting business executives and decision-makers, mainly in Japan (6.6M in the *Mainichi Shimbun*) and in the United States (1.7M in *The New York Times* (up until the end of 2019), 1.6M in the *Los Angeles Times*, 1.3M in the *Wall Street Journal*, 910,000 in *The Washington Post* (up until the end of 2019), and much less in the *Des Moines Register*) but also in Europe (*Le Figaro*, *El País*, *De Standaard*, *Le Soir*, *Handelsblatt*), Russia (*Rossiskaya Gazeta*), Australia (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *AFR*), New Zealand (*The Dominion Post*) and Argentina (*El Cronista*).<sup>137</sup> To convince these newspapers to accept the supplement, the *China Daily* offers a financial remuneration. As such, **between November 2016 and April 2020, the *China Daily* paid nearly \$19 million to American newspapers that published its advertising or supplements,**<sup>138</sup> including nearly \$6 million to the *Wall Street Journal*, \$4.6 million to *The Washington Post*, and \$50,000 to *The New York Times*.<sup>139</sup>

This “Trojan Horse” – or “Worm in the Apple” – tactic,<sup>140</sup> has a long-term effect, disseminating influence daily or weekly, but it can also be used in the short term, on the occasion of a specific event, such as during **an election**. For example, during the campaign for the 2018 midterm elections in the United States, the *China Daily* used its supplement in the *Des Moines Register* (Iowa’s largest daily) to try to weaken Donald Trump in one of his strongholds. One of the articles highlighted the president’s responsibility for the trade war and its negative consequences for American farmers.



On the left, “China Watch” supplement in the *Des Moines Register*, 23 September 2018 (source: <https://twitter.com/JenniferJacobs/status/1043919358752423937/photo/1>); on the right: the magazine *Foreign Policy* has also harbored a “China Watch” supplement since 2019, and received \$100,000 for the sole May-October 2020 period.<sup>141</sup>

The Chinese strategy actually aims to produce a triple effect. Two direct effects: on the one hand, **inserting Chinese propaganda into the very heart of the world’s most influential daily newspapers** and in a relatively discreet way, so that the reader may not necessarily be aware that they are no longer reading their newspaper – *a fortiori* when it appears as an online feature on the host newspaper’s website, “further blurring the lines between Chinese state media content and the host outlet’s own reporting.”<sup>142</sup> On the other

137. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 36.

138. Eric Chang, “China Daily Paid US Papers \$19 Million in Advertising, Printing,” *Taiwan News* (10 Jun. 2020).

139. Mo Yu, “US Spending Report Sheds Light on China’s Global Propaganda Campaign,” *VOA* (26 Jun. 2020).

140. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 36-37.

141. John Dotson, “Xinhua Infiltrates Western Electronic Media, Part One: Online “Advertorial” Content”, *China Brief*, 21:7, 12 Apr. 2021.

142. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 8.



INTRODUCTION

hand, for the *China Daily*, it boosts **its image and credibility** by being associated with the major headlines of the Western press. This was also the case for the Russian equivalent, “Russia Beyond the Headlines,” a supplement launched in 2007 by *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* which had the same targets but has only existed in its online version since 2017.<sup>143</sup> Finally, there is also an indirect effect: **having financial leverage on the dailies in question**, since this financial windfall makes them more likely to want to please Beijing in order to keep the contract, more vulnerable to pressure, and more likely to engage in self-censorship.

CONCEPTS

### The *Daily Telegraph*’s “China Watch”

Until recently, *The Daily Telegraph* received **£750,000 (€835,000) per year to distribute the “China Watch” supplement** of the *China Daily*.<sup>144</sup> This eight-page supplement was included in the newspaper since 2011 and also had a dedicated section on the UK newspaper’s website after 2015.<sup>145</sup> This kind of collaboration created **a financial dependence that affected the entire editorial line**, not just in the inserted pages: it was in fact found that between 2016 and 2018, *The Telegraph* published no less than 20 articles of the Chinese ambassador, twice as many as those published by the *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times* combined.<sup>146</sup> The degrading relations between China and the UK in 2019-2020, and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, illustrated a tension between critical articles about China on the one hand and articles of Chinese propaganda published in the *China Daily*’s dedicated section on the other (such as “Why are Some Framing China’s Heroic Efforts to Stop Coronavirus as Inhumane? “or “Traditional Chinese Medicine “Helps Fight Coronavirus””).<sup>147</sup> Finally, in April 2020, *The Telegraph* decided to discontinue its collaboration with *China Daily*.

ACTORS

*The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* also terminated their partnerships with *China Daily* in late 2019 and early 2020.<sup>148</sup> In Australia, the Nine Entertainment group (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and the *Australian Financial Review*) renounced the *China Daily* supplement at the end of 2020.<sup>149</sup> The same year in France, *Le Figaro* also stopped inserting “China Watch” in its pages.<sup>150</sup> The renunciations are multiplying. Similarly to the Confucius Institutes (→ p. 306), this is probably the first sign of a durable pushback against what is now perceived as propaganda, or even as an unacceptable foreign interference.

ACTIONS

#### c. Through accessible and reusable content

Besides the particular case of “China Watch,” which is a regular supplement, Chinese media also penetrate foreign media by providing them, more or less regularly, with content, in such a way that **“hundreds of millions of news consumers around the world routinely view, read, or listen to information created or influenced by the CCP, often**

CASE

143. *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Le Figaro*, *La Repubblica*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

144. Jack Hazlewood, “China Spends Big on Propaganda in Britain... but Returns are low,” *Hong Kong Free Press* (3 Apr. 2016).

145. Cao Yin, “China Watch to Reach More Online Readers,” *China Daily* (29 Apr. 2015).

146. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper (Feb. 2019), 20.

147. Jim Waterson and Dean Sterling Jones, “Daily Telegraph Stops Publishing Section Paid for by China,” *The Guardian* (14 Apr. 2020).

148. Yuichiro Kakutani, “NYT Quietly Scrubs Chinese Propaganda,” *Free Beacon* (4 Aug. 2020).

149. Amanda Meade, “Nine Entertainment newspapers quit carrying China Watch supplement,” *The Guardian* (8 Dec. 2020).

150. “BFM, *L’Opinion* et *Le Figaro* jouent les discrets relais.” A journalist from the group confirmed to us that it was in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, that the management of *Le Figaro* terminated the contract binding them to *China Daily*.

without knowing its origins.”<sup>151</sup> We need to distinguish two situations here, starting with the **free supply of free content**. Unlike major Western agencies (AP, AFP, Reuters, etc.), Chinese agencies (Xinhua, China News Service and CCTV) offer free content. **In 2018, CCTV provided “free video footage and television scripts to 1,700 smaller foreign news organizations and media groups.”**<sup>152</sup> **This practice is particularly prevalent in Africa**, where local media can least afford to turn them away because they often lack resources, well-trained journalists, and quality content. In addition, Chinese agencies offer international news, while most African media cannot afford correspondents abroad. The fact that local media use Chinese content to cover international news means that “the image conveyed by the Sahelian media is identical to that which China itself presents.”<sup>153</sup> This practice is not unique to Africa: it occurs everywhere in the world, including in Europe – in Sweden for example, small media with few means have been offered the use of Chinese content, images and databases free of charge.<sup>154</sup>

**Then, they also use infomercials: Chinese media pay foreign outlets to include articles that are nothing but more-or-less explicit advertisement in their printed pages and/or on their websites that the readers may sometimes find difficult to separate from legitimate articles.** This is especially true for the print media, but also for television. In Germany, for example, the private television group Deutsches Regionalfernsehen (DRF), which had only broadcast animal programs previously, now broadcasts “China Info,” a daily prime time show which promotes China, sometimes even on political topics (for example, to claim that there is no proof of the Chinese origin of the coronavirus). The insertion may seem incongruous, but DRF’s editor-in-chief assumes it, explaining that it is a **“source of income” like any other**. Another German example: between 2017 and 2019, the public broadcasting service Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) broadcast a political and economic debate program on the digital television channel tagesschau24 in partnership with CGTN: “40,000 German viewers attended without any critical questions being asked about human rights violations.”<sup>155</sup>

This is a common practice but, in some cases, it can be an intense media campaign. For instance, on March 17, 2021, the *People’s Daily* published an entire page untitled “Injecting Positive Energy for World Development,” in which it congratulated itself for **the diffusion of 750 different articles** – described as “informational products” (新闻产品) – **in nearly 200 foreign media, from more than 40 countries, in 12 languages, and during an entire week** (March 5-11).<sup>156</sup> It coincided with the annual congress of the two Chinese assemblies (PNA and CPPCC). It also coincided with the launch of the “14<sup>th</sup> five-year plan” and Beijing hoped to circulate the representation of an efficient China, which had extirpated its immense population from poverty and made scientific achievements. To do that, the *People’s Daily* introduced paid promotional inserts in widely circulated newspapers

151. Sarah Cook, *China’s Global Media Footprint: Democratic Responses to Expanding Authoritarian Influence*, National Endowment for Democracy (Feb. 2021), 2.

152. Emily Feng, “China and the World: How Beijing Spreads the Message,” *Financial Times* (12 Jul. 2018).

153. “Soft Power au service de l’influence: l’exemple de la Chine en Afrique. Entretien avec Mme Selma Mihoubi” (“Soft Power at the Service of Influence: the Example of China in Africa. Interview with Mrs Selma Mihoubi”) in *Soft Power. Les Cahiers du comité Asie n. 16*, Les Jeunes IHEDN (Autumn 2019), 117.

154. Interview with one author in Stockholm (Feb. 2020).

155. Christina Brause, Anette Dowideit, Tina Kaiser, and Maximilian Kalkhof, “Chinas heimliche Propagandisten” (“China’s secret propagandists”), *Die Welt* (15 Jun. 2021).

156. “为世界发展注入正能量” (“Injecting Positive Energy for World Development”), 人民日报 (*Renmin Ribao*) (17 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/O1GIM>).

– so many that **the campaign probably cost dozens of millions of dollars in less than a week.**<sup>157</sup>

In France, for example, the newspaper *L'Opinion* published two “advertorials” on March 11 (with the mention “content produced by the *People's Daily*”) that bragged about China’s ability to “reduce poverty while preserving the environment” on the one hand,<sup>158</sup> and the resilience of the Chinese economy on the other (see below).<sup>159</sup> Normally, without knowing how much the *People's Daily* eventually paid, a full page in *L'Opinion* costs between €18,000 and €30,000.<sup>160</sup>



On the left: the page of the *People's Daily* congratulating itself for the publication of articles in foreign media (March 17, 2021).  
On the right: the two articles published in *L'Opinion* (March 11, 2021).

Interestingly, **the host media are not always comfortable with this collaboration when it becomes public**, as illustrated by the following example. On March 17, 2021, *Jeune Afrique* published an article by He Qian, the Parisian director of the French online version of the *People's Daily*, promoting Maxime Vivas’s book on the Uyghurs – which, as we will see, “dismantles the information of Western media that accuse China of violating human rights in this region in full expansion” (→ p. 335). The mention “sponsored content” was added at the bottom of the text. As such, it was probably an article published by *People's Daily* thanks to an agreement with *Jeune Afrique*. Its publication was actually relayed by the Chinese embassy in France. This agreement was quickly denounced on Twitter, including by Antoine Bondaz who presented it as “a concrete example of the use, by the [Chinese] authorities, of paid partnerships with foreign media to disinform,” and he tagged @jeuneafrique on this post.<sup>161</sup> The criticism was efficient: the following day, the article was withdrawn and the link did not work anymore – which seems to indicate that, in hindsight, *Jeune Afrique* rapidly came to the conclusion that the article bore a **reputational risk**.

157. David Bandurski, “Dropping propaganda,” *China Media Project* (17 Mar. 2021).

158. Gu Zhongyang and Yu Jingxian, “Réduire la pauvreté par la préservation écologique permet à la population de s’enrichir” (“Reducing Poverty Through Ecological Preservation Allows People to Become Richer”), content produced by *People's Daily* in *L'Opinion* (11 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/w8cgg>).

159. Luo Shanshan, “Les investissements étrangers affichent une croissance résiliente en Chine malgré la conjoncture défavorable en 2020” (“Foreign Investment Shows Resilient Growth in China despite Adverse Economic Conditions in 2020”), content produced by *People's Daily* in *L'Opinion* (11 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/yaRgX>).

160. According to the prices set by the newspaper (2021): [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S9zfofNSPLvvzYBAggc\\_YStZYkVtehmQ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S9zfofNSPLvvzYBAggc_YStZYkVtehmQ/view).

161. <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1372067398698815488>.



The article, published online on March 17, was withdrawn on March 18,<sup>162</sup> but the webpage was archived and remains accessible.<sup>163</sup>

## 2. Acquisition

**Foreign media purchases are multiplying**, not only in Asia (see: Taiwan), but also in Europe,<sup>164</sup> such as in Hungary, Italy and Portugal: the two oldest Portuguese newspapers, *Diário de Notícias*, founded in 1864, and *Jornal de Notícias*, founded in 1888, are owned by a Chinese joint venture (as are other media in the country, including TSF radio and the sports newspaper *O jogo*).<sup>165</sup> **There are generally consequences on the editorial line.** When two Czech media groups, Empresa Media and Médea, came under the control of the Chinese consortium CEFC in 2015, the media of these groups “including Tyden (a weekly) and Barrandov TV, distinguished themselves by their inordinately enthusiastic coverage of China.”<sup>166</sup>

This risk is higher in the most open media circles, where there are still places to be taken. This is one of the factors that explain why Japan remains relatively less vulnerable to Chinese influence than other countries in the region (see box below).

### The Japanese counter-example

Despite their geographical proximity, China’s influence in Japan is limited compared to other democracies for a number of reasons: first, **due to an insularity that is both historical and economic** (the “Galapagos Syndrome”) that makes the Japanese difficult to influence from the outside; *a fortiori* by the Chinese toward whom most feel **distrust at best, or even antipathy** (85% of Japanese presumably have a negative opinion of China –among the 34 countries surveyed by Pew, Japan is the country with the highest negative opinions of China). This is in part grounded in a common history of nearly 2,000 years which, in the recent period, has seen several bloody wars and, more recently, the 2010-2012 conflict over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and China’s subsequent decision to stop exporting rare earth materials to Japan. This has often been described as a “turning point” in their relationship.<sup>167</sup>

162. <https://twitter.com/ambordas1/status/1372578017948663810>.

163. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210317021515/https://www.jeuneafrique.com/brandcontent/1137388/fake-news-temoignage-maxime-vivas-sur-le-xinjiang/>.

164. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 10.

165. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *The China Story: Reshaping the World’s Media*, research report on China and its impact on media (2020), 6.

166. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 37.

167. Devin Stewart, *China’s Influence in Japan: Everywhere Yet Nowhere in Particular*, CSIS (Jul. 2020), 21.



Other factors are the **important homogeneity of the Japanese population**,<sup>168</sup> its **great political stability** as, aside from two short digressions (1993-1994 and 2009-2012), the same party, the PLD (自由民主党), has been in power since 1955, and the other parties are not easier to influence (even the Japanese Communist Party, with little political weight, is relatively nationalist and therefore not very sensitive to Chinese influence);<sup>169</sup> and **very strict rules**, especially on financial contributions to political parties and foreign investment (to protect domestic companies). To all this, one must add, in recent years, **a greater awareness of the Chinese threat**, through other examples (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia), and **strengthened intelligence capabilities** – which make any Chinese attempt to influence even more difficult than before.

As for the media, the 810,000 Chinese living in Japan are a privileged target for Beijing, notably via the local Chinese-language media, most of which only pick up on the dispatches written by Xinhua or the *People's Daily*.<sup>170</sup> The Japanese Chinese-language newspaper with the highest circulation, *Chubun News (Chinese Review Weekly)* “toe[s] the CCP line.”<sup>171</sup> But its influence is as limited as its readership. **Overall, the Japanese media market is oligopolistic:** five conglomerates (TBS-Mainichi, TV Asahi-Asahi, NTV-Yomiuri, Fuji TV-Sankei, and TV Tokyo-Nikkei) divide the media landscape among themselves, leaving almost no room for anything else, including outside influence. **Beijing is unable to penetrate the Japanese-language media market**, which is generally very resistant to any outside influence, except perhaps that of the United States (with the Japanese version of the *Wall Street Journal*). Nor has there been any significant acquisition of Japanese media by Chinese groups. There is the case of the inclusion of the “China Watch” in the *Mainichi Shimbun* but, on the one hand, the newspaper accepts “news on travel issues but no political or economic issues” and, on the other hand, the Japanese readership see these pages for what they are: advertising.<sup>172</sup> For all of these reasons, Japan offers relatively few holds for the usual Chinese tactics, which does not prevent Beijing from identifying other vulnerabilities, including separatists and pacifist movements (→ p. 401).

### Two radio stations broadcasting in the United States are controlled by Beijing



In April 2020, *The Washington Free Beacon* revealed that two local radio stations were actually controlled by Beijing: one is a Mexican radio station owned by the Chinese Phoenix TV Group, which broadcasts Chinese-language propaganda from a tower in Mexico that allows it to reach across the border into southern California, circumventing U.S. regulations.<sup>173</sup> The other is the Las Vegas Public Radio

(LVPR), which, contrary to its name, is not a public radio station (it is not affiliated to the National Public Radio network), but a radio station registered as a lobbyist for Huawei.<sup>174</sup> The station assumes this role, as the tweet below shows. In its broadcasts, it indeed tries to counter the idea, which is very present in the United States, that Huawei is a threat to national security. Since its inception in 2016, it has employed two Chinese citizens as “international liaisons,”

168. In December 2019, 2.93 million foreigners lived in Japan, a record compared to previous years but still only 2.3% of the population. Most are from China (810,000), South Korea (440,000) and Vietnam (410,000) <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13256541>.

169. Stewart, *China's Influence in Japan: Everywhere Yet Nowhere in Particular*, 25.

170. Ibid., 9.

171. Ibid., 10.

172. Ibid., 11.

173. Adam Kredo, “Cruz Seeks to Shut Down Chinese Propaganda Station Phoenix TV,” *Free Beacon* (24 Apr. 2020).

174. Yuichiro Kakutani, “The Strange Story of a Las Vegas Radio Station Co-Opted by China,” *Free Beacon* (27 Apr. 2020).



one of whom became its program director. It not only defends Huawei but, more generally, disseminates official Chinese narratives on issues such as the Hong Kong crisis. Its founding president, Gregory LaPorta, met with foreign ministry officials in Beijing in October 2019 and won support from the Chinese government for his plan to open an office in China.

### 3. Cooptation

Beijing cultivates foreign media producing favorable content, seducing them in exchange for compensations (**advertisements, all-expenses-paid trips/trainings in China, contracts with other companies of the same group, “and even political appointments”**).<sup>175</sup> These “bought” private media subsequently alter their editorial line and relay pro-Beijing positions. Another method producing the same result is to cultivate local figures of influence (various personalities, politicians, researchers, etc.) that, in turn, intervene in local media to defend pro-Beijing positions. In all cases, Beijing benefits from “strings” that can be concealed, since these positions, defended on private outlets by private individuals, are not directly attributable to Beijing.

### 4. Training and networking

#### a. “Training” journalists

The General Administration of Press and Publication (known until 2018 as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, 新闻出版总署) has in recent years hosted **trainings for more than 3,400 media professionals from 146 countries. In some countries, a majority of journalists has been trained in China:** this is the case in Grenada where 70% of media professionals have visited China since 2013, with consequences for the editorial line of local media. **“This “re-education’ of Grenadian journalism has had a major impact on the local media,** which have become much more reverential toward China. The situation is similar in the neighboring islands of Dominica and Barbados, where the media have also benefited from Chinese largesse.”<sup>176</sup>

They offer **several programs:** special 26-day BRI training courses (“Dongfang” fellowships); “red carpet” fellowships, which bring nearly 100 journalists from the Indian sub-continent, Southeast Asia, and Africa every year for a ten-month stay. They are “received like film stars, they are given luxurious accommodation in central Beijing, two trips a month to different Chinese provinces, Chinese-language courses and a monthly stipend of up to 5,000 RMB (650 euros). At the end, the journalists even receive a diploma in international relations from a Chinese university.”<sup>177</sup> RSF noted that **“the journalists are not chosen by their editors, but by the Chinese embassy with the Party’s approval.** And something is demanded in return. **The conditions are clear: they must promise to ‘tell the China story well’ and even portray its authoritarian regime as a democracy and international peacemaker.** The guests are not, however, allowed to move around freely during their stay.”<sup>178</sup>

175. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 9.

176. *Ibid.*, 33.

177. *Ibid.*, 33.

178. *Ibid.*, 33.

The practice is widespread: half of the journalists' unions surveyed in 58 countries and territories around the world in September and October 2019 responded that journalists from their countries or territories had participated in such trainings in China, lasting from two weeks to ten months.<sup>179</sup> **Beijing seems to target primarily journalists with “ineffective or repressive governments”<sup>180</sup> but not only:** all countries are ultimately targeted, including those with effective governments, such as Singapore (CGTN invites many Singaporean journalists to China for training that they call “familiarization trips” and that some Singaporeans ironically call “indoctrination trips”)<sup>181</sup> or Australia (dozens of Australian journalists in recent years). A particular effort has recently been given to **Muslim journalists**, who have been specifically selected, even in non-Muslim countries, to visit Xinjiang and **influence their coverage of the Uyghur issue.**<sup>182</sup>

Beijing also seeks to formalize its relationships: 36% of the journalists' unions surveyed (55% of them in Europe) had been offered an MoU by a Chinese entity, “a classic United Front strategy [...] to co-opt entities traditionally perceived as hostile or neutral.”<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, more than a third of respondents said that content-sharing agreements with Chinese media – which either offer it for free or pay the local media to circulate stories – were in place in their country.<sup>184</sup>

#### *b. Networks*

Beijing creates networks, through regular events such as the **World Media Forum**, established in 2009, and “which – as its name fails to suggest- is entirely designed, organized and funded by the Chinese state news agency Xinhua.”<sup>185</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> edition in October 2019 brought together more than 400 Chinese-language media representatives from 61 countries. The All-China Journalists Association (ACJA) also organizes a **Belt and Road Journalists Forum** bringing together around 100 media representatives from about 50 countries and, since April 2019, a formal network, the **Belt and Road News Network (BRNN)**, chaired by the *People's Daily* in Beijing, bringing together 72 media outlets from 42 countries.<sup>186</sup>

## 5. Constraints

In line with its usual methods to encourage self-censorship, **Beijing uses carrots (advertising resources, contracts, benefits in kind, etc.) but also sticks**, taking a number of direct actions such as using visas as weapons against critical foreign journalists, **leveraging family members and close friends in China, intimidating** local journalists and/or media via Chinese diplomats (threatening phone calls and emails, naming and shaming, etc.) The Swedish case (→ p. 521) is not isolated. There are many examples around the world of harsh reporting on China that was suppressed at the last moment, or of critical journalists who were fired. In South Africa, just hours after publishing an

179. IFJ, *The China Story*, 3.

180. *Ibid.*, 3.

181. Interview with one of the authors in Singapore (Nov. 2019).

182. IFJ, *The China Story*, 2.

183. *Ibid.*, 4.

184. *Ibid.*, 5.

185. RSE, *China's Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 12.

186. *Ibid.*, 31.

editorial on Uyghur persecutions, the journalist Azad Essa was fired from *Independent Online* because Chinese investors had a 20% stake in the publication.<sup>187</sup> Of course, this does not always work. In December 2018, an attempt by “Chinese diplomats” to cancel the broadcast of the documentary *The World According to Xi Jinping* scheduled on Arte (a European public channel) “by intervening with the channel in Paris and with the Quai d’Orsay”<sup>188</sup> ultimately failed.

**The CCP also exerts indirect, more subtle pressure via intermediaries**, “advertisers, satellite firms, technology companies, foreign governments and international organizations – to prevent or punish the publication of unfavorable content.” **The pressure is also legal, through the threat of prosecution**, which pertains to lawfare (→ p. 53).

Finally, **it can go as far as the use of force**. Chinese **cyberattacks** (mainly DDOs and phishing attacks) are not only aimed at individuals and communities within the Chinese diaspora, who are considered by Beijing as threats (the “five poisons”) – even if they do remain priority targets – but also at major foreign media: the servers of *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*, for example, have been attacked.<sup>189</sup> In Hong Kong, for several years, **journalists have been physically attacked** by people suspected of being linked to Beijing, and cases intensified during the 2019 crisis.<sup>190</sup>

## D. Control over the containers

The “CCP’s approach over the past decade has been at least as such about controlling the medium as about controlling the message,”<sup>191</sup> as one enables the other. In other words, Beijing is developing “a sophisticated strategy to **influence every stage of the global information supply chain**, from the people who produce content to the institutions that publish it and the platforms that deliver it directly to consumers.”<sup>192</sup>

### 1. Television

A satellite TV service provider, for example, has the power to prioritize a particular channel in its offerings. Hence, when **the Chinese group StarTimes**, which was instrumental in the transition from analog to digital on the African continent, provides services to its millions of subscribers. It prioritizes **CCTV channels in its package deals, to the detriment of independent international news channels**. “In Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, for example, packages that include international options like the BBC World Service cost more than basic packages with local channels and Chinese state media, sometimes beyond the reach of what many African families can afford”;<sup>193</sup> “3 to 5 euros a month for a StarTimes multichannel subscription, as against at least 12 euros for Canal Plus, for example.”<sup>194</sup>

187. Ibid., 4.

188. *La Chine démasquée*, Les dossiers du Canard enchaîné, 157 (Oct. 2020), 30.

189. Ibid., 17.

190. Ibid., 15.

191. Ibid., 16.

192. Rush Doshi, “China Steps Up its Information War in Taiwan,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Jan. 2020).

193. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 17.

194. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 28.

## 2. Digital Platforms

In this area, Beijing is clearly on a **path of conquest**. In May 2020, the Academy of Social Sciences wrote that Beijing should use its platforms – WeChat, Weibo and TikTok – to **counter the influence of American platforms** – Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.<sup>195</sup>

### a. WeChat

Launched in 2011, first as a mobile messaging application, WeChat (微信) was developed by Tencent and it has quickly become a real ecosystem offering a wide range of services: calls, transmission of images, videos, and voice messages, information dissemination, mobile payment, gaming, etc. It is the most popular social network in China and is now indispensable to access certain services.<sup>196</sup> But it is also **the third most popular social network in the world**, with more than 1.2 billion monthly users in the third quarter of 2020.<sup>197</sup> In January 2019, as many as 45 billion messages were sent on the platform every day<sup>198</sup> – likely many more today. WeChat is **increasingly used by non-Chinese speakers**, especially, but not only, by politicians, to reach out to their Chinese electorate, such as in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada.

First, **WeChat poses a problem of surveillance and censorship**. The messages exchanged on the app (which are not encrypted) pass through **a server managed by Tencent which filters, detects, blocks, and reports to the Chinese authorities the content they consider unacceptable**. In several successive studies since 2016, Citizen Lab (University of Toronto) has shown how censored messages are those that contain one or more keywords, or combinations of keywords, that are automatically detected.<sup>199</sup> One hacker also showed that, out of 3.8 billion messages intercepted on March 18, 2019, 59 millions of which were in English and 19 millions of which were sent from outside China, keywords such as “Xi Jinping,” “CCP,” “Rights,” “1989,” “Tibet,” “Authorities,” “Crackdown,” “Party,” “Tian’anmen” automatically triggered the selection of the conversation for review.<sup>200</sup> In this way, **WeChat censors in real time**.<sup>201</sup> The app can also **automatically detect and censor images** (by comparing them with a database of banned images considered “politically sensitive,” and using an “MD5 hash” – a kind of digital fingerprint).<sup>202</sup>

195. 林跃勤 (Lin Yueqin), “着力提升因应外部对华舆论攻击能力” (“Improve Our Capacities to Respond to Exterior Attacks on China”), 中国社会科学网 (*Chinese Social Sciences Net*) (24 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/IT5gJ>.

196. Tamara Khandaker, “The WeChat Factor,” *Vice New* (1 Feb. 2019).

197. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>.

198. <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/wechat-statistics/>.

199. Lotus Ruan et al., *One App, Two Systems: How WeChat Uses One Censorship Policy in China and Another Internationally*, Reports of Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto, #84 (30 Nov. 2016); Lotus Ruan, Jeffrey Knockel, and Masahi Crete-Nishihata, *We (Can't) Chat: '709 Crackdown' Discussions Blocked on Weibo and WeChat*, Research report #91 (13 Apr. 2017); Lotus Ruan, Jeffrey Knockel, and Masahi Crete-Nishihata, *Censored Contagion: How Information on the Coronavirus is Managed on Chinese Social Media* (3 Mar. 2020); Masahi Crete-Nishihata et al., *Censored Contagion II: A Timeline of Information Control on Chinese Social Media During COVID-19* (25 Aug. 2020).

200. <https://twitter.com/0xDUDE/status/1120374736276553728>.

201. Patrick Howell O'Neill, “How WeChat Censors Private Conversations, Automatically in Real Time,” *MIT Technology Review* (15 Jul. 2019).

202. Jeffrey Knockel, Christopher Parsons, Lotus Ruan, Ruohan Xiong, Jedidiah Crandall, and Ron Deibert, *We Chat, They Watch. How International Users Unwittingly Build up WeChat's Chinese Censorship Apparatus*, Citizen Lab, Toronto (7 May 2020).

**The Covid-19 led to another round of censorship on WeChat:** many users in North America, Europe, and Asia have noticed that, since February 2020, their contacts in China can no longer see messages that others post in shared groups.<sup>203</sup> An initial study showed that between January 1 and 31, 2020, 132 keyword combinations related to the outbreak, in both simplified and traditional Chinese, triggered censorship, and then another 384 between February 1 and 15, for a total of 516 in that month-and-a-half period. Among the sub-topics censored were the CCP's response to the crisis, in particular any criticism of the measures taken; the policies implemented in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau; and a few specific individuals, such as Dr. Li Wenliang (19 combinations with his name), one of the first doctors to have warned of the outbreak of the virus and who died in Wuhan on 7 February.<sup>204</sup> A second study showed that between January 1 and May 31, a total of 2,174 key words were censored (162 in January, 645 in February, 501 in March, 628 in April, 238 in May).<sup>205</sup>

**“In Canada, WeChat censors deleted a Member of Parliament’s message to constituents praising Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement protesters, manipulated dissemination of news reports related to Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou’s arrest, and blocked broader media coverage of Chinese government corruption and leading Chinese officials. In the United States, Chinese Americans have reported censorship of WeChat posts in group conversations about local political issues, or had their accounts shut down after commenting about democratic parties’ victory in Hong Kong’s district council elections in November 2019.”**<sup>206</sup> **Messages posted by diplomatic missions are also widely censored:** when the accounts of the American and British talk about Hong Kong, the South China Sea, the pandemic, and ethnic minorities, the Uyghurs for instance, or when the account of the Indian embassy talks about the clashes between the Chinese and Indian armies in Ladakh.<sup>207</sup>

Citizen Lab has shown that **surveillance on WeChat affects all users, including those abroad**, whereas it was initially thought to apply only to accounts registered in China.<sup>208</sup> Not only are “documents and images shared among non-China-registered accounts...subject to content surveillance [but they are also] used to build up the database WeChat uses to censor China-registered accounts.”<sup>209</sup> In other words, **those who use WeChat in France, the United States, Australia, Canada, are indirectly contributing to enhancing the surveillance of the population in China.**

**Second, WeChat also poses a problem of propaganda and disinformation.** One of its peculiarities, especially when compared to applications such as WhatsApp, is that users can create private chat groups but also receive information from official accounts.<sup>210</sup> This makes WeChat a hybrid application, both private messaging and social media, that competes with other information sources. Beijing thus uses WeChat as **a vehicle to reach Chinese communities abroad** directly, through official accounts, or indirectly, by instrumentalizing

203. David Guilbert, “Here’s How China is Silencing Coronavirus Critics in the U.S.,” *Vice* (12 Feb. 2020).

204. Ruan, Knockel, Crete-Nishihata, *Censored Contagion*.

205. Crete-Nishihata et al., *Censored Contagion II*.

206. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 18.

207. Fergus Ryan, Audrey Fritz and Daria Impiombato, *TikTok and WeChat: Curating and Controlling Global Information Flows*, ASPI, International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report 37 (Sept. 2020), 30-33.

208. Jeffrey Knockel et al., *We Chat, They Watch: How International Users Unwittingly Build up WeChat’s Chinese Censorship Apparatus*, Research Report 127, The Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto (7 May 2020).

209. *Ibid.*, 6

210. There are about 10 million of them.



local agents of influence. This report describes numerous cases where **WeChat was used to monitor, intimidate, and mobilize Chinese students on campus** (→ p. 274), **raise money to fund legal action against a journalist critical of Beijing** (→ p. 576), and **spread fake news and conspiracy theories**, for example about the origin of Covid-19 (→ p. 599). **WeChat has also been used for election interference**, to encourage voting for certain candidates of Chinese origin, as in Canada (→ p. 562), or voting against an incumbent government, as in Australia (→ p. 269). During the May 2019 election in Australia, where WeChat is the primary source of information for 26% of citizens of Chinese descent, a “fear campaign” against the Labor Party was organized on WeChat “in a way that could influence critical marginal seats, away from the scrutiny of the main campaign.”<sup>211</sup> The Chinese app also caused a stir in Canada in 2019 when Karen Wang, the Liberal Party candidate in the Burnaby South district in British Columbia used it to try to win the votes of the Chinese community in her district, reminding members of the Chinese diaspora that she was the “only candidate of Chinese descent” against the NDP’s Jagmeet Singh, of “Indian descent.” Karen Wang was heavily criticized in the media and on social networks and was forced to withdraw.<sup>212</sup>

In France, the United Front’s agents of influence, acting through the Association for China’s Peaceful Reunification,<sup>213</sup> also use WeChat to mobilize the population of Chinese descent during elections<sup>214</sup> or to support demonstrations, such as the movement that arose “spontaneously” against “injustice and police violence” after the death of Liu Shaoyao, who was shot by the police in March 2017. Chinese authorities have asked France to shed light on this case, but they have also mobilized, via WeChat in particular, the French population of Chinese origin and Chinese residents in France<sup>215</sup> to put pressure on the French government.

A study conducted by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism<sup>216</sup> at Columbia University, on the use of WeChat in the United States also showed that **the level and nature of disinformation operations on the network were similar to what could be observed on Facebook**: hyper-partisan comments, caricatures, stories leading to the reinforcement of dissent. Certain topics are the subject of recurrent debates, such as the question of the integration of minorities (especially Asian minorities), discrimination, the right and conditions of the vote, and unemployment. Rumors are also frequent and tend to accentuate the divisions in the American society.<sup>217</sup> But most rumors and fake news seem to come from private groups and individuals who have no state support and do not, for that matter, always seem to have a political agenda.

211. Steve Cannane and Echo Hui, “Federal Election 2019: Anti-Labor Scare Campaign Targets Chinese-Australians,” *ABC* (3 May 2019).

212. Fanny Bédard, “La candidate libérale qui devait affronter Jagmeet Singh se désiste” (“The Liberal Candidate Who Was Running Against Jagmeet Singh Abandoned”), Radio Canada (16 Jan. 2019).

213. A “pseudopod” of the United Front Labor Department (中共中央统一战线工作部) whose mission is to increase the influence of the Chinese Communist Party among people of Chinese origin.

214. “Les Chinois de France se sont organisés pour se rendre aux urnes” (“Chinese from France Organized Themselves to Go Vote”), *Chine-info.com* (24 Apr. 2017), <https://archive.vn/QnCHT>.

215. This mobilization, encouraged by the Chinese Embassy, was confirmed by several Chinese students from Parisian universities.

216. Zhang Chi, “WeChatting American Politics: Misinformation, Polarization, & Immigrant Chinese Media,” Tow Center for Digital Journalism, A Tow/Knight Report, Columbia University (2018).

217. For example, the U.S. association No Melon, specialized in the detection of false news and counter-narratives on WeChat, debunked a false story about a national day of riots on November 3, 2017. This rumor emerged on 4Chan before spreading on WeChat. See Daniel Funke, “On WeChat, Rogue Fact-Checkers are Tackling the App’s Fake News Problem,” *Poynter* (3 Jul. 2018).

## b. Weibo

Second largest social network in China after WeChat: Weibo (微博), which means “microblog” in Chinese, and is a microblogging website similar to Twitter. It was created by the Chinese company Sina Corporation – hence its full name “Sina Weibo” (新浪微博) – in 2009, a year marked by the twentieth anniversary of Tian’anmen but also by the Urumqi Riots in Xinjiang, following which the Chinese authorities decided to block Twitter, Facebook, and the Chinese equivalent of Twitter at the time, Fanfou (饭否).<sup>218</sup> With some 511 million active monthly users in the third quarter of 2020, Weibo has reportedly had **more users than Twitter** in recent years.<sup>219</sup>

Generally presented as the Chinese Twitter, the Weibo platform is actually more like Facebook. It is possible to create groups, share stories, texts beyond the initial 140-character limit (lifted in 2016),<sup>220</sup> live-stream, and make purchases. The strategic partnership signed with Alibaba – which acquired 18% of Weibo in 2013, then 30% in 2015 – has indeed made the development of e-commerce features possible on the platform.

As with WeChat, access to the platform is increasingly regulated and requires the verification of the user’s identity. The content that circulates on the platform is subjected to **ever-increasing surveillance**. In 2012, the Greatfire.org website already estimated that about **2,500 words** were blocked on it.<sup>221</sup> In 2017, the platform recruited **1,000 “monitors”** (监督员) among its users to monitor and report pornographic, harmful, and illegal content. These monitors had to report at least 200 pieces of content for a fixed monthly fee of RMB200, or less than €30, and there were in-kind rewards (cell phones and computers) for the ten best performing monitors of the month, i.e., those who reported the most content.<sup>222</sup> The Cyberspace Administration had previously sanctioned the platform for disseminating illegal information and for other problems, although it is not clear for what specific content the platform was punished.<sup>223</sup>

Also, censorship efforts do not spare foreign governments whose embassies or officials choose to open an account on the platform. In 2011, the **Canadian embassy’s** post about Chinese fugitive Lai Changxing (赖昌星) was immediately deleted for instance.<sup>224</sup> Censorship can take various forms, ranging from the outright deletion of the publication, either immediately or with a delay, to the temporary deactivation of the commenting and sharing features of the publications.<sup>225</sup> In order to circumvent censorship, the **U.S. embassy’s** account came up with the idea of sharing a politically charged article which discussed, among other things, Wang Lijun (王立军), a police officer, and Chen Guangcheng (陈光诚), a Chinese activist, and their efforts to gain political asylum in the United States but

218. Gady Epstein, “Sina Weibo,” *Forbes* (3 Mar. 2011).

219. According to Statista data: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/795303/china-mau-of-sina-weibo/>. “Twitter User Numbers Overtaken by China’s Sina Weibo,” *BBC News* (17 May 2017).

220. “Sina Weibo Ends 140-character Limit Ahead of Twitter,” *BBC News* (20 Jan. 2016).

221. “新浪微博的新屏蔽措施及敏感词变化” (“New blocking Measures and Evolution of Sensitive Words on Sina Weibo”), *Greatfire.org* (2 Oct. 2012).

222. Charlotte Gao, “China’s Weibo Hires 1000 “Supervisors” to Censor Content,” *The Diplomat* (29 Sept. 2017); 微博管理员 (Weibo Administrator) post on *Weibo* (27 Sept. 2017), <https://archive.vn/P5wHf>; 微博监督员 (Weibo Supervisor), “微博监督员工作条例” (“Weibo Monitors Labor Regulations”), *Weibo* (28 Sept. 2017), <https://archive.vn/4ZvVj>.

223. “China Punishes Microblog Platform Weibo for Interfering with Communication,” Reuters (10 Jun. 2020).

224. Mark Mackinnon, “Canadian Embassy’s Posting on Lai Changxing Taken Off Chinese website,” *The Globe and Mail* (5 Aug. 2011), cited by Fergus Ryan, “Weibo Diplomacy and Censorship in China,” *Policy Brief*, 3, ASPI (2018).

225. Fergus Ryan, “Weibo Diplomacy and Censorship in China,” 12.

by publishing a post ostensibly about Michael Jackson.<sup>226</sup> To announce the publication of the 2013 report on human rights and democracy and beat the censorship, the **UK embassy's** account used techniques borrowed from the “Martian” language (火星文).<sup>227</sup> Rather than writing “人权” (*renquan*) for “human rights,” the embassy split the second character into two, “人(木又)” (*ren (muyou)*), which no longer means anything to the algorithm that locates the monitored keywords, but is still understandable to the human eye. Similarly, instead of writing “民主” (*minzhu*) for “democracy,” the first letters of their transliteration into pinyin, “MZ,” allow a reference to this word.

### c. TikTok

TikTok, a video-sharing social network, is the international version of Douyin (抖音), launched in China in 2016 and developed by ByteDance. TikTok was launched in September 2017 and has since **grown dramatically** around the world, notably in the United States where it counted 100 million active monthly users in August 2020, an 800% increase since January 2018. Globally, TikTok had approximately one billion users in January 2021.<sup>228</sup> **Like WeChat and Weibo, TikTok is a monitored and censored platform.** An ASPI report found “that TikTok engages in censorship on a range of political and social topics, while also demoting and suppressing content.”<sup>229</sup> The report noted that “ByteDance executives, including CEO Zhang Yiming (张一鸣), have stated on the record that they’ll ensure that their products serve to promote the CCP’s propaganda agenda. [They] made it clear that **the party line should be integrated into the company’s apps down to the level of the algorithm.**” For example, in 2018, a joke-sharing app developed by the company was removed: “The product [had] gone astray, posting content that [went] against socialist core values,” Zhang recounted.<sup>230</sup> The company has since hired 4,000 additional censors and invested a lot of money to develop **an algorithm that incorporates these “socialist core values.”**

Another milestone was reached during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020: a former employee testified that “ByteDance’s army of content moderators were using the tools and algorithms that I helped develop **to delete content, change the narrative and alter memories** of the suffering and trauma inflicted on Chinese people during the COVID-19 outbreak.” He also explained that, in early 2020, the company employed 20,000 content moderators solely tasked with surveilling the Chinese traffic. Additionally, he showed how automatic censorship worked: the soundtrack of livestreamed events is automatically transcribed into text and an algorithm then compares the text with “a long and constantly-updated list of sensitive words, dates and names” that normally triggers a report. The Cyberspace Administration of China constantly sends directives – sometimes more than a hundred a day – to ByteDance’s Content Quality Center (内容质量中心) which then integrates them in its moderation. And its technical team receives multiple demands to build “an algorithm that could automatically detect when a Douyin user spoke Uyghur, and then cut off the livestream session” because the moderators did not

226. Archived publication (30 May 2012) archived on FreeWeibo.com: <https://freeweibo.com/en/weibo/3451371632386418>. Cited by Fergus Ryan, “Weibo diplomacy.”

227. “英駐華使館發「火星文」避審查” (“British Embassy Uses ‘Martian’ Language to Circumvent Censorship”), *Apple News* (13 Apr. 2014); Visen Liu, “In China, Internet Censors are Accidentally Helping Revive an Invented ‘Martian’ language,” *Quartz* (30 Jul. 2017), cited by Fergus Ryan, “Weibo diplomacy.”

228. “TikTok Statistics – Updated January 2021,” Wallaroo Media, (1 Jan. 2021).

229. Ryan, Fritz and Impiombato, *TikTok and WeChat*, 3.

230. *Ibid.*, 19.

understand the language. It eventually did not follow through with the project for technical reasons. He then explained that political contents represented only a portion of the deleted contents, because **“Chinese netizens are fluent in self-censorship and know what not to say.”**<sup>231</sup>

**Censorship covers not only the usual topics** (videos mentioning Tian’anmen, Tibetan independence, or Falun Gong are removed),<sup>232</sup> **but also LGBTQ+ topics** (the hashtags #гей (“gay” in Russian), #ягей (“I am gay” in Russian), #ялесбиянка (“I am a lesbian” in Russian), #مثلي\_الجنس (“gay” in Arabic), #المتحول جنسيا (“transgender” in Arabic), #gei (“gay” in Estonian), #gej (“gay” in Bosnian) are automatically removed from the platform), and **criticism of certain political leaders or regimes** (“#путинвор” (“Putin is a thief” in Russian)). TikTok’s justification is a “localized approach to moderation” in which it restricts access to certain terms to comply with “local laws.”<sup>233</sup> Yet *the Guardian* found that LGBTQ+ content was censored even in countries where homosexuality was not illegal.<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, leaked moderation files obtained by *The Intercept* showed that **“TikTok has influenced content on its platform not just by censoring videos and disappearing users, but by padding feeds with content from ‘shadow accounts’ operated by company employees posing as regular users.** Internal employee guidelines [...] suggest that ByteDance employees scoured Instagram for popular topics, downloaded the videos, and reshared them to TikTok to maintain a steady spray of appealing content.”<sup>235</sup>

Samantha Hoffman, author of an ASPI report on data collection by Chinese state-owned enterprises,<sup>236</sup> added that **“TikTok is a good example of a seemingly benign app that can give the CCP a lot of useful data ... [that] can be used to understand how people are influenced and how they think.”**<sup>237</sup>

### 3. Smartphones

As hardware has an impact on software and installable applications, allowing surveillance and espionage, **Chinese smartphone manufacturers, especially Huawei and Xiaomi, are regularly incriminated.** Regarding Huawei especially, RSF noted that “[a] key partner in Chinese Internet censorship and in the persecution in Xinjiang province, Huawei has also been accused of **installing a ‘backdoor’ in some of its products that allows secret access to data,** and of providing its surveillance technologies to the Iranian regime.”<sup>238</sup> The Huawei cases discussed in a separate section (→ p. 133).

231. Shen Lu, “I Helped Build ByteDance’s Censorship Machine,” *Protocol* (18 Feb. 2021) (all the quotes from this paragraph).

232. Alex Hern, “Revealed: How TikTok Censors Videos that do not Please Beijing,” *The Guardian* (25 Sept. 2019).

233. Ryan, Fritz and Impiombato, *TikTok and WeChat*, 5.

234. Alex Hern, “TikTok’s Local Moderation Guidelines Ban Pro-LGBT Content,” *The Guardian* (26 Sept. 2019).

235. Sam Biddle, Paulo Victor Ribeiro and Tatiana Dias, “Invisible Censorship,” *The Intercept* (16 Mar. 2020).

236. Samantha Hoffman, *Engineering Global Consent: The Chinese Communist Party’s Data-Driven Power Expansion*, ASPI, International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report No. 21 (2019).

237. Samantha Hoffman, in Rohan Thomson, “How China Surveils the World,” *MIT Technology Review* (19 Aug. 2020).

238. RSF, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Meida Order*, 14.



## E. The Case of Africa

The major agencies – Xinhua, CGTN and *China Daily* – have offices in Africa. In 2012, Xinhua and CCTV installed their African headquarters in Nairobi, from where they produce content in English and French for the entire continent. China Radio International (CRI) is based in Dakar. In general, the editorial structure is dual, with draft articles reviewed first by African editors and then (censored by) Chinese editors in Beijing. There are few constraints on African journalists when they write, but they subsequently quickly realize that the published text may be very different from what they have submitted.<sup>239</sup>

**Chinese censorship and procedures heavily impact the format of the broadcasts and the daily work of the staff**, as Selma Mihoubi explained: “[the] journalists and translators working for CRI are subject to strict rules of compliance with the communiqués issued by the authorities. They must conform to the terminology used in Chinese, and thus act as a mouthpiece for the government. Also, live broadcasts are impossible or very rare on CRI, as all information must be double-checked by the CCP. **All stories must be checked again before being broadcast, a time-consuming task** that prevents Chinese radio from being first in broadcasting international news.”<sup>240</sup> All of this undermines the popularity of Chinese broadcasts in Africa, which are **less responsive and always very official in tone**, a contrast with competing Western or Russian media “that rely on speed and sensationalism to hook their listeners.”<sup>241</sup>

**The vast majority of African journalists are critical**, and they willingly “denounce the bad journalistic practices of Chinese media, some of which are considered anti-democratic, such as the censorship and systematic proofreading of articles by an officer of the Chinese Communist Party, or the ban on live broadcasts.”<sup>242</sup> **African populations are apparently not fooled** and do not trust Chinese media more than African media.<sup>243</sup> “Most Africans realise the subjectivity of the news programmes broadcast by China. They consume all kinds of content distributed by the Chinese media, but mistrust the news programmes.”<sup>244</sup> **On the other hand, they appreciate the positive tone of Chinese media:** there is a widespread belief that Western media are biased and convey a catastrophic and miserable vision of Africa that focuses on conflicts, natural disasters, and governance problems. From this point of view, the Chinese approach of “constructive” or “positive” journalism (to tell “good stories” about China but also about China-Africa relations and their successes, etc.) is attractive. There is a need for positivity to which Chinese media responds by emphasizing economic development, infrastructure, or a modern Africa that is moving on, on path to development, etc.<sup>245</sup>

**Beijing has made significant efforts to attract African journalists, with donations of equipment** to local newsrooms (computers, printers, microphones, smartphones, etc.) **and frequent invitations to China.** Each year, the China-Africa Media Cooperation Forum invites about 30 African journalists for training trips that last from six to ten months.

239. “China’s Influence on African Media,” a meeting organized by the International Forum for Democratic Studies (National Endowment for Democracy) and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) (Accra, Ghana, 22-23 Feb. 2018).

240. Selma Mihoubi, “Géo-histoire de l’implantation de la radio chinoise en Afrique francophone” (“Geo-History of the Implantation of Chinese Radio in Francophone Africa”), *Revue de Géographie historique* (May 2018).

241. Ibid.

242. “Soft Power au service de l’influence,” 116.

243. “China’s Influence on African Media.”

244. RSE, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, 28.

245. “China’s Influence on African Media.”



African journalists who participated quickly understood that there were not there to receive training: they were embarked on visits of cultural sites and infrastructure projects, attended lectures on the Chinese system of governance, and they met with representatives of official Chinese state media.<sup>246</sup>

In order to seduce the local populations, **Beijing is also developing a pro-Third-World discourse**, reminding its audience of the Chinese commitment to African independence and that, “from a historical point of view, there is no colonial history between China and Africa, on the contrary, China and Africa have been the object of colonial aggression; they have the same experience.”<sup>247</sup> To move in this direction, Beijing introduced a resolution against **colonialism** at the UN Human Rights Council (→ p. 216) on September 29, 2021, a few days after the deputy spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zhao Lijian (→ p. 232), denounced the “historical debts,” which included “the colonial system” of “some Western countries.” According to Antoine Kernén, a researcher at the University of Lausanne, “in many respects, China is pursuing a colonial policy in the regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, exploiting the resources there and pushing aside the local populations. [However,] China’s maneuver at the Human Rights Council is not directed at the West, as it gave up trying to convince it, but at Africa. **The anti-Western discourse is aimed at an increase of its sphere of influence.**”<sup>248</sup> That said, and despite their efforts, Chinese media sometimes harm themselves by portraying **a stereotypical or even racist image of local people**, as illustrated by the annual Spring Festival Gala on CCTV, which sparked controversy.<sup>249</sup>



“A Chinese actor in blackface in a skit on a Lunar New Year Gala TV show” (15 Feb. 2018).<sup>250</sup>

These persisting blunders may be explained in the same way as those committed by Beijing elsewhere in the world, notably in Europe: **Chinese state media are primarily tasked with projecting the image of a strong and powerful China among its people – as such, the incidence of propaganda abroad is often an afterthought.**<sup>251</sup>

246. Ibid.

247. “Qui pratique donc le néo-colonialisme en Afrique? [“Who Practices Neo-Colonialism in Africa?”]” *CRI* (24 Oct. 2006).

248. Simon Petite, “La Chine s’en prend au colonialisme” (“China Attacks Colonialism”), *Le Temps* (1 Oct. 2021), 6.

249. Dani Madrid-Morales, “China’s Media is Struggling to Overcome its Racial Stereotypes of Africa,” *Quartz Africa* (27 Feb. 2018).

250. Ibid.

251. “China’s Influence on African Media.”

In terms of content, as often, **China talks a lot about itself**, most prominently about its president (news about Xi Jinping), its companies and their activities in Africa, its development aid (especially in the agricultural and medical fields), its history and culture. It is an **exclusively ameliorative coverage** (for China), and potentially controversial subjects are avoided: “subjects such as the exploitation of oil or uranium, or the use of fishing resources by Chinese companies are not covered.”<sup>252</sup> In the Sahel, their coverage of the conflict in Mali focuses on the MINUSMA, which again deals with itself since the MINUSMA has a large contingent (400) of Chinese Blue Helmets.

The Chinese media also played a role in Burkina Faso’s decision to abandon Taiwan in May 2018, as they helped isolate the country in the region: “[it] was indeed their isolation, accompanied by a Chinese offensive to gain a foothold in the Sahel – for example with the opening of a Chamber of Commerce in Burkina Faso, the recruitment of local journalists and the creation of an Association of Friends of China in Burkina Faso – that led to the decision.”<sup>253</sup>

In any case, **“contrary to Russian organizations, Chinese agencies remain focalized on the diffusion of narratives on the Chinese regime, without trying to adapt themselves to the local problematics and arguments, which heavily limits their popularity and ultimately their propagation in Africa.”**<sup>254</sup> (See box below).

#### Russian media are much more reproduced than Chinese media

A French team from the GEODE research lab (University of Paris 8) analyzed “content written in French by two Russian agencies (548 articles from RT and Sputnik) and five Chinese agencies (230 articles from Xinhua, CCTV, CRI, CRI Senegal, and China Daily) on topics dealing with Africa,” i.e., 3,889 pages that reproduced all or part of the stories written by the Russian media and 484 pages that reproduced the Chinese media. First observation: Russian content was reproduced much more often (7.09 times on average) than Chinese content (2.1).<sup>255</sup> The authors explained this by the fact that “most of the content published by Chinese media outlets dealt with Chinese preoccupations and not African issues [...] **the diplomatic, nationalistic, and defense nature of Chinese media publications hindered their popularity in African publics**, as their content is not very relevant to their concerns. The content produced by Russian media, on the other hand, dealt with much more diverse and politically engaged themes and issues, which explained why there were many more platforms that pick up Russian content.”<sup>256</sup> There were variations between the countries: for example, the largest number of websites relaying Chinese media was found in Guinea, Senegal, Algeria, Morocco, Ivory Coast, and Benin, and the most consulted relaying websites were in Ivory Coast, Morocco, Tunisia, and Niger.<sup>257</sup> The researchers also believed that “the coverage of Chinese content in Africa was not an ideological and activist phenomenon on the part of relaying websites, but usually an “easy” solution as the articles were freely available and allowed African outlets to relay or cover the relations between China and African countries.”<sup>258</sup>

252. “Soft Power au service de l’influence,” 116.

253. Ibid., 117.

254. Frédéric Douzet, Kévin Limonier, Selma Mihoubi and Élodie René, “Mapping the Spread of Russian and Chinese Contents on the French-speaking African Web,” *Journal of Cyber Policy*, 6 (2021).

255. Ibid., 84.

256. Ibid., 84.

257. Ibid., 86.

258. Ibid., 97.

### III. Diplomacy

#### A. International Organizations and Standards

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a **permanent member of the U.N. Security Council**, with a veto power, and it holds **several key positions in the organization**, including the top executive position in four of the fifteen specialized agencies. It provides **one of the largest financial contributions** and has more **peacekeeping troops deployed** around the world than the other four permanent members of the Security Council – the US, Russia, France, and the U.K. – combined. Hence, it has unquestionably become a major player on the international scene since joining the UN in 1971.

Rather than adapting itself to international norms, the PRC has shown that it seeks instead to **overhaul the international system** (→ p. 148). Since Xi Jinping came to power, the PRC has defended the vision of a “community of common destiny,” “a shared future for mankind,” where a logic of “win-win cooperation” would allow all states to develop and every individual to “enjoy human rights.”<sup>259</sup> This ambition is presented as a project for a “better world” carried out by China. In fact, it is a plan to reshape the world to conform to the CCP's goals, and to “Sinicize international norms.”<sup>260</sup> And these ideas have already penetrated UN institutions. Several resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council have used language coined by the Party.<sup>261</sup> **The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, presented as a project of global connectivity and win-win cooperation, but which is above all the projection of a strategy of influence, has been approved by the UN for instance (→ p. 206). Secretary-General António Guterres stated that the BRI was aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) UN Agenda, and that the UN would therefore support member states that wish to integrate BRI projects into their economies and societies.<sup>262</sup>

International organizations are seen by Chinese authorities as **instruments to project its influence**, and thus the UN is the first platform that China seeks to control. One of its strategies is to “**form voting coalitions in the United Nations**, then use them as leverage to propel its citizens or allies to the head of strategic international organizations with the aim of imposing its vision on the entire global community.”<sup>263</sup> These voting coalitions notably include African countries for which China is the largest trading partner, or which are heavily indebted and therefore obliged to China.

**Beijing does not hesitate to use classical diplomacy, as well as clandestine influence operations**, to exert economic and political pressure, to use cooptation, coercion and corruption to strengthen its presence in key positions, to frame debates and control the

259. See Xi Jinping's speech at the United Nations in 2017, <http://archive.vn/kzOIM>. Also see *supra*.

260. Emmanuel Véron and Emmanuel Lincot, “Organisations internationales: le spectre d'une hégémonie chinoise se concrétise” [International Organizations: the Specter of a Chinese Hegemony is Getting More Real], *The Conversation* (21 Apr. 2020).

261. See for example the following resolutions: Security Council, Resolution 2344 (2017) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7,902<sup>nd</sup> meeting,” United Nations, S / RES / 2344 (17 Mar. 2017); Economic and Social Council, “Social Aspects of the New Partnership for Africa's Development,” United Nations, E / RES / 2017/11 (8 Aug. 2017); General Assembly, “Non-deployment of Weapons in Outer Space First,” United Nations, A / RES / 72/27 (11 Dec. 2017); Human Rights Council, “Promotion of Mutually Beneficial Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights,” United Nations, A / HRC / 37 / L.36 (19 Mar. 2018); General Assembly, “New Concrete Measures to Prevent an Arms Race in Outer Space,” United Nations, A / RES / 74/34 (18 Dec. 2019).

262. “United Nations Poised to Support Alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Sustainable Development Goals, Secretary-General Says at Opening Ceremony,” *United Nations*, SG/SM/19556 (26 Apr. 2019).

263. *La Chine démasquée*, 14.

discourse, to obtain the support it needs, to impose its agenda and to influence the elaboration and interpretation of international standards.<sup>264</sup> Some are punctual operations, such as paying \$1.3 million in **bribes** to the Antiguan diplomat John Ashe, then president of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in 2013-2014, and to the Dominican Republic's deputy ambassador to the UN, to encourage the two men to help a Chinese entrepreneur, Ng Lap Seng, build a UN-sponsored conference center in Macau (which ultimately never saw the light of day).<sup>265</sup> This was probably not a private initiative, since Ng Lap Seng is a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress, which Peter Mattis described as "the militia of the United Front."<sup>266</sup>

Other operations are more about shaping the world for the long haul. Through the strength of its financial contributions, China has the means to influence the UN agenda. For example, it is the only contributor to the United Nations Trust Fund for Peace and Development, which was established in 2016; it thus occupies four of the five seats on its steering committee. The steering committee advises the UN Secretary-General on which projects should receive funding, making it easy for the PRC to lobby for the BRI.<sup>267</sup>

Through its **growing presence in organizations that produce international standards and norms**, the PRC has also shown that it has the capacity, and above all the will, **to change the "rules of the game,"** to develop a normative power. This is particularly the case with the concept of human rights, which it seeks to subordinate to the right to state development (→ p. 216); it is also the case with the responsibility to protect, the norms of Internet governance, or maritime law – to name but a few examples.

**China's strategy of influence in international organizations therefore takes several forms, including control of the narratives**, for example within the WHO, encouraging **inhibitions**, as illustrated by the Human Rights Council, or **highjacking the institutions**, the NGO committee for instance. The Party targets not only global organizations but also regional organizations, as we shall see in the case of the European Union.

## 1. Controlling high-level positions at the UN

Compared to the other permanent members of the Security Council, especially the United States (in 2020, out of 170 senior UN positions, three were held by Chinese, compared to twenty or so by Americans<sup>268</sup>), but also France and the United Kingdom, and even other large countries such as Germany and India, **China has very few staff members in UN bodies**, *a fortiori* in proportion to its own population and to its ambitions. The reasons are well known: its late entry into the UN system, the UN bureaucracy, what it may perceive as cultural differences, its lack of experience on peace and security issues, and the growing

264. After benefitting from Chinese investment, Greece blocked a European Union condemnation of human rights violations in China in 2017. See Helena Smith, "Greece Blocks EU's Criticism at UN of China's Human Rights Record," *The Guardian* (18 Jun. 2017).

265. "Corruption à l'ONU: 4 ans de prison pour un entrepreneur chinois" ("Corruption at the UN: 4 Years in Jail for a Chinese Entrepreneur"), *Le Figaro* (11 May 2018).

266. Schrader, *Friends and Enemies*, 14.

267. For instance, a project of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs – controlled by the PRC since 2007 – to promote the BRI was accepted in 2017. See Pingfan Hong, "Strengthening National Policy Capacity for Jointly Building the Belt and Road Toward the Sustainable Development Goals: A Capacity Development Project Financed by UN Peace and Development Trust Fund," Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (14-15 May 2017).

268. This includes posts from category B to category E "Senior officials of the United Nations and Officers of Equivalent Rank Whose Duty Station is in New York" United Nations, (1 Apr. 2020 update). [https://protocol.un.org/dgacm/pls/site.nsf/files/SeniorOfficials/\\$FILE/ListofUNSeniorOfficials.pdf](https://protocol.un.org/dgacm/pls/site.nsf/files/SeniorOfficials/$FILE/ListofUNSeniorOfficials.pdf).



distrust it arouses around it.<sup>269</sup> There is, however, an exception: China has provided the largest number of interns, in 2018 at least.<sup>270</sup> In any case, the quantity or proportion of positions held is not the only criterion to assess the degree of Chinese infiltration in international bodies. The **nature of the positions** must also be considered. In 2017, Liu Zhenmin (刘振民), a former Chinese vice-minister of foreign affairs, succeeded Wu Hongbo (吴红波) as the **United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs**, a position held by a Chinese since 2007. In 2019, Xu Haoliang (徐浩良) was appointed **assistant secretary general at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** and director of the Bureau for Policy and Program Support. His career at the UNDP began as early as 1994. Also in 2019, Xia Huang (夏煌), a former Chinese ambassador to several African countries, was appointed as **special envoy for the Great Lakes region**, despite attempts by Nikki Haley, U.S. ambassador to the U.N., to block his appointment.<sup>271</sup>

These positions, in particular in the **Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**, provide the PRC with visibility, legitimacy, and a semblance of impartiality that is very useful to advocate for the Party's interests, such as **promoting the BRI** and encouraging more states to join.<sup>272</sup> In 2016, DESA published a study, led by a Chinese economist, Hong Pingfan, that showed how the BRI could help the UN achieve its Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>273</sup> For some diplomats, as reported by *Foreign Policy*, **DESA seems to be nothing more than a “Chinese enterprise” that serves Beijing’s goals of becoming the world’s development leader: “everybody knows it and everybody accepts it.”**<sup>274</sup>

DESA leaders Wu Hongbo and Liu Zhenmin both used their influential positions to block the participation of Dolkun Isa, president of the World Uyghur Congress, at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2017 and again in 2018.<sup>275</sup> These positions of responsibility allow those who hold them to use the power entrusted to them to **limit the participation of individuals or groups perceived as challenging the authority of the Party.**

Invited on a CCTV program to share his experience with a young Chinese audience, Wu Hongbo explicitly stated that, as an international civil servant, he has a duty to defend Chinese interests,<sup>276</sup> which is in direct conflict with the norms of conduct of the international civil service, according to which an international civil servant “should not seek

269. Courtney J. Fung and Shing-Hon Lam, “Staffing the United Nations: China’s motivations and prospects,” *International Affairs*, 97:4, 2021, 1143-1163.

270. *Ibid.*, 1154.

271. Robbie Gramer and Colum Lynch, “Haley Tried to Block Appointment of Chinese Diplomat to Key U.N. Post. He Got the Job Anyway,” *Foreign Policy* (14 Feb. 2019).

272. Liu Zhenmin, “Statement: High Level Symposium on the Belt and Road Initiative and 2030 Agenda,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (13 Jun. 2018); Wu Hongbo, “Welcome Remarks: The Belt and Road Initiative: Advancing Progress In SDGs,” UN DESA (11 Apr. 2017); “Remarks by UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Director Haoliang Xu at the 2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Thematic Forum on Green Silk Road,” UNDP (24 Apr. 2019); “UNDP Experts Suggest Cooperation with China’s Belt and Road Initiative in War-Torn Countries,” CGTN (2 May 2017).

273. Hong Pingfan, “Jointly Building the ‘Belt and Road’ Toward the Sustainable Development Goals,” UN DESA (25 Jun. 2016).

274. Colum Lynch, “China Enlists U.N. to Promote Its Belt and Road Project,” *Foreign Policy* (10 May 2018).

275. “Former High-Ranking UN Official Represented Chinese State Interests at UN; Persecuted Chinese Minorities,” UNPO (26 Apr. 2019); “Press release: UNPO Vice President Prevented for Second Year in a Row from Participating in UN Indigenous Forum,” UNPO (17 Apr. 2018); “Dolkun Isa Participates in UN Indigenous Forum Despite Growing Chinese Influence,” *European Interest* (12 May 2019).

276. To view the excerpt in question, see World Uyghur Congress, “CCTV Interview with Wu Hongbo,” *Facebook* (25 Apr. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=649658305496919>. The full show can be viewed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmrI2n6d6VU&t=149>.



nor should they accept instructions from any Government, person or entity external the organization.”<sup>277</sup> To support his point, he recalled that Interpol had issued a Red Notice for Dolkun Isa, whom he described as a terrorist. Interpol Red Notices serve as an information-sharing mechanism to facilitate cooperation between police forces around the world, alerting and informing them of internationally wanted fugitives. Even if they do not constitute arrest warrants, such notices, once made public, can ruin the reputation of the individuals concerned, while the evidence that is supposed to justify such accusations is often not made public. It is therefore difficult to determine, especially when such charges are pressed by authoritarian states, whether these red notices are in fact disguised political persecution of dissidents, journalists and activists. The Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui, who has promised to bring down the communist regime, is also the subject of a Red Notice.<sup>278</sup> Hence the interest for Beijing to have been able to place in the position of Secretary General of Interpol, from 2016 to 2018, Meng Hongwei, former Vice Minister of Public Security of the PRC. But this is a position that China lost following the arrest of the Chinese executive by the authorities of his own country. The organization is now headed by a German.

Xu Haoliang also sought to promote the BRI within the UN institutions he worked for. While still the head of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific in 2016, he was reportedly the one who prompted the then-administrator Helen Clark to sign the first memorandum of understanding between the UNDP and the PRC for a better cooperation in the implementation of the BRI and the 2030 SDGs agenda.<sup>279</sup> It can be noted that at that time, Helen Clark was campaigning for the position of UN Secretary General and hence sensitive to Chinese support.<sup>280</sup> **Regardless of their degree of responsibility, Chinese officials have shown that they serve above all the interests of the Party, of which they are members.**

## 2. Management of four norm-producing specialized agencies

**China headed four UN agencies in August 2021**<sup>281</sup>: the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). By comparison, the United States, the United Kingdom and France each head only one agency, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, and UNESCO respectively. While leading an agency does not mean having complete control over it, such a position certainly offers an opportunity to develop influence and have an impact on the interpretation or formulation of the standards produced by the agency.

As a specialized agency charged with promoting industrial development, **UNIDO** assists member states in complying with international standards to export their products, and it helps develop and form standards in various areas such as quality control, food safety, environmental impact, and social responsibility.<sup>282</sup> In addition to this normative role, UNIDO promotes technical cooperation among member states and provides pol-

277. See Article 8, “Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service,” International Civil Service Commission (2013).

278. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Interpol Is Helping Enforce China’s Political Purges,” *Foreign Policy* (21 Apr. 2017).

279. “UNDP and China to Cooperate on Belt and Road Initiative,” UNDP (19 Sept. 2016).

280. Colum Lynch, “China Enlists U.N. to Promote Its Belt and Road Project,” *Foreign Policy* (10 May 2018).

281. Between August 2019 (beginning of Qu Dongyu’s term as head of the FAO) and August 2021 (end of Liu Fang’s term as ICAO Secretary General).

282. “Standard-Setting and Compliance,” UNIDO.

icymaking advice.<sup>283</sup> Li Yong (李勇), a former vice minister of finance of the PRC, has served as the director general of UNIDO since 2013. Re-elected in 2017 for four years, his term ends in 2021. He was a member of the CPPCC, the supervisory body of the United Front (→ p. 39) until 2016.<sup>284</sup> As head of UNIDO, Mr. Li has created a new directorate for programs, partnerships, and field integration (which is particularly powerful because it selects countries for partnership programs) and has appointed Ciyong Zou, a Chinese national, as its director. With no fewer than 19 Chinese nationals serving administrator positions in this organization, China controls its governance. The same trend can be observed elsewhere: there is evidence that “agencies headed by Chinese nationals show faster increases in Chinese staff members in both absolute and relative terms.”<sup>285</sup> Director General Li Yong has more than once expressed UNIDO’s **willingness to become more involved in the Belt and Road initiative** to “promote and accelerate inclusive and sustainable industrial development.”<sup>286</sup> And, in November 2019, he signed a joint statement with the vice president of Huawei Technologies to **strengthen the partnership between UNIDO and Huawei**.

The **ICAO** works to establish standards, practices and policies in the civil aviation sector to ensure safety and efficiency worldwide. Liu Fang (柳芳) was the first woman and first Chinese to be elected to the position of ICAO Secretary General in 2015. Re-elected in 2018, her term ended in August 2021. Liu Fang previously worked for the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC). During her term running the agency, Taiwan was denied participation in the triennial assembly, despite protests from some countries.<sup>287</sup> In 2020, during the Covid-19 crisis, ICAO came under heavy criticism when **its Twitter account blocked several users who had criticized its policy of excluding Taiwan** (→ p. 477).<sup>288</sup>

The **ITU** sets standards and regulations for the information and communication technology sector, allocates radio frequency bands and satellite orbits, and assists in the operation of telecommunications services worldwide. ITU standards are frequently adopted in developing countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, whose infrastructures are often built by the Chinese. Zhao Houlin (赵厚麟) has served as secretary general of the ITU since 2015. Re-elected in 2018, his term ends in 2023. He joined the ITU in the 1990s and served as deputy secretary-general from 2007 to 2015, after working at the PRC’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). Since taking office, Secretary General Zhao Houlin has more than once emphasized the importance of **cooperating with China, including in its “Digital Silk Roads”<sup>289</sup> project**. The MIIT, for which he worked for before joining the ITU, signed a memorandum of understanding with the ITU in May 2017 at the first New Silk Roads Forum.<sup>290</sup> Zhao Houlin also stated that he did not consider Huawei’s 5G technology to be a security issue, which has fueled **suspicious that the**

283. “UNIDO in brief,” UNIDO.

284. “Liste des 27 membres du 12<sup>e</sup> comité national de la CCPPC évincés pour violations disciplinaires” (“List of the 27 Members of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Committee of the CCPPC Evicted for Disciplinary Violations”), *Quotidien du peuple* (6 Sept. 2016), <http://archive.vn/DL7Hc>.

285. Courtney and Lam, “Staffing the United Nations,” 1147.

286. “UNIDO Further Engages with the Belt and Road Initiative,” UNIDO (25 Apr. 2019).

287. J. Michael Cole, “ICAO Refuses to Invite Taiwan to Assembly,” *The News Lens* (23 Sept. 2016); “Ally Backs Taiwan’s ICAO Participation,” *Taipei Times* (3 Oct. 2019).

288. “U.S. Denounces ICAO for Blocking Critics Supportive of Taiwan Inclusion,” *Focus Taiwan* (28 Jan. 2020); J. Michael Cole, “ICAO Twittergate-Taiwan Scandal Highlights Deeper Problems at the UN,” Macdonald-Laurier Institute (6 Feb. 2020).

289. “Top Official Says ITU Can Help in Digital Silk Road,” *China Daily* (16 Dec. 2015). Kong Wenzheng, “ITU vows to join hands with China,” *China Daily* (24 Apr. 2019).

290. “ITU Secretary-General: BRI Helps Narrow World Digital Divide,” CGTN (1 May 2019).

**ITU could facilitate the global adoption of of Huawei's 5G networks** (→ p. 133).<sup>291</sup> Indeed, the Chinese company recently proposed to the ITU a new vision of the Internet, in a radical departure from the representation of networks we have today, and in which governments would have more control over the Internet.<sup>292</sup> China's position in the ITU also provides it with the opportunity to **negotiate the best possible frequencies and orbital slot allocations for its Beidou satellite navigation system, and to leverage influence in favor of Chinese players in the submarine cable sector** (→ p. 131).

The **FAO** sets international standards for food security, assists member states in setting their agriculture and food policies, and develops international responses to crises in these areas.<sup>293</sup> Qu Dongyu (屈冬玉) is the first Chinese to hold the position of director general. He was previously vice minister of agriculture and rural affairs of the PRC. Elected in 2019, his term ends in 2023. Media outlets reported that **China had exerted political and economic pressure on other countries to ensure the victory of its candidate**: Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina were reportedly threatened that they would no longer receive certain exports from China if they did not vote for the Chinese candidate, and Cameroon withdrew its candidate, Médi MOUNGUI, from the race some time after China quietly cancelled its \$70 million debt.<sup>294</sup>

### 3. Leadership positions in other organizations

Former PRC Vice Minister of Commerce Yi Xiaozhun (易小准) is one of four deputy directors general of the **World Trade Organization** (WTO). Appointed in 2013, he was selected again in 2017 for a second four-year term. Xue Hanqin (薛捍勤) became the first woman and first Chinese to be vice president of the **International Court of Justice** (ICJ) in 2018 for a three-year term. She had been a member of the ICJ since 2010.

Zhang Tao (张涛) has been deputy managing director of the **International Monetary Fund** (IMF) since 2016.<sup>295</sup> A former deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, he was the second Chinese national to join the IMF's management after Zhu Min (朱民), who joined in 2011.<sup>296</sup> Ren Minghui (任明辉) is deputy director general at the **World Health Organization** (WHO) in charge of universal health coverage and communicable and non-communicable diseases. In open access publications, he presented the BRI as an opportunity to improve global health and China as the country that should take the lead in this area.<sup>297</sup>

These examples show how the PRC intends to use the high-level positions it manages to obtain in these normative institutions to develop a positive vision of China and of its projects,

291. Alkesh Sharma, "UN's ITU Says No Evidence Huawei 5G Equipment Poses Security Concerns," *The National* (21 Apr. 2019); Tom Miles, "Huawei Allegations Driven by Politics Not Evidence: U.N. Telecoms Chief," Reuters (5 Apr. 2019).

292. Anna Gross and Madhumita Murgia, "China and Huawei Propose Reinvention of the Internet," *Financial Times* (27 Mar. 2020); Madhumita Murgia and Anna Gross, "Inside China's Controversial Mission to Reinvent the Internet," *Financial Times* (27 Mar. 2020).

293. Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, "Outfoxed and Outgunned: How China Routed the U.S. in a U.N. Agency," *Foreign Policy* (23 Oct. 2019).

294. Gerardo Fortuna, "China's Qu Dongyu Beats EU Candidate for FAO leadership," Euractiv (24 Jun. 2019); Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, "Outfoxed and Outgunned: How China Routed the U.S. in a U.N. Agency," *Foreign Policy* (23 Oct. 2019); Jenni Marsh, "China Just Quietly Wrote Off a Chunk of Cameroon's Debt. Why the secrecy?" CNN (5 Feb. 2019).

295. "Zhang Tao est nommé directeur général adjoint," ("Zhang Tao Appointed Deputy Director General"), CCTV (23 Aug. 2016).

296. "Min Zhu," International Monetary Fund (8 Apr. 2015).

297. Ren Minghui, "Global Health and the Belt and Road Initiative," *Global Health Journal*, 2:4 (Dec. 2018).

such as the BRI, to influence the work of these organizations toward its own interests, and to make them work toward **the revision of the international order dominated by the United States.**

However, the PRC does not need to control all the key positions to infiltrate international organizations. It can also use **financial contributions**: Beijing, for example, is the largest extra budgetary contributor to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (with \$575,000, or 44% of voluntary contributions, far ahead of the United States, which contributes only 24%) to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (with a \$1 million grant for five years), as well as the second-largest contributor to the International Atomic Energy Agency and to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, behind the United States.

Many senior international officials have expressed support for China, often to congratulate, thank or praise its contributions, sometimes even to promote its projects. For the director general of the **International Labour Organization**, Guy Ryder, the “very strong synergies” between the BRI and the 2030 SDGs Agenda should give China, in his words, “leadership in the multilateral system.”<sup>298</sup> In an interview with Xinhua, the president of the **International Fund for Agricultural Development**, Gilbert Houngbo, praised the Chinese model for national economies in transition.<sup>299</sup> Several other UN specialized agencies have officially expressed interest in, and support for, the BRI: the **International Maritime Organization** and the **World Tourism Organization** for instance. Others, such as the **International Labour Organization**, **UNESCO**, and the **World Meteorological Organization**, have already formalized their cooperation in the BRI with the PRC.<sup>300</sup>

Despite the aggressiveness of some Chinese maneuvers, they do not consistently succeed. In 2019, former Hong Kong police chief Andy Tsang Wai-hung was unable to secure the position of head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime he coveted.<sup>301</sup> Last year, China failed to win the position of director general of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Wang Binying, WIPO’s deputy director general, lost to the Singaporean candidate Daren Tang, who had been supported by the United States and others.<sup>302</sup> The possibility that China could get its hands on a fifth specialized UN agency, especially the one in charge of the strategic intellectual property patents, certainly attracted more attention and was compared to **“appointing the fox to guard the hen house.”**<sup>303</sup> The former director of WIPO, Francis Gurry, had already been criticized for his secret negotiations with China and Russia that led to the establishment of two WIPO offices in these countries.<sup>304</sup>

298. “Guy Ryder s’adresse au forum ‘La ceinture et la route, pour une coopération internationale’” (“Guy Ryder to the Forum ‘The Belt and the Road, for an International Cooperation’”), International Labour Organization (14 May 2017).

299. Eric J. Lyman, “Interview: IFAD Chief says China’s Poverty Reduction Model for Other Economies in Transition,” *Xinhuanet* (4 Aug. 2017).

300. “ILO Broadens Cooperation with its Chinese Partners Under the Belt and Road Initiative,” ILO (29 Apr. 2019); “UNESCO Strengthens Collaboration for Science with Key Chinese Institutions,” UNESCO (7 Nov. 2018); “Overview of meteorological support for Belt and Road Initiative 2017,” *China Meteorological Administration* (11 Jan. 2018).

301. Stuart Lau, “Former Hong Kong Top Cop Andy Tsang Misses Out on Plum UN Posting,” *South China Morning Post* (23 Nov. 2019).

302. Nick Cumming-Bruce, “U.S.-Backed Candidate for Global Tech Post Beats China’s Nominee,” *The New York Times* (4 Mar. 2020); Colum Lynch, “China Bids to Lead World Agency Protecting Intellectual Property,” *Foreign Policy* (26 Nov. 2019).

303. Katrina Manson, Primrose Riordan, and James Kynge, “US-backed Candidate Nominated to Lead UN Body After Anti-China Campaign,” *Financial Times* (4 Mar. 2020).

304. Steve Brachmann, “Whistleblowers Testify on Alleged Gurry Abuses at WIPO to House Foreign Affairs Committee,” *IPWatchdog* (29 Sept. 2016).



With six of the fifteen ongoing terms ending in 2021, Beijing is already maneuvering to maintain its presence at the head of these institutions and to win new ones.

Furthermore, China's influence is not limited to UN-affiliated organizations. As mentioned earlier, **Interpol** is not protected from potential abuses in the use of Red Notices by authoritarian regimes such as China. The surprise arrest of its former head, Meng Hongwei, the first Chinese national to head the organization, raised a number of questions about Interpol's potential complicity, or at least complacency, with the Chinese government.<sup>305</sup> **ICANN** is another example: the California-based non-profit corporation allocates domain names and numbers on the Internet, and it maintains an "unusual" relationship with the Chinese government.<sup>306</sup> The decision of its former CEO, Fadi Chehade, to accept to preside the World Internet Conference, an initiative of the Chinese government, came as a surprise.<sup>307</sup> The issue at stake here, for the Party, is to influence the development of Internet standards. It is also noteworthy that structures such as the CICIR, a think tank of the MSS, participate in the World Internet Conference alongside the Cyberspace Administration of China.

**China seeks to penetrate and influence as many standards-setting institutions as possible, regardless of the subject matter.** Perhaps more than any other country, it has the means and the will to train experts to take on more and more leadership positions. However, China does not need to seize leadership positions in the majority of organizations to achieve its goals – nor does it necessarily have an interest in doing so. **It is enough that the people in these positions support Chinese policies on their own**, which often happens through elite cooptation or political opportunism. These efforts to infiltrate international organizations have allowed the party **to silence some criticism, paralyze some structures and guide the development of international norms.**

#### A former World Bank Chief Executive accused of having changed China's ranking in report

In September 2021, the World Bank decided to stop publishing its influential annual *Doing Business* report, which since 2003 has assessed the international business environment by ranking 190 state economies, after irregularities in the 2018 and 2020 editions were reported.<sup>308</sup> An independent investigation commissioned by the World Bank has indeed concluded that senior officials at the institution, including its Chief Executive Kristalina Georgieva (now head of the IMF), lobbied the report's authors to improve China's ranking in the 2018 edition.<sup>309</sup> Beijing, which is the third largest contributor to the World Bank, after the United States and Japan, indeed challenged its fall of seven places to the 85<sup>th</sup> rank in the report meant to be published in October 2017. The investigation established that, under pressure from its general management, World Bank teams then changed data to allow China to retain its 78<sup>th</sup> place – an intervention that prompted protests and the resignation of Paul Romer, the World Bank's chief economist, who now confirms that "Kristalina undertook to doctor the report and cover it up."<sup>310</sup> It is not certain that, in this case, Beijing intervened directly, and this is precisely what makes it interesting since it could testify to **the internalization of the constraint: the Party-State no longer even needs to apply**

305. Victor Mallet, "Interpol 'Complicit' in Arrest of its Chief in China," *Financial Times* (7 Jul. 2019).

306. Kieren McCarthy, "China's New Rules May Break the Internet Warns US Government," *The Register* (16 May 2016).

307. Kieren McCarthy, "The Firewall Awakens: ICANN's Exiting CEO Takes Internet Governance to the Dark Side," *The Register* (18 Dec. 2015).

308. "World Bank Group to Discontinue Doing Business Report," [worldbank.org](https://www.worldbank.org) (16 Sep. 2021).

309. *Investigation of Data Irregularities in Doing Business 2018 and Doing Business 2020*, WilmerHale, September 15, 2021: <https://bit.ly/3B3124M>. The irregularity found in the 2020 report had to do with Saudi Arabia.

310. Richard Hiault avec AFP, "La directrice de la FMI accusée d'avoir exercé des pressions pour favoriser la Chine" ("IMF chief accused of lobbying for China"), *Les Échos* (17 Sep. 2021).



**pressure directly, since others are doing it for it.** This is a phenomenon found in some cases of self-censorship following pressure not directly from Beijing, but from local actors fearing the Party's reaction (→ p. 360).

#### 4. Controlling the discourse: the example of the WHO during the Covid-19 pandemic

China first took over the leadership of a UN specialized agency in 2006 with the election of Margaret Chan to head the World Health Organization (WHO). During her tenure, she was criticized for her lack of diligence in handling the 2014 Ebola outbreak.<sup>311</sup> In 2016, she **cancelled Taiwan's observer status** following the election of President Tsai Ing-wen. Since then, **Taiwan has been systematically excluded from the World Health Assembly**, WHO's annual forum. In doing so, the organization has lost valuable experience, as Taiwan learned a lot from the SARS episode in 2003 during which "Beijing did not play the game of transparency."<sup>312</sup> In 2017, Margaret Chan was replaced by Tedros Ghebreyesus, a native of Ethiopia, a country with which China has an excellent relationship. When he was still Minister of Health in Ethiopia, **Dr. Tedros** – who used his first name to campaign – was criticized for his handling of several cholera outbreaks.<sup>313</sup> Since his appointment, he has more than once **taken a public position in favor of China – which is the second largest financial contributor to the WHO** among the 194 member states, behind the United States only – going so far as sycophancy.<sup>314</sup> In particular, he praised its handling of the Covid-19 epidemic in January 2020. According to Tedros, the Chinese government should have been "congratulated" for its management, which reportedly slowed the spread of the virus abroad. He praised China's "impressive speed" with which it "detected the outbreak, isolated the virus, sequenced the genome, and shared it with WHO and the world," but also applauded China's "commitment to transparency," and concluded that China was "setting a new standard for outbreak response."<sup>315</sup>

In reality, the reverse is more accurate: **China tried to cover up Covid-19** at the beginning of the pandemic. The first cases, which appeared as early as October<sup>316</sup>, were ignored, as was the high level of contagiousness, which was established as early as December. Authorities ordered laboratories to stop testing, to destroy all existing samples, and then to publish nothing on the subject.<sup>317</sup> Some hospitals falsified diagnoses.<sup>318</sup> Whistleblowers were punished. Some of them, doctors and journalists, simply disappeared. And while the danger of the virus was known, the January 18 banquet for 40,000 families in Wuhan was not cancelled. An Associated Press investigation found that the Chinese government balked for six days before

311. "Emails Show the World Health Organization Intentionally Delayed Calling Ebola a Public Health Emergency," *Business Insider* (20 Mar. 2015).

312. F. Chih-Chung Wu, interviewed by C. Leblanc, "Taiwan apparaît aujourd'hui comme le défenseur de la démocratie. Et cela mérite d'être soutenu" ("Taiwan Appears Today as the Defensor of Democracy. And It Deserves Being Said"), *L'Opinion* (10 May 2020).

313. Donald G. McNeil Jr., "Candidate to Lead the W.H.O. Accused of Covering Up Epidemics," *The New York Times* (13 May 2017).

314. Niall McCarthy, "Which Countries Are the Biggest Financial Contributors to the World Health Organization? [Infographic]," *Forbes* (8 Apr. 2020).

315. "WHO Director-General's statement on IHR Emergency Committee on Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)," World Health Organization (30 Jan. 2020).

316. Jonathan Pekar et al., "Timing the SARS-CoV-2 index case in Hubei province", *Science*, 18 Mar. 2021.

317. G. Yu et al., "How Early Signs of the Coronavirus Were Spotted, Spread and Throttled in China," *The Straits Times* (28 Feb. 2020).

318. J. Zaugg, "Comment la Chine a laissé échapper le coronavirus" ("How Did China Leave the Coronavirus Escape?"), *Le Temps* (17 Mar. 2020).

publicly declaring the coronavirus outbreak. During those key six days, between January 14 and 20, 2020, more than 3,000 people were reportedly infected.<sup>319</sup> Concealment of the disease at a critical moment in its development was costly in human lives: a study published in *Nature* estimated that if physical distancing had been implemented one, two, or three weeks earlier in China, the number of global cases could have been reduced by 66%, 86%, and 95%, respectively.<sup>320</sup> As is often the case, this concealment was motivated primarily by domestic political reasons (stability, confidence, and the image of the Party), and only secondarily by the preservation of the country's image on the international stage.

While it must be acknowledged that China did implement strict containment, controls, and population monitoring measures to contain the outbreak in the months that followed the start of the epidemic, this was not enough to set a “new standard” for all, as Tedros defended. **To please Beijing, WHO ignored warning messages sent by Taiwan's Centers for Disease Control as early as December 31, 2019 and delayed declaring a public health emergency of international concern because China opposed it.**<sup>321</sup> On January 12, the organization maintained that there was “no clear evidence” of human-to-human transmission of the virus.<sup>322</sup> On January 14, it only hypothesized “limited human-to-human transmission.”<sup>323</sup> It was not until January 22, three weeks into the epidemic, and after China finally agreed to allow WHO experts to visit Wuhan, that the organization confirmed that there was evidence of human-to-human transmission.<sup>324</sup> Then, the WHO waited until March 11, when Italy had more than 10,000 confirmed cases and its population was under a lockdown, to finally declare Covid-19 a pandemic. According to the CIA and the BND, **China threatened WHO that it would stop cooperating with the agency's investigation of Covid-19 if it declared a pandemic.**<sup>325</sup> Moreover, while one of the first steps Taiwan took was to suspend air traffic in order to limit the spread of the virus, the WHO asserted that there was “no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade,” and recommended that there be no restrictions on trade or movement;<sup>326</sup> this, again, was a position consistent with the PRC, which then criticized the United States for banning flights from China.

### Controlling and shaping the discourse on organ trafficking

The CCP “oversees the largest state-run organ trafficking industry in the world: almost certainly deriving a large number of organs from prisoners of conscience who are... executed on demand for paying customers.”<sup>327</sup> If this elicited almost no international reaction and if, ironically, China had even helped create the WHO task force against organ trafficking, and placed

319. “China Did not Warn Public of Likely Pandemic for 6 Key Days,” The Associated Press (15 Apr. 2020).

320. S. Lai et al., “Effect of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions to Contain COVID-19 in China,” *Nature*, 585 (2020), 410-413.

321. P. Benkimoun, “Coronavirus: comment la Chine a fait pression sur l’OMS” (“Coronavirus: How China Pressured the WHO”), *Le Monde* (29 Jan. 2020); F. Godement, “L’OMS, la pandémie et l’influence chinoise: un premier bilan” (“WHO, Pandemic and Chinese Influence: A First Assessment”), Institut Montaigne (24 Mar. 2020).

322. “Novel Coronavirus – China,” World Health Organization (12 Jan. 2020).

323. “WHO Timeline – COVID-19,” World Health Organization (27 Apr. 2020).

324. “Mission summary: WHO Field Visit to Wuhan, China 20-21 January 2020,” World Health Organization (22 Jan. 2020).

325. Naveed Jamali and Tom O’Connor, “Exclusive: As China Hoarded Medical Supplies, the CIA Believes It Tried to Stop the WHO from Sounding the Alarm on the Pandemic,” *Newsweek* (5 Dec. 2020).

326. “WHO Director-General’s Statement on IHR Emergency Committee on Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV),” World Health Organization (30 Jan. 2020).

327. Matthew P. Robertson, “Examining China’s Organ Transplantation System: The Nexus of Security, Medicine, and Predation / Part 3: China’s United Front Tactics in Managing the Narrative on Organ Trafficking,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, 20:16 (16 Sept. 2020), 13.

a representative of its choice at the head of the Transplantation Society (TTS), it was because it succeeded in controlling and shaping the discourse on this subject, with **three objectives** according to Matthew Robertson: **“protect the political security and legitimacy of the regime from the accusation that it systematically exploits prisoners of conscience as an organ source. The party’s second goal is to ensure the continued availability of transplant organs for members of the party elite. The party’s third goal is to bolster China’s image on the global stage** as a leader in a field of advanced medicine, while maintaining the prestige and access of Chinese surgeons to Western medical journals, conferences, and professional societies.”<sup>328</sup> And, from this point of view, the CCP was clearly successful: both the WHO and the TTS helped spread the representation that China stopped these practices in 2015, after which date organ removals are presumably voluntary (despite the fact that Beijing had been known to falsify data concerning voluntary transplantations).<sup>329</sup>

**Beijing bought the cooperation of executives from relevant international organizations** by convincing them that they were helping China reform itself – a gratifying idea – or that no one would gain from a scandal; but also with more concrete benefits such as all-expenses-paid trips to China to visit medical facilities, funding, including indirect funding (the annual TTS conference is funded by pharmaceutical companies dependent on the Chinese market), or by “cultivating” certain individuals, helping them to obtain positions, for example.<sup>330</sup>

When China showed a decline in the number of confirmed cases, the WHO chose to confirm these figures and again to congratulate the Chinese government,<sup>331</sup> although many voices pointed out that these figures were probably out of sync with reality. The Chinese government had indeed decided to change its counting method by deliberately ignoring confirmed but asymptomatic cases.<sup>332</sup> U.S. intelligence even believes that China deliberately underreported both the number of sick people and the number of deaths to **hide the extent of the epidemic in China**.<sup>333</sup> By late December 2020, figures provided by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggested that the number of people infected in Wuhan might have been ten times higher than initially reported (nearly 500,000 instead of 50,000).<sup>334</sup> The official death toll (only 4,635) is also surprisingly low for a country of 1.4 billion people.

**This pandemic has at least been able to reveal the extent of the Chinese influence within the WHO.**<sup>335</sup> The reaction of Bruce Aylward, a Canadian epidemiologist and head of the international coronavirus observation mission in China, to a question from the Hong Kong journalist Yvonne Tong about Taiwan was revealing in this respect. When she asked him whether the WHO would consider Taiwan as a member state, Aylward,

328. Ibid., 13.

329. Ibid., 14.

330. Robertson, “Examining China’s Organ Transplantation System,” 15.

331. “Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” World Health Organization (16-24 Feb. 2020); “Steep Decline in Coronavirus Cases in China: WHO Expert,” *The Economist Times* (25 Feb., 2020).

332. John Xie, “In China, Officials Exclude Asymptomatic COVID-19 Carriers from Data,” VOA (28 Mar. 2020); Vivian Wang, “How Many Coronavirus Cases in China? Officials Tweak the Answer,” *The New York Times* (12 Feb. 2020); Ken Moritsugu, “New Coronavirus Cases Decline in China as Counting Method Revised Again,” *The Diplomat* (20 Feb. 2020); Yuan Yang, Nian Liu, and Tom Mitchell, “China fall in Coronavirus Cases Undermined by Questionable Data,” *Financial Times* (25 Feb. 2020).

333. Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, “China Concealed Extent of Virus Outbreak, U.S. Intelligence Says,” *Bloomberg* (1 Apr. 2020).

334. 中国疾控中心 (Chinese Center for Disease Control), 科学认识人群新冠病毒抗体流行率——全国新冠肺炎血清流行病学调查结果问答, 微信 (*Weixin*) (28 Dec. 2020), <https://archive.vn/4F9lz>; Bang Xiao and Alan Weedon, “Coronavirus Cases in Wuhan May be Far Higher than Thought, According to China CDC study,” ABC News (31 Dec. 2020).

335. Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, “How WHO Became China’s Coronavirus Accomplice,” *Foreign Policy* (2 Apr. 2020); Renaud Toffier, “L’OMS est-elle vendue à la Chine?” (“Is WHO Sold to China?”), *Le Figaro* (18 Apr. 2020).

visibly caught off guard, did not know what to say for almost ten seconds, then suggested moving on to another question, cut the video call, which was restored a few seconds later, and finally, when the journalist insisted that he comment on Taiwan's management of the epidemic, replied that they had "already talked about China."<sup>336</sup> **This denial of Taiwan's very existence as a distinct political entity** is perfectly in line with the One China policy advocated by Beijing. Rather than engaging with a government that has proven its ability to handle a health crisis effectively and which has even been praised and held up as a model,<sup>337</sup> the WHO director general accused the Taiwanese government of orchestrating a racist campaign against him on social networks;<sup>338</sup> a campaign that was later revealed to be another **information-manipulation operation** presumably conducted by Beijing (→ p. 474).

## 5. A Crippled U.N. Human Rights Council

On April 1, 2020, China's Jiang Duan (蒋端) was appointed to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Consultative Group alongside representatives from Chad, Slovenia, Mexico, and Spain for one year (2020-2021).<sup>339</sup> The news led to an outpouring of criticism, the decision being compared to making a "pyromaniac into the town fire chief."<sup>340</sup> Sitting on the consultative group is not a trivial matter: the five members of the HRC consultative group have **the power to choose the experts who will be responsible for investigating**, among other things, human rights violations in the framework of special procedures, and whose impartiality should be beyond reproach. China will be able to **influence the selection of at least 17 experts over the course of the year, including potentially the special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression**, or members of the working group on arbitrary detention. Each member of the consultative group chairs the selection process for at least five terms, and the HRC generally appoints the experts selected by the consultative group.<sup>341</sup> This means that China is likely to succeed in appointing at least five candidates who meet its criteria.

The Advisory Group should not be confused with the HRC Advisory Committee, which is the HRC's "think tank." The Advisory Committee is composed of 18 "independent" experts whose role is mainly to produce studies responding to the interests of the HRC.<sup>342</sup> These experts are nominated by their respective governments before being elected by the

336. The video is online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UICYFh8U2xM>; Helen Davidson, "Senior WHO Adviser Appears to Dodge Question on Taiwan's Covid-19 Response," *The Guardian* (30 Mar. 2020); June Cheng, "A Politicized WHO," *World Magazine* (11 Apr. 2020).

337. Nick Aspinwall, "Taiwan Is Exporting Its Coronavirus Successes to the World," *Foreign Policy* (9 Apr. 2020); Andreas Kluth, "If We Must Build a Surveillance State, Let's Do It Properly," *Bloomberg* (22 Apr. 2020); "Taiwan: A Role Model for Pandemic Management," *Healthcare in Europe* (3 Apr. 2020).

338. "Taiwan Reveals Emails Warning WHO of Disease in December; Dr. Tedros Replies Accusing Taipei of a Hate Racist Campaign," *MercoPress* (17 Apr. 2020).

339. "Consultative Group: Nomination, Selection and Appointment of Mandate Holders," United Nations Human Rights Council.

340. "China Joins U.N. Human Rights Panel, Will Help Pick Experts on Free Speech, Health, Arbitrary Detention," *UN Watch* (3 Apr. 2020).

341. "La Chine rejoint un groupe des droits de l'homme de l'ONU, suscitant des protestations" ("China Joins a Group of Human Rights at the UN, Leading to Protests"), *UN Watch* (4 Apr. 2020).

342. "Background Information on the Advisory Committee," Human Rights Council United Nations.



HRC. The expert appointed by the PRC is a diplomat, Liu Xinsheng (刘昕生), whose current term does not end until 2022.<sup>343</sup>

China's strategy in this body is to **change the general interpretation of the concept of human rights to one subordinate to national sovereignty**. The two resolutions that China pushed through at the UNHRC on “the contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights” in 2017, and then on “promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights,” in 2018, actually advocated for a regressive vision of rights.<sup>344</sup> This vision promoted by China is positively received by other authoritarian regimes, which unsurprisingly support a vision that insists on respect for non-interference.<sup>345</sup> To build support for its human rights principles, China has already organized two editions of the South-South Human Rights Forum, during which it advocates rights tailored to the regional, political, economic, social, cultural, historical and religious contexts of different countries; in other words, **a vision that denies the universality of human rights**.<sup>346</sup>

With the adoption of the first resolution in 2017, the UNHRC, at China's request, solicited the consultative committee to study the extent to which development contributes to the enjoyment of all human rights by all.<sup>347</sup> This is not so much an academic research as a maneuver to further imprint the Chinese narrative and impose the Party's agenda on the work of the UNHRC. The study commissioned by China, chaired by Liu Xinsheng and whose rapporteur was the committee's Russian expert, concluded that human rights could only be guaranteed for all if the state enjoyed a situation of peace and stability, and that the development and stability of a state was intimately linked to human rights.<sup>348</sup> As Andrea Worden pointed out, this is the kind of narrative that can be easily instrumentalized to justify violent repressive measures in the name of stability.<sup>349</sup> According to the vision promoted by the PRC, **the state – rather than the individual – thus becomes the primary subject of development and human rights**.

The PRC also takes advantage of its position in the UNHRC to **block any criticism voiced against its policy**, be it about Xinjiang, Tibet, or Hong Kong, and whether the criticism comes from individuals or NGOs. In 2019, Chinese diplomats interrupted the speech of the Hong Kong activist and singer Denise Ho at the HRC.<sup>350</sup> In June of the same year, China invited a UN counterterrorism official, Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov, to visit Xinjiang, thus carrying out a public relations operation: they suggested that Uyghurs were terrorists, hence legitimizing Beijing's repressive policy in the region.<sup>351</sup> Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is still barred from visiting Xinjiang, despite her willingness to draw attention to the conditions of detention in Chinese camps.<sup>352</sup>

343. Andréa Worden, “The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee: A New Tool in China's Anti-Human Rights Strategy,” *Sinopsis* (6 Aug. 2019).

344. Frédéric Burnand, “À l'ONU, le travail de sape de la Chine contre les droits de l'homme” (“At the UN, China Undermines Human Rights”), *Justice Info* (26 Mar. 2018).

345. Worden, “The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee.”

346. Melanie Hart, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on “A ‘China Model?’ Beijing's Promotion on Alternative Global Norms and Standards” (13 Mar. 2020).

347. “Human Rights Council Adopts 10 texts, Requests a High-Level Panel Discussion on Genocide and a Study on the Role of Capacity Building in the Promotion of Human Rights” United Nations Human Rights Council (23 Mar. 2018).

348. Draft final Report on Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of Human Rights, United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, A/HRC/AC/22/CRP.4 (18-22 Feb. 2019).

349. Worden, “The Human Rights Council Advisory Committee.”

350. Joshua Berlinger, “China Interrupts Hong Kong Pop Star during UN Speech,” CNN (9 Jul. 2019).

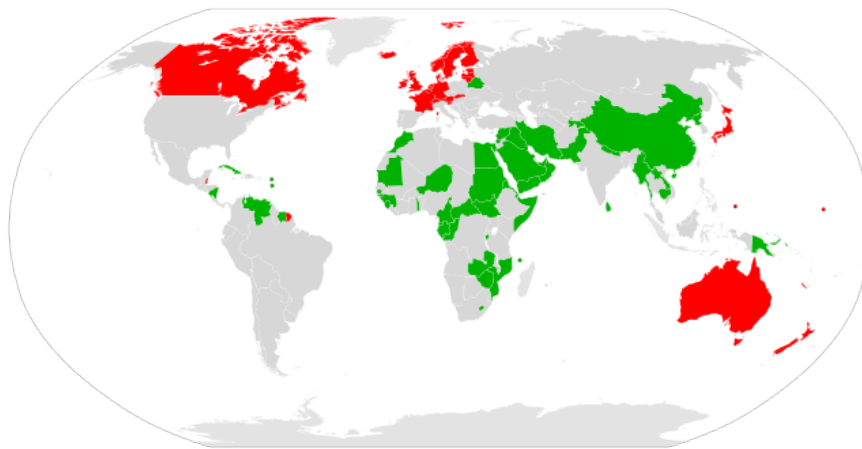
351. “UN anti-Terror Official Makes Controversial trip to Xinjiang,” Associated Press (16 Jun. 2019).

352. Colum Lynch, Robbie Gramer, “Xinjiang Visit by U.N. Counterterrorism Official Provokes Outcry,” *Foreign Policy* (13 Jun. 2019).



It should be recalled that the PRC is obviously not the only country undermining the work of the HRC. Other authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Russia have also held or are still holding key positions in the HRC.<sup>353</sup> For that matter, the PRC regularly seeks the support of these regimes. The difference between China and these regimes is that China is more active, and **it is able to influence or paralyze the UNHRC and to change the prevailing interpretation of international norms.**

**China's influence at the UNHRC is mainly southern**, as Beijing has significant leverage over the so-called developing countries: on June 30, 2020, a declaration supporting Hong Kong's national security law was voted by 53 states (not only the big authoritarians such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and North Korea, but also all the African members of the council) with 27 opposing it (mainly European countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan). This polarization is clearly visible on the map.



In green, the 53 states that voted for the declaration supporting the Chinese law and in red the 27 states that voted against, on June 30, 2020 at the UNHRC (© image Alalycine – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92271312>).

## 6. A Committee on NGOs diverted from its mission

The Committee on NGOs is a standing committee of ECOSOC composed of 19 members elected for a four-year term, but without a rule limiting the number of successive terms a member state can serve. China is currently serving for the 2019-2022 term. This committee has the power to approve – or reject – applications from NGOs to receive the consultative status that allows them to operate within the United Nations.<sup>354</sup> The special consultative status gives recipients the power to submit written communications as well as petitions to ECOSOC, and the general consultative status also allows them to propose items to ECOSOC's agenda.<sup>355</sup> An NGO with consultative status is also able to attend and organize events, to expand its network, and conduct lobbying activities.<sup>356</sup> Conversely, an NGO denied this consultative status has great difficulties acting within the United Nations framework.

The PRC has pressured the committee to **block or delay granting a consultative status to certain NGOs**, particularly those working on human rights, but also all those that

353. In 2015, Saudi Arabia's presence in the advisory group was also criticized.

354. <https://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/committee.htm>.

355. "Working with ECOSOC: an NGOs Guide to Consultative Status," United Nations (2018).

356. "China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE)," MDG World Centre of Excellence.

do not conform to the position and terminology that satisfies Beijing with regard to Tibet, an “autonomous region of the PRC,” and Taiwan, a “province of China.”<sup>357</sup> **By formulating and repeating questions that are often politically motivated or even inappropriate, it postpones the application of some NGOs until the following session** – which means two to seven months later. The PRC then manages to suspend applications. For example, in January 2013, when the NGO Children’s Rights Network (CRN), which had applied as early as 2010, was in its fifth round of questioning, the PRC made the following three requests rather than addressing CRN’s contribution to children’s rights: “1. Please do the necessary corrections to the organization’s website and publications in order to align to United Nations terminology when referring to the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. 2. Please provide a written commitment to respect United Nations terminology when referring to certain regions of China. 3. Please provide what position the organization has with regards to the question of Tibet.”<sup>358</sup>

In 2015, the Chinese delegation to the Committee on NGOs attempted to make the committee’s deliberations even more opaque by proposing not to list the name of the member states that oppose or question an NGO’s application for consultative status. The proposal was withdrawn, but nonetheless reflects the PRC’s desire to hide its actions.<sup>359</sup>

**In contrast, Chinese NGOs** that are more or less openly linked to the Chinese government and whose objectives are more or less explicitly aligned with those of the Party **do not face as many difficulties in obtaining consultative status** with ECOSOC. The China Foundation for Peace and Development and the China Women’s Development Foundation obtained it on their first attempt, in 2014 and 2016 respectively, even though they are both affiliated with the United Front (→ p. 62).<sup>360</sup>

**Nearly 30 Chinese NGOs have been granted consultative status** today, including the United Nations Association of China (中国联合国协会),<sup>361</sup> the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, 中国人民对外友好协会)<sup>362</sup> and the China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE, 中国民间组织国际交流促进会),<sup>363</sup> which were granted consultative status in 2000, 2001, and 2008, respectively. The CNIE, which is a coalition of about 30 NGOs founded in 2005, is the Asia-Pacific regional coordinator of the informal UN-NGO-IRENE network;<sup>364</sup> it has openly advocated for stricter Chinese government control over NGOs and considers that there are still a small number of NGOs engaged in activities that violate Chinese law, threaten China’s reunification, security, and ethnic solidarity.<sup>365</sup> The CPAFFC, meanwhile, is a United Front-related organization.<sup>366</sup> Other Chinese NGOs with consultative status include the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO) 中国国际民间组织合作促进会, or the

357. Joe Sandler Clarke, “United Nations Failing to Represent Vulnerable People, warn NGOs,” *The Guardian* (11 Aug. 2015).

358. “The Costs of International Advocacy: China’s Interference in the United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms,” Human Rights Watch (2017).

359. AFP, “UN Rejects China’s Move to Black Out NGO Criticism,” *South China Morning Post* (1 Feb. 2015); “The Costs of International Advocacy: China’s Interference in the United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms,” Human Rights Watch (2017).

360. “The Costs of International Advocacy.”

361. <http://www.unachina.org/en/>.

362. [https://www.cpaaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/xiehui\\_list/cate/11/lang/2.html](https://www.cpaaffc.org.cn/index/xiehui/xiehui_list/cate/11/lang/2.html).

363. “China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE),” MDG World Centre of Excellence.

364. Ibid.

365. “Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for the Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of China,” CNIE (Mar. 2018).

366. John Doston, “China Explores Economic Outreach to U.S. States Via United Front Entities,” Jamestown Foundation (26 Jun. 2019).

China Academy of Culture. Founded in 1992, CANGO was granted the status in 2007 and, in 2018, it had over 160 members.<sup>367</sup> As for the China Academy of Culture, it is the affiliate organization of the CEFC Huaxin conglomerate, whose links to the PLA were previously presented (→ p. 116).

Because of their ties to the Party-State, Chinese NGOs are often referred to as “GONGOs,” an acronym for the oxymoron “government-organized non-governmental organizations.”<sup>368</sup> Rather than representing civil society, Chinese GONGOs such as the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture (CAPDTC, 中国西藏文化保护与发展协会)<sup>369</sup> **actually advocate for Party policies, which is legitimized by the ECOSOC consultative status.** One need only identify the members of the CAPDTC leadership to gauge its ties to the Party: its honorary chairman, Raidi (热地), and its president, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai (帕巴拉-格列朗杰), both hold important positions within the Party. Raidi is a member of the Central Committee and Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai is vice-chairman of the CPPCC, the body that oversees the United Front (→ p. 39).<sup>370</sup>

The CAPDTC presents itself as a non-governmental organization promoting the preservation and development of Tibetan culture when, in fact, it serves as a **platform to implement propaganda and intimidation campaigns** against all individuals and organizations critical of China’s policies in Tibet. It also undermines the work of NGOs genuinely interested in defending the rights of Tibetans and the preservation of the Tibetan culture.<sup>371</sup>

## 7. Influence on regional organizations: the Chinese-European “friendship”

The CCP’s influence on international organizations also extends to regional organizations such as the **European Union.**<sup>372</sup> **Lacking a seat in the EU, China hopes to infiltrate it through informal platforms.** A study by researcher Jichang Lulu found that the EU-China Friendship Group (EUCFG, 欧洲议会欧中友好小组), the EU-China Friendship Association (EUCFA, 欧洲议会欧中友好协会), the EU-China Joint Innovation Centre (EUCJIC, 欧盟中国联合创新中心), and the Europe-China Culture and Economy Commission (EUCNC, 欧盟中国经济文化委员会) are all informal Chinese-European organizations allowing the PRC to surreptitiously **turn European elites into instruments relaying the Party’s propaganda.**<sup>373</sup>

These informal Chinese-European friendship organizations – which Jichang Lulu called friendship clusters – seek to **seduce the European elites in order to cultivate a “docile neutrality” thanks to “knowledge asymmetry” and “weaponiz[ed] mediocrity.”**<sup>374</sup>

367. “2018 Annual report,” China Association for NGO Cooperation.

368. Moises Naim, “What is a GONGO?” *Foreign Policy* (13 October, 2009); Reza Hasmath, Timothy Hildebrandt and Jennifer Y. J. Hsu, “Conceptualizing Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations,” *Journal of Civil Society*, 15:3 (2019).

369. <http://www.tibetculture.org.cn>.

370. “中国西藏文化保护与发展协会理事会领导机构” (“CAPDTC Board of Directors”), CAPDTC (22 Apr. 2019).

371. Bhuchung K. Tsering, “This is how China Preserves and Develops Tibetan Culture,” Central Tibetan Administration (26 Mar. 2014); “China Fails to Shut Down Scrutiny of its Violations as UN Council Adopts China Rights Report,” *International Campaign for Tibet* (20 Mar. 2014); “Forum on Tibetan Cultural Preservation Upholds Party Development Policy,” Congressional-executive Commission on China (3 Nov. 2006).

372. “La Chine à l’assaut de Bruxelles: un réseau d’organisations influentes (1/4)” (“China Storming Brussels: A Network of Influential Organizations (1/4),” *Asie Pacifique News* (11 Dec. 2018).

373. Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy: The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster,” *Sinopsis* (26 Nov. 2019).

374. Ibid.

Yet they have explicit links with Party organs such as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC, 中国人民对外友好协会) and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT, 中国国际贸易促进委员会), or even directly to the CCP International Liaison Department and the United Front Work Department (UFWD).<sup>375</sup>

The courted elites become **potential vehicles for Chinese interests in the European Parliament**. A former British MEP and EUCFA president Nirj Deva is a supporter of Chinese positions. In 2019, he said he could not think of “one big mistake” that China made in the last fifteen years, thus endorsing Beijing's policies as nearly one million Uyghurs were massively interned in Xinjiang.<sup>376</sup> He also took a stand in favor of Huawei and reportedly urged his fellow MEPs to do the same.<sup>377</sup> In 2009, he made a name for himself during the visit of Rebiya Kadeer, president of the World Uyghur Congress. Addressing the European Parliament's Human Rights Committee, she denounced the Chinese government's mismanagement of the bloody July riots in Urumqi, among other things.<sup>378</sup> Nirj Deva replied: “If the Uyghur language is banned, how come she is fluent in it today?”; “If Rebiya Kadeer's rights are indeed violated, how come she could become a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference?”; “If Rebiya Kadeer is indeed discriminated against, how come she can become one of the richest women in China.”<sup>379</sup> These **ad hominem attacks** sought to delegitimize her rather than to address the substance of the issues raised.

These questions were actually brought to Nirj Deva by his assistant and EUCFG secretary general, Gai Lin (盖琳), who is of Chinese origin.<sup>380</sup> Indeed, he reportedly suggested the idea to create the EUCFG to Nirj Deva, pointing out that there was an EU-Taiwan friendship group but none for the PRC.<sup>381</sup> He also suggested that the mistrust or even anti-Chinese sentiment among Europeans was only due to the many prejudices they harbor toward China.<sup>382</sup> **Gai Lin is the first EU official of Chinese nationality**. He was born in 1981 in Shenyang, Liaoning, and he studied in Belgium. He reportedly first met Nirj Deva in a bar and was later recruited as his assistant. Deva is said to have made a special request to the president of the European Parliament to be authorized to recruit Gai Lin.<sup>383</sup>

In 2006, Gai Lin and Nirj Deva founded the EUCFG with the aim of promoting a better understanding of China. **About 40 MEPs from about 20 countries and seven different political groups – the list was never disclosed – are apparently members of this friendship group**. About ten of them held key positions such as president of a political group, parliamentary committee or delegation in the European Parliament.<sup>384</sup> The EUCFG regularly organizes trips to China for its members, including trips to Tibet, while

375. Ibid.

376. Ibid.

377. Leigh Baldwin and Peter Geoghegan, “Senior Tory Revealed as Huawei Cheerleader in Brussels,” *Open Democracy* (2 May 2019).

378. Qu Bing, “European Parliament's New Powers and the Implications for China,” *GR:REEN Working Paper* (11 Nov. 2011).

379. “Des eurodéputés réfutent les discours séparatistes de Rebiya Kadeer” (“MEPs Disproved the Separatist Speeches of Rebiya Kadeer”), *China.org* (3 Sept. 2009), <http://archive.vn/tzMuR>.

380. Gai Lin, *My Experience in the European Parliament* (Evanston: Northeastern University Press, 2009), 63, cited by Juchang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy.”

381. “Une délégation du groupe d'amitié Parlement européen – Taiwan reçue à Taipei” (“A Delegation of the European Parliament – Taiwan Group hosted in Taipei”), *Taiwan Info* (19 Feb. 2019).

382. Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy.”

383. “盖琳：欧洲议会的中国80后” (“Gai Lin: The Chinese 30-Year Old of the European Parliament”), *Blog sina* (12 Aug. 2010), <http://archive.vn/fgmqd>.

384. “About Group,” EU-China Friendship Association.



the European Parliament's official working group on China still has not been authorized into the region.<sup>385</sup>

Gai Lin is the secretary general of EUCFG and of the EU-China Friendship Association. While the group promotes Chinese-European relations from a political viewpoint, the association is dedicated to all non-political aspects such as culture, research, tourism, trade, etc.<sup>386</sup> Gai Lin is also associate professor at the School of International Relations at the University of International Business and Economics and founding president of an association of Northeast Chinese (Dongbei) in Europe (欧洲东北同乡会暨商会).<sup>387</sup> This association, which may have ties to the United Front, has also implemented a campaign to “present the Chinese experience in the fight against Covid-19” to the health services of the European Parliament.<sup>388</sup>

In 2009, Gai Lin published a book about his experience in the European Parliament.<sup>389</sup> His personal ambition was to show the “true face” of China, especially with regard to the situation in Tibet, to MEPs.<sup>390</sup> He was pleased with his “achievements”: the EUCFG supported the 2008 Olympic Games in China, but also the Chinese people after the earthquake in Wenchuan, Sichuan, by collecting tents, and the group was hosted several times by the highest authorities of the PRC, including then-President Hu Jintao. When the European Parliament received the Dalai Lama in 2012, Gai Lin strongly criticized this decision by signing an op-ed in *European Voice*, as secretary general of EUCFG, in which he urged Europe to “focus on helping its jobless rather than on Tibet.”<sup>391</sup>

## B. “Wolf-warrior” diplomacy or how to dignify trolling

“**Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy**” (战狼外交), a name referring to the Chinese blockbuster *Wolf Warrior* (2015, 2017 → p. 348), is the diplomatic version of the “fighting spirit” that Xi Jinping requires not only from the PLA but from all state and Party services, to defend China's interests and image abroad. The expression was coined mainly to characterize **the postures of the Foreign Ministry spokesperson's office and of a dozen diplomats** who, in 2020, responded particularly virulently to criticisms levelled against China during the Covid-19 pandemic (which focused in particular on the name and origin of the virus, Beijing's responsibility in its circulation and on the management of the epidemic in China). Their aggressiveness was all the more striking because it broke with the discretion that had characterized Chinese diplomats before.

The attacks carried out by these diplomats have taken relatively classic forms (official communiqués on embassy websites, official protests via diplomatic channels) but also new ones, such as **social networks and an uninhibited recourse to abuse, admonition**

385. Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing Democracy.”

386. “Gai Lin,” *School of international relations*, <http://archive.vn/TzH3O>. “About Association,” EU-China Friendship Association, <http://archive.vn/LepYg>.

387. “旅欧华人华侨积极为全球 «战» 疫做贡献” (“The Chinese in Europe are actively contributing to the “war” against the pandemic”), Western Returned Scholars Association – Overseas educated Scholars Association of China, March 13, 2020, <http://archive.vn/0nWSI>

388. “欧洲东北同乡会暨商会向欧盟介绍中国抗疫经验” (“The European Association of Dongbei Chinese Brings the Chinese Experience of Fighting Against Epidemics to the EU”), 京报网 (Jingbaowang) (20 Mar. 2020), <http://archive.vn/aYOf0>.

389. Gai Lin, *我在欧洲议会* (*Me at the European Parliament*) (n.p., Éditions de l'université du Nord-Est, 2009).

390. “首位中国籍欧盟公务员: 将真实西藏传达给欧洲议员” (“China's Top EU official: Telling European Parliamentarians the Truth about Tibet”), *China news* (25 Jun. 2014), <http://archive.vn/1gmCj>.

391. Gai Lin, “EU Must Prioritise China Summit,” *European Voice*, *Politico* (8 Oct. 2012).



**and even intimidation.** For example, the Chinese consul general in Calcutta replied to a Twitter user that he would be “eradicated just like the virus,” or Zhao Lijian, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who posted a photo-montage showing an Australian soldier cutting the throat of an Afghan child (see image below), which provoked numerous indignant reactions around the world. This latest image, titled *Peace Force* (《和平之师》), is the work of the political artist Fu Yu (付昱), known as Wuheqilin (乌合麒麟), whom the Chinese media readily portrays as a “**wolf warrior artist.**”<sup>392</sup>



**The violence of some comments has sometimes led platform moderators to take action.** Twitter locked the official account of the Chinese embassy in the United States in January 2021 after a tweet describing Uyghur women as “baby-making machines.”

The problem with the term “wolf warrior,” which was picked up in 2020 by the media and many researchers, is that it helps make attractive a practice that should not be appealing. Elise Thomas recommended that “we should probably stop using terms like ‘wolf warrior,’ which makes everything sound cooler than it is, for what is essentially just diplomatic trolling.”<sup>393</sup>

Her analysis is accurate in terms of the informational content, which can be observed on Twitter especially (from this perspective, the “wolf warrior” diplomacy is a “Twiplomacy” → p. 229) – but also during press conferences (during one of them, in July 2020, Zhao Lijian attacked the German researcher Adrian Zenz (→ p. 53) with what amounted to a death threat: “what is unjust is doomed to destruction”).<sup>394</sup> But the **so-called “wolf-warrior” diplomacy is also present offline, in the physical world.** In order to exert pressure, silence critics, or impose positions favorable to the CCP, Chinese diplomats use many tools, of which this report provides examples: letters, phone calls, surveillance, intimidation, and even **physical attacks.** Indeed, on October 8, 2020, on the sidelines of a Taiwanese National Day reception in Fiji, two Chinese diplomats assaulted a member of the Taiwanese Trade Office in Suva who had to be hospitalized as a result, prompting the

392. Li Lei, “‘Wolf warrior artist’ strives to use new art to spread truth and inspire patriotism”, *Global Times*, 18 Jun. 2020, <https://archive.vn/WhBcy>.

393. <https://twitter.com/elisethoma5/status/1333702774454841346>.

394. “Chinese FM ‘Not Surprised’ If Rumormongers Will be Sued,” *Global Times* (9 Jul. 2020) (<https://archive.vn/qIWls>).

Taiwanese Prime Minister to say that the “wolf warrior” diplomacy is really a diplomacy of “hooligans.”<sup>395</sup>

### When the Chinese embassy puts pressure on Indian journalists

October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Letter from Chinese Embassy

Dear media friends,  
Regarding the so-called forthcoming “National Day of Taiwan”, the Chinese Embassy in India would like to remind our media friends that there is only one China in the world, and the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’s territory. These facts are recognized by UN resolution and constitute the universal consensus of the international community. All countries that have diplomatic relations with China should firmly honor their commitment to the One-China policy, which is also the long-standing official position of the Indian government.

We hope Indian media can stick to Indian government’s position on Taiwan question and do not violate the One-China principle. In particular, Taiwan shall not be referred to as a “country(nation)” or “Republic of China” or the leader of China’s Taiwan region as “President”, so as not to send the wrong signals to the general public.

The Chinese Embassy in India appreciates the good faith and efforts by friends from the media. We are willing to maintain communication with media friends on China-related reports.

Press Section  
Embassy of China in India

Source : <https://twitter.com/AdityaRajKaul/status/1313814773830578176/photo/1>.

On October 7, 2020, about 250 Indian journalists received a letter from the Chinese embassy anticipating their potential coverage of the “so-called” Taiwanese national holiday that was to take place three days later (October 10). It reminded them that there was “only one China,” that Taiwan was “an inalienable part of China’s territory,” and that this statement was “the long-standing position of the Indian government.” The embassy therefore expected the media to respect this position, to “not violate the One-China principle,” and in particular not to refer to Taiwan as a “country,” “nation,” or as the “Republic of China;” but also not to refer to the leader of what is therefore only a “region” as a “president” (Tsai Ing-wen was not named in the letter). As usual, the letter ended with a **thinly veiled threat**: if these instructions were not followed, communication with the media would be broken off. As is often the case, this initiative by the embassy proved **counterproductive**, since one of the journalists to whom the letter was sent posted it on Twitter, where he was followed by more than 280,000 persons, and where it was widely circulated, prompting numerous reactions, including from the Taiwanese Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>396</sup> His Indian counterpart responded the next day, explaining that the “free media in India [...] reports on issues that they see fit.”<sup>397</sup>

Similarly to journalists, politicians are also common targets, especially when they meet dissidents: in Germany, a meeting between Joshua Wong and Heiko Maas provoked a sharp response from the embassy.<sup>398</sup> Members of parliaments are specifically targeted by “wolf-warrior” diplomats who do not refrain from calling them, or sending insistent and threatening letters, particularly when they plan to visit Taiwan, as happened in the Czech Republic (where the president of the parliament was targeted by a disinformation campaign → p. 267), or in France, as the following letter testifies. The Chinese ambassador Lu Shaye wrote to the senator Alain Richard, setting in motion a succession of events that led the ambassador to insult the researcher Antoine Bondaz and, *in fine*, pushed the minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs to summon the ambassador (→ p. 237). Only two days after the stern admonition from the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Lu Shaye reiterated with a second two-page letter to Alain Richard, dated March 25, this time clearly threatening retaliatory measures if the trip to the island, which he described as a “rupture”,

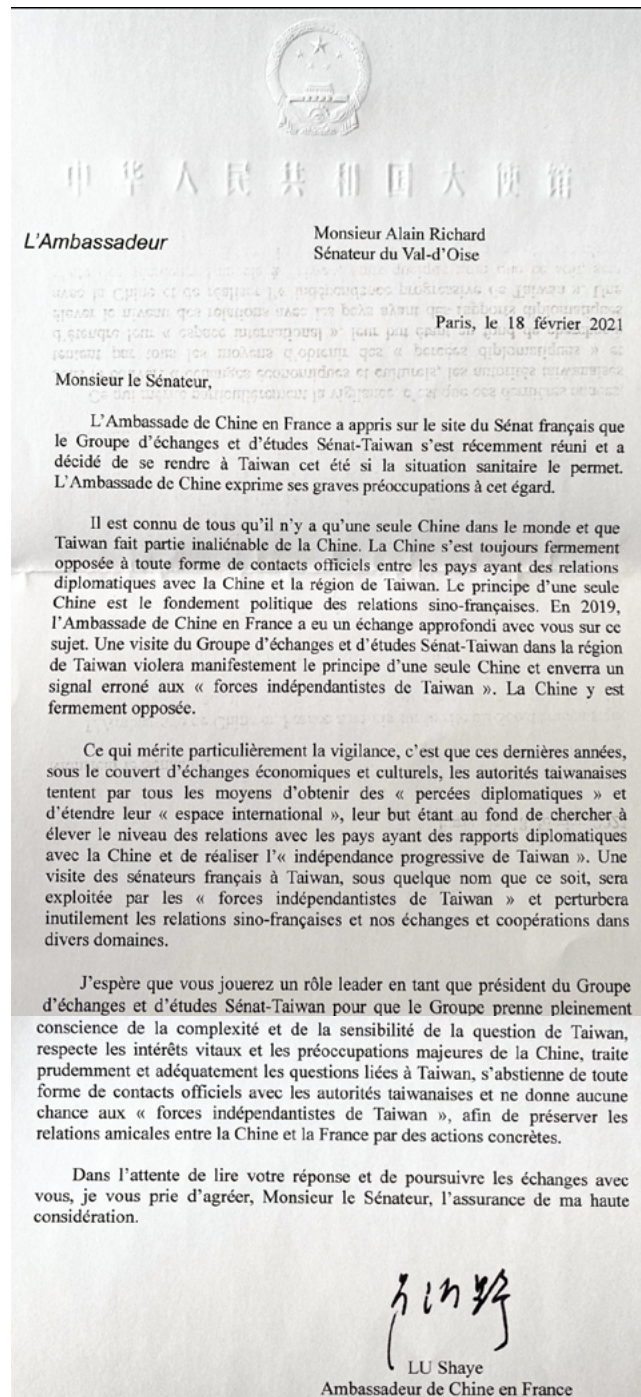
395. Keoni Everington, “Taiwan Premier Condemns China’s ‘Wolf Warriors’ in Fiji for Being ‘Hooligans,’” *Taiwan News* (20 Oct. 2020).

396. [https://twitter.com/MOFA\\_Taiwan/status/1313838337875079169](https://twitter.com/MOFA_Taiwan/status/1313838337875079169).

397. Kallol Bhattacharjee, “Indian Media is Free, Says in MEA Response to Chinese Embassy’s Note to Press on Taiwan,” *The Hindu* (8 Oct. 2020).

398. Interview conducted by one of our research assistants in Berlin (Mar. 2020).

was maintained.<sup>399</sup> Ignoring the warning he had just received, the Chinese ambassador seems to prefer provocation and escalation. The visit was not a novel idea however; Alain Richard already led delegations of senators to Taiwan in 2015 and 2018, such as his counterparts in the National Assembly did. And the five French parliamentary trips to Taiwan after 2015 had not harmed relations between Paris and Beijing. The Chinese reaction to this proposed trip, which is no different from the previous ones, is thus symptomatic of the increasing aggressiveness of the Party-State, particularly on the Taiwan issue.



Source:<sup>400</sup> <https://twitter.com/soubrou/status/1371850916320665601/>.

399. Régis Soubrouillard, “L’ambassadeur de Chine Lu Shaye récidive au Sénat” (“The Chinese Ambassador Lu Shaye On the Offensive Again in the Senate”), *La Lettre A* (13 Apr. 2021).

400. The letter was sent on February 18 by the ambassador Lu Shaye to the senator Alain Richard, chairman of the Senate Study Group on Taiwan, and disclosed by the website *Lettre A* on March 25 (<https://bit.ly/2NRkD4z>).



In the United States, **the Chinese Consulate in Chicago tried to pressure state congressmen as well.** On February 26, 2020, the office of Roger Roth, president of the Wisconsin Senate, received an email from a Wu Ting from the consulate asking him to introduce a resolution praising the Chinese management of the crisis. Attached to the email was a draft resolution, in which we could read that “China’s action has been critical to the global fight against the epidemic, and China has adopted unprecedented and rigorous measures... [it has been] transparent and quick in sharing key information of the virus with the World Health Organization and the international community.” The attempt was **counter-productive** because, instead of the resolution proposed by China, Roger Roth introduced a resolution untitled “the Communist Party of China deliberately and intentionally misled the world on the Wuhan coronavirus.”<sup>401</sup>

**Along with journalists and MPs, researchers are also specifically targeted.** The ASPI, one of the best think tanks in the world in its analysis of the Chinese influence, has published dozens of excellent reports on the matter, and has thus become a preferred target of Chinese diplomats that described the institution as “[US-funded] anti-China far-right scholars [that] fabricate[s] fake reports” (see the tweet from the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands below). The ASPI, more specifically Australian public funding of this institute presented by Beijing as “anti-China”, was listed among the 14 grievances that the Chinese embassy transmitted to the Australian press in November 2020.<sup>402</sup> ASPI is not an isolated case. In Canada, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute was also targeted by the Chinese embassy after it supposedly criticized the CCP.<sup>403</sup> In France, the example of Antoine Bondaz, described later in the report, illustrates the counter-productive character of these attacks (→ p. 237).



401. Michael R. Pompeo (Secretary of State), and Roger Roth (Wisconsin State Senator), “State Legislatures and the China Challenge,” Speech at the Wisconsin State Capitol (Madison, Wisconsin, 23 Sept. 2020) (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/state-legislatures-and-the-china-challenge/index.html>).

402. Jonathan Kearsley, Eryk Bagshaw and Anthony Galloway, “If You Make China the Enemy, China Will be the Enemy: Beijing’s Fresh Threat to Australia,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (18 Nov. 2020).

403. “Chinese Embassy Spokesperson’s Remarks” (19 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/Lxtdz>. It singled out an open letter signed by a hundred researchers and politicians and denouncing the cover-up by the Party-State at the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic. The letter branded it as a “Chernobyl-like moment”: <https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/experts-say-chinese-government-covid-19-cover-chernobyl-moment/>.

These discursive strategies pertain to what Marc Angenot calls an **agonic discourse** – satire, pamphleteering or polemical speeches for instance – of the epideictic genre.<sup>404</sup> The latter focuses on blaming or praising and can have a role in the social construction of a group. In its typical use, this argumentative strategy **is meant to consolidate the unity of the group, of a nation, in the face of designated enemies**. Through such a radical posture, the goal is to reinforce a divide: those who do not support China are enemies. This rhetoric highlights the narrative of the Party dedicated to the diasporas about the unfair treatment suffered by Chinese in the West. Furthermore, it uses modeling, axiological or deontic discursive markers (injunction, position of authority), and it is tied to eristic – the “**argumentative warfare**” which aims to exterminate the adversary and its arguments. To do this, it resorts to fallacies, to pathos in its vilest form, as well as to invective. The processes are well known: unfounded accusations, *argumentum ad baculum* (an appeal to force), “pathos of indignation”, etc.<sup>405</sup>

The “**wolf-warrior**” diplomats abundantly use this repertoire of discursive strategies as they condemn Western hegemon, colonialism, even racism; they brandish the humiliations suffered by the Chinese since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to justify this posture. They ultimately want the world to understand that **the moment when China allowed this to happen is “over”** – something explicitly written by the Chinese embassy in France and the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see below). In a word, the world should get used to the **Chinese power, hence its aggressive behavior** (the second being presented as a manifestation of the first), and it should adapt itself accordingly.



Based on this assumption, they disqualify everything that they see as a critic. They refuse to debate and strive to deprive the adversary of the very possibility to express an opinion, **systematically countering narratives disagreeing with the official CCP line, blurring the line between what belongs to the CCP and to China as a culture or country**. In this narrative system, the Party represents the whole China and is the depository of the Chinese culture. This is a renewed version of the rhetoric of the Three Representations (三个代表) adopted by Jiang Zemin but created by Wang Huning (王沪宁).

Hence, this aggressiveness of Chinese diplomats is **at the very heart of the Chinese Machiavellian moment that seemingly characterizes the current influence policy of the CCP**. The Party’s strategy is apparently based on the idea that **seduction is not enough to reach its objectives. It is then necessary to constrain and intimidate those who “lower” or criticize China**.

404. Marc Angenot, *La parole pamphlétaire* (The Pamphleteer’s Word) (Paris: Payot, 1995).

405. Ibid.



## 1. The origin

While this strategy became widely recognized during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, its beginnings could be observed long before, with **some particularly aggressive ambassadors already acting as forerunners**, starting with Gui Congyou (桂从友) in Sweden (→ p. 523) and Lu Shaye (卢沙野) in Canada (→ p. 547), both explored in Part 4. **Thus, the trend was not new and the pandemic only acted as a catalyst.**

The origin of this aggressive diplomatic posture can be found in Xi Jinping's decision to abandon Deng Xiaoping's 24-character doctrine – often summarized in 4 characters (韬光养晦), which literally means “hide one's splendor and nurture darkness”<sup>406</sup> but is often interpreted as to “hide one's ability and wait for the right moment.”<sup>407-408</sup> For Xiang Lanxin (相蓝欣), the evil came from even further back: the origin of this diplomatic hubris would be found in Martin Jacques' 2009 book, *When China Rules the World*. Jacques was instrumental in popularizing the theory of a superior Chinese model. The great success of the British author is said to have intoxicated the Chinese leadership, which began to believe in this hypothesis, especially on the basis of China's recent economic successes. However, according to Xiang Lanxin, Jacques' erroneous interpretation was merely a modern version of Paul Kennedy's thesis on “the rise and fall of great powers.”<sup>409</sup> Indeed, Xiang believed that James was obsessed with a culturalist vision of China quite similar to the one that drove the Jesuits – except that they had a command of Chinese, which Jacques did not. The British author made China a model by denigrating the West (抑西扬中), leading to a dangerous systemic opposition.<sup>410</sup> This interpretation, however, has not convinced a majority of Chinese intellectuals. Chen Dingding, for example, who is much closer to the authorities, believes that the “wolf warrior” diplomacy is not real, but a narrative produced by the United States, and particularly its hawks, in order to stigmatize and weaken China.<sup>411</sup>

Whatever the source from which diplomats drew their intellectual inspiration, it seems that the new diplomatic tone was **initiated by the Chinese foreign minister himself**. Indeed, several media outlets point out at Wang Yi's response to a question by a Canadian journalist on June 1, 2016, about the disappearance of a bookseller in Hong Kong's Causeway Bay – it presumably served as an inspiration for the diplomats<sup>412</sup>: “Have you ever been to China? Do you know that China has helped 600 million people lift themselves out of poverty? Do you know that China is the second largest economy with a per capita income of US\$8,000? Do you know that China has included the protection of human rights in its Constitution?”<sup>413</sup>

406. This is a quote from the Book of Tang (舊唐書).

407. Popularized as the official Chinese interpretation, according to the Pentagon and others, but contested by Chinese specialists. For our part, we decided to keep a more literal translation, faithful to the classical origin, that eventually leaves the interpretation to the reader.

408. The 24 characters are “冷静观察，稳住阵脚，沉着应付，韬光养晦，善于守拙，决不 当头。” Translation: “Observe Calmly, Secure Your Positions, Face Placidly, hide your Splendor and Nurture the Darkness, be Circumspect, and Above all, Do not Proclaim your Superiority.”

409. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1988).

410. 相蓝欣 (Xiang Lanxin), Interview with Ma Guochuan (马国川), “著名国际政治专家 相蓝欣教授:反思 战狼文化, 呼唤文明沟通” (“Professor Xiang Lanxin, a Renowned Expert on International Relations: Rethinking the Culture of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy, Invoking Civilized Communication”), 苍山夜语 (30 Apr. 2020).

411. Chen Dingding, Hu Junyang, “Is China Really Embracing ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomacy?” *The Diplomat* (9 Sept. 2020).

412. 安德烈 (An Delie), “中国外交部战狼式外交 反响不太好” (“Chinese Foreign Ministry's wolf warrior diplomacy not well received”) RFI (19 Dec. 2019).

413. The citation in Chinese: “你去过中国吗? 知道中国从一穷二白, 帮助六亿摆脱贫困吗? 知道中国人均 8000 美元的第二大经济体吗? 知道中国把保护人权列入到宪法当中了吗?”



Presentation of the “passport” at the premiere of the film *Wolf Warrior 2*.<sup>414</sup>

The minister’s “boldness” was widely circulated on Chinese-language social networks; its popular success and the Party’s tacit approval could have inspired diplomats. When the “wolf warriors” spoke out during the Covid-19 crisis, Wang Yi was quick to support this posture: “We will strongly hit back against malicious slander and firmly defend national honor and dignity. We will lay out the truth to counter the gratuitous smears and firmly uphold justice and conscience.”<sup>415</sup>

Even if Wang Yi signaled that a new diplomatic posture was desirable – although one cannot exclude an intellectual reconstruction after the fact – the expression “wolf warriors” is not his: it was borrowed from a Chinese film franchise, *Wolf Warrior*, which features a Chinese special forces agent rescuing his fellow citizens. It is difficult today to trace the exact genealogy of the graft that led to describing diplomats as “wolf warriors”: we simply acknowledge it here and focus instead on the description of the posture in itself.

The parallel drawn between the film and Chinese diplomats is based on the message conveyed by the work of fiction, which these diplomats supposedly embody today. **Indeed, *Wolf Warrior’s* motto is “[anyone] who harms China will die, no matter how far they are”** (“犯我中华者虽远必诛”). The message was reinforced by the final scene of the movie, which revealed a Chinese passport with the following inscription superimposed on its back: ‘Citizens of the People’s Republic of China: when you are in danger abroad, do not give up. Do not forget that behind you is your powerful motherland’ (see image above).<sup>416</sup>

## 2. The Twitterization of Chinese diplomacy

Unsurprisingly, this shift in the habitus of the diplomats has led to an increased presence on Western social networks, the very ones that cannot be used by Chinese citizens (especially Twitter). They were even encouraged to do so by Xi Jinping who, in a

414. “Patriotism Helps Chinese Military Action Flick ‘Wolf Warrior 2’ Reach No.2 on List of Highest Single-Day Earnings for A Domestic Film,” *Global Times* (30 Jul. 2017).

415. Wendy Wu, “Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi Defends ‘Wolf Warrior’ Diplomats for Standing Up to ‘Smears,’” *South China Morning Post* (24 May 2020).

416. Passport covers with this quote are sold in China.

2018 speech, urged them to “reach an international discursive power [and] optimize China’s international communication strategy and posture,” including “telling China’s story well and shaping a positive national image” and “actively using social media platforms abroad.”<sup>417</sup> He has apparently been heard because, starting in 2019, official Chinese Twitter and Facebook accounts have multiplied.

**Between March 2019 and March 2020, the number of Twitter accounts belonging to Chinese embassies, consulates, and ambassadors grew by 250%;**<sup>418</sup> 75% of the 162 Chinese government and diplomatic Twitter accounts that the Alliance for Securing Democracy (ASD) tracks on its Hamilton 2.0 tool were created in 2019 or 2020.<sup>419</sup> There were apparently **two turning points** prompting the Chinese authorities to respond: **first, the Hong Kong crisis in 2019**, which coincided with the creation of a large number of accounts. Forty accounts were created between September and December 2019, about as many as Chinese diplomats with Twitter accounts prior to March 2019.<sup>420</sup> By the end of December 2019, the BBC had counted 55 Twitter accounts of Chinese diplomats, embassies and consulates, the majority of which (32) had been created in 2019.<sup>421</sup> **Next, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020**, which coincided with another peak in account creation—especially in the beginning (February-March), when China was implicated (4 in January 2020, 10 in February 2020, 9 in March, 5 in April, 3 in May, and 1 in July),<sup>422</sup> as well as with an increase in activity (while all the Chinese diplomatic accounts had accumulated a total of 5,000 tweets in January 2020, they had nearly 20,000 in April).<sup>423</sup> This sudden inflation, which answered two successive crises, suggests that the Twitterization of the Chinese diplomacy could actually have been **a policy, and a communication strategy** more than a series of “decentralized personal initiatives,”<sup>424</sup> even though this last possibility cannot be excluded either.

In this process, several personalities stand out. Zhao Lijian (赵立坚) – the first to open an account in 2010 as “Mahomet Zhao Lijian” (“穆罕默德赵立坚”<sup>425</sup>) – was a counselor at the Chinese embassy in Pakistan at the time. Then several ambassadors created an account, starting with “small” postings (Wei Qiang (魏强), ambassador to Panama, in October 2017), later followed by larger ones (Sun Weidong (孙卫东), ambassador to India, in December 2017). Then, in 2019, after China’s diplomatic presence on Twitter was deemed conclusive, the most important postings joined the social networks: Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai (崔天凯), in July 2019; Ambassador to the United Kingdom Liu Xiaoming (刘晓明), in October 2019. But they do not all have individual accounts yet (in France, for example, @AmbassadeChine handles the communication on Twitter).

417. Speeches on Xi Jinping’s Media Thought (2018 Version) (习近平新闻思想讲义(2018年版)), (Beijing: People’s Press [人民出版社], 2018).

418. Laura Rosenberger, “China’s Coronavirus Information Offensive,” *Foreign Affairs* (22 Apr. 2020).

419. Raymond Serrato and Bret Schafer, *Reply All: Inauthenticity and Coordinated Replying in pro-Chinese Communist Party Twitter Networks*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Alliance for Securing Democracy (ASD) (Jul. 2020), 3.

420. Jessica Brandt and Bret Schafer, “Five Things to Know About Beijing’s Disinformation Approach,” Alliance for Securing Democracy, German Marshall Fund (30 Mar. 2020).

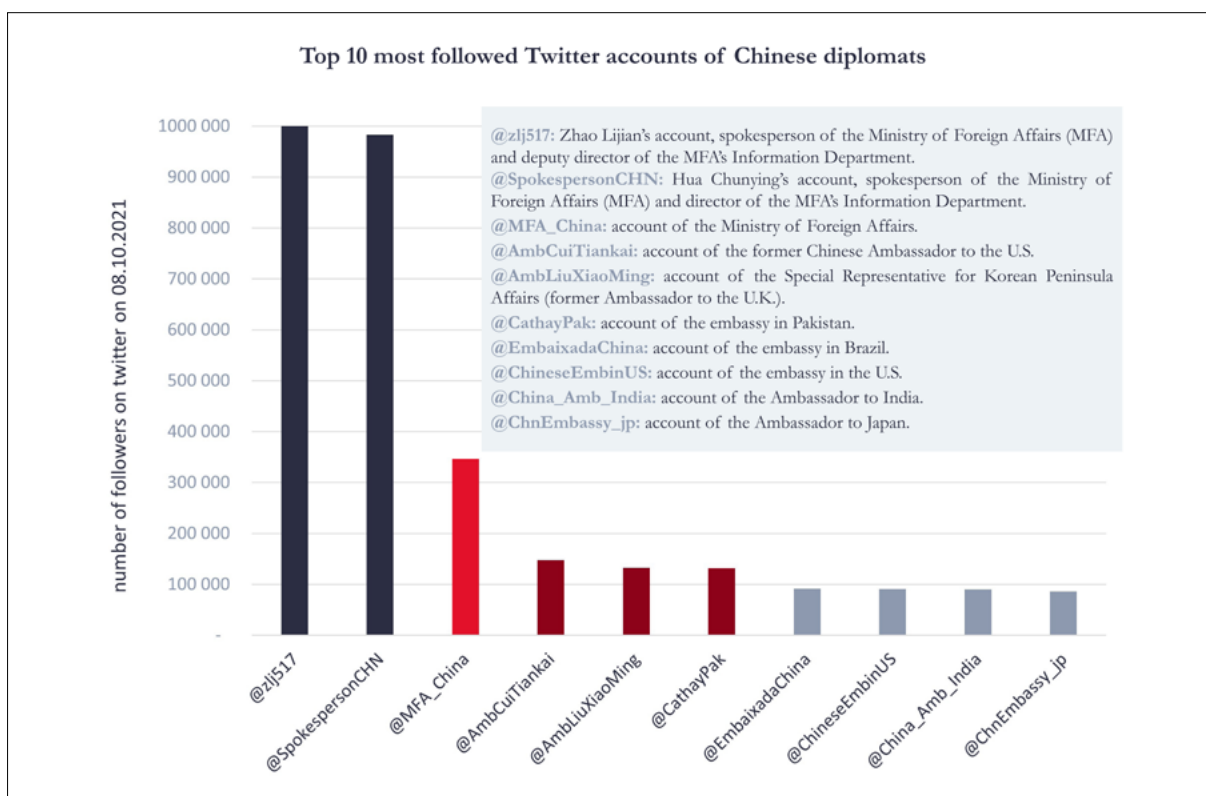
421. Feng Zhaoyin, “China and Twitter: The Year China Got Louder on Social Media,” BBC (29 Dec. 2019).

422. Alicia Fawcett, *Chinese Discourse Power: China’s Use of Information Manipulation in Regional and Global Competition*, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (2020), 8.

423. Serrato and Schafer, *Reply All*, 3.

424. Marc Julienne and Sophie Hanck, “Diplomatie chinoise: de l’‘esprit combattant’ au ‘loup guerrier’” (“Chinese Diplomacy: From a ‘Combative Spirit’ to the ‘Wolf Warriors’”), *Politique étrangère*, 1 (2021), 108.

425. Lai Fu, “Growling back at the West,” *China Media Project*, August 8, 2021.



**Not all online diplomats are “wolf warriors”:** it depends on their personality but also on the context, i.e. the host country. For example, in **Hungary**, the Twitter and Facebook accounts of the Chinese embassy are less aggressive, because there is simply no need for it: the Hungarian government has been pro-Chinese since 2010 (→ p. 313). It was also pro-Chinese during the 2020 pandemic, emphatically thanking Beijing for its assistance. “Given the cooperative approach of the Hungarian government to china in the last ten years, the Chinese government has no reason to directly influence or actively intervene in the domestic discourse to change public perceptions. It is the Hungarian government itself that promotes the success of Beijing in fighting the virus and emphasizes the importance of China.”<sup>426</sup>

426. DigiComNet, “The Chinese Covid-19 Information Campaign in Hungary: Keeping a Low Profile,” medium.com (14 Jun. 2020).



### Zhao Lijian (@zlj517), leader of the “wolf-warrior” diplomats

Born in 1972, Zhao Lijian is China’s most active diplomat on Twitter (he is the author of more than 65,000 tweets published between May 2010 and May 2021), and he has been known for his undiplomatic style and aggressiveness, especially against the United States. He has become a “wolf warriors” icon, so much so that his image is most often used to represent the phenomenon, as seen in the illustration below against the background of an image from the film *Wolf Warrior*.



An artist’s impression of Zhao Lijian as the hero of the action movie *Wolf Warrior* (by Tony Bell).

In July 2019, while stationed at the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, he reacted to international condemnations of the treatment of the Uyghurs by accusing Americans of being racist themselves. His tweet angered the American elite, including President Obama’s former National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, who thrust Zhao Lijian into the spotlight. His boldness paid off: called back to Beijing in the summer of 2019, he was promoted spokesman and deputy director-general at the Foreign Ministry’s Information Department, where he has played a role in the “Twitterization” of Chinese ambassadors around the world. During the pandemic, he also spread conspiracy theories about the supposedly American origins of the virus (→ p. 596). He is considered one of the main figures, and perhaps the leader, of the “wolf-warrior” generation of diplomats.





### 3. The artificial amplification of diplomatic accounts

Another phenomenon which grew most prominently during the epidemic **is the creation of a large number of anonymous accounts on social media that support the actions of the diplomats.** By following 36 Twitter accounts belonging to Chinese diplomats or ambassadors, the Global Engagement Center (GEC) of the US Department of State detected a **sudden increase in the number of followers after March 2020, which coincided with Beijing’s efforts to amplify its propaganda on Covid-19.** The average number of daily new followers went from around thirty to over 720, a 22-fold increase. Considering that “many of these new followers were newly created accounts,”<sup>427</sup> it apparently indicated the implementation of **an artificial network designed to amplify the messages of Chinese diplomats,** a tendency that “intensified from March to May.”<sup>428</sup> The GEC coordinator gave as examples two accounts linked to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, @zlj517, and @spokespersonchn: 3,423 of their 10,000 latest followers were identical and “nearly 40 percent of the most recent followers were created in just a six-week period between the 1st of March and the 15th of April, 2020.”<sup>429</sup> Another example: the Twitter account of the Chinese Ambassador in Hungary, created in October 2019, had 2,137 followers near the end of May 2020, 98% of them non-Hungarian with an unusually high representation of accounts from the Middle-East, South Asia, and Africa.<sup>430</sup>

An analysis of the 828,646 followers of two CCP accounts showed that a large number of them appeared unauthentic and coordinated, were created in March 2020 and published **on topics linked to four main themes: Covid-19 (conspiracy), Taiwan (independence), Hong Kong (protests), and the United States (anti-racists protests).**<sup>431</sup> Their unauthenticity was indicated by: their name (many of them, with numbers, seemed to have been automatically generated), the time of their creation (in large chunks and at the same time), their profile picture (stolen elsewhere or unrelated to the account), their language (a same Twitter account tweeted in three to five languages), their behavior (mostly defensive, with a high reply rate – in some cases, 65% of tweets were replies – to criticisms of China usually, and to defend the country), etc.

These followers, with accounts that seemed nothing but fake, are **located everywhere around the world, but disproportionately in Pakistan.** It is not surprising considering that the country served as a trial platform in the early days of the Twitterization of Chinese diplomacy when Zhao Lijian was posted there.<sup>432</sup> The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad was also one of the first to create an account, which remains one of the most followed accounts among Chinese diplomatic representations, ahead of larger embassies. Finally, the General Consul in Karachi, Li Bijian (李碧建) (@libijian2), “has been the CCP’s most active diplomat (by a significant margin) since joining Twitter in January 2020.”<sup>433</sup>

427. Lea Gabrielle (GEC coordinator), “Briefing with Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle, Global Engagement Center Update on PRC Efforts to Push Disinformation and Propaganda around COVID,” U.S. Department of State (8 May 2020).

428. Ibid.

429. Ibid.

430. Tamás Matura, “The Chinese Covid-19 Information Campaign in Hungary: Keeping a Low Profile,” DigiComNet (14 Jun. 2020).

431. Serrato and Schafer, *Reply All*, 2.

432. Ibid.

433. Ibid., 6.

## 4. The French Case

France also witnessed a **radical mutation of the embassy's attitude since the appointment of Lu Shaye (卢沙野)** as ambassador in late July 2019. Earlier, the Chinese Embassy Twitter account had mostly been diffusing soothing information worthy of a tourism agency, praising the taste of Yangchun's noodles, the finesse of plum flower paintings, or the dazzling colors of the Miao people's New Year celebrations. Since then, and most specifically (but not solely) in the context of Covid-19, the embassy has been committed to defending the Chinese performances in a **more aggressive manner**, responding to criticisms and reports or research supposedly conveying an erroneous image of the situation in China: the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, religious freedom, or Hong Kong politics for instance.

These narrative strategies are often imparted through intermediaries, as seen previously. On November 10, 2020, the embassy thus broadcast a video showcasing a French expert, **Pierre Picquart**, a regular on the Chinese (and Russian) media where he relays – and provide a foreign “scientific” veneer to – the CCP's positions (→ p. 317). This time, his remarks were ostensibly read out on a teleprompter, which did not fail to provoke reactions.<sup>434</sup> Along the same lines, it published, a month before, a video in which an unidentified Westerner explained in Chinese that, before visiting China, he held a negative view of the country, which was taught to him by Western media, but that he had realized how erroneous it was. Furthermore, a few days later, an interview of Dr. Robert Lawrence Khun, an American investor who deplored the inability of Western media to understand China, was also posted.



434. For example: Nicolas Hénin on Twitter: “Dear Chinese embassy, the next time you stamp an academic to get your message across, try to make him a little more comfortable. Right now, he really looks like he has a Kalashnikov pointed at his head...” (In French: “Dites, l’ambassade de Chine, la prochaine fois que vous tamponnez un universitaire pour faire passer vos messages, essayez de le mettre un peu à l’aise. Là, il donne vraiment l’impression d’avoir une kalachnikov pointée sur la tempe...,” [https://twitter.com/N\\_Henin/status/1326124257127112706](https://twitter.com/N_Henin/status/1326124257127112706)).

### Lu Shaye, a not so diplomatic ambassador

The current Chinese ambassador in France, Lu Shaye, has been known as a “remarkably undiplomatic,” “combative,” and “vehement” diplomat, “slayer of the press,” even before his appointment in Paris.<sup>435</sup> Born in 1964 in the Zhejiang province, Lu started his career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987,<sup>436</sup> among the specialists of the French-speaking world. With an expertise on West Africa, he was posted to the Chinese Embassy in Guinea, then at the Department on African Affairs, a directory of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1988-2001). He was later posted to the Chinese Embassy in France (2001-2003), and again at the Department of African Affairs, as deputy director (2003-2005). He was appointed ambassador in Senegal (2005-2009) at age 41, making him one of the youngest Chinese ambassadors, before becoming director general of Africa at the Ministry (2009-2014). He subsequently worked for a year as deputy mayor of Wuhan (2014-2015), and another year as director of the Bureau of Policy Research of the **CCP’s Central Small Leading Group for Foreign Affairs (2015-2016)** – an important position that gave him access to central authorities. He later became ambassador to Canada (2016-2019) and to France (since July 2019), with the rank of vice-minister.

Ambassador Lu was noticed in Canada for, among other things, its virulent criticisms of Canadian media (→ p. 547). After the arrest of Huawei’s executive Meng Wanzhou by Canadian authorities, and that of two Canadian nationals in China, he personally signed an op-ed in *The Hill Times* that criticized those who seemed to believe that “only Canadian citizens’ freedom shall be deemed valuable” and accused the country of an arrogant double standard which he explained to be due to “Western egotism and white supremacy.”<sup>437</sup> During a seminar in Ottawa in May 2019, he defended **Chinese supremacy** (“a 5000 year old Eastern civilization, [with] a much longer history than all the existing Western countries”, which “has realized its modernization and become the second largest economy in the world in only a few decades, while it took its Western counterpart several hundred years to achieve the same,” etc.).<sup>438</sup>

In March 2020, the Twitter account of the Chinese Embassy in France “liked” a tweet asking the “fascist media” to stop “doing propaganda for white supremacy.”<sup>439</sup> On April 12, 2020, the embassy put on its website a statement untitled “Restoring Distorted Facts – Observations of a Chinese Diplomat in Office in Paris,” in French and in Chinese, in which this “diplomat,” who presumably was none other than the ambassador himself,<sup>440</sup> **violently attacked France and spread false information.** He notably wrote that the “healthcare personnel at EHPADs [*établissements d’hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes*] (nursing homes), abandoned their duties overnight, collectively deserting and leaving residents to die of hunger and illness.”<sup>441</sup> The statement was meant to show to the French – and to the Chinese – the superiority of the CCP’s authoritarian regime and to silence the “unfounded” criticisms com-

435. Keegan Elmer, “China’s ‘Outspoken’ Lu Shaye Leaves Canada to Become Ambassador to France,” *South China Morning Post* (10 Aug. 2019); Antoine Malo, “En France, un ambassadeur chinois peu diplomate” (“In France, A Seldom Diplomatic Chinese Diplomat”), *Le Journal du Dimanche* (2 Jun. 2020); “Le diplomate chinois Lu Shaye, pourfendeur de la presse canadienne, nommé ambassadeur en France” (“The Chinese Diplomat Lu Shaye, Slasher of the Canadian Press, Appointed Ambassador to France”), *Reporters sans frontières* (17 Jun. 2019).

436. “Curriculum Vitae de l’Ambassadeur” (“Curriculum Vitae of the Ambassador”), Ambassade de la République populaire de Chine en République française (31 Jul. 2019).

437. Lu Shaye, “China’s Ambassador: Why the Double Standard on Justice for Canadians, Chinese?” *The Hill Times* (9 Jan. 2019).

438. Embassy of China in Canada, “Remarks by Ambassador Lu Shaye at the Seminar on China-Canada Relations” (24 May 2019).

439. <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1243140773215862784/photo/1>.

440. *La Chine démasquée*, 12.

441. “‘Rétablir des faits distordus’ Observations d’un diplomate chinois en poste à Paris” (“‘Setting the Record Straight,’ Observations from a Chinese Diplomat Posted in Paris”), Ambassade de la République populaire de Chine en République française (12 Apr. 2020), <https://web.archive.org/web/20200413103340/http://www.amb-chine.fr/fr/zfzj/t1768712.htm>.

ing from France. Besides, Lu Shaye had previously taken a stand to explain that Westerners, by their negligence and inability to handle a crisis, were, in some way, responsible for the pandemic. This article was strongly criticized, particularly by the researcher Antoine Bondaz who regularly denounces the lies spread by the embassy's Twitter account.



The ambassador was urgently summoned by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian on April 14, who expressed his disapprobation.<sup>442</sup> The embassy subsequently removed the incriminated text from its website, but neither Lu Shaye nor the embassy apologized to the French people.

Official declarations posted on the embassy's website went back to a more conventional content, and the Twitter account back to highlighting elements of the Chinese “utopia” – the ambassador simply stressing the good relations between the French and Chinese powers, relying, when necessary, on consensual figures, such as General de Gaulle. And yet, the admonitions targeting opponents of the “Chinese Dream” who try to raise awareness to

442. Frédéric Lemaître, “Coronavirus: la France convoque l’ambassadeur de Chine pour lui exprimer son mécontentement” (“France Simmons the Ambassador of China to Express Its Discontent”), *Le Monde* (15 Apr. 2020). Lu Shaye was summoned to the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs in February 2020, following the publication of a statement by the Chinese Embassy that accused the French authorities of discriminating against Huawei.



the situation in Xinjiang among Europeans, have not disappeared. Raphaël Glucksmann, who leads a PR campaign on the situation in Xinjiang in the European Parliament, has become a target of the embassy's account.



### The “Bondaz Effect,” or the demonstration of the perverse effect of the wolf-warrior diplomacy



Antoine Bondaz is a researcher at the French *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique* (Foundation for Strategic Research – FRS). He is used to denouncing, on Twitter and in the media, the disinformation and interferences coming from the PRC Embassy in Paris – which blocked him on social networks. On March 16, 2021, he reacted to the publication of a letter from the embassy that exhorted French senators to abandon a planned trip to Taiwan (→ p. 225). In a tweet, Bondaz wrote that “this injunction is inadmissible. This is a characterized interference.”<sup>443</sup> The following day, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs addressed the issue during a press conference: “the French members of Parliament freely decide when they want to travel and the contacts they have.”<sup>444</sup> When, on March 19, Bondaz relayed this information on Twitter, the official account of the Chinese embassy

insulted him, calling him a “lightweight.”<sup>445</sup>

This insult provoked an immediate condemnation from researchers, journalists, MPs, and political leaders – both in France and abroad. **The embassy even managed a tour de force:** as François Heisbourg noted, the intervention **united the entire “community of French analysts and researchers,”** even those who usually work with the embassy.

To defend itself, the Chinese embassy released a communiqué on March 21, reiterating its message and calling Bondaz “an ideological troll” and a “crazy hyena,”<sup>446</sup> while the *Global Times* internationalized the scandal by publishing, the following day, two articles in English that defended

443. <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1371857850100817932>.

444. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/chine/evenements/article/chine-q-r-extrait-du-point-de-presse-17-03-21>.

445. <https://twitter.com/AmbassadeChine/status/1372813385688027138>.

446. <https://archive.vn/N1X70>.



the embassy and attacked Bondaz again<sup>447</sup> – who then denounced a “well-ordered and coordinated attack that mobilized the resources of the [Chinese] state to try to discredit [him] and silence [him].”<sup>448</sup> He subsequently received more visibility and even more messages of support.



In only three days, the scandal led to numerous articles in newspapers and Bondaz won more than 3,000 additional followers on Twitter (not all of them benevolent however), after giving a number of interviews to newspapers, radio and TV programs. On March 22, the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, reacted: “[t]he public comments of the Embassy of China in France and the actions taken against European elected leaders, researchers, and diplomats are unacceptable”; for the second time in a year, he then summoned the Chinese ambassador to answer for this scandal, as well as for the Chinese sanctions adopted that very day against several European citizens, including the MEP Raphaël Glucksmann.<sup>449</sup> Even the former Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, also president of FPI which, as we will see, usually relays Chinese positions (→ p. 313), distanced himself from the embassy.



Summoned to the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs on March 23, the Chinese ambassador was received by the Director for Asia who told him that “the methods of the embassy, and the tone of its public communication, are totally unacceptable and cross the line of what is commonly deemed acceptable for any diplomatic representation, wherever it may be.”<sup>450</sup> The same day, the *Global Times* dedicated a third article to the scandal, noting that “[the] Chinese ambassador to France won widespread support from the Chinese public after he pushed back against radical words and deeds by some French politicians and pseudo-scholars over China’s

447. Shan Renping, “The Chinese Embassy Calls Him ‘Little Rascal’, is that Wrong?” *Global Times* (22 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/H3kWM>); Chen Qingqing, “Chinese Ridicule French Scholar for Reigniting War of Words with Chinese Embassy for Attacking China in Pursuit of ‘Political Correctness,’” *Global Times* (22 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/2l5zx>).

448. <https://twitter.com/antoinebondaz/status/1373690137683591172>.

449. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/chine/evenements/article/chine-22-03-21>.

450. Christian Chesnot, “Qui est Lu Shaye, ambassadeur de Chine en France, ‘loup combattant’ de la diplomatie chinoise?” (“Who is Lu Shaye, Ambassador of China in France, and ‘Wolf Warrior’ of the Chinese Diplomacy?”) FranceInfo (23 Mar. 2021).

internal affairs in Xinjiang.”<sup>451</sup> This argument reflects the largely shared interpretation that **“wolf-warrior” diplomats are not looking to please local public opinions, which they actually alienate with indifference, but to please Beijing** by highlighting their individual actions as good soldiers that do not allow China’s standing to be challenged abroad.

That said, this case exemplifies how counterproductive this has become, both because, **as it hoped to discredit a researcher, the embassy drew more attention to his work** – thousands of people who did not know him discovered him and are now aware of the threat of Chinese influence and of the need to defend Taiwan, especially through parliamentary visits to the island – but also because, through its brutal and coarse attitude, **the embassy lost, or weakened, some of its partners**. These relays might find it more difficult to work with the embassy in the future. Hence, Pascal Boniface, director of IRIS (→ p. 316), seems to have admitted that “he could not go on with such a partnership [with the Embassy of China] after the attacks” against Bondaz.<sup>452</sup>

This is not exactly a case of the “Streisand Effect” since by attacking Bondaz the embassy did not seek to prevent the disclosure of information but, like the Streisand effect, it is a case of **a perverse effect as the actions undertaken by the embassy backfired**. In the context of the so-called “wolf-warrior” diplomacy, we can now call this the **“Bondaz Effect.”**

## 5. Doubts about its efficiency

This aggressive turn of the Chinese diplomacy was surprising because obviously **counter-productive** vis-à-vis the authorities and opinions of the host countries: when ambassadors, tasked with developing bilateral relations, constantly attack people on social media or in the press, **relations tend to deteriorate, along with China’s image** – which they were supposed to promote in the first place. The Swedish case is telling of this situation (→ p. 523). What shocks and raises questions is that Chinese diplomats do not seem to understand that **this brutal and tactless attitude, which involves calling journalists to insult and threaten them for instance, does not work in liberal democracies; it even systematically backfires**. More generally, this behavior accelerated a reckoning regarding the nature of the Chinese regime and the formation of a united front against China.

Now, this situation is paradoxical but not unexplainable. First, **it should not be assumed that China’s behavior is always rational and calculated**: it can sometimes result from an improvisation, and the expression of personalities not primarily swayed by particular policies. In this case, however, the “wolf-warrior” diplomacy seems to be a willing Chinese policy: its implementation is simply more or less skillful from one country to another. Then, **diplomacy is not conducted by diplomats but by the Party**: the diplomatic apparatus and personnel are subordinated to it, just like the rest of the state. In other words, **the Party sees the diplomats as its spokespersons**, which can generate discrepancies, if not tensions, among them. Finally, it is paramount to understand that **pleasing foreign publics is less important than pleasing Beijing**. It is, as Camille Brugier explains in an IRSEM note, an **“external policy for internal use [whose] main purpose is to legitimize the CCP in the eyes of its own citizens.”**<sup>453</sup> Moreover, Chinese diplomats do not hide it: “The standard for evaluating our work is not how foreigners see us but how people

451. Chen Qingqing, “Netizens Hail Chinese Envoy’s France Pushback,” *Global Times* (23 Mar. 2021) (<https://archive.vn/BhKRO>).

452. Nicolas Quénel, “La propagande de Pékin à la conquête de la France” (“Beijing’s Propaganda On Its Way to Conquer France”), *Libération* (3 Apr. 2021), 9.

453. Camille Brugier, *La diplomatie des “loups-guerriers” ou la nouvelle politique de légitimation du parti communiste chinois* (The “Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy, or the New Policy of Legitimation of the Chinese Communist Party”), Research Paper 115, IRSEM (12 Apr. 2021), 1.

in China see us”, explains Lu Shaye.<sup>454</sup> The people and especially the Party: the diplomats are **ambitious individuals who hope that their aggressiveness will be perceived in Beijing as a show of loyalty, hence helping to advance their careers.** Many precedents seem to validate this idea, with the most famous case being that of Zhao Lijian, who was propelled deputy spokesperson from his position as counsellor at the embassy in Pakistan (→ p. 232).<sup>455</sup> This rationale is not specific of diplomats and, in fact, also applies to zealous students on campuses, for instance; something that Clive Hamilton highlighted: “it is important to remember that Chinese nationalists who engage in patriotic attacks overseas are lauded in China and rewarded for their patriotism.”<sup>456</sup>

**That being said, Beijing sometimes acknowledges going too far and, in certain cases, even apologizes.** When in February 2020, Dai Yuming, a chargé d’affaires at the Chinese Embassy in Israel, compared the Covid-19 pandemic to the Holocaust following the suspension of air connections between the two countries (“In the darkest days of the Jewish people, we did not close the door on them. I hope Israel will not close the door on the Chinese”), a comparison that stirred outrage in the country, the embassy eventually apologized.<sup>457</sup>

More generally, the important cost of these positions – the overall deterioration of China’s image across the world and the measures taken to counter its ambitions – generates an internal debate. **The “wolf-warrior” diplomacy divides and creates unease among parts of the Chinese diplomatic elite.** This is illustrated by the division between those, on the one hand, who claim this name – which originated in China and was not imposed from abroad – and those, on the other hand, who criticize it as if it were an insult. As such, an article from the *People’s Daily*, explained that, on December 5, 2020, at Renmin University, Le Yucheng (乐玉成), deputy minister of foreign affairs, “rejected the criticisms according to which, Chinese diplomats engaged in the ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy, affirming that the word was only another version of the ‘China threat theory’ and a rhetoric trap aimed at preventing China from retaliating when its dignity and interests are affected [...]. The ‘coercive diplomacy’ label cannot be pinned on China,” he repeated. “It is not China who coerces others, but some countries who accuse China of engaging in ‘coercive diplomacy.’”<sup>458</sup>

A widely discussed article by Colonel Dai Xu (戴旭) noted **that “wolf warrior” diplomats have reinforced China’s isolation** – and this, despite the fact that the Trump administration sparks rejection – and he concluded that this strategy was mistaken.<sup>459</sup> This assessment of China’s growing isolation risks solidifying even further with the Biden administration and its emphasis on reconstructing the global image of the United States and building a diplomatic front against Beijing. Hence, it is not surprising that this “wolf warrior” posture was stopped or, at least, put on hold to give time to reassess it. This new approach seemed confirmed,

454. Lemaître and Guibert, “L’ambassadeur de Chine en France.”

455. Other such examples include that of Lin Songtian, who was noticed when he was ambassador in South Africa, when he vigorously opposed a visit of the president of the exiled Tibetan government, and who, in May 2020 – perhaps as a reward for his attitude – was named president of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC); Lu Shaye as well (→ p. 235), the very vehement – particularly since the Huawei affair – former ambassador to Canada, who was named Ambassador to France with a protocole rank of deputy minister. Note that the actual weight of his behavior in Canada in the decision to appoint him in Paris is difficult to evaluate, and it may have been less important, in fact, than his previous functions within the Central Small Leading Group for Foreign Affairs.

456. Clive Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities” (lecture at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, 28 Aug. 2019).

457. “China Apologizes After Envoy Says Israel’s Travel Ban Reminiscent of Holocaust,” *The Times of Israel* (2 Feb. 2020).

458. “Selon un responsable chinois, l’étiquette de diplomatie du ‘guerrier-loup’ est infondée” (“According to a Chinese Politician, There is no Credit to the “Wolf-Warrior” Diplomacy”), *Le Quotidien du peuple en ligne* (7 Dec. 2020), <https://archive.vn/8dSiq>.

459. Richard McGregor, “Beijing Hard-Liners Kick Against Xi Jinping’s Wolf Warrior Diplomacy,” *Asia Nikkei* (28 Jul. 2020). <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Beijing-hard-liners-kick-against-Xi-Jinping-s-wolf-warrior-diplomacy>.

according to Bill Bishop, by the moderate Chinese reaction – particularly that of Wang Yi – to the closing of the Houston consulate, in July 2020,<sup>460</sup> when many observers expected a vigorous reaction from Chinese diplomats. It could also explain the more moderate discourse of the ambassador in France, Lu Shaye, between its convocation in April 2020 at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and that of March 2021.

Other Chinese voices have criticized this diplomatic *hubris*, including Yuan Nansheng (袁南生)<sup>461</sup> who, taking heeds from a book by Jared Diamond, believed that **the simultaneous confrontation with several countries can only lead to the failure of the diplomacy led by the Party**, which might be overestimating its capacities. Yuan listed historical examples of a confrontation with several opponents that resulted in a general collapse: Napoleon, the Qing dynasty, and more notably a militarist Japan during the 1930s.<sup>462</sup> Xiao Gongqin (萧功秦)<sup>463</sup> took up this comparison with Japan, explaining that it was the excessive southern expansion of the Japanese Empire that led to a war with the United States.<sup>464</sup> He also highlighted the limits of rationality in the succession of decisions that led to the confrontation.<sup>465</sup> Yan Xuetong (阎学通)<sup>466</sup> used another comparison: the Cold War. He presented it not as a “neither war, nor peace” period, but rather, as a specific form of conflictuality by proxy (代理人战争). Hence, he believed that if a new cold war were to emerge, it would hinder China’s policy of “national rejuvenation.”<sup>467</sup>

The internal debate continues. On July 14, 2021, at a seminar organized by the Beijing-based think tank Center for China and Globalization (CCG),<sup>468</sup> Chu Yin (储殷) of the University of International Relations (国际关系学院), also took freely criticized what he described as **the trap (陷阱) of “external propaganda modeled on internal propaganda” (宣内宣化)**. He noted that China needs to pay “special attention to the differences in environment, context, industry, and norms of communication, and **pay attention to the difference between internal and external propaganda.**”<sup>469</sup> His approach is similar to that developed by Zhang Jian (张建), a researcher at the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS – 上海国际问题研究院), at a seminar organized by SIIS and IILD on Xi Jinping’s thinking on diplomacy and published in *The Paper* (澎湃新闻), a newspaper controlled by the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee.<sup>470</sup> Zhang thus argues that

460. Edward Wong, Lara Jakes, and Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Orders China to Close Houston Consulate, Citing Efforts to Steal Trade Secrets,” *The New York Times* (22 Jul. 2020).

461. A diplomat who used to be consul general in San Francisco. He is now Deputy-President of the China Institute of International Studies (中国国际问题研究所), the MFA’s think tank.

462. “袁南生：与多国同时对抗：岂止是外交灾难” (“Yuan Nansheng: to Face Off Several States Simultaneously: More Than a Diplomatic Disaster”) *中美印象 (China-US Perception)* (9 Sept. 2020).

463. Historian and member of the Neo-Authoritarian Current (新权威主义).

464. Katsuji Nakazawa, “Analysis: China’s Wolf Warrior Overreach Draws Comparison to Imperial Japan,” *Nikkei Asia* (17 Sept. 2020).

465. “萧功秦：太平洋战争是如何爆发的 ——从近代几次战争看人类决策理性的局限性” (“Xiao Gongqin: How the Pacific War Started – The Limitations of Rationality in the Human Decision-Making Seen Through Several Wars of Modern Era”), *中美印象 (China-US Perception)* (26 Aug. 2020).

466. Berkeley graduate, and now dean of the Institute of International Relations at the University of Qinghua.

467. 阎学通 (Yan Xuetong), “为何及如何防范中美意识形态之争加剧” (“Why and How to Prevent the Intensification of the Chinese-American Ideological Divergence”), *爱思想 (Aimer la pensée)* (7 Oct. 2020).

468. This think tank is headed by Wang Huiyao (王辉耀) an economist who has just published a book entitled *I’m Talking to the World about China* (我向世界说中国) and is said to be close to the United Front. See on this topic: David Bandurski, “Seeking China’s New Narratives,” *China Media Project* (16 Jul. 2021).

469. “如何破解国际传播话语困境？知名专家学者如是” (“How to solve the problem of spreading [China’s] word internationally? What leading experts and researchers say”), CCG WeChat Account (14 Jul. 2021). <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7Yflp6wj89vDTXE0ORvHQg>.

470. David Bandurski, “Strategies for the China story,” *China Media Project* (9 Jul. 2021).



China should develop *ad hoc* narratives tailored to each of the audiences it addresses and embellish its narratives with concrete examples to make them more digestible.



Left, Chu Yin at the GCC seminar on July 14, 2021<sup>471</sup>; right, Zhang Jian at a seminar in June 2021.<sup>472</sup>

All these voices warning the Party of an incoming danger essentially compare the CCP's situation to the *hamartia* described by Aristotle in his *Poetics* – this mistake that constitutes **the triggering act of the downfall of the tragic hero**. But despite these warnings, there is no sign that this strategy may be abandoned.

If the Covid-19 epidemic revealed this posture to the world, the evolution of Chinese diplomacy stems from a **slow transformation that has been propelled by the progressive reckoning, among Chinese leaders, of their newly-found power**.<sup>473</sup> In fact, it seems that no directive signaling a change in the diplomatic strategy has so far been penned. On the contrary, several organs and actors of the Party reasserted that this stance was not only legitimate but efficient. The *Renmin Ribao* thus published an article on August 10, 2020, that highlighted the altogether positive results from the campaign led by the diplomats during the first phase of the epidemic: “During the coronavirus epidemic, some countries ‘stigmatized’ China, and attempted to ignore their own responsibility – hence not doing enough to fight the epidemic – in order to make China a ‘scapegoat.’ [In response, we] launched a public opinion campaign with a very visible banner, we refuted them with reasoned arguments, we exposed their lies, and we let the world see their despicable actions and ugly faces.”<sup>474</sup>

An interview of Le Yucheng, published on the *Guancha* website on August 12, 2020, confirmed the sentiment evoked by the *Renmin Ribao*: **the wolf-warrior diplomacy will not stop, and is here to stay**.<sup>475</sup> The statements of the minister carried more weight knowing that they were in line with what Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi said on August 6 and 7 respectively. Le Yucheng's central argument was that the guilty parties are in Washington, not in Beijing: “[the] series of measures recently taken by the United States against China aim to fuel an ideological confrontation, and rekindle the Cold War for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We get the

471. <https://archive.vn/cPPIO>.

472. <https://archive.vn/8cdkX>.

473. Kathrin Hille, “Wolf warrior’ Diplomats Reveal China’s Ambitions,” *Financial Times* (12 May 2020).

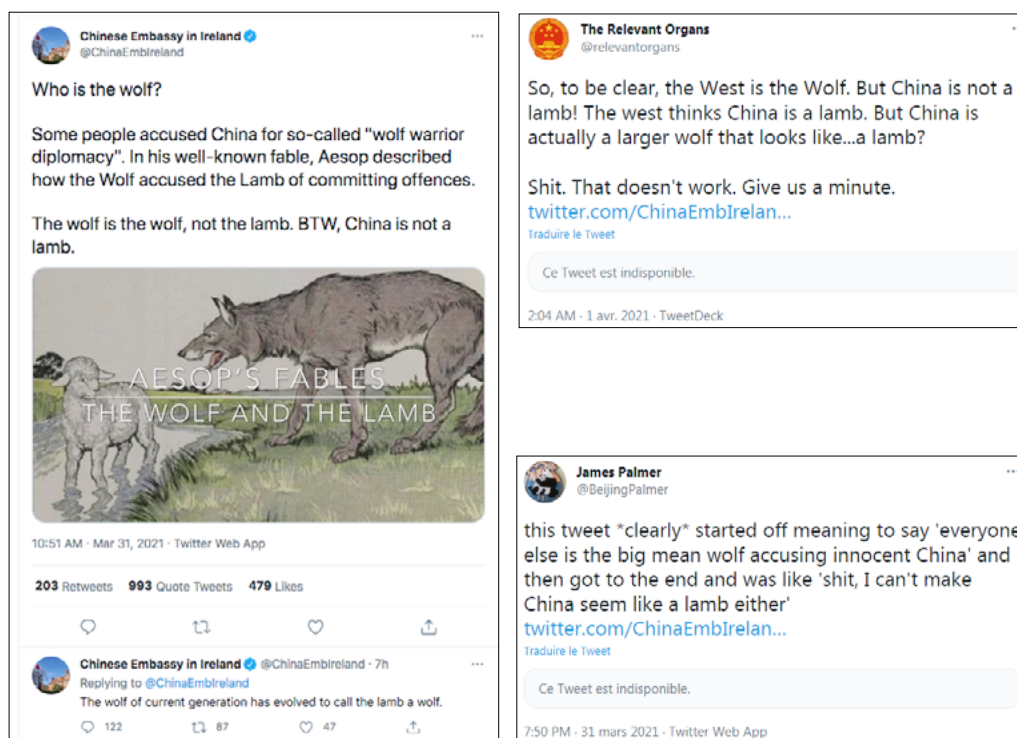
474. Quote in Chinese: “在新冠肺炎疫情期间，某些国家对中国‘污名化’，极力‘甩锅’本国抗疫不力的责任，拿中国当‘替罪羊’。我们旗帜鲜明地开展舆论斗争，有理有据地进行批驳，揭穿他们的谎言，让世人看到其卑劣行径和丑恶嘴脸。” See “凝心聚力谱新篇（中国制度面对面⑧）——社会主义先进文化制度怎么守正创新？”，*人民日报* (10 Aug. 2020).

475. “复活冷战是时空错乱之举” (“Resurrect the Cold War is an Act Susceptible to Engender Chaos”), Interview of Le Yucheng (乐玉成), *观察者 (L’Observateur)* (12 Aug. 2020).



feeling that the ghost of McCarthyism is resurfacing in the United States. During the 1950s, when the United States fell for an anticommunist hysteria, tens of thousands of members of the Chinese community were suspected of being ‘spies.’ More than 20 million people had to go through ‘controls.’ Even three-year-old children had to sign a ‘loyalty oath.’ The expression, ‘find reds under the beds,’ was coined to describe this insane paranoia [...].<sup>476</sup>

In a word, **Beijing is aware of the ambivalent results of its “wolf-warrior” diplomacy, which is “both criticized and saluted in China.”**<sup>477</sup> This is contradictory since it is presented “both as the fruit of the imagination of the Western discourse on the Chinese threat but also as a response to this threat.”<sup>478</sup> This inconsistency is well illustrated by a particularly confusing tweet from the Chinese embassy in Ireland, which on March 31, 2021, sought to use the fable “The Wolf and the Lamb” to justify the “wolf warrior” diplomacy (images below).



On the left, two tweets published on March 31, 2021 by the Chinese embassy in Ireland and that have since been deleted.<sup>479</sup> They illustrated the confusion in Beijing toward the “wolf-warrior” concept – which was both revendedicated and rejected here. The post from the embassy led to an immediate outpouring of mocking tweets such as those presented above (on the right), confirming the counterproductive nature of such actions.<sup>480</sup>

Now, there is **no reason to believe that this posture could disappear.** It will more probably last, **alternating between varied degrees of aggressiveness. Beijing also appears to seek to diversify its repertoire of actions.** Diplomats will continue fighting on social media to impose the Party’s narratives and admonish those identified as enemies, but will also likely try to build coalitions and lean on front organizations to create a buffer

476. Quote in Chinese: “美国近期针对中国的一系列做法，是在挑动意识形态对抗，在21世纪复活”冷战”，让人感到“麦卡锡主义”的幽灵又在美重现。上世纪50年代，美国国内掀起了疯狂的反共浪潮，成千上万的华裔被怀疑为“间谍”，2000多万人接受了所谓“清查”，甚至3岁的小孩也要签署“忠诚宣誓书”。对于这一荒唐行径，英语里都留下了一句话叫“find reds under the beds,”意思就是“到床底下查找赤色分子。”

477. Julienne and Hanck, “Diplomatie chinoise,” 115.

478. Brugier, *La diplomatie des “loups guerriers”*, 6.

479. It was taken from this address: <https://twitter.com/ChinaEmbIreland/status/1377302554489544710>.

480. Helen Davidson, “Wait, Who is the Wolf Again? Chinese Embassy’s Aesop Fable Analogy Baffles Twitter,” *The Guardian* (1 Apr. 2021).

space; their mission will ultimately be to weaken the unity of targeted societies, particularly the United States. **The risk for Beijing is twofold. On the one hand, it risks falling into a “rhetorical trap”** that would cause it to lose control of the consequences of the actions of some of its diplomats. By not disavowing them, even when they go too far – because this would cause it to lose face and, above all, would give the impression that there are dissonant voices within a Party that would thus appear to be weakened – **the Party-State could be caught up in a dangerous spiral. On the other hand, Beijing risks increasing the internal divisions between the moderates** who, as we have seen, condemn the increasing aggressiveness of the diplomats and plead for more restraint, **and the radicals**, who are in overdrive and criticize the Party for not going far enough. This is the case with the most nationalistic fringe of the Chinese public opinion, which is already disappointed when the authorities do not react strongly enough to what they consider to be provocations. Thus, when in June 2021 Beijing reacted in a relatively restrained way to the visit of U.S. senators to Taiwan, some Internet users on Weibo criticized Chinese officials (“weak and incompetent”), criticizing their lack of firmness (“Why didn’t we shoot them down? They violated our air space”).<sup>481</sup> **Caught between two fires of its own making** – on the one hand, the international community and moderates who denounce the aggressiveness of the Chinese discourse and, on the other, the more nationalistic people who push for escalation and will not accept any retreat – **the Party has condemned itself to being disappointing.**

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481. “Chine: les ‘loups’ pris au piège de la diplomatie combattante” (“China: the ‘wolves’ caught in the trap of combat diplomacy”)AFP (29 Jun. 2021).

## IV. The Economy

Economic pressure is undoubtedly one of the main levers of China's coercive diplomacy; it is also, therefore, the most studied and best understood by observers of all stripes, whether they focus on the harmful effects of debt, commercial pressure exerted against states, companies or individuals to achieve political objectives, or on the "capture of economic elites" by the Party-State. The preceding overview of the literature has led us to a less in-depth treatment of this tool of influence in favor of others – information manipulation, for example – which seem to us to be all the more dangerous because they are less adequately identified or studied.

Economic leverage is notably important, primarily due to the size of the Chinese economy and the asymmetry of Beijing's relations with most countries. Because it is the second global economy, with a GDP standing at \$14 trillion, but also the first exporter and second importer of goods in the world, it is difficult to resist when China offers trade and investment deals to countries that need them or when it threatens to reduce trade exchanges, even among the richest countries. Beijing is the **most important creditor among poor countries**. Apparently free, **Chinese aid is actually conditional** on the non-recognition of Taiwan, in the first place, but also on the obligation to "use Chinese companies."<sup>482</sup> Loans are also particularly opaque. A 2021 study of 100 contracts between state-owned Chinese entities and public borrowers in 24 developing countries from five continents found, among other things, that **loan contracts contain unusual confidentiality clauses and other measures that allow "the lenders to influence debtors' domestic and foreign policies."**<sup>483</sup>

In September 2021, an analysis of 13,427 Chinese development projects conducted by AidData, a research center of a U.S. university, concluded that, overall, **China spends about \$85 billion a year on international development, twice as much as the US**, but that, since the launch of the BRI, this has been mostly in the form of loans (with a ratio of 31 loans to 1 aid grant), thus creating debt.<sup>484</sup> "Between 2000 and 2018," recalls researcher Thierry Vircoulon, "50 out of 54 African countries borrowed from China in various forms. In 2018, the PRC held nearly 21% of the continent's outstanding external public debt."<sup>485</sup> AidData's study concludes that **42 states already have a Chinese public debt that equals over 10% of their GDP**. But it does not stop there: for a variety of reasons, including the opacity of agreements with Beijing, the actual debt is not always clear in the public accounts of these states – in fact, according to the study's authors, **the "hidden debt" tied to the BRI would amount to \$385 billion**. These figures must be used with caution however, as they may be subject to conscious or unconscious manipulation – the researcher Thierry Pairault reminds us that the weight of Chinese debt varies from 13% to 60% of the stock of long-term debt among sub-Saharan African countries, depending on

482. Thierry Pairault, "L'Afrique et sa dette 'chinoise' au temps de la Covid-19" ("Africa and its 'Chinese' debt in times of Covid-19"), *Revue de la régulation*, 29 (2021).

483. Anna Gelpert, Sebastian Horn, Scott Morris, Brad Parks, and Christoph Trebesch, *How China Lends: A Rare Look into 100 Debt Contracts with Foreign Governments*, AIDDATA / Kiel Institute for the World Economy / Center for Global Development / Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) (Mar. 2021), 2.

484. Ammar A. Malik et al., *Banking on the Belt and Road: Insights from a new global dataset of 13,427 Chinese development projects*, AidData, College of William & Mary (Sept. 2021).

485. Thierry Vircoulon, "Au bout de vingt ans, la 'success story' de la Chinafrique a des conséquences qui posent problème" ("After twenty years, the 'success story' of Chinafrique has consequences that pose a problem"), *Le Monde* (16 Mar. 2021).

the definition adopted, particularly if private debt is taken into account.<sup>486</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that loans are now one of China's instruments of influence in Africa and "those who refuse to see the strategic dimension of Xi Jinping's New Silk Roads are acting in bad faith," as Jean-Pierre Cabestan explains, adding that, "**by multiplying the links of economic and financial dependence** between an ever-increasing number of countries in the South, **China has set up new asymmetrical and, so to speak, tributary relationships that represent a new form of hegemony.**"<sup>487</sup> Some do not hesitate to describe the effects of the BRI in South Asia as a form of "**neo-colonialism,**" evoking "the way in which the financing of infrastructure via loans outside the rules of the market allows Beijing to monopolize the economic assets of a state."<sup>488</sup>

**The economic dependence toward China is, more often than not, the first tool leveraged by Beijing.** The latest Chinese five-year plan, approved in March 2021, adopts a strategy of "**offensive decoupling**" which consists in making itself less dependent from abroad while increasing the global dependence on China, which would mechanically increase the economic leverage, and therefore the influence, of the Party.<sup>489</sup> Beijing takes advantage of this strategy by **emphasizing bilateral relations,** especially in Europe, so as to impose itself more easily.

The use of economic pressures can also be explained by their **greater acceptance** on the international stage. Although it reveals a certain contempt for their trade partners and comes with "detrimental aspects" (due to the opacity of the deals, the resulting dependence, and the corruption stemming from them),<sup>490</sup> **these methods remain less intrusive than other instruments of the repertoire of active measures,** such as subversion and disinformation. Finally, and it is far from negligible, they are **formidably efficient.**

**The Chinese economic coercion takes vastly different forms**<sup>491</sup>: denial of access to the Chinese market, embargos, trade sanctions, restrictions on investments, quotas on the number of Chinese tourists in regions dependent on them, popular boycotts – all actions that have targeted numerous countries in the last few years, particularly Japan, South Korean and now Australia.

**The Beijing-led trade war against Canberra** is unprecedented, with sanctions targeting seven lines of goods (coal, beef, wood, wine, cotton, barley, and lobsters) and which could be extended to others later on (i.e. wool, sugar, or wheat). This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg and, **against Australia, Beijing employs many tools from its repertoire of actions:** trade sanctions; threats to lower the number of Chinese students and tourists; extremely violent attacks on social media (with the infamous photomontage posted by the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs of an Australian soldier slitting the throat of a little girl → p. 223); legal proceedings to muzzle critical voices (lawfare); blocking Australian ships in Chinese ports ("dozens of container ships were unable

486. Pairault, "L'Afrique et sa dette 'chinoise.'"

487. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, preface to Pierre-Antoine Donnet, *Chine, le grand prédateur (China, the Great Predator)* (Paris: éditions de l'Aube, 2021), 13.

488. Olivier Guillard, "Les 'Nouvelles Routes de la Soie,' la Chine et le néocolonialisme en Asie du Sud" ("The 'New Silk Roads,' China and neo-colonialism in South Asia"), *Asialyst* (22 Jan. 2021). Note, however, that the term is only found in the title and presentation of the article, not in its content.

489. Mat Pottinger, "Statement to the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission," U.S. Congress (15 Apr. 2021).

490. David Schullman, ed., *Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy: An Assessment of Chinese Interference in Thirteen Key Countries*, International Republican Institute (IRI) (2019), 5.

491. Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, *China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures*, Center for a New American Security (Jun. 2018).



to unload coal imported from Australia [and] tons of grapes were stuck outside the port of Shenzhen<sup>492</sup>) regular cyber attacks, military threats (the bellicose *Global Times* talks about sending “long-range missiles” to Australia<sup>493</sup>); even the abduction of Australian nationals as part of the “hostage diplomacy” (→ p. 411). By deliberately leaking, in November 2020, a one-page document that listed 14 recriminations presented as the origin of the bilateral tensions to Australian media, the **Chinese embassy in Canberra implicitly admitted to be in a logic of retaliation, and made Australia an example for the region and for the world.** The Australian case is a message to states and businesses around the world: “China has chosen Australia as a kind of scapegoat to show Westerners what it might cost them to criticize the Middle Kingdom too much,” analyses economist Philippe Chalmin.<sup>494</sup> That said, it is not the first such case (when the South Korean government decided to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system on its soil in 2017, it was targeted by a wave of cyberattacks that did not spare the business sector<sup>495</sup>). And it won’t be the last. **This trend should worry European countries as they could be targeted by those same practices in the future<sup>496</sup>.**

Economic sanctions are sometimes taken in isolation, but they are, **more often than not, associated with diplomatic or political sanctions.** France was targeted in 2008-2009, after Nicolas Sarkozy conditioned his participation in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games on a renewed dialogue between Beijing and the Tibetans, and after announcing that he would meet with the Dalai Lama.<sup>497</sup> In response, the CCP deployed political sanctions (it postponed the 11<sup>th</sup> annual EU–China Summit, which was supposed to be held in Paris, the Chinese minister of foreign affairs refused to receive the French ambassador, even though the Chinese ambassador in France continued to meet with Bernard Kouchner), and economic ones (it cancelled an order of 150 Airbus airplanes, but also excluded France from any trade deal for many months). All of this aimed to make France give in.

## A. Economic pressures on foreign companies

Chinese economic pressures do not solely target countries, but also companies and even individuals. **Beijing increasingly requires censorship as a condition to access its market. And many companies eventually crack under the pressure:** Mercedes-Benz apologized for quoting the Dalai Lama,<sup>498</sup> and Zara, Qantas, Marriott and Delta Airlines altered the way they named Taiwan when Beijing used “economic blackmail” against them.<sup>499</sup> Coach, Givenchy, and Versace were also targeted by attacks on social networks because they presented Taiwan as a country on their clothes or in their advertisements; they all eventually cave

492. Armelle Bohineust, “Embargos, surtaxes, intimidation, un an d’escalade entre la Chine et l’Australie” (“Embargos, surcharges, intimidation, a year of escalation between China and Australia”), *Le Figaro* (8 Jun. 2021), 21.

493. Hu Xijin, “China needs to make a plan to deter extreme forces of Australia,” *Global Times* (7 May 2021), <https://archive.vn/LGKzF>.

494. Bohineust, “Embargos, surtaxes, intimidation.”

495. Yeo Jun-suk, “Cyberattacks Against South Korea in Protest of THAAD: Former US Navy Commander,” *TheKorea Herald* (27 Apr. 2017).

496. Nicolas Regaud, “China’s policy of economic coercion against Australia: what can Europeans learn from it?,” *Strategic Brief*, 15, IRSEM, 20 Jan. 2021.

497. Which he did, on December 6, 2008.

498. Sui-Lee Wee, “Mercedes-Benz Quotes the Dalai Lama. China Notices. Apology Follows,” *The New York Times* (6 Feb. 2018).

499. Tara Francis Chan, “Economic Blackmail: Zara, Qantas, Marriott and Delta Change Taiwan References After China Anger,” *Business Insider Australia* (18 Jan. 2018).



in, apologized, and recognized the “One China” policy.<sup>500</sup> In April 2018, the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) sent a letter to 44 airplane companies, asking them to specify, in all public communications, that Taiwan was part of China, threatening them of retaliatory measures. A few weeks later, two dozen of them had already complied.<sup>501</sup> **Beijing tracks and condemns all mentions of Taiwan in the companies’ communication, which, in general, all end up submitting to the pressure, and present apologies** that the Chinese media relish in relaying, such as the *Global Times* on February 13, 2021 with an apology by the Bayern Munich football club (see the screenshot below).



Likewise, the Party used economic pressure in the **Xinjiang cotton** controversy. In March 2020, ASPI published a report revealing the extent of the forced labor system put in place by the Party against Uighurs locked up in camps.<sup>502</sup> The Australian think tank identified 27 factories in Xinjiang and in 9 other provinces that used Uighur forced laborers. These factories were included in the production chain of 82 foreign companies, including Volkswagen, Lacoste, Nokia and Alstom. Following the revelations, some companies, including Nike, Adidas, Uniqlo and H&M, stopped buying cotton from Xinjiang that was the product of forced labor and publicly stated their motivations.<sup>503</sup> They then became the target of a smear campaign, led in particular by the Communist Youth League on Weibo (with the slogan “Xinjiang cotton doesn’t eat this!” – see below). Beijing took additional retaliatory measures, removing the products of the brands concerned from online plat-

500. Iain Robertson, *Chinese Messaging Across the Strait: China-friendly Narratives and the 2020 Taiwan Presidential Election*, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (Dec. 2020), 22.

501. Erika Kinetz, “Airlines Caving to China’s Demands Despite White House Protest,” *USA Today Travel* (22 May 2018).

502. Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, *Uyghurs for sale. ‘Re-education’, forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang*, ASPI (25 Mar. 2020).

503. See for instance, the reaction by H&M: <https://hmgroupp.com/sustainability/fair-and-equal/human-rights/h-m-group-statement-on-due-diligence/>.

forms, calling for a boycott of physical stores and blurring their logos on television. This campaign, which aimed to defend Chinese cotton and criticize those who “attacked China,” seemed to have been motivated less by the decision of these companies, which dated back several months, than by the need to respond to the growing criticism and sanctions taken by the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union.<sup>504</sup>



**Economic sanctions targeting professional sports are a common CCP practice.**

In 2004, the NFL suffered its wrath for accepting the diffusion of a clip in homage to freedom that included a picture of the *Tank Man* near Tian’anmen Square in 1989. This “incident” led China to sanction the NFL by canceling all game broadcasts in China for a year.<sup>505</sup> If basketball is by far the most important sports market, other big professional sports’ leagues bet on Chinese consumers and are, for that reason, particularly sensitive to economic sanctions. The baseball (MLB) and ice hockey (NHL) leagues have both signed game broadcasting contracts with Tencent for instance.

504. Robin Brant, “Nike, H&M Face China Fury over Xinjiang Cotton ‘Concerns,’” BBC (25 Mar. 2021).

505. Andrew Beaton and Ben Cohen, “America Obsessed Over Janet Jackson. But the NFL Secretly Enraged China,” *The Wall Street Journal* (14 Oct. 2019).

### The case of the NBA

On October 4, 2019, during the Hong Kong protests, Daryl Morey, the general manager of the Houston Rockets, a member of the American National Basketball Association (NBA), retweeted a picture that read: “Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong.” The Party’s sanction was immediate, and all the stronger due to the fact that Houston welcomed the star of Chinese basketball, Yao Ming, from 2002 to 2011, and because it was the second most-liked team in China.<sup>506</sup> **As a retaliatory measure, the NBA’s Chinese partners suspended their ties with the American basketball league.** Daryl Morey’s apologies were not enough to assuage Beijing’s anger and Chinese media outlets announced that no pre-season game would be broadcast on their channels. In the end, Tencent (the leader on that market) was allowed to broadcast a short summary of the games. This late loosening of the restrictions was most likely meant to avoid sanctioning the Chinese companies for whom the NBA represented an important source of income.<sup>507</sup>

NBA games were eventually broadcast again on Chinese television on October 10, 2020, after a year of purgatory, but the reasons behind this return to grace are unknown. CCTV declared that the NBA had made a show of “continual goodwill” (持续表达的善意) and had expressed its support to China during the fight against the Covid-19 epidemic.<sup>508</sup> We can assume that the dissatisfaction of the Chinese public may have influenced the decision as well, even if *Sup China* highlighted a notable discontent among the most nationalist fringe of the population regarding the decision to resume broadcasting.<sup>509</sup> Besides, on October 16, Daryl Morey announced his resignation from his position at the head of the Houston Rockets, presenting this decision as personal, although we can imagine that both the owner of the team and the NBA were in favor of this “solution.” On the Chinese side, even if CCTV remained polite (yet slightly ironic), the *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao*), did note that many Chinese fans believed that Morey only got what he deserved.<sup>510</sup>

## B. The German Case

“What good would it do to interfere in Germany? Its leaders are fully won over, **China is in conquered territory**”: these words, from one of the officials we met in Berlin, adequately illustrate the current mindset in Germany. Many of them, referring to “absolute naivety” or to a “cognitive bias” have confirmed this substantive tendency: the attitude of the German authorities and of the business sector have largely been directed by the weight of the Chinese economy in the German trade balance. In 2020, for the fifth year in a row, China was the main German trade partner (first importer and second export market for German goods<sup>511</sup>). This long-standing partnership (that debuted at the end of the 1980s) constitutes the original bias explaining the **benevolent stance of economic and political leaders in Germany**. Even if the economic partnership is increasingly perceived as asymmetrical by German companies, it is maintained by the strong personal links established between the German employers and senior executives (the top 100 or 50 of the DAX

506. Antony Tao, “Everyone is Jumping on Rockets GM Daryl Morey’s Hong Kong Tweet,” *Sup China* (7 Oct. 2019).

507. In 2018, more than 500 million Chinese watched at least one NBA game.

508. “央视谈复播NBA: 对方持续表达善意支持中国抗疫” (“CCTV on the NBA Comeback: The Other Involved Expressed its Goodwill to Support China against the Pandemic”), 环球网 (*Huanqiu shibao*) (9 Oct. 2020).

509. Feng Jiayun, “Chinese State Television Lifts Yearlong Ban on NBA Games, but Nationalists Want it to stay,” *Sup China* (9 Oct. 2020).

510. Wang Qi and Deng Xiaoci, “Chinese NBA Fans ‘Wish Morey well’ After Resigning,” *Global Times* (16 Oct. 2020).

511. According to number compiled by Destatis: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/\\_node.html](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/_node.html).

companies' executives) on one side, and Chinese actors, who manage to bring a majority of German entrepreneurs to interiorize the CCP's narratives, on the other.<sup>512</sup>

The dominant idea, at least until the KUKA case,<sup>513</sup> is the win-win deals struck between the two economies, dominated by very positive representations of China among the companies and the representatives of different professional associations. **The alarm bells that rose from other countries like Australia regarding the risks of dependency toward China and the latter's subsequent infringements of the sovereignty of these states have been largely ignored.**

Several events nonetheless affected the pro-Chinese stance of the economic and political actors in Germany<sup>514</sup>: KUKA's purchase by Chinese investors in 2016, which opened up the debate on the role reversal between Chinese and German economic actors, the latter becoming the targets of China's predation; the publication of the program *Made in China 2025*, which revealed the true strategy of the regime in many key technologies; the gradual realization of the actual role of the CCP's correspondents in Chinese companies, which is becoming more tangible for expatriate German managers through their increasing involvement in the strategy and in the internal life of the company; the action of Chinese representatives in standardization committees; or, the evolution of the internal balance of power inside the CCP.

Regarding the latter, several German experts believe that the concentration of power in China tends, in fact, to numb its system. According to them, the regime needs to propose a new political offer to its population, or at least a symbolic alternative: the representation of a superior Chinese system. It is the temptation of "Cosmological Communism" exposed by Didi Kirsten Tatlow.<sup>515</sup> **The exposure (if not overexposure) of the German economy to the Chinese market is the first variable of Berlin's policy vis-à-vis Beijing**, and it explains the moderate stance of the German chancellor, who is the main spokesperson of her business community.

**The business community in Germany has undergone a significant change: it is now divided** between long-homogenous actors seeing China as an exceptional market, without any alternative, and companies that chose to remain careful and vigilant. The BDI report published in the fall of 2019 was the translation of that mood change among a number of German managers. With the publication of the *Made in China 2025* strategy, **they became aware that China hopes to eliminate German industries from key sectors, rather than pursuing the cooperation.** Sensing the tide turning, Beijing is redoubling its efforts to influence not only business leaders and politicians but also public opinion, by **recruiting communication agencies and local lobbyists.**<sup>516</sup> But its attempts are not always skillful, and at the same time there is a growing awareness in Germany (as in France → p. 640) of the extent of Chinese influence operations, thanks in particular to some in-depth investigations in the press, including a particularly detailed article published in *Die Welt* in June 2021.<sup>517</sup>

512. A good example of this narrative is the argument that the regime was able to remove 600 million Chinese from poverty in record time. Another such discourse highlights the "efficiency of the CCP in the coronavirus epidemic management."

513. The German and European industrial robotic leader was bought by the Chinese group MIDEA for 4.5 billion of euros in June 2016.

514. The topic chosen on Anne Will's talk show (one of the most popular on ARD) in October 2019 was a good indication of this trend: "Kann Man China Noch Vertrauen?" ("Can We Still Trust China?").

515. <https://www.merics.org/en/china-monitor/cosmological-communism>.

516. Brause et al., "Chinas heimliche Propagandisten."

517. Ibid.

According to a 2019 study, Germany was host to 190 Chinese groups with direct links to the UFWD, about 80 CSSAs in the universities, more than 20 Confucius institutes and classrooms, a dozen Chinese-speaking medias “aligned with the United Front” and an unknown number of “Chinese help centers” (华助中心). In total, Didi Kirsten Tatlow estimated that “there are hundreds of groups working in Germany to maintain the CCP’s ideology, values, language and goals to varying degrees among a relatively small Chinese diaspora, and, importantly, more broadly in the society from the grassroots to the elite.”<sup>518</sup> Germany is also a European base: for instance, the Federation of Chinese Professional Associations in Europe (FCPAE, 全欧华人专业协会联合会), a United Front organization, is based in Frankfurt and operates everywhere in Europe.

### The China Brücke

The China-Brücke (“bridge” in German) was created by Hans-Peter Friedrich, a former minister for agriculture (CSU), who was removed from the Merkel government in 2014 over his involvement in information leaks on an ongoing criminal investigation regarding an SPD MP suspected of pedophilia. Friedrich may be considered as very close to the business sector. The China-Brücke is a forum for dialogue between the (mainly) Chinese and German economic elites, tasked with improving the knowledge of China among German decision-makers. It is set on promoting “exchanges between actors from the political, economic, scientific, civil society and cultural sectors regardless of ongoing political events.”

The composition of its executive board is telling. It includes the former SPD MP Johannes Pflug, now *China-Beaufragter* (in charge of the relations with China) for the city of Duisburg (often seen as the front door of Chinese influence in Germany, and a hub of the Chinese presence in the Ruhr); Carsten Senz, the head of corporate communications at Huawei Deutschland; along with SAP and Alibaba managers.<sup>519</sup>

Created in early 2020 on the model of the Atlantic-Bürcke, which was very active in German-American lobbying, the China-Bürcke strives to leverage influence in the business sector. Most of its manifestations (conferences, meetings behind closed doors) remain out of sight, although it should be said that the health situation put a stop to the network practices, in Berlin as elsewhere.

## C. CCP agents lobbying from within Western companies

In December 2020, a document presented as a leak from the CCP, and containing a register of two million Party members, was made public by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), which gathers about 150 MPs from a variety of countries who hope to change the relationship between democratic countries and the PRC. The document had supposedly been passed on to the IPAC that September by a Chinese “dissident” whose identity is not known. The IPAC then transmitted the register to four media outlets after prookchecking it. The register apparently dated from 2016 and seemed to comprise members of the Party’s Shanghai committee mostly, mentioning their positions within the Party, their birthdates and their ethnicities; it was divided into 79,000 branches, of which many were affiliated with private companies.<sup>520</sup>

518. Tatlow, “Mapping China in Germany,” 2.

519. Claudia von Salzen, “Was es mit dem neuen Netzwerk auf sich hat – und warum die Mitglieder geheim bleiben,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (6 Jun. 2020).

520. Sharri Markson, “Names, positions of Chinese Community Party operatives revealed in major security leak,” *The Weekend Australian* (19 Dec. 2020).





**The list of Party members contained the name of individuals working for prominent companies such as Volkswagen, HSBC, ANZ or Boeing.** The latter counted, at the time the list was compiled, 287 employees who were CCP members in its 21 branches in China; Qualcomm, an American company making processors (among other things) had 229 Party members in its ranks; Hewlett-Packard employed 390 CCP members in 14 branches in China; Volkswagen, on its part, listed over 5,700 employees as members of the CCP in 131 sites. Other sensitive sectors appeared on this list, such as **pharmaceutical companies**: Pfizer's branch in China, Pfizer Investment Co, counted 69 members, while AstraZeneca employed 54. **The register also included scholars**, particularly in Australia and the United Kingdom, and an executive at the British Consulate in Shanghai.<sup>521</sup>

Belonging to the CCP does not mean that these individuals were Chinese spies *ipso facto*, or that they even collaborated with the Party. Many employees of big companies conduct political activities, alongside their careers. It is not necessarily incompatible. In China, as we mentioned with the LJC (→ p. 72), adhering to the CCP can constitute a career accelerator, and is often the main motivation of the inductees. The issue – and in that, the Chinese case differs from that of democracies – is that the **affiliation of these individuals constitutes a leverage that the Party can use to demand information on their employers.** Some could even be tempted to volunteer information to the CCP to get favors, increase their influence in the Party, or even accelerate their careers (and so on).

The *Global Times* quickly countered the media's revelations. The Chinese daily used a classical discursive method and spoke about the “alleged list of CCP's members.” “Alleged” in this case, is meant to discredit the other's argument, or the proof put forward to cast doubt on its veracity. This method often hides a cruel lack of solid arguments. The official media added that this announcement was part of a witch hunt targeting China. It affirmed, finally, that this type of statements stemmed from a lack of knowledge on China, a recurrent argument of the CCP.<sup>522</sup>

521. Jake Ryan, Jonathan Bucks, and Holly Bancroft, “Leaked files Expose Mass Infiltration of UK Firms by Chinese Communist Party Including AstraZeneca, Rolls Royce, HSBC and Jaguar Land Rover,” *The Mail on Sunday* (12 Dec. 2020).

522. “West Hypes ‘Leaked’ List of CPC Members to Sow Discord in Foreign Institutions,” *Global Times* (14 Dec. 2020).

## V. Politics

### A. Political parties

**The relationships between parties, or the “Party’s diplomacy,”** is an important front for the CCP, and a significant part of its state diplomacy, as we explained in the section about the **International Liaison Department (ILD)**, which is in charge of it (→ p. 70). The Party considers that this diplomatic form presents many advantages: it reinforces the inter-states relationships, palliate the weaknesses of official diplomacy, offers a vehicle to broadcast a good image of the Party abroad, and strengthens the Party’s power.<sup>523</sup> Although its activities resemble public diplomacy, they more often than not consist in **infiltrating target societies in order to influence the development of public policies.**

These direct relationships between political parties can be used to circumvent official diplomacy, and allow the CCP to infiltrate the local political life, something that the PRC, if it were to be a target, would likely qualify as interference. These links can be exploited in different ways: on the one hand, the relationships with a governing party can, in some countries, serve as a channel of influence to the government; on the other, the relationships with one or several opposition parties can be instrumentalized to pressure the government. Essentially, **the relationships between parties enhance the knowledge of the dynamics that characterize the local political life, to identify the potentially exploitable tensions and weaknesses,** but also to broadcast the Party’s propaganda and its narratives, to defend the Chinese agenda and a positive image of the country, and to participate in targeting potential sources and “useful idiots.”

Since Xi Jinping came to power, the ILD has multiplied the “presentation sessions” (宣介会) organized for foreign political personalities,<sup>524</sup> officially to respond to a “global demand.” According to that idea, countries apparently want to know China and the CCP better, and to understand why they “succeed.” It is apparently the “new question everyone asks.”<sup>525</sup> These presentation sessions are an opportunity to expose the policies led by China, their successes, to explain the “spirit” (精神) of the Party’s congresses, to demonstrate the “unique advantage” (独特优势) of the Chinese governing system and of Chinese socialism, and to build a common language.<sup>526</sup> The latter is articulated around the rhetoric of “community of common destiny,” guided by the “Chinese dream,” playing the role of a “bridge.” It is materialized in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (→ p. 150).

Besides, rather than mere “presentation” sessions, as the name suggests, they are really **a “recruiting” and building program to rally foreign political parties to the Chinese agenda.** These “presentation sessions” are organized by the ILD, either in China – inviting foreign political dignitaries – or abroad, sending delegations of the Party to visit targeted parties directly.

523. 金鑫 (Jin Xin), “国内外关于中国共产党对外交往的研究综述” (“A Summary of the Chinese and Foreign Research on the Party’s Diplomacy”), *CPC News* (16 Mar. 2015), <https://archive.vn/8bf89>.

524. Neil Thomas, “Proselytizing Power: The Party Wants the World to Learn from Its Experiences,” *Macro Polo* (22 Jan. 2020).

525. “中国为什么能?” “中国共产党为什么行?” “成为新的”世界之问,” (“Why is China Capable of it?” “Why Does the Chinese Communist Party Succeed?” Have Become the New “World Questions?”); See 侯露露 (Hou Lulu), “近三十个对外宣介团在近八十个国家和地区精准传播十九大精神” (“Close to 30 Propaganda Groups Broadcast with Precision the Mindset of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress in Close to 80 Countries and Regions”), *CPC News* (2 Feb. 2018), <https://archive.vn/dw20f>.

526. “王家瑞：努力开创党的对外工作新局面” (“Wang Jiarui: Let Us Try to Create the New Phase of the Party’s Diplomacy”), *CPC News* (3 Jun. 2014), <https://archive.vn/vYyQR>.

## 1. A strategy initially oriented toward China's allies, in a process of diversification

The target countries are, first and foremost, those in the immediate vicinity of Beijing, and those who, historically, are part of the “Third World” and share the legacy of Bandung, in Africa, in the Middle East and in Latin America.<sup>527</sup> At the “presentation session” organized in Nanchang, Jiangxi, in November 2019, the **ILD gathered some 200 political personalities from about fifty countries** to explain the “spirit” (精神) of the 4<sup>th</sup> plenum of the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. To salute the Chinese “achievements,” several guests took the floor: delegates from the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the Democratic Party of Mongolia, the Baas Party in Syria, Cyprus’ Democratic Rally and the Cambodian People’s Party.<sup>528</sup> Several events of this type were organized at the provincial level to present the Chinese “achievements” on specific themes: the ethnic policy and promotion of interethnic unity and solidarity in Xinjiang in 2019; the rural revitalization policy in Henan in 2019; the determining role of the policy of reforms and opening in China’s destiny in Guangdong in 2018; or even, the promotion of “high quality” development in Zhejiang in 2018.<sup>529</sup>

Attending these “presentation sessions” were delegates of the Keadilan Party of Malaysia (in the ruling coalition), Indonesia’s National Mandate Party (minority), the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party (ruling party), the United Hearts Movement of Central African Republic (presidential majority), Botswana’s Democratic Party (ruling party), Communist Party of Vietnam (ruling party), United Russia (ruling party), and of the Nationalist Party of Malta (opposition).<sup>530</sup>

As for the delegations sent abroad, their number has significantly grown since 2013. According to the data collected by Macro Polo, although only six, then ten countries received delegations from the ILD in 2013 and 2014, about forty countries were visited between November 2015 and March 2016, after the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress, about thirty after the 6<sup>th</sup> plenum and about sixty after the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress. This increase reveals the Party’s growing interest in that vector of influence. The visits were conducted by executives of the ILD and other structures of the Party-State such as the State Council, the National People’s Congress, the Central Party School of the CCP, the Propaganda Department, or the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.<sup>531</sup>

The highlight of this “Party diplomacy” was the “**High-Level Summit: The CCP in Dialogue with the World’s Political Parties**” (中国共产党与世界政党高层对话

527. “以周边和发展中国家为重点, [...] 实现对亚非拉发展中国家政党政要的全面交往” (“By Considering the Key Neighboring and Developing Countries, Let us Develop a Full Engagement with Political Parties of Africa, Asia and Latin America”). See “深入学习习近平总书记党的对外工作重要思想 努力开创党的对外工作新局面” (“Let Us Study the Thinking of General Secretary Xi Jinping on the External Work of the Party, and Let Us Try to Create the New Phase for the Party’s Diplomacy”), *Qiusi* (15 Oct. 2017), <https://archive.vn/c3hh9>.

528. “中联部面向外国政党举办四中全会精神宣介会” (“The International Liaisons Department Held a Presentation Session on the Spirit of the 4th Plenum to Foreign Political Parties”), International Liaison Department (20 Nov. 2019), <https://archive.vn/ErZcb>.

529. The pages regarding the events organized in Xinjiang are available here: <https://archive.vn/KuNHn>; Henan: <https://archive.vn/VRmut>; Guangdong: <https://archive.vn/EePDd>; and Zhejiang: <https://archive.vn/KuNHn>.

530. More info on the delegates coming from Malaysia: <https://archive.vn/WzwXI>; from Indonesia: <https://archive.vn/K4umZ>; from Pakistan: <https://archive.vn/4S3Aa> and <https://archive.vn/uwnZw>; from the Central African Republic: <https://archive.vn/zJG2Z>; Botswana: <https://archive.vn/q5FS5>; from Vietnam and Russia: <https://archive.vn/EePDd>; and from Malta: <https://archive.vn/nNrAh>.

531. The data collected by Macro Polo can be downloaded at: <https://macropolo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ILD-Foreign-Briefings-List-Updated.xlsx>.

会).<sup>532</sup> Organized in Beijing from November 30 to December 3, 2017 by the ILD, it gathered a total of 600 executives of about 300 political parties and groups from 120 countries. It was the first summit of this type since the creation of the CCP where, in the words of the ILD director Song Tao (宋涛), political leaders from all over the world were brought together around the idea of the creation of a “community of common destiny,” one of the leitmotiv of the Chinese propaganda we mentioned previously (→ p. 149).<sup>533</sup> The subheading of the event was: “Build a community of common destiny and a beautiful world: the responsibility of political parties.” And the summit was structured around two plenary sessions and one seminar, in the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress, followed by four conferences on the challenges and the future of the Party’s consolidation; the Party’s experience in the building of a “beautiful” country; the Party’s contributions in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative; the responsibility and the role of the leader of the Party in the construction of a community of common destiny.<sup>534</sup> In his opening speech, Xi Jinping announced that the CCP hoped to institutionalize this summit to make it a high level political dialogue platform with a large representation and influence at the international level, and that a total of **15,000 political personalities of the entire world would be invited to China** by the CCP over the next five years.<sup>535</sup>

The complete list of foreign delegates at the Summit was apparently not published and only the names of those who took the floor during the event are known, although we do not have access to the content of their speeches. The presence and intervention of **Tony Parker**, treasurer of the **Republican National Committee** (RNC) was noticed and condemned by the RNC chairwoman **Ronna Romney McDaniel**, who had allegedly not been informed of his participation, although Parker affirmed had had let her know prior to the event.<sup>536</sup> Invited and sponsored by the **EastWest Institute** (EWI), Tony Parker previously took part to other events organized by this think tank, which is closely tied to China.<sup>537</sup> In 2016, for instance, he was part of the American delegation to the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the US-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue.<sup>538</sup> Other representatives of political parties already known for their proximity with the CCP also took the floor, such as Serguei Jelezniak, then vice secretary of the executive board of United Russia (the ruling party); Aung San Suu Kyi, president of the National League for Democracy (in power at that time) of Myanmar; Hun Sen, prime minister and president of the Cambodian People Party (ruling party); or Demeke Mekonnen, vice-president of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (coalition in power).<sup>539</sup> In addition, there were representatives of the Congolese Party of Labor (ruling majority), Fiji First (ruling party), Sudan’s National

532. The event’s page can be found with this link: <https://archive.vn/HhyXW>.

533. 马小宁 (Ma Xiaoning), 孟祥麟 (Meng Xianglin), and 李伟红 (Li Weihong), “发挥政党作用 携手建设更加美好的世界” (“Let us Reveal the Role of the Political Parties and Build, Together, a Better World”), *CPC News* (4 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/OHYKI>.

534. The program is available on the event’s website: <https://archive.vn/HhyXW>.

535. Xi Jinping’s speech is available (in English): <https://archive.vn/SEhTQ>; (in Chinese): <https://archive.vn/raCKw>.

536. Ralph Z. Hallow, “RNC official burnishes Xi’s image, tangles with Chairman McDaniel,” *The Washington Times* (1 Feb. 2018).

537. Ibid.

538. Natalie Pretzer-Lin, “9<sup>th</sup> U.S.-China High-Level Political Party Leaders Dialogue,” *EastWest Institute* (23 Nov. 2016), <https://archive.vn/XNRan>.

539. Interventions of Serguei Jelezniak: <https://archive.vn/FUmHR>; Aung San Suu Kyi: <https://archive.vn/immjT>; Hun Sen: <https://archive.vn/jo1kA>; Demeke Mekonnen: <https://archive.vn/wdGxg>.



Congress Party (dissolved in 2019), and of the Italian Democratic Party.<sup>540</sup> The former French Prime Minister **Jean-Pierre Raffarin** also attended.<sup>541</sup>

Before this world-scale summit, the ILD organized **more targeted, regional forums**, such as those between China and the United States (中美政党对话), China and Africa (中非政党理论研讨会), China and Asia (中亚政党论坛), and China and Europe (中欧政党高层论坛).<sup>542</sup> In 2017, the China-Africa and China-Asia dialogues held their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions respectively. The other two, on the other hand, were launched in 2010. The former Democratic Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the then-director for Chinese Affairs at the State Department, Richard Llewellyn Williams attended the first edition. Additionally, the Chinese-American dialogue hosts a bipartisan American delegation approximately once a year.<sup>543</sup> On December 4, 2017, this dialogue was held around the theme “China and the United-States: a New Beginning, New Opportunities, New Cooperation” and the American delegates were able to meet Yang Jiechi.<sup>544</sup> An 11<sup>th</sup> edition was held in November 2019 around the theme “The Chinese and American Political Parties and the China-US Relations” with the participation of **Gary Locke**, the Democratic former Secretary of Commerce in the Obama administration, and first American of Chinese descent appointed ambassador to China; but with **Alphonso Jackson** also, a Republican former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, already present at the 10<sup>th</sup> edition.<sup>545</sup> These dialogues, always organized by the ILD, and mostly held in Beijing, gather about fifty participants each time, mostly representatives of political parties but also from think tanks and the business world.<sup>546</sup>

As for the High-Level Forum of Political Parties between China and Europe, at least five editions have been held since 2010. Also organized by the ILD, this forum was held in various cities of China, including Beijing, Tianjin and Suzhou, but also in Brussels. In 2016, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition took place in two phases with a first forum in Beijing, followed by an economic and commercial dialogue centered around the BRI at Zhengzhou, to which 40 political delegates from 20 European countries participated.<sup>547</sup> Two Bulgarian delegates, Yanaki Stoilov and Sergei Stanishev, respectively former vice-president at the National Assembly and for-

540. Mentions of the parties from Congo: <https://archive.vn/nQCYC>; from Fiji: <https://archive.vn/oThZj>; from Sudan: <https://archive.vn/BHXbZ>; and from Italy: <https://archive.vn/2nWB2>.

541. The participation of Jean-Pierre Raffarin (拉法兰) is mentioned in “中国共产党与世界政党高层对话会的三个小故事” (“Three Little Stories about the Summit for High-level Dialogue Between the CCP and Other Political Parties of the World.”), *CPC News* (27 Sept. 2019), <https://archive.vn/00M3T>. He was also present on the group picture (middle line, second from the right), which can be found via: <https://archive.vn/R32PD>; and he was also photographed with ILD Director Song Tao: <https://archive.vn/oHhfu>.

542. See the political parties’ dialogues between China and the United States: <https://archive.vn/rr8Kn>; between China and Africa: <https://archive.vn/acJqj>; between China and Asia: <https://archive.vn/MEI2l>; between China and Europe: <https://archive.vn/1bBof>.

543. “中美政党举行高层对话” (“The Chinese and American Political Parties Hold a High-level Dialogue”), *China news* (31 Mar. 2010), <https://archive.vn/gP1Sp>.

544. “第十届中美政党对话在北京举行” (“The 10<sup>e</sup> Edition of the Chinese and American Political Parties Dialogue was Held in Beijing”), *Sina* (4 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/WMkFK>. 杨洁篪会见美国共和、民主两党代表团 (“Yang Jiechi Meets with the Bipartisan American Delegation”), *International Department Central Committee of CPC* (3 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/7vFQ2>.

545. “第十一届中美政党对话在北京举行” (“The 11<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Chinese and American Political Parties Dialogue was Held in Beijing”), PRC government website (18 Nov. 2019), <https://archive.vn/noc18>. 第十届中美政党对话在北京举行，中联部部长宋涛与外宾握手 (“The 10<sup>e</sup> Edition of the Chinese and American Political Parties Dialogue was held in Beijing, the Minister of the Liaison Department Song Tao Shakes the Hand of the Guests”), *International Department Central Committee of CPC* (7 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/pUJVv>.

546. “第十一届中美政党对话在北京举行” (“The 11<sup>e</sup> Edition of the Chinese and American Political Parties Dialogue was Held in Beijing”), <https://archive.vn/noc18>.

547. Kong Genhong, “High-level Political Parties Forum Galvanizes China-Europe Cooperation,” *China.org* (8 Aug. 2016), <https://archive.vn/XFfkF>.



mer prime minister of Bulgaria, expressed their support for the BRI during the proceedings and commended the opportunities it brings to different countries.<sup>548</sup>

The objective of these events is to reach the largest spectrum of political parties. That is why several delegates from the same country, but of different political parties, can be targeted. The ILD has, for instance, invited **Francis Wurtz**, former president of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) and member of the French Communist Party but also **Thierry Mariani**, former vice-president of the French Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).<sup>549</sup> In the case of Germany, the ILD invited **Lothar Bisky**, former co-president of the German left-wing party, Die Linke, and president of the GUE/NGL, along with **Reinhard Bütikofer**, a member of the German ecologist party Alliance 90/The Greens and former vice-president of the European Green Party, or **Elmar Brock**, a member of the European People's Party and president of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament.<sup>550</sup> Similarly, **Charles Michel**, president of the Reformist Movement, later Prime Minister of Belgium, **Philippe Lamberts**, member of the Belgian Ecolo Party and then co-president of the European Green Party, along with **Véronique de Keyser**, member of the Belgium Socialist Party and former vice-president of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats of the European Parliament also participated in this forum.<sup>551</sup> We can note some participants from Spain, **Emilio Menéndez del Valle**, a member of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; from Sweden, **Kent Hårstedt**, member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and president of the Friendship Association for China of the Swedish Parliament; from Great-Britain, **Graham Watson**, president of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party group (ELDR), from Montenegro, **Srdan Milić**, president of the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro, and even from Ireland, **Dick Roche**, former member of the Republic Party **Fianna Fáil**, Irish minister for European Affairs and vice-president of the ELDR.<sup>552</sup>

## 2. Converting influence into political resources

The network weaved by the ILD enables it to identify and retain politicians willing to defend China's image by intervening in local media or acting behind the scenes in the CCP's interest. Lothar Bisky for instance, said he was impressed by the CCP's determination to improve the living condition of the Chinese population,<sup>553</sup> and he criticized the coverage of China in Western media, which he did not consider to be objective.<sup>554</sup> Philippe Lamberts was impressed by China's commitment to build social harmony and environmental awareness, qualifying the PRC as a "natural partner of the EU" and affirming that "the destinies of all countries are tied."<sup>555</sup> Thierry Mariani commended the Chinese initiative

548. Ibid.

549. Ibid.

550. Ibid.; Uking Sun, "Forum speakers suggest more dialogue," *China Daily* (31 May 2012) <https://archive.vn/wMKfQ>.

551. "China and Belgium", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, <https://archive.vn/VVNma>; Uking Sun, "EU Politicians Urge Cooperation with China," *China Daily* (2 Jun. 2012), <https://archive.vn/A5R6f>; "The EU-China High-Level Political Parties and Groups' Forum," *Socialists and democrats* (31 May 2012).

552. Uking Sun, "EU Politicians Urge Cooperation with China," *China Daily* (2 Jun. 2012), <https://archive.vn/A5R6f>; Uking Sun, "Political Parties Forum Progresses Well," *China Daily* (3 Jun. 2012), <https://archive.vn/pbn6D>; Genhong, "High-level political Parties Forum Galvanizes China-Europe Cooperation."

553. Ibid.

554. "中欧政党高层论坛新闻发 布会" ("Press conference of the Chinese and European Political Parties Forum"), State Council Information Office of the PRC (26 May 2010).

555. Sun, "EU Politicians Urge Cooperation with China."

– i.e. the forum – in promoting a mutual understanding and he called for a deeper cooperation between China and France.<sup>556</sup>

As for Irish former minister Dick Roche, who had already commended “China’s spectacular results” and called to increase the cooperation with China,<sup>557</sup> he became a consultant with European institutions, and his main client, Huawei, presumably paid him between €100,000 and €200,000 between 2018 and 2019, according to the EU’s transparency register,<sup>558</sup> which led some media outlets to call him a “Huawei lobbyist.” He was joined by the former European diplomat Serge Abou, also on the payroll of the Chinese company.<sup>559</sup> They are not the only Europeans who have offered **their services – and opened their contact books – to Chinese clients.** In its attempt to win the Estonian market for the construction of the 5G network, Huawei turned to the PR consultant company Powerhouse, which employed **three former Estonian ministers:** the company’s co-founder Janek Mäggi, a former public administration minister, Marko Pomerants and Andres Anvelts, who both occupied several ministerial positions, including at the ministry of the interior.<sup>560</sup> According to *Re: Baltica*, Pomerants and Mäggi sought to open the doors of the Estonian government to Huawei by mobilizing their personal network: Pomerants’s party (Isamaa) was in the ruling power coalition at the time.<sup>561</sup> A member of the Estonian Social Democratic Party, and a former participant to the China-Europe Forum organized by the ILD, Randel Länts managed the “government relations” pole in the consulting company Miltton, which supposedly offered PR services to the Chinese Embassy in Tallinn.<sup>562</sup> **In fact, Central and Eastern European countries are specifically targeted by the ILD, who has organized two types of forums for this region (→ p. 310):** the Dialogue Between Political Parties of China and Central and Eastern Europe (中国- 中东欧政党对话会), in Budapest in 2016 and Bucharest in 2017, but also the Forum of Young Political Leaders of China and Central and Eastern Europe (中国与中东欧青年政治家论坛), in Beijing in 2015, which invited Mailis Reps, an Estonian Centre Party minister of education and research, among others.<sup>563</sup>

**Maintaining direct relations with influential politicians in any country opens the doors to infiltrating its societies, collecting official and unofficial support, and to bypassing potential blockages inside the structures of power using opposition or “retired” politicians.** The Party already prides itself that China’s position on the South China Sea is supported by “over 120 states, 240 political groups and parties, and 280 think tanks and NGOs” across the world, the result of an effective “party diplomacy.”<sup>564</sup> Others have expressed support for the Chinese policy in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, or praised the BRI. Such support often comes from political parties with ideals close to the CCP’s, such as Cyprus’ Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), a “communist ally” and one of the

556. Zheng Yangpeng, “Beijing, Paris Should ‘Work Together,’” *China Daily* (24 Apr. 2013), <https://archive.vn/7kQ7S>; Genhong, “High-level Political Parties Forum Galvanizes China-Europe Cooperation.”

557. Ibid.

558. <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/displaylobbyist.do?id=48084848642-01>.

559. Ellie Donnelly, “Ex-minister to Earn Up to €200,000 as Huawei Lobbyist,” *Independent.ie* (9 Mar. 2020).

560. Frank Jüris, “Estonian Parties in the CCP’s Grip: The International Liaison Department’s Influence Activities,” *Sinopsis* (25 Sept. 2020).

561. Holger Roonemaa, “Huawei’s Backdoor in Estonia: Ex-Ministers Hired for Last Minute Lobby Efforts,” *Re:Baltica* (16 Feb. 2020).

562. Frank Jüris, “Estonian Parties in the CCP’s grip.”

563. Ibid.; “Mailis Rep,” 中国与中东欧青年政治家论坛 (*Young Political Leaders Forum of China and Central and Eastern Europe Countries*) (24 Oct. 2015).

564. “深入学习习近平总书记党的对外工作重要思想 努力开创党的对外工作新局面” (“Let Us Study the Thinking of General Secretary Xi Jinping on the Party’s Foreign Work and Let Us Try to Create the New Phase for the Party’s Diplomacy”), 求是 (*Qinshi*) (15 Oct. 2017), <https://archive.vn/c3hh9>.

most important parties in the country. Its secretary general, Andros Kyprianou, has often taken a stand in favor of China, its governance model, the BRI, or denounced the “violence” in Hong Kong.<sup>565</sup> This party was also targeted by visits from the ILD and “presentation sessions.”<sup>566</sup> More recently, a dozen political leaders supposedly sent congratulation messages to the ILD to praise the Chinese management of the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>567</sup> Besides, the ILD organized a video-conference in June 2020, as part of the “CCP in Dialogue” Summit, with communist parties from Latin America countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chili, Cuba, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela) on “the Strengths of Popular Philosophy of the CCP and its Response to Covid-19” – which sets the tone of the discussion.<sup>568</sup>

**Furthermore, this party diplomacy improves the Chinese’s understanding of national events.** In 2014, exchanges between the ILD and a delegation from the Estonian Parliament, presided by Marko Mihkelson, focused, among other things, on the situation in Ukraine. It enabled the Chinese to better understand how the United States and its allies reacted to the Russian aggression, and, as such, helped them think about their own actions in Hong Kong, in the South China Sea, and vis-à-vis Taiwan.<sup>569</sup>

Another objective of this “Party diplomacy” is to reinforce **China’s discursive power at the international level.**<sup>570</sup> When China calls for the development of a new “common language” across the world, it evidently does not refer to any common language, but its own, of which the key words are “community of common destiny,” “win-win cooperation,” “new international order,” “international peace,” “world development,” and so on.<sup>571</sup> The more political leaders and other influential personalities adopt this vocabulary, even if they do not endorse what it really means for the Chinese, the more China’s discursive power, its capacity to impose its narratives on China and the world is strengthened. **By imposing its elements of speech, the Party shapes the debate, builds filters and interpretation schemes that favor it.**<sup>572</sup> The Party also seeks to impose a “good” image of China and to tell the “right” stories regarding China. Several pages of the ILD’s website titled “Stories of the CCP” (中国共产党的故事), explain, for instance, China’s various “achievements” in different domains.<sup>573</sup> The Chinese make sure to use a discourse that can be echoed at the international level, and that foreign audience can easily accept.<sup>574</sup>

565. “China’s Development, Governance Set Model for World: Cypriot Party Leader,” *Belt and Road News* (4 Oct. 2019); “Chinese Vice President Meets Republic of Cyprus Party Leader,” *Global Times* (8 Sept. 2009).

566. Qu Qingshan visited his party in December 2017. See the data collected by Macro Polo: <https://macropolo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/ILD-Foreign-Briefings-List-Updated.xlsx>.

567. “Foreign Party Leaders Praise CPC’s Role in Global Anti-Pandemic Effort,” *Xinhuanet* (9 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/IHlVn>.

568. “IDCPC Holds Video Conference with Communist Parties of Latin American Countries,” International Department Central Committee of CPC (9 Jun. 2020), <https://archive.vn/V1OBW>.

569. Frank Jüris, “Estonian Parties in the CCP’s grip: The International Liaison Department’s Influence Activities,” *Sinopsis* (25 Sept. 2020).

570. “王家瑞：努力开创党的对外工作新局面” (“Wang Jiarui: Let Us Try to Create the New Phase of the Party’s Diplomacy”), *CPC News* (3 Jun. 2014), <https://archive.vn/vYyQR>.

571. Xi Jinping, “Working Together to Build a Better World,” speech at the High-Level Summit: “the CCP in Dialogue with the World’s Political Parties” (1 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/SEhTQ>.

572. Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

573. “Stories of CPC: Jiangxi’s Achievements in Practicing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” *International Department Central Committee of CPC*, <https://archive.vn/yUOfd>. “Stories of CPC: Henan’s Achievements in Practicing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” *International Department Central Committee of CPC*, <https://archive.vn/VRmut>.

574. “用国际通用的话语和外国受众能够接受、易于接受、乐于接受的说法把中国故事讲清楚、说精彩” (“Let Us Use the Discourse Commonly Used at the International Level, a Discourse that is Easily Acceptable by Foreign Audiences, to Tell Them the Chinese History Properly, in a Clear and Fascinating Way.”). See: “王家瑞：努

Beyond the advantages stemming from tightening relations with foreign political parties, this kind of events also enables the CCP to restore its image and to reinforce its legitimacy and credibility. Holding the 2017 “CCP in Dialogue” Summit was, according to ILLD director Song Tao, “largely applauded by the international community,” it “showed the great political inclusiveness and moral attractiveness of the Party,” and “represented a major contribution to further the world political civilization.”<sup>575</sup> To quote the words used by China, this kind of event is, indeed, an occasion to put forward CCP’s “political advantage” (政治优势), and to show its “worldwide influence capacity” (世界影响力),<sup>576</sup> without necessarily trying to export the Chinese model.<sup>577</sup>

### 3. Priority to investments in the regions

The **Canadian case** (→ p. 539) illustrates the fact that Chinese efforts towards foreign political circles are often directed primarily towards **the local and regional levels, which are more accessible and discreet targets**, and make it possible **to cover the territory and be as close as possible to the population**.

In France, as elsewhere, the Chinese Embassy **lobbies MPs and senators intensively**, and **organizes regional events** with local political authorities, who are often in demand. This is notably the case of **the Hauts-de-France region**, which has notably developed its relations with China. Every year since 2017, it has invited the Chinese ambassador to celebrate the Chinese New Year in a large ceremony in Lille.<sup>578</sup> On January 13, 2020, the event was co-organized with the Confucius Institute of the University of Artois.<sup>579</sup> For the same reasons that favor decentralization in its influence efforts, Beijing is particularly seeking to locate its Confucius institutes and classes in medium-sized universities (→ p. 300).

The Hauts-de-France region has also entered into **an agreement with China’s Zhejiang province** (September 2019) as well as between **the ports of Dunkirk and Ningbo** (April 2019).

力开创党的对外工作新局面” (“Wang Jiarui: Let Us Try to Create the New Phase of the Party’s Diplomacy”), *CPC News* (3 Jun. 2014), <https://archive.vn/vYyQR>.

575. Song Tao, “Working Hard to Bring Happiness to the Chinese People and Promote Progress of All Mankind,” *Global Times* (3 Sept. 2020), <https://archive.vn/A754u>.

576. 马小宁 (Ma Xiaoning), 孟祥麟 (Meng Xianglin), and 李伟红 (Li Weihong), “发挥政党作用 携手建设更加美好的世界——中联部部长宋涛介绍中国共产党与世界政党高层对话会有关情况” (“Show the Party’s Role: Let Us Build a Better World Together – the ILLD Director Song Tao Presents the CCP and the World Summit of Political Parties”), *CPC News* (Dec. 4, 2017), <https://archive.vn/OHYKI>.

577. Xi Jinping: “We do not ‘Import’ Models from Other Countries, nor do We Want to ‘Export’ the Chinese Model, Still Less Will we ask Other Countries to Replicate the Chinese Practice” in “Working Together to Build a Better World,” speech at the High-Level Summit:” the CCP in Dialogue with the World’s Political Parties (1 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/SEhTQ>.

578. “Amis chinois, bienvenue en Hauts-de-France!”, Région Hauts-de-France (14 Feb. 2018) (<https://www.hautsdefrance.fr/chine-bienvenue-nouvel-an/>).

579. “La célébration du Nouvel An chinois 2020 organisée conjointement par la Région Hauts-de-France et l’Institut Confucius de l’Université d’Artois” (“The celebration of the Chinese New Year 2020 organized jointly by the Hauts-de-France Region and the Confucius Institute of the University of Artois”), Bureau of Confucius Institutes, Nanjing University, February 15, 2020 (<https://archive.vn/fn4BD>).



### Influencing federated and decentralized actors: the German example

In Germany, Berlin is not the best environment to observe and analyze China's interferences. **The federal organization of Germany *de facto* renders it far more vulnerable to interference at the Länder level** (Bavaria and Bada-Wurtemberg where companies are particularly exposed to the Chinese market, as well as North-Rhine-Westphalia with Duisburg, a Chinese-style smart city).

No study at the local level has been conducted, in North-Rhine-Westphalia for instance, to establish a precise map of the numerous Chinese initiatives, apparently under the cover of business development, and the economic-financial interdependencies stemming from it (business trips, economic partnerships, R&D, university programs). Duisburg (a project of digital city, or smart city<sup>580</sup>) and Gelsenkirchen are often pointed out as vulnerable due to their financial situations (in the Ruhr region) and partnerships with Chinese companies such as Huawei (Duisburg)

The difficulty comes from the decentralized political power and its federal character, which limit any attempt at centralizing information, and hence any coordinated federal policy response.

**For foreign actors, Germany's decentralization is a "windfall for influence actions."**<sup>581</sup>

In addition, parts of the partnerships (such as the Thousand Talents program (→ p. 292), support to study programs, etc.) are not covered by the 2018 German law on foreign investment, because they are not participations in a company's capital or joint-ventures.<sup>582</sup>

The different political cultures in Germany, between the East and the West, even thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, favor the permeability to CCP narratives. The foothold of the AfD and Die Linke parties, both vectors of greater acceptance of authoritarian discourses than in the West, is doubled with a tendency to use a narrative of victimization in a part of the electorate (Ossis, victims of the West). This **is, *in fine*, a more permissive and vulnerable environment for the actions of Chinese actors and their relays** – highlighting the discriminations supposedly faced by China and its companies.

## B. People

"What other country, besides China, coopts as many former leaders from all over the planet?"<sup>583</sup> *Le Canard enchaîné* asked after listing two former French Prime Minister (Jean-Pierre Raffarin et Dominique de Villepin), one former British Prime Minister (David Cameron), a former German vice-Chancellor (Philippe Rösler) and one former Australian Prime Minister (Paul Keating) – a list far from exhaustive that encompasses practically every country. As was previously mentioned, in Estonia for instance, "the Powerhouse company, which was lobbying in the name of the Chinese company Huawei, employs three former Estonian ministers"<sup>584</sup> (→ p. 259).

**The Chinese Communist Party has always forged links with politicians** from countries whose positions, or at least, whose representations of China, they wished to influence. These practices were also part of the Soviet repertoire of active measures and are among United Front activities. In the Chinese case, the ILD plays an important role in this type of operations as it is responsible for maintaining most of the bilateral relations with political parties.

580. On this topic see: Alice Ekman, "The Chinese Art City. New Sphere of Influence," *Études de l'IFRI* (Dec. 2019).

581. Interview conducted by one of our research assistants in Berlin (Mar. 2020).

582. See the work of Felix Turbanisch, PhD student researching that topic at the University of Göttingen.

583. *La Chine démasquée*, 23.

584. Frank Jüris, "Estonian Parties in the CCP's grip: The International Liaison Department's Influence Activities," *Synopsis* (25 Sept. 2020).



It can be noted, however, that the CCP has made increasingly important efforts regarding targets that could be particularly useful. One method seen in Australia,<sup>585</sup> but also in European institutions, **consists in appointing advisors close to Western politicians**. Charles Parton thus reported that, during the visit of European MEPs in Beijing, a “British deputy had brought his advisor, a former Chinese professor, to an internal meeting, and had defended positions that differed little, or not at all, from the Propaganda department’s documents. Said advisor is well known in Brussels for organizing pro-China events.”<sup>586</sup>

The ties can be varied: some politicians are only **contacts** to Chinese agents using them to transmit messages or influence opinions; another circle is composed of politicians who can be manipulated, based on their ideology or sheer interest: they are “**useful idiots**”; a third group is composed of individuals fully aware of working for Chinese interests and who accept it, whatever the reason may be. They are **actual influence agents** that Beijing can trust with more specific directives; finally, the last circle, closest to the Party, is composed of those **formally recruited by Chinese intelligence services**. When politicians stay out of reach from Beijing’s efforts, the Party can use intimidation or punitive actions (one of its most common weapons being visa denial, used against researchers [→ p. 285] but also against recalcitrant politicians). The level of penetration and the number of politicians under influence greatly vary from country to country. Many cases are known in Australia and New Zealand, but the phenomenon touches everyone, everywhere.

**In Germany for instance, Bundestag politicians, MPs and ex-MPs from all parties, are courted by companies or the embassy:** from the CDU-CSU (Hans-Peter Friedrich (CDU), vice-president of Bundestag is seen as pro-China) through exchange programs dedicated to young talents, to the FDP, SPD, or the AfD. The B’90-Grünen is the only group that seems to stay impermeable to these actions of influence (except for Jürgen Trittin), due to the prominence of human rights issues and to its core environmentalist ideology. The case of SPD deputies of the Bundestag Commission for Human Right, prohibited from entering the territory and denied entry visas in 2018, is often mentioned as an example of a visible, voluntary action. This initiative falls within a networking-lobbying approach brought about by several lead executives of German companies (Siemens, VW, etc.), all part of the DAX of the China-Brücke, and based on the model of the Transatlantik-Brücke; it shows that those who are pro-China still favor dialogue and see Beijing as an unavoidable trade partner (→ p. 252).<sup>587</sup>

585. Clive Hamilton and Alex Joske, “Political Networking the Chinese Way – A Sydney MP and his ‘Community Advisor,’” *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 Jun. 2017).

586. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper (Feb. 2019), 23.

587. See the work of the Henry Jackson Society and of the KAS on the CCP and China’s efforts to influence Germany.

### When a German MP hijacks a Chinese communication operation with some irony

In 2018, more than 100 Bundestag MPs received copies of the English edition of Xi Jinping's recently-published *China's Governance II*. The shipment was decided by a German marketing agency (Beijing makes extensive use of local communication and marketing agencies and lobbyists to try to improve its image). The letter accompanying the book informed the MPs that it was free of charge but asked them in return to “display the books in their constituencies and send a photo to an e-mail address of the agency.”<sup>588</sup> CDU MP Michael Brand, who is no stranger to Beijing, had an idea. He has specialized in the protection of religious minorities and has been known for his outspokenness toward the CCP, which made him *persona non grata* in China after he refused to answer the Chinese ambassador to Germany's demand to censor his own website two years earlier (the ambassador asked him to remove photos and texts about the persecution of religious minorities). When he received Xi Jinping's book and the request to display and photograph it, Brand did so: he displayed the books on a shelf, alongside books dedicated to crimes committed by the CCP or to resistant figures, such as the Dalai Lama and the artist Ai Weiwei. He took a photo (below) and sent it back to the sender.



Source: Christina Brause, Anette Dowideit, Tina Kaiser, and Maximilian Kalkhof, “Chinas heimliche Propagandisten,” *Die Welt*, June 15, 2021.

In the Czech Republic, another interesting European example, Chinese influence on politicians has reached new heights. MapInfluenCE described a **massive penetration of Czech political networks**,<sup>589</sup> the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) most specifically. The links between this party and the CCP pre-date the election of President Miloš Zeman, and rest on a few key individuals such as Jan Hamáček, who leads the party, or Jan Kohout, a presidential advisor who was appointed head of the New Silk Road Institute Prague in 2015. According to MapInfluenCE, the social-democrats also harbor politically-involved entrepreneurs who use this platform to develop ties with the CCP or structures related to it. This influence can be illustrated by **Jaroslav Tvrdík**, a ČSSD former MP and defense minister in the governments of Miloš Zeman and Vladimír Špidla. He was vice-president of the board of directors of the Chinese company CEFC in Europe between 2015 and 2020.

588. Brause et al., “Chinas heimliche Propagandisten.”

589. Their work is available via this link: <https://www.chinfluence.eu/>.

The close links between Tvrđík and China date back to at least 2012, when he became president of the supervisory board of the Czech-China Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, and then chairman of its board of directors two years later.<sup>590</sup> Tvrđík subsequently became an advisor for Jiří Rusnok and Bohuslav Sobotka, prime ministers from 2013 to 2014 and from 2014 to 2017 respectively, on issues regarding China.<sup>591</sup> In 2015, the Chinese conglomerate CEFC Group Europe set up its European headquarters in Prague, and launched an aggressive acquisition drive that targeted numerous Czech companies: J&T Finance Group, the airline Travel Group, the multimedia group Empresa Media, and even the football club SK Slavia Prague. Jaroslav Tvrđík, who was appointed vice-president of CEFC Europe, played a key role in the majority of these acquisitions. He also became chairman of the supervisory board of SK Slavia Prague in 2015, and then chairman of its board of directors in 2016. The president and founder of CEFC, **Ye Jianming** was, on his part, appointed **political and economic advisor to the Czech president Milos Zeman**.<sup>592</sup> In 2017, this progression was hit by a scandal when CEFC was accused by the U.S. Justice Department of having bribed the Chadian president with €2 million in exchange for oil exploitation rights. Furthermore, CEFC China Energy was not able to pay its debt obligations, estimated at €475 million, to J&T Private Investments on time. Hence, J&T obtained the shareholder rights and appointed a new president.<sup>593</sup> Ye Jianming was eventually arrested in China in late 2018 on charges of corruption and economic crimes.<sup>594</sup>

The CITIC company, controlled by the Chinese government and, “for several specialists, an **extraordinary den of intelligence officers**,”<sup>595</sup> took control of CEFC and managed to recover the group’s presidency by settling parts of its debt.<sup>596</sup> Tvrđík was again appointed vice-chairman of CEFC Europe.<sup>597</sup> Tvrđík is also seemingly tied to the supervisory board of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Foundation (TMC) which, as we saw, is one of Beijing’s influence tools (→ p. 152). Finally, he owns shares (25%) in the firm Little Mole Cartoon which, in 2016, coproduced with CCTV a 52-episode TV show depicting the little Czech mole and the Giant Chinese panda preparing the visit of Xi Jinping in Prague.<sup>598</sup> That sole example shows how the **CCP manages to turn local politicians in true agents, capable of infiltrating the political society of a nation**.

590. “Contacts,” China Investment Forum, [http://www.czechchina.com/cif/?page\\_id=1850&lang=en](http://www.czechchina.com/cif/?page_id=1850&lang=en) (consulted on 24 Apr. 2020).

591. “Exministr Tvrđík se vrátil, radí Rusnokovi s Čínou,” Aktualne.cz <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/exministrtvrdik-se-vratil-radi-rusnokovi-s-cinou/r~7e70a4405b1911e38b9e002590604f2e/> (consulted on 24 Apr. 2020); Fu Jing, “Czech Republic Prepares for Dream Visit by Xi,” *China Daily*, (27 Apr. 2020), <http://iosnews.chinadaily.com.cn/newsdata/news//201603/27/383612/article.html>.

592. A. Chen and J. Lopatka, “China’s CEFC Has Big Ambitions but Little Known About Ownership, Funding,” Reuters (13 Jan. 2017).

593. M. Shabu, “Konec Tvrđíka v, evropské ‘CEFC. J&T kvůli neuhrazení dluhů ovládla firmu, odvolané vedení krok zpochybní, Lidovky” (17 May 2018). [https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/firmy-a-trhy/j-t-sesadila-tvrdik-a-z-vedenievropske-cefc-kvuli-neuhrazeni-dluhu.A180517\\_192428\\_firmy-trhy\\_pev](https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/firmy-a-trhy/j-t-sesadila-tvrdik-a-z-vedenievropske-cefc-kvuli-neuhrazeni-dluhu.A180517_192428_firmy-trhy_pev).

594. “Tvrđík: Česká CEFC bude do několika dnů oddlužená. Zaplatí 11,5 miliardy korun,” Lidovky (9 May 2018), [https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/firmy-a-trhy/tvrdik-ceska-cefc-bude-do-nekolika-dnu-oddluzena-zaplati-11-5-miliardy-korun.A180509\\_174328\\_firmy-trhy\\_ele](https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/firmy-a-trhy/tvrdik-ceska-cefc-bude-do-nekolika-dnu-oddluzena-zaplati-11-5-miliardy-korun.A180509_174328_firmy-trhy_ele).

595. De Pierrebouurg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 196.

596. J. Lopatka, “CEFC Europe Says CITIC Unit Taking Board Chairmanship in Company,” Reuters (28 May 2018).

597. “CEFC Europe Names New Management Team,” *Prague Business Journal* (consulted 24 Apr. 2020), <https://praguebusinessjournal.com/cefc-europe-names-new-management-team/>; “Tvrđík je zpět ve vedení CEFC Europe. Stal se místopředsedou představenstva,” Echo 24.cz (28 May 2018), <https://www.echo24.cz/a/Sawtj/tvrdik-je-zpet-vevedeni-cefc-europe-stal-se-mistopredsedom-predstavenstva>.

598. C. Peterson, “Panda to join Little mole in new cartoon series” *China Daily* (28 Mar. 2016), [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2016-03/28/content\\_24131110.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2016-03/28/content_24131110.htm).



On the left, Tvrdik answered a criticism of China that defended the help of the EU during the Covid-19. He mentioned China's donations to Europe and the low prices of the Chinese masks. On the right, a tweet mentioning the low number of Covid-19 cases in Wuhan compared to the Chinese population, and praising the drastic measures taken by the Chinese authorities to defeat the epidemic.

### The resistance of Prague's mayor

Zdeněk Hřib, mayor of Prague since 2018, did not fold under Chinese pressure when the Chinese ambassador asked him to exclude the Taiwan representative from a meeting with foreign diplomats. As the Ambassador invoked a clause from the 2016 agreement stipulating that Prague and Beijing are twin cities, and by which Prague committed its support to the One China policy, Hřib asked to drop the clause insofar as it regarded a foreign policy matter, in which an agreement between two cities had no weight. He additionally stood out by raising the Tibetan flag on the façade of the town hall in March 2019, to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising (a tradition in Prague first set by Vaclav Havel that had been abandoned in 2014), by welcoming the exiled Tibetan government leader Lobsang Sangay for a visit, and by going to Taipei for an official visit of his own. In addition, he has regularly denounced the Human Rights violations committed by China.

### The visit of the president of Czech Parliament in Taiwan

On January 10, 2020, the Chinese Ambassador in Prague sent a threatening letter to the then-president of the parliament, Jaroslav Kubera, second most important political figure in the country, to dissuade him from going on his planned visit to Taiwan. The letter stated that, if need be, retaliatory measures would be taken against Czech companies in China, such as Skoda Auto and Home Credit Group. In the end, Kubera could not see his project through – he died from a cardiac arrest ten days later, on January 20. His successor, Miloš Vystrčil, was subjected to equal pressure but he did not fold: he partook in a particularly mediatized official visit in Taiwan, at the head of a delegation of 90 people, from August 30 to September 4, 2020. The Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi immediately reacted to Prague crossing a “red line”; he hence announced that the country would pay a “heavy price” for this insult.<sup>599</sup> Several days later, Song Tao (宋涛), the head of the ILD (→ p. 70), asked the president of the central committee of the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), Vojtěch Filip, to distance himself from Vystrčil.<sup>600</sup> The country’s president Zeman subsequently announced that he would do the same.<sup>601</sup>

The president of the parliament was also targeted by a defamation campaign, with misinformation stating that he had been paid \$4 million by Taiwan for the visit, a sum supposedly meant to finance a future presidential campaign. The media Aktuálně.cz received messages from Michael Winkler and Robert J. Mojzes, representing the Swiss consulting firm RefinSol Advisory Services, inviting them to publish this (fake) news. Aktuálně.cz inquired about the informants and established that they were also behind eurasiainfo.ch, which seemingly relays information from the Chinese Embassy in Switzerland.<sup>602</sup> Winkler also wrote pro-Beijing articles (one was titled “Xi Jinping: a Responsible Leader in Switzerland,” in which he praised the Chinese president for the “depth of his knowledge on the historical ties” between the two countries and “the clarity and fairness of his objectives” during his visit).<sup>603</sup> According to University of Basel Professor Ralph Weber, the RefinSol Advisory Services and eurasiainfo.ch offices are both located next to an association for overseas Chinese from the Jiangxi province headed by Zhu Ailian (朱爱莲), who runs eurasiainfo.ch with Winkler and Moizes. They seem close to the CCP: on a picture on the European Jiangxi Chamber of Commerce website, that she also runs, she poses with the Chinese vice-president, Wang Qishan.<sup>604</sup>

**The CCP also seems very active within the Italian political class**, targeting the M5S in particular.<sup>605</sup> The situation is judged even more worrying since the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has little resources on China. In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, is perceived to be fully aligned with the CCP’s cause, defending its interests in Italy – although his positions seem to have evolved recently.<sup>606</sup> He was notably criticized for signing a Belt and Roads Initiative agreement in March 2019, when he was minister of the Economic Development, which has increased the Italian trade imbalance and eased the Chinese penetration in Italy since.

**In France, as much as anywhere else, the Party has forged strong relationships with individuals enabling China to infiltrate the political sphere, defend its interest and silence critical voices.** Beyond individuals punctually and diversely recruited by the

599. “Wang Yi: Those Who Challenge The One China Principle Will Pay Heavy Price,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PCR (31 Aug. 2020), <https://archive.vn/NOuaK>.

600. <https://archive.ph/fW9m5>.

601. Martin Hála, Filip Jirouš, and Petra Ševčíková, “How the CCP Mobilized a Cross-Border Disinformation Campaign against the Czech Senate Speaker,” *China Brief*, 21:7 (12 Apr. 2021).

602. On the Chinese influence in Switzerland, see Ralph Weber, “Unified Message, Rhizomatic Delivery: A Preliminary Analysis of PRC/CCP Influence and the United Front in Switzerland,” *Sinopsis* (18 Dec. 2020).

603. “Character Assassination as the ‘Heavy Price’ for Visiting Taiwan,” *Sinopsis* (11 Nov. 2020).

604. *Ibid.*

605. Meeting between one of the authors and an Italian researcher, in Germany (Feb. 2020).

606. Giulia Pompili, “Di Maio e la Cina sono in una Relazione Complicata,” *Il Foglio* (30 Jul. 2020).



Party, the construction of a Chinese network within the French elite runs through the **France-China Foundation** since 2013. According to its staff, the foundation's "Young Leaders" program aims to "promote the meeting of high potential individuals from China and France from diverse background (economic, political, cultural, media), who will play an important role in their home country or in the context of China-France relations." The foundation was created by Emmanuel Lenain, Arnaud Ventura, Nicolas Macquin and Shan Sa on the French side.<sup>607</sup> "The profiles are screened," recognized Nicolas Macquin. "There is a division within the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the Institute of Foreign Affairs of the Chinese people – that controls all these exchange and cooperation programs." The ministry itself lists the participants. Sponsoring the program, it ensures that one of its representatives is included in each of the sessions. They are Beijing's eye, in some ways."<sup>608</sup>

If the list of the sessions reveals judicious choices among the French elite, the same cannot be said about the Chinese elite. In fact, this type of structure serves, first and foremost, China's interest by favoring the emergence of positive perceptions of China among the recipients and **the creation of a reserve army from which the Party can draw to lead its influence operations.** In China, the foundation is tied to the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (中国人民外交学会), which was created by Zhou Enlai (周恩来) in 1949 to put in place a people-to-people diplomacy – in other words, to open more channels toward foreign elites. Today, the institute works within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ensures the ideological compatibility of selected French individuals. **The Chinese system is not very different from how the Soviets used to send delegations abroad to provide the KGB with avenues of penetration in targeted societies and to facilitate the selection of potential "useful idiots."**

This strategy of recruiting current or retired foreign politicians is led simultaneously to the ILLD's activities specifically targeting political parties.

## C. The elections

Chinese electoral interferences have long existed (there were allegations of illegal Chinese donations during the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign),<sup>609</sup> but the evident Chinese disinhibition in that regard is more recent. According to an ASPI report, **China interfered in 10 elections in 7 countries over the past decade**, a majority of which took place in the Indo-Pacific region (Australia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Taiwan),<sup>610</sup> the only other country being the United States. To this list a few local elections in Canada can be added, as voters were encouraged, via WeChat, to vote for certain candidates of Chinese descent in exchange for money (→ p. 562).

The Canadian and Australian cases are, as usual, fairly similar, **with the most obvious interferences conducted in the most "Sinicized" districts of the country**, Richmond in British Columbia for Canada (54% of residents are of Chinese descent) and Bennelong (New South Wales) in Australia (21%).<sup>611</sup> The American case is interesting insofar as it

607. <https://francechinafoundation.org/membres-fondateurs/?lang=fr>.

608. *La Chine démasquée*, 97.

609. James Bennet, "Clinton Says Chinese Money Did Not Influence U.S. Policy," *The New York Times* (18 May 1998); Jeff Gerth and Eric Schmitt, "House Panel Says Chinese Obtained U.S. Arms Secrets," *The New York Times* (31 Dec. 1998).

610. Sarah O'Connor, Fergus Hanson, Emilia Currey, and Tracy Beattie, *Cyber-enabled foreign interference in elections and referendums*, ASPI, Policy Brief, Report 41 (2020), 15.

611. [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/CED103](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/CED103).

involved a cyberattack targeting Biden’s team, which could be an attempt to copy what the Russians did in 2016 with the DNC Leaks (→ p. 625).

However, the **Taiwanese case** remains the best documented (→ p. 458), in particular the 2018 elections that marked the “first claim of a direct PLA involvement in disinformation on social media for election interference.”<sup>612</sup>

### On WeChat, a letter instructing votes in Australia

In December 2017, in the context of a local election in the Bennelong district, in New South Wales, which is the district with the highest proportion of residents of Chinese descent (21%), a letter calling to vote for the Labor candidate and to defeat the Liberal Party (described as “anti-Chinese”) was circulated along with a call to “overthrow” the Turnbull government. This letter, which was not signed, was nonetheless widely shared on WeChat by Yan Zehua, Australian citizen of Chinese descent and vice-president of the Australian branch of the Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, an organization of the United Front.<sup>613</sup>



Extract of the letter shared on WeChat. Source: James Elton-Pym, “Bennelong Letter Urges Chinese Voters to Vote for Keneally, says Liberals are ‘Opposed to China,’” *SBSNews* (14 Dec. 2017).

612. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military’s Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 82.

613. Nick O’Malley and Alex Joske, “Mysterious Bennelong letter urges Chinese Australians to ‘take down’ the Turnbull government,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (13 Dec. 2017).

## VI. Education

The economic dependence vis-à-vis China, the freedom of expression on campuses and the role of Confucius Institutes, are topics that have increasingly worried universities across the world and that, in some countries like Australia, have been debated beyond academic circles. They have been deemed matters of national interests.

### A. Universities

It is fairly easy to understand why foreign universities are one of the main targets of Chinese influence operations: **“the CCP has a deep understanding of the importance of ideas and ideological struggle in the contest for political power, so ideas and those who generate them are a central target of the CCP’s influence work.”**<sup>614</sup>

#### 1. Financial dependence vis-à-vis China

Third preferred destination in the world for international students, after the United States and the United Kingdom, **Australia** is, by far, the country that welcomes the most students as a proportion of its population (1,559 for 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 653 for the United Kingdom, 517 for Canada, 379 for France and 304 for the United States).<sup>615</sup> International students are very important for Australia, as the revenues they bring (tuition fees, contributions to the economy), tens of billions of Australian dollars, **represent the third source of revenues for the country in the export market**, after minerals.

**And Chinese students represent, by far, the first contingent** (60% on average for the eight most prestigious Australian universities, even 69% for the University of Sydney, 66% at the University of New South Wales, and 56% at the University of Melbourne).<sup>616</sup> In some programs and classes, they even represent a strong majority of students, with possible adverse effects: when 80% of the students are Chinese, as is the case in some MBAs, other students are dissuaded from attending (young Australians choose North America or Europe instead), insofar as everyone speaks Chinese in class and it is of lesser interest in terms of networking, which is one of the main motivations for this kind of program.

In any case Chinese students generated AUS\$534 million (€340 million) at the University of Sydney (23% of its total revenue) in 2017, 446 million (€285 million) at the University of New South Wales (22 %) and 410 million (€262 million) at the University of Melbourne (16 %).<sup>617</sup> In other words, in some cases, close to a quarter of their revenues comes from Chinese students, without counting funding from Chinese companies. These proportions have made universities – some more than others – **dependent on Chinese students**. It is even more salient with the decreasing public subsidies from the government.

However, after an uninterrupted growth since 2010 (about +10% per year on average), the number of study permits delivered to Chinese has stagnated between 2017 and 2018, before decreasing between 2018 and 2019 (-3.3%). This tendency stems from various fac-

614. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

615. Salvatore Babones, *The China Student Boom and the Risks It Poses to Australian Universities*, CIS China and Free Societies, The Centre for Independent Studies, Analysis Paper 5 (2019), 22.

616. Eryk Bagshaw, Fergus Hunter, and Sanghee Liu, “‘Chinese Students Will Not Go There’: Beijing Education Agents Warn Australia,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (10 Jun. 2020).

617. Babones, *The China Student Boom and the Risks It Poses to Australian Universities*, 29.

tors, including the development, and thus increased attractiveness, of Chinese universities, but also the bilateral tensions since 2017-2018 – approximately when Australia became more cognizant to the “existential” threat that China’s influence represents (→ p. 544).

This dependence on Chinese students in Australian universities is, in fact, representative of Australia’s overall dependence to China. It is similar to how Beijing weaponizes the number of tourists in some areas (→ p. 405); it **uses students to pressure Australia**. In June 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a warning advising Chinese students not to go to Australia due to Covid-19-related risks, but also to the “racial discrimination” they presumably face in the country.<sup>618</sup> The economic consequences of a drastic fall in the number of Chinese students in Australia have created pressing concerns in the country, for which the only solution is to break the dependency – in other words, to diversify (→ p. 273).

The Australian case is the most spectacular, but is far from being the only one. **Other countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, are facing the same problem.** The United Kingdom does not have such a big Chinese diaspora (0.7% of the population),<sup>619</sup> but its main vulnerability regarding influence resides precisely in the fact that its universities welcome “more Chinese students than the rest of Europe combined.”<sup>620</sup> The financial dependence toward Chinese students increased throughout the last decade. Since 2014-15, their number went from 89,540 to 120,385, a 34% increase in five years.<sup>621</sup> It is, by far, the largest non-European student group (three times more than Indians). About fifteen universities earn over a fifth of their income from them. According to the *Global Times*, the United Kingdom has become a more popular destination than the United States for Chinese students.<sup>622</sup> Just like everywhere else, the richest schools, such as Oxford or Cambridge, have the resources to resist and Beijing has more leverage on universities where Chinese students are the most numerous, Nottingham and the LSE for instance. The situation is similar in the United States (329,000 Chinese students in 2017, over five times more than ten years ago)<sup>623</sup> and in Canada (→ p. 567).

Essentially, **this financial dependence, sometimes reinforced by the presence of a Confucius Institute (→ p. 299), renders these universities less susceptible to resist Chinese influence operations. On the contrary, it pushes them to actively participate in self-censorship**, to avoid saying or doing things that displease Beijing. **“We don’t bite the hand that feeds us,”** replied the hierarchy of a professor at an Australian university when he expressed his concerns about the safety of Hong Kong students.<sup>624</sup> All the more so since, within its dissuasion arsenal, Beijing has other ways to pressure them, including **cyberattacks**. The attack that targeted the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra at the end of 2018, revealed in June 2019, and that allowed the responsible parties to steal the personal information of thousands of students and staff members, was not officially attributed, but its target and degree of sophistication presupposed a level of skills that only a few states had.

618. <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1270243896069459968>.

619. “Ethnicity and religion statistics,” Institute of Race Relations (<https://irr.org.uk/research/statistics/ethnicityand-religion/>).

620. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper (Feb. 2019), 13.

621. Branwen Jeffreys, “UK Universities See Boom in Chinese Students,” *BBC News* (21 Jan. 2020).

622. Chen Xi and Ji Yuqiao, “More Chinese Students Want to Study in UK than US: Survey,” *Global Times* (2 Jul. 2020).

623. Stephanie Saul, “On Campuses Far from China, Still Under Beijing’s Watchful Eye,” *The New York Times* (4 May 2017).

624. Grégory Plesse, “Les universités australiennes sous influence chinoise” (“Australian universities under Chinese influence”), *Le Figaro*, June 30, 2021.

## Two cases at Charles University, the oldest University in Central Europe

The prestigious Charles University in Czech Republic, the oldest in Central Europe, was the target of at least two Chinese influence operations.

– **The Balabán case.** In 2015, a Chinese-Czech center was created at Charles University, in Prague, with Miloš Balabán as secretary general. He was not entirely unknown to the Czech security and intelligence service (BIS), which, in their 2013 annual report, noted that the 9<sup>th</sup> Prague Security conference, organized by Balabán, showcased a certain leniency regarding the activities of Russian and Chinese intelligence services but an eagerness to denounce the activities of the Czechs' American ally.<sup>625</sup> In 2015, Balabán, who was cumulating his new position at the China-Czech center with that of director of another of the university's research center, the Center for Security Policy, created a private namesake company (Center for Security Policy). Through this private company, China financed the annual conferences of the China-Czech center in 2018 and 2019, for approximately €47,000. The objective of the financial arrangement was apparently caution, enabling Balabán to not mention the Chinese money when questioned on how the 2019 conference was funded: it was paid by the China-Czech center (€20,000) and other participants (€2,300), he replied, omitting to highlight that China was its main contributor (€23,500).<sup>626</sup> When it was revealed, Balabán resigned from both centers at the university. It was later uncovered that in 2018, Balabán had volunteered a university course on the BRI, which he co-taught, and at the end of which the eight best students were offered a free trip to China through the Bridge for the Future program. The class was allegedly invoiced not to the university but, through his private company, to the Embassy of China, who paid him €2,700.<sup>627</sup>

– **The PPF case.** PPF (*První Privatizační Fond*) is an important Czech financial group, “the richest private company in the Czech Republic,”<sup>628</sup> which owns Home Credit, a company that makes most of its profit in China. It seems, however, that Beijing had put a condition to its access to the Chinese market: an improvement of the relationships between the Czech Republic and China. For that reason, and to convince Beijing, PPF worked hard to “help flip the government's anti-communist foreign policy into a pro-China one.” They notably “arranged a Beijing visit by Czech President Milos Zeman in 2014, even supplying a private jet to fly him back.”<sup>629</sup> The efforts paid off: that same year, Home Credit was granted access to the Chinese market, with important financial benefits. At the start of October 2019, Home Credit offered to sponsor Charles University if it signed an agreement to “not hurt PPF's global interests,” which essentially “translated that the university would have to stop all criticisms toward China.” However, “Charles University has many influential critics of China in its staff, including Martin Hala and his organization Sinopsis, an institution that has examined and exposed the Czech Republic's questionable dealings with Beijing. Within days of learning about Home Credit's sponsorship agreement with Charles University, students, faculty and Czech media lambasted the university's leadership, prompting Home Credit to withdraw its offer and the head of the university to publicly apologize for his role in the matter.”<sup>630</sup>

625. BIS, *Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2013*, (2014), 11.

626. Alžběta Bajarová, “The Czech-Chinese Centre of Influence: How Chinese Embassy in Prague Secretly Funded Activities at the Top Czech University,” *China Observers* (7 Nov. 2019).

627. Ibid.

628. Rob Schmitz, “China's Influence in the Czech Republic,” *NPR* (31 Oct. 2019).

629. Ibid.

630. Ibid.



Aware of their vulnerabilities, Australian universities and the government are organizing themselves. In August 2019, they created a University Foreign Interference Taskforce with government and university representatives. This group published guidelines for Australian universities in November. **To reduce the Chinese influence, they generally encouraged the diversification of students** (such as Indian students, whose enrollment has increased a lot recently, although it remains far from the volume represented by the Chinese – they are also less solvent; Australia being on the same segment as the United Kingdom, Brexit could benefit Australian universities by redirecting a part of the flow of Indian students), **increased subsidies from the government and Australian businesses;** and **red-lined strategic topics** (AI, quantum computing, engineering – but it generated a debate, insofar as, due to the Chinese head start there, depriving the country of such collaborations could be scientifically damaging).

Finally, it should be remembered that **the financial pressure** – without necessarily going as far as dependence – **is exerted via the income generated not only by the presence of Chinese students but also by Chinese funding** for laboratories, research, events or teaching programs, especially in Chinese language. In **Germany**, for example, the Free University of Berlin signed a contract with Hanban (the Chinese organization that manages Confucius Institutes → p. 299) granting it nearly €500,000 over five years to train some 20 Chinese language teachers each year. The contract contains clauses allowing Beijing to exert political pressure on the content of the teaching, notably by offering the Chinese side the possibility of reducing or suspending its financing if it considers that certain elements of the program are contrary to Chinese law, or of revoking the contract with more advantageous conditions than if the university does.<sup>631</sup> There are many more or less formalized and binding agreements. In a small country like **Slovakia**, which is part of a region (the Visegrád group, and more broadly Central and Eastern Europe) that is strategic for Beijing (→ p. 310), no less than 113 formal relationships have been identified between Chinese entities (universities but also other organizations such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences or Hanban, and companies such as Huawei and ZTE), and Slovak universities and research institutes. The peak was reached in 2016-2017, with ten new agreements signed yearly.<sup>632</sup>

## 2. Academic freedom and freedom of expression on campuses

Many of the hundreds of thousands of Chinese students on foreign campus are nationalists. In Australia for instance, “the vast majority of them are Chinese government supporters.”<sup>633</sup> And some have been particularly zealous and aggressive, if not violent. They create problems, particularly, but not only, by attempting to restrict academic liberties and freedom of expression in the university community, starting with that of their Chinese peers. It is important to emphasize that this latter attitude only concerns a minority of them – especially since some Chinese students choose these countries precisely because they want to escape the Chinese regime, at least temporarily, breathe a little, and taste the freedom offered by democracies. **The primary objective of this active minority is to**

631. David Matthews, “Chinese contract with German university criticized,” *Times Higher Education*, February 7, 2020.

632. Matej Šimalčík and Adam Kalivoda, *China’s inroads into Slovak universities: Protecting academic freedoms from authoritarian malign interference*, CEIAS and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, December 2020, 8-9.

633. Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, “Blinkered Chinese Nationalists Are Trolling Me – but Once I Was One of Them,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 Aug. 2019).

prevent their peers from accessing these liberties, the democratic values and freedom that could, in the mind of the CCP, corrupt them.

*a. Surveillance and intimidation of Chinese students.*

Chinese students abroad are one of the priority targets identified by Xi Jinping at the United Front Work Conference in 2015 (with the New Media, young entrepreneurs and intellectuals not members of the Party).<sup>634</sup> The reason is simple: “the CCP makes extensive efforts to keep overseas students in line partly because it is anxious that they may be ‘infected’ by Western ideas.”<sup>635</sup> They are, as such, constantly monitored by others among them. In South Korea where about 40% of foreign students are Chinese, “there is a saying among the teachers: ‘at least one of your Chinese students is an informant.’”<sup>636</sup> It is likely true. Chinese studying abroad, in the United States, in Australia, or elsewhere, revealed that their parents in China had been informed and questioned on the fact that their child had gone to a class in which they had said this or that. The director of Human Rights Watch for China mentioned the case of a graduated student who spoke of something in a closed seminar on the campus of an American university, and two days later, his parents in China received a visit from the Ministry of Public Security “asking why their kid had brought up these touchy topics that were embarrassing to China in a classroom in the U.S.”<sup>637</sup> This is the proof that informants in class do not only **protest to attempt to influence class materials and campus activities**, but in fact partake in a **practical and permanent surveillance**, relay these information (who said what, where, and in front of whom) to the authorities, likely through the consulate or the embassy, who then relay them to Beijing for potential measures to be taken, in the form of **pressure on the parents** – the whole circuit happening in 48 hours, which indicates a rather well-oiled system.

**This puts the teachers in an ethical dilemma**, explained Kevin Carrico, who teaches China studies at Monash University in Australia: on the one hand, as a teacher in a free country, he does not want to make concessions on the content; on the other hand, what he says in class, or what his students say in class, is surveilled and relayed to Chinese authorities and the families. How to protect students without compromising on the content?<sup>638</sup>

**Surveillance is also constant outside the classroom, especially during demonstrations.** Chinese students, some of whom have chosen Australia to enjoy greater freedom, are watched as if they were still in China, primarily by some of their peers, but also by embassy and consulate officials and numerous party-related organizations. Here is a typical student testimony: “When I came to Australia, I thought I would finally be able to demonstrate freely. During [a] demonstration [in Melbourne, against the treatment of Chinese doctors and journalists who tried to alert the public about Covid-19], someone took my picture, which later ended up on WeChat. Then I got a video call from my parents, who were at the police station. The policeman told me that I had to go back to China and turn myself in, that what I had done was illegal and anti-Chinese.” The student does not dare to go back home anymore and she has “also stopped talking to [her] parents to avoid putting them in danger.”<sup>639</sup>

634. “习近平：巩固发展最广泛的爱国统一战线” (“Xi Jinping: Let Us Consolidate and Develop the Largest United Front”), Xinhua (20 May 2015), <https://archive.vn/DI6Qw>.

635. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

636. Meeting between one of the authors and a Korean academic, in Seoul (Apr. 2019).

637. Elizabeth Redden, “China’s ‘Long Arm,’” *Inside Higher Ed* (3 Jan. 2018).

638. Ibid.

639. Plesse, “Les universités australiennes sous influence chinoise.”

**Intimidation is even stronger with regard to at least two categories of students. On the one hand, scholarship recipients** (in France, for example, there are 1,400 scholarship recipients out of 30,000 Chinese students<sup>640</sup>), because they are financially dependent on Beijing and therefore cannot refuse anything to the embassy or the Party. On the other hand, **minority students** (notably Uyghurs and Tibetans) **and/or protest movements** (such as the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong). And this is true no matter where in the world they are. The Party manages to exert pressure on them, most often via their relatives, their parents, who remain in China. A Uyghur student at a university in western France explained: “The [Chinese] police ask me what I’m doing [by e-mail and telephone], whether I’ve participated in activities, whether I see other Uyghurs. I have to keep sending copies of my documents, taking pictures of myself in front of my college. If I don’t answer, they come to my parents’ house in Xinjiang.”<sup>641</sup>

**On campuses, intimidation frequently goes as far as physical aggression.** Over the summer 2019, the Hong Kong crisis reached Australian and New Zealander universities. Several times, particularly on the campuses of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Auckland, the same scenario repeated itself: pacific demonstrations of pro-Hong Kong democracy students were interrupted by pro-Beijing students yelling nationalist songs, such as “China is great,” and ripping signs and posters. It sometimes escalated, particularly on the campus of the University of Queensland (UQ), in Brisbane, where 300 pro-Beijing students physically attacked the pro-democracy protestors, dealing hits, before the police intervened. The **Chinese consulate later issued a statement praising the “patriotic behavior” of the students**, which led to a reaction from the minister of Defense, calling foreign diplomats to not interfere. In fact, UQ has strong ties to the consulate: the consul himself was appointed guest professor that same month (July 2019).<sup>642</sup> Moreover, pro-Beijing actors use WeChat groups to mobilize people before pro-democracy gatherings they are aware of, to fight “the separatist forces to the end” and “never make a concession.”<sup>643</sup>

**Harassment also takes place online:** pro-democracy students are targeted by hate campaigns and frequently threatened. Drew Pavlou, a 20-year-old UQ student, and one of the main organizers of pro-democracy protests in favor of Hong Kong, received dozens of death threats. In a message, a user told him he would hire an assassin in the Deep Web to kill his family (picture below). Others had their “driver’s license, marriage certificate, student ID and other identifying information published on Chinese social media site Weibo”<sup>644</sup> – this practice, called doxing, is developed in a separate section (→ p. 397).

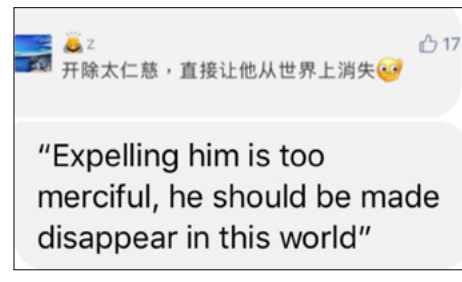
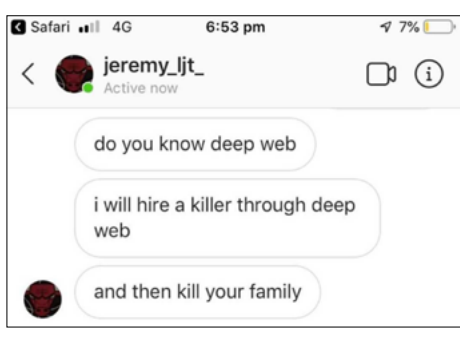
640. Ibid.

641. Laurence Defranoux, “Les profs et étudiants chinois enrôlés dans la ‘guerre d’opinion’ menée par Pékin” (“Chinese teachers and students enlisted in Beijing’s ‘war of opinion’”), *Libération* (27 Jul. 2021).

642. A. Odysseus Patrick and Emanuel Stoakes, “China’s Influence on Campus Chills Free Speech in Australia, New Zealand,” *The Washington Post* (9 Aug. 2019).

643. Ibid.

644. Anne Kruger, “Harassment and Hate Speech are Spilling Over from the Hong Kong Protests Through Social Media” (First Draft) (15 Aug. 2019).



Threats received by Drew Pavlou in 2019.<sup>645</sup>

*b. Intimidation of professors and university administrators*

Chinese students are not the only ones targeted. **Professors, university administrators, and staff members are also constantly surveilled and intimidated** to make sure that life on the campus, including teachings and research programs, is compliant with the CCP's line.

In the American case, a detailed report of the Wilson Center noted in 2018 that “a small number of PRC students have infringed on the academic freedom of American university faculty, students, administrators, and staff in recent years by: demanding the removal of research, promotional and decorative materials involving [considered by the PRC as] sensitive content from university spaces; demanding faculty alter their language or teaching materials involving [considered by the PRC as] sensitive content on political rather than

645. Sources: <https://twitter.com/DrewPavlou/status/1162576118177660929>; <https://twitter.com/DrewPavlou/status/1253283434744565760>; <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-12-21/student-australia-china-xi-jinping-uighurs-muslims>; <https://www.laroutedelasoie-editions.com/notre-catalogue/revue-dialogue-chine-france/>.



evidence-based grounds; interrupting and heckling other members of the university community who engage in critical discussion of China; and pressuring universities to cancel academic activities involving [considered by the PRC as] sensitive content. PRC students have also acted in ways that concerned or intimidated faculty, staff, and other students at American universities by: monitoring people and activities on campus involving [considered by the PRC as] sensitive content; probing faculty for information in a suspicious manner; and engaging in intimidation, abusive conduct, or harassment of other members of the university community.”<sup>646</sup> This description is valid for all the countries where universities welcome a relatively important number of Chinese students.

### The University of New South Wales censored itself under Chinese pressure



On July 31, 2020, the University of New South Wales (UNSW) published a quote from a professor at the university (who was also director of Human Rights Watch Australia), on its Twitter account, to “bring attention to the fast escalation of the situation in Hong Kong.” This tweet brought about protests from Chinese students, who were particularly numerous in this university where they amounted to close to a quarter of total enrollments, 69% of international students, and whose tuition fees equalled 22% of the university’s budget (which, in addition, had important deals, approximating AUS\$60 million (€38 million), with Chinese companies). This power imbalance quickly pushed the university to its first concession, tweeting a few hours later that “the opinions expressed by our academics do not always represent the views of UNSW,” before deleting both tweets. The original article where the quote was taken from was also removed from the website – after Chinese students asked the embassy to pressure the university. According to the *Global Times*, deleting the tweets was not enough to calm the students, who asked the university to

publish an apology.<sup>647</sup> This deletion quickly became a national polemic, with MPs, along with the minister for education, considering that this self-censorship infringed on the freedom of expression and on academic freedom (which should be particularly protected in universities). It is another example of the unacceptable influence of China on Australian campuses.<sup>648</sup>

**Notably, any link with the Dalai Lama causes a systematic reaction.** This is true for countries (following a visit by the Dalai Lama in Copenhagen in 2009, Beijing froze its bilateral relations with Denmark until the government issued a statement defending that Denmark “was opposed to Tibet’s independence”), but also universities. When in 2009, the University of Calgary granted the title of doctor *honoris causa* to the Dalai Lama, the Chinese government retaliated by removing the university from its list of school recognized by China, which caused the departure of many Chinese students, fearing they would not find a job in China because their degrees at the University of Calgary were no longer recognized. Punished during two years, the University was recertified in 2011.<sup>649</sup> When in

646. Anastasia Lloyd-Damnjanovic, *A Preliminary Study of PRC Political Influence and Interference Activities in American Higher Education*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC (2018), 1-2.

647. Zhao Yusha, “Australian University Under Attack for Article ‘Interfering’ HK Affairs,” *Global Times* (1 Aug. 2020).

648. Max Walden and Stephen Dziedzic, “UNSW Under Fire for Deleting Social Media Posts Critical of China over Hong Kong,” ABC News (3 Aug. 2020).

649. “UCalgary Regains Accreditation in China,” *Maclean’s* (4 Apr. 2011).



2017 the University of California in San Diego invited the Dalai Lama to give a conference, the Chinese students of the university protested. On WeChat, the local CSSA (→ p. 280) posted a statement saying they had asked for advice from the Chinese consulate and negotiated with the university's executive body to cancel the event. On Facebook, they posted no less than 1,600 comments, some of which accused the Dalai Lama of being a “terrorist.”<sup>650</sup> The university did not yield, which led to an aggressive article in the *Global Times* suggesting that the Chinese authorities might not deliver a visa to the president of this university or recognize its degrees.<sup>651</sup> A few months later, the China Scholarship Council (国家留学基金管理委员会) froze all scholarship funding for Chinese students who wished to study at the University of California in San Diego (see image below).



Statement of September 12, 2017 sent by the China Scholarship Council informing the scholarship freeze toward the University of California in San Diego.<sup>652</sup>

When, in 2016, in France, INALCO (the National Institute for Eastern Languages and Civilizations) invited the Dalai Lama to give a conference, the university “received official letters from the Embassy of China demanding that the invitation be rescinded,” always with the barely veiled threat that what was at stake was “maintaining good relations between INALCO and China.” “They also came twice [...] they are less subtle orally,” explained Françoise Robin, an INALCO professor.<sup>653</sup> All in vain, because INALCO did not cede – contrary to Sciences Po, who had planned to host him as well but “cancelled his visit after an intervention of the Embassy of China.”<sup>654</sup> At the INALCO event, its president, Manuelle Frank, was even “on stage during the whole conference, even though the embassy had urged her no to.”<sup>655</sup> This time, there was no sanction.

These interventions are not aimed at exceptional guests like the Dalai Lama only: they are commonplace in university life, including in France, as Jean-Philippe Béja, emeritus director of research at the CNRS and researcher at the Centre for International Studies and Research (CERI) at Sciences Po, explains: “**For the past three or four years, Chinese**

650. Elizabeth Redden, “Chinese Students vs. Dalai Lama,” *Inside Higher Ed* (16 Feb. 2017).

651. Liu Jianxi, “US University Fails to Teach Students Correct History of Tibet,” *Global Times* (20 Jun. 2017).

652. To a colleague of Professor Victor Shih: <https://twitter.com/vshih2/status/908974180711960577/photo/1>.  
653. Jérémy André, “Comment la Chine pousse ses pions à l’université” (“How China Pushes Its Pawns at the University”), *Le Point*, 2532 (25 Feb. 2021), 46-50 (for the four quotes).

654. “Le dalai lama en France, sans temps mort ni contact en haut lieu,” (“The Dalai Lama in France, Without Pause... or High-Level Contacts”), *La Croix* (12 Sept. 2016).

655. André, “Comment la Chine pousse ses pions à l’université.”

students, often Communist Youth cadres, have been coming to disrupt our conferences. They are probably sent by the embassy. Others do it to make themselves look good to the authorities.”<sup>656</sup>

*c. The role of Chinese diplomats*

Nationalist Chinese students are not the only actors involved: Chinese diplomats often give them a hand. In the United States for instance, **diplomats have notably “infringed on the academic freedom of American university faculty, students, administrators, and staff** by complaining to universities about invited speakers and events; pressuring and/or offering inducements to faculty whose work involves content deemed sensitive by the PRC authorities.” **They have also “infringed on the personal safety of people at American universities** by probing faculty and staff for information in a manner consistent with intelligence collection; and employing intimidating modes of conversation.”<sup>657</sup>

When they do not intervene directly, diplomats at least collect data. In Japan, for instance, where there are only 115,000 Chinese students, who are also less active than in the previously mentioned countries, the **embassy keeps a file on students**, asking incoming Chinese students to register to send them messages. **It also gives instructions:** some of these students received an order to befriend Taiwanese students, to seduce them, to invite them to China, to help them find a job, etc.<sup>658</sup>

In all cases, it ultimately questions the link between students and Chinese authorities. It is certain that **“Chinese students are becoming even more assertive and aggressive, taking advantage of the freedom of their host countries, and operating with increasingly open support from the Chinese authorities,”** as explained by Rowena He, professor at St Michael’s College in Vermont.<sup>659</sup> And yet, what does this support entail? When they surveil, inform, intimidate, and protest, do students simply express their patriotism spontaneously or are they more or less guided by the authorities, via the embassies and consulates? This is a crucial question insofar as, in the former case, the host country’s universities and authorities cannot do much besides stressing and enforcing limits inherent to the freedom of expression (which does not cover harassment, hate speech, death threats and physical aggressions) while, in the latter case, it involves a blatant interference.

However, the fact that a counter-demonstration is not aligned with the values of the host country, and provokes the indignation of the universities and authorities, does not mean that it is necessarily organized by China’s agents. In fact, **it is hard to tell whether the actions of Chinese students are, in general, spontaneous or guided**, first of all because “in general” does not apply here – all cases are specific; second, because **most of the Chinese students have internalized the constraint** even before they arrived in the country where they study. As Dirk Van der Kley explained: “there is enough patriotism and pride among Chinese students that these kinds of things are going to happen frequently, even without [the Chinese] government direction.”<sup>660</sup> “They are even more indoctrinated than before,” added an interlocutor in Stockholm, **“the embassies and consulates do not even need to control them, they’re programmed.”**<sup>661</sup> In many cases, however, it is pos-

656. Ibid.

657. Lloyd-Damnjanovic, *A Preliminary Study of PRC Political Influence*, 1-2.

658. Meeting of the authors in Tokyo (Mar. 2019).

659. Redden, “China’s ‘Long Arm.’”

660. Frances Mao, “Hong Kong Protests: ‘I’m in Australia but I feel censored by Chinese students,’” BBC (31 Jul. 2019).

661. Meeting of one of the authors in Stockholm (Feb. 2020).

sible to demonstrate a command-and-control relationship between students and Chinese authorities, via the CSSAs, the embassies and consulates. This is developed in the following pages and in the case studies (→ p. 568).

### 3. Student Associations (CSSA)

In most universities in the world with a notable share of Chinese students, there is a local branch of the **Chinese Student and Scholars Association (CSSA, 中国学生学者联合会)**. For instance, there are 265 CSSAs in American universities for about 300,000 Chinese students.<sup>662</sup> Under a façade of solidarity and kindness (they help the arriving Chinese students to adapt to their new environment, to find housing, roommates, etc.), the CSSAs are in fact **preferred platforms for United Front activities**.<sup>663</sup> They not only serve to maintain a **certain control over Chinese students abroad**, but also to **mobilize them if necessary to defend China** against critical opinions.

The bubble created by CSSAs around Chinese students, under the guise of helping them, actually monitors and controls what they say, which is problematic for those who go abroad precisely to benefit from the freedom they do not have in China. They are so supported that “they feel they are being hosted by the Chinese government in Australia,”<sup>664</sup> and parents who send their children to study in Australia also to allow them to make friends abroad “are disappointed when they come back saying they only hang out with fellow Chinese students.”<sup>665</sup>

CSSAs **organize campus surveillance, the denunciation of opponents or critics, the promotion of Beijing’s interests**, the organization of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations; they also censor professors and conferences – or encourage self-censorship. In 2017, the president of the CSSA at the University of Canberra, Lu Lupin, admitted that she “would inform the embassy if dissident Chinese students were organizing a human rights protest.”<sup>666</sup>

They serve, in particular, as intermediaries for the authorities when they need to **mobilize thousands or even tens of thousands of students for events, such as welcoming Chinese political leaders visiting the country, or to counter dissident protests**. This phenomenon is not new. In 2008, 20,000 Chinese students in Australia had been mobilized via the CSSA to welcome the Olympic Torch in Canberra – and, in passing, they “intimidated and punched protesters supporting Tibetan independence.”<sup>667</sup> Similarly, Xi Jinping’s welcome party in Washington in September 2015, with hundreds of Chinese students aligned in the street and waving flags, was not spontaneous: the embassy went through CSSAs to recruit 700 students, paid \$20 each (remuneration distributed by CSSAs a few months later) and, during the event, diplomats were in direct contact with them via

662. Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Exclusive: 600 U.S. Groups Linked to Chinese Communist Party Influence Effort with Ambition Beyond Election,” *Newsweek* (26 Oct. 2020).

663. Alexander Bowe, “China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States,” Staff Research Report, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (24 Aug. 2018), 10-12; Alex Joske, “The party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front System,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Policy brief, 32 (2020), 30.

664. John Fitzgerald, quoted in John Garnaut, “Chinese Spies at Sydney University,” *Sidney Morning Herald* (21 Apr. 2014).

665. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

666. Alex Joske and Wu Lebao, “The Truth about the Chinese Students and Scholars Association,” *Woroni* (12 Oct. 2017).

667. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

WeChat, “responding to messages as late as 3 a.m.”<sup>668</sup> As reminded by Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, this is far from being the only example of paid student mobilizations orchestrated via CSSAs. In the U.S. (there are other examples elsewhere), it happened for Xi’s visit in February 2012, when he was vice-president (the embassy transferred the funds promised to George Washington University’s CSSA only one year later), and in Chicago for the visit of Hu Jintao in 2011.<sup>669</sup> The Chinese Embassy in Australia also “trained hundreds of CSSA members,” and “divided [them] into ‘security squads’” during the visit of Prime Minister Li Keqiang in March 2017.<sup>670</sup>

Students are encouraged to commit to the CSSAs in order to please Chinese diplomats at the embassy and/or consulates and obtain scholarships, recommendation letters, funding for extracurricular activities, and invitations to events.<sup>671</sup> There are many testimonies of students undergoing pressure from a CSSA to dissuade them from doing this, or on the contrary, encourage them to do that. **The permanent surveillance exerted by the CSSAs on other students is meant to be dissuasive:** its impact is translated less in terms of sanctions impacting a few individuals but rather, in practice, by the fact that all Chinese students are careful about what they say in public, explained Perry Link, professor at the University of California – Riverside.<sup>672</sup>

This is an “essential element of the propaganda and a guarantee of Chinese patriotism abroad.”<sup>673</sup> According to Chen Yonglin, a Chinese diplomat who defected in Australia in 2005, **CSSAs “are in fact controlled by the Chinese mission and are an extension of the Chinese communist regime overseas.”**<sup>674</sup> The general association is financed in part by the Chinese government,<sup>675</sup> and “these organizations live in great part thanks to the subsidies from the PRC delegations abroad.”<sup>676</sup> Many CSSAs admit on their websites being “registered with, or even subsidized by the local Chinese Embassy or consulate.”<sup>677</sup> Cornell University’s CSSA, for instance, noted on its website that it is “the ONLY Chinese student organization officially supported by Embassy of People’s Republic of China at Cornell University.”<sup>678</sup> **This financial relation is more or less assumed:** some CSSAs do not hide it, others visibly regret having spoken about it (see picture below). Perhaps for discretion’s sake, the money provided by the Chinese authorities is sometimes wired not to the official CSSA account, but to the treasurer’s personal account or to another undeclared account: hence, **the university’s administration does not know that a student organization on its campus receives funds from a foreign government,** which, in the United States for instance, enables them to go below the radar of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).<sup>679</sup>

668. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm Reaches into American Campuses,” *Foreign Policy* (7 Mar. 2018).

669. Ibid.

670. Joske and Lebao, “The truth about the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.”

671. J. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019), 188.

672. Saul, “On Campuses Far from China, Still Under Beijing’s Watchful Eye.”

673. De Pierrebouurg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 206.

674. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 189.

675. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper (Feb. 2019), 15.

676. De Pierrebouurg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 206.

677. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

678. <https://www.cornellcssa.info/about-us> (<https://archive.vn/ipRIM>).

679. Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm Reaches into American Campuses.”





Source: <https://twitter.com/shawnwzhang/status/964605758024265728>.

“Most of CSSA operate under the guidance of Chinese embassies and consulates”<sup>680</sup>; in fact, the *People’s Daily* wrote in 2013 that CSSAs in Australia “accomplish their mission [...] **under the direct guidance of the Embassy’s Education Office.**”<sup>681</sup> The point of contact for the students is usually the person in charge of education at the consulate,<sup>682</sup> given that the Ministry for Education has many links with the United Front Work Department (UFWD) – as illustrated by the appointment of an UFWD executive as attaché for education in Chicago between 2013 and 2016.<sup>683</sup> The same is true for CSSAs in the United Kingdom, Holland, Egypt, Singapore, but also in France.<sup>684</sup> Korea University’s CSSA even admitted on its website that the eighth bureau of the UFWD was responsible for the “general orientation of the student organizations abroad.”<sup>685</sup> Other clues also point to **links between CSSAs and the United Front.** Several CSSAs participated in a conference in 2015 to “study the spirit of the United Front’s work,” including CSSAs from Yale, Kyoto, Princeton, Rome, universities in California, Moscow and in France.<sup>686</sup> Furthermore, CSSAs in the United Kingdom received a delegation from the Ministry of Education led by the UFWD and which counted, amongst its members, the vice-director of the 6<sup>th</sup> UFWD Bureau Duan Xiuyun (段秀云), who was also the vice-secretary of the China Overseas Friendship Association (中华海外联谊会).<sup>687</sup>

680. Joske, “The Party speaks for you,” 30.

681. 李景卫 (Li Jingwei), “澳大利亚优秀中国学联干部颁奖” (“Australian Outstanding CSSA Cadre Prizes Awarded”), *People’s Daily* (22 Nov. 2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20200218043850/http://world.people.com.cn/n/2013/1122/c1002-23631324.html>, quoted in Joske, “The Party speaks for you,” 30.

682. Tatlow, “Exclusive: 600 U.S. Groups Linked to Chinese Communist Party Influence Effort with Ambition Beyond Election,” *Newsweek* (29 Oct. 2020).

683. “覃菊华同志任驻芝加哥总领馆教育组参赞衔领事” (“The Comrade in Juhua Appointed Advisor for the Education Section at the Chicago Consulate”), PRC Ministry of Education website, <https://archive.vn/k7kPT>; “中央统战部来校调研外事管理工作” (“The UFWD Visits the School to Inspect Foreign Affairs Management Work”), Huaqiao University (28 Jun. 2019), <https://archive.vn/774OD>.

684. “关于学联” (“About the Organization”), CSSAUK, <https://archive.vn/nOKbk>; “关于学联” (“About the Organization”), ACSSNL, <https://archive.vn/88Yme>; “关于学联” (“About the Organization”), CSSUE, <https://archive.vn/3usqM>; “新加坡中国学者学生联合会” (“Chinese Scholars and Students Association of Singapore”), Baidu, <https://archive.vn/iorEQ>; “学联简介” (“Presentation of the Organization”), Union of Chinese Students and Scholars of France, <https://archive.vn/V0vg5>.

685. “历史沿革” (“History”), Korea University Chinese Students and Scholars Association, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190728072528/https://www.kucssa.org/intro>.

686. “海外学联学习中央统战精神工作会议召开” (“Opening of the Conference on Student Organization for the Study of the Spirit of the United Front Work”), 光明留学 (*Guangming Lixue*) (25 May 2015), <https://archive.vn/Q1FWY>.

687. “全英学联与中央统战部代表团座谈” (“Talks Between the CSSAUK and UFWD Delegation”), 人人 (*Rénrén*) (No date), <https://web.archive.org/web/20190517021756/http://blog.renren.com/share/222714759/8950960648>.



Some nonetheless believe that “**intelligence officers** in diplomatic facilities are the primary point of contact for students in CSSAs”<sup>688</sup> and that the MSS takes that opportunity to recruit informants, if not agents, among the students.<sup>689</sup> **Some meetings are official** (each year, the Chinese Embassy in Australia invites all CSSA leaders in Australian universities to meetings at the embassy).<sup>690</sup> **Others, however, are clandestine:** Frank Tian Xie, professor at the University of South Carolina, was part of the CSSA when he arrived as a student at Purdue University in the 1980s, and he remembered that, at the time, representatives of the Chinese consulate in Chicago met with CSSA students in motel rooms.<sup>691</sup> For Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, “the embassies’ education services are directly linked to Chinese secret services.”<sup>692</sup> In fact, there are multiple evidence that **some CSSAs have worked with or for the MSS.**<sup>693</sup> The FBI presumably documented encounters between intelligence officers and students. As early as 2005, *Le Monde* revealed that the CSSA of the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL) was involved in “a multinational network of economic intelligence overseen from Belgium.”<sup>694</sup>

Generally speaking, “**CSSAs often attempt to conceal or obscure their ties to the Chinese government**, frequently omitting incriminating language from the English versions of their websites – the ones typically reviewed by university administrators.”<sup>695</sup> The Chinese versions are often more revealing, sometimes oversharing: in 2017 for instance, the president of George Washington University’s CSSA explained in a promotional video that the CSSA was “directed by the Chinese Embassy” and that it “[worked] with” the embassy.<sup>696</sup> The CSSA at the Australian National University presented itself as “the only Chinese student organization in Canberra officially approved by the Chinese government.”<sup>697</sup> Chinese authorities have also expressed their gratitude, as shown by this “appreciation certificate” delivered by the consulate to a CSSA president (see below). In addition, executive members of Swiss CSSAs are often hired by organizations dealing with Chinese influence in the country, once their studies completed, which made Ralph Weber say that **the “CSSA could also have an important role in talent recruitment.”**<sup>698</sup>

688. Zach Dorfman, “How Silicon Valley Became a Den of Spies,” *Politico* (27 Jul. 2018).

689. J. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019), 39.

690. Joske and Lebao, “The truth about the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.”

691. Saul, “On Campuses Far from China, Still Under Beijing’s Watchful Eye.”

692. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 204.

693. Zach Dorfman, “How Silicon Valley became a den of spies,” *Politico Magazine* (27 Jul. 2018).

694. Jean-Pierre Stroobants, “Une université belge pourrait abriter un réseau d’espionnage industriel chinois” (“A Belgian University May be Hosting a Chinese Network of Industrial Espionage”), *Le Monde* (10 May 2005).

695. Alexander Bowe, *China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States*, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Research Report (24 Aug. 2018), 12.

696. *Ibid.*, 11.

697. Joske and Lebao, “The truth about the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.”

698. Weber, “Unified message, rhizomatic delivery.”



Source: <https://twitter.com/YaxueCao/status/964251735945629696>.

### A feeling of impunity and omnipotence on foreign campuses

The Australian scholar Clive Hamilton reported that, during the summer of 2019, on the campus of Brisbane University in Queensland, a security guard caught three men trashing a “Lennon wall” put together to support Hong Kong protests. “The men refused to show student IDs [and] when the guard indicated he would call the police, the leader of the group replied: “I do not care if you call the police. I will call the Ambassador.”<sup>699</sup> This reminded him of another story: four years earlier, the president of the Australian National University’s CSSA in Canberra asked who had “authorized” the campus pharmacy to sell the *Epoch Times*, journal of Falun Gong, and intimidated the pharmacist until he threw them away. These examples – and there are many more – attest of a **feeling of omnipotence from some Chinese students on foreign campuses, aware of their economic weight and, thus, of the schools’ dependence on them; they are also certain of the support, and encouragements, of Chinese authorities.**

## 4. Shaping China studies

**Academic communities working on China are generally divided.** To only consider the German example, the community is mostly empathetic vis-à-vis Beijing, and the few dissident voices are more often than not on the sidelines of China studies departments. The micro-community of researchers working on and in Taiwan set itself apart from traditional German universities. In fact, a majority of researchers, shaped by interpersonal relationships they have built with their Chinese academic partners for decades, are closer to the discourse of the business class: China is not a threat, and the point is to try and deconstruct the prejudices and the ignorance vis-à-vis this original political system. They hope to work on a rapprochement and dialogue (notably through academic

<sup>699</sup>. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”

exchange programs). The researchers considering China as a threat or those qualified as “China-Kritiker” are in the minority in Germany, and most do not have permanent positions in German universities. The open letter published by the spouse of the Canadian researcher Michael Kovrig, arrested and detained in China (→ p. 546), was signed by MERICS experts, journalists, think tankers critical of China at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP), but not by the crushing majority of university professors in Germany (about forty scholars). It revealed the invisible fracture between the “China-Versteher” and “China-Kritiker.”<sup>700</sup>

Tensions inside the academic community and think tanks working on China are present everywhere in the world and efficiently exploited by Beijing. Besides, **to control the research published on China, and thus to model China studies, the Party-State uses the following tools:**

- **Access to the field**, using visas as leverage: they deny visas to researchers who are too critical, either on a case by case basis or, as it increasingly does, as part of official sanctions, such as those enacted in March 2021. Indeed, they targeted the British researcher Joanne Smith Finley, Assistant Professor of China studies at the University of Newcastle; the Swedish Björn Jerdén, director of the Swedish National China Center at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm; the German Adrian Zenz, Senior Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in the United States; and the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), the largest European research foundation on China, based in Berlin, and which hosts more than thirty experts. These individuals “and companies and institutions associated with them,” but also their families, are barred from visiting China, Hong Kong, and Macao, and they can no longer do business in China. Beijing accused them of circulating “lies” about China, on the fate of the Uyghurs but also, in the case of Jerdén, on the danger represented by the Confucius Institutes, or, in the case of MERICS experts, for “colluding with anti-China forces.” Targeting MERICS was surprising because it was far from the most radical research center on China; it usually followed a more moderate line. And yet, it was “the largest Chinese research center in entire Europe. Cutting off ties with China means its research channel will hardly be sustainable and its influence will be critically hit,” the *Global Times* noted. **The goal was clearly to dry up the sources and the credibility of these individuals and institutions** (first and foremost based on the researchers’ access to the field, in area studies), **while intimidating the other researchers on China elsewhere in the world.** Like this young sinologist who, under cover of anonymity precisely because he fears losing access to his research field, reports: “We all hear about a blacklist of researchers who would no longer be issued visas”. It does not matter whether this is true or not – **it is even in Beijing’s interest to maintain a strategic ambiguity since, when in doubt, not knowing what their situation is and what the Chinese authorities’ tolerance threshold is, visa applicants will censor themselves with greater zeal.** The anonymous young sinologist worries: “If tomorrow I can no longer go in the field, what legitimacy would I have as a researcher?” And, to show his credentials, he makes sure to include at least one official propaganda document in his bibliography – “a way to show the plurality

700. Interview conducted by one of our research assistants in Berlin (Mar. 2020).

of entries and not to antagonize anyone,” he justifies.<sup>701</sup> This is how self-censorship begins and how the CCP wins.

- **Financial dependence** (universities financially dependent on China are less susceptible to criticize it → p. 270);

- **Elite capture** (gifting luxurious trips and jobs – supplementary or full-time positions – in Chinese universities);

- **Pressure by Chinese students** on campuses (shaping the topics studied and the list of guest lecturers);

- **Pressure on publishers** (to discourage them from publishing critical books such as *Silent Invasion* by Clive Hamilton, which was rejected by several publishers by fear of “retaliation from Beijing or from people in Australia acting in the name of the CCP”),<sup>702</sup> and on **scientific journals** (→ p. 287);

- **Pressure on PhD advisors** (a professor at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland received emails “from China” stating that one of her PhD students was posting “neo-Nazi type content” on Twitter (in reality, his account created ten days earlier and followed by less than ten people was only criticizing China’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic); fearing “that [she] would not be able to get a visa to China afterwards,” she sent her PhD student an email titled, “Urgent: Complaint from China about your Twitter” and terminated the academic relationship; the student has since dropped out of the PhD program)<sup>703</sup>;

- **Pressure on relatives in China** for Chinese researchers of Chinese origin or with ties to China. For example, a professor of Chinese origin, naturalized French, working in a French university, posted this message on a social network in May 2021: “It is too dangerous for me to comment on the Xinjiang issue. Although I have always fought for academic freedom and freedom of expression, I must do my best to protect the safety of my family on the Chinese mainland”).<sup>704</sup> For similar reasons, some professors, such as Vanessa Frangville (a professor of China studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles), have given up on taking Chinese doctoral students because “either they are there for other reasons than studying, or I am putting them in danger.”<sup>705</sup>

- **Arrests and intimidations for those with access to their field in China.** In 2017, Feng Chongyi, a permanent resident in Australia who holds a professorship at the University of Technology, Sydney, was completing a three-week research field trip to southern China, during which he had met with human rights defenders, among others, when he was detained by the authorities, questioned, and held for one week. Another example: a doctoral student from a Belgian university “was detained” during a trip in China “and interrogated for three days in a hotel room. The Chinese services had a huge file on him, including all his tweets since 2016 translated into Mandarin and a photo of a dinner at his [thesis director’s] home”.<sup>706</sup>

701. Laurence Defranoux and Marie Piquemal, “Dans les facs françaises, des travaux dirigés par Pékin” (“In French universities, work directed by Beijing”) *Libération* (27 Jul. 2021).

702. Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s influence in Australia* (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), x.

703. Fanny Scuderi, “L’Université de Saint-Gall se méfie des critiques sur la Chine” (“University of St. Gallen wary of criticism of China”) *Le Temps* (4 Aug. 2021), 2.

704. Defranoux, “Les profs et étudiants chinois enrôlés.”

705. Ibid.

706. Ibid.



- **Kidnappings, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, forced televised “confessions”** of activists, journalists, publishers, critics of Beijing;
- **Lawsuits** (or the threat of it) such as the ones that targeted the Canadian J. Michael Cole, the French Valérie Niquet, or the German Adrian Zenz; this is the *lawfare* strategy introduced in the first part of the report (→ p. 53). Beijing does not care about winning a trial, but aims to impose a cost on the target and to intimidate the others.
- And finally, stemming from all of the above, **self-censorship**.

### Influencing publishers, printers and booksellers

In August 2017, the **British publisher Cambridge University Press (CUP) blocked access to over 300 online articles** from *China Quarterly* to residents of China at the request of the Chinese authorities because they covered topics considered sensitive by Beijing, including the cultural revolution, Tian’anmen, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan.<sup>707</sup> The General Administration of Press and Publications (→ p. 193) made the request, providing the list of all the articles to remove. CUP yielded to be able to continue publishing in China: “[we] do not, and will not, proactively censor our content and will only consider blocking individual items (when requested to do so) when the wider availability of content is at risk.”<sup>708</sup> In other words, **publishers yield to what they perceived as the lesser of two evils, because Beijing gave them the choice between removing the contentious articles or blocking their overall distribution**. Following the scandal that this case brought about, (academics rallied against the decision), CUP went back on its decision, and a few days later, reestablished access to the articles in question. The Chinese authorities then asked CUP to block certain articles from the *American Political Science Review* which they did not do.<sup>709</sup>

This example is not isolated. In November 2017, the German publisher **Springer Nature blocked access from China to at least 1,000 articles**, at the request of the Chinese government.<sup>710</sup> In September 2018, at Beijing’s request, the British **publisher Taylor and Francis removed from its offer in China** (its pack “arts, humanities and social sciences” sold to libraries) **83 journals** with content deemed “inappropriate,” including the *Asian Studies Review*. More recently, in France, a Chinese university asked the portal Cairn, which distributes online journals, to withdraw the December 2020 issue of the journal *Esprit*, containing a dossier on China, which Cairn refused to do.<sup>711</sup>

Even **children’s publishing is targeted**. In March 2021, at the request of the Chinese consulate in Hamburg, which threatened legal action, the German publisher Carlsen-Verlag withdrew from sale an illustrated children’s book (*Ein Corona-Regenbogen für Anna und Moritz*) that had become the target of Chinese authorities and media (citing a request from the “Chinese community” in Germany<sup>712</sup>) because it described the coronavirus as “originating in China”. The publisher is preparing a new, corrected edition.<sup>713</sup>

**Book publications are also concerned**, which are often far less expensive in China (45% less expensive than in New Zealand for a book in color with illustrations on glassy paper for instance),<sup>714</sup> which gives Beijing yet more leverage: **some Chinese printers take it upon themselves to censor, sometimes reject, foreign books meant for foreign publics**. For instance, one of them produced a list of keywords that publishers needed to avoid, while an

707. Ian Johnson, “Sydney Professor Feng Chongyi Returns to Australia After Week-Long Detention in China,” ABC News (2 Apr. 2017).

708. John Ruwitch and Fanny Potkin, “UK publisher Pulls Scholarly Articles from China Website at Beijing’s Request,” Reuters (18 Aug. 2017).

709. Benjamin Haas, “Cambridge University Press Headed for Showdown with China over Censorship,” *The Guardian* (9 Sep. 2017).

710. Christopher Bodeen, “Springer Nature Blocks Access to Articles in China,” AP News (1 Nov. 2017).

711. Pierre Buhler, hearing at the information mission “Extra-European State Influences” in the Senate, July 13, 2021 (<https://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20210712/miic.html>). The issue in question of the journal *Esprit* is available at this address: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-esprit-2020-12.htm>.

712. “Chinese Community Angered by German Book Claiming the Coronavirus Comes from China Demands Apology and Recall of the Book,” *Global Times* (8 Mar. 2021), <https://archive.vn/vptjH>.

713. Stefan Dege, “China gets German children’s book about COVID withdrawn,” DW (15 Mar. 2021).

714. Thomas Coughlan, “NZ Publishers Feel Long Arm of Chinese Censorship,” *Summer Newsroom* (4 Mar. 2019).



Australian publisher eventually renounced having an atlas for children printed in China after the Chinese printer rejected one of its maps.<sup>715</sup> Finally, what the above demonstration shows is that **Beijing’s objective is to influence writings at every stage: not only their production** (by trying to influence authors through incentives and pressures, pushing them to censor themselves for instance) **but also their distribution**, by trying to influence publishers and printers. It also includes the last stage which, for books, is their sales in bookstores. Here the story of the Thalia bookstore chain in Germany is telling. In September 2020, a customer posted photos on Facebook of the particularly large and propagandistic China section of a Thalia bookstore in Berlin, highlighting in particular the works of President Xi Jinping and significantly lacking in publications critical of the Party. It thus drew attention to a practice that was not new (a year earlier, a Taiwanese from Berlin had also reported it on Facebook, but in Chinese, so without causing a German reaction in the media). This time, Thalia had to react and explain itself by acknowledging that it had rented some space in some of its stores to China Book Trading, a German subsidiary of the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), an organization dependent on the Party’s Propaganda Department.<sup>716</sup> These rental contracts are neither illegal nor unusual, but in this case, the nature of the client introduced an important bias in the presentation of books from and about a country.<sup>717</sup> The German press denounced such “propaganda” in the country’s bookstores. “Chinese propaganda is much more effective in Germany when it is distilled by people, media or even reputable companies like Thalia,” explains researcher Mareike Ohlberg.<sup>718</sup>



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/moni.muka>.

A survey carried out in 2018 among more than 500 experts on China showed that repression was a “rare but real phenomenon and collectively present a barrier to the conduct of research in China.”<sup>719</sup> **The identified restrictions belonged to three categories: restrictions on access to China** (visa refusal or delay in deliverance: “the Chinese govern-

715. Ibid.

716. CIPG is a “body subordinate to the central authorities” (“中央所属事业单位”) and its activity is controlled by the Propaganda Department. See for example the Baidu page dedicated to CIPG: <https://urlz.fr/gr8X>.

717. See, for instance, Felix Stephan, “Bruch eines Tabus,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (20 Sep. 2020).

718. Brause et al., “Chinas heimliche Propagandisten.”

719. Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Rory Truex, “Repressive Experiences among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data,” *The China Quarterly* (2019), 1.

ment does restrict visa access for work it considers potentially problematic,” in gradation: difficulties in obtaining a visa, denial of a visa, blacklisting<sup>720</sup>; **restrictions on access to material or research topics** (denied access to archives, deleted questions during interviews, cancelled interviews); **surveillance and intimidation** (questioning by the authorities, confiscated equipment, including computers – these issues happen everywhere in China, but even more so when a researcher goes to sensitive regions such as Xinjian and Tibet).<sup>721</sup> For 70% of the respondents “**self-censorship is a problem in the China study field.**”<sup>722</sup>

Another article based on over a hundred interviews in American universities spoke of “**an epidemic of self-censorship at U.S. universities on the subject of China.**”<sup>723</sup> Considering the lack of resources in most universities, many students are tempted to reorient their research in a direction that satisfies Beijing in order to have access to the field and receive funding. “It has gotten to the point where I do not engage with anything overly political relating to the Chinese state,” explained, for instance, a graduate student at a top American university.<sup>724</sup> A common, and even encouraged, reaction: “I frequently hear graduate students and younger scholars – people with academic jobs but pre-tenure – being advised not to explore sensitive subjects in their research, so they can preserve visa access,” an American historian on China testified.<sup>725</sup> But this self-censorship has consequences: it “restricts the ability of U.S. policymakers, businesspeople, human rights advocates, and the general public to make smart decisions about how to interact with China.”<sup>726</sup>

**Self-censorship is made stronger by blurry red lines:** Beijing has not created a guide explaining what to say or what not to say, it is up to everyone’s best guess. This ambiguity is strategic: it prompts even more self-censorship to avoid the risk of crossing limits that are not clearly defined.

That being said, the more China extends its influence over the world, the more it becomes possible **to study China outside of China:** researchers who no longer go to mainland China do a lot of field research in Honk Kong (less since 2019), in Taiwan, in Korea, Mongolia, etc. And the more Beijing becomes aggressive toward foreign researchers, increasing the risks for them to run into issues in China, if not being arrested, accused of espionage, etc., the more acceptable it becomes for scholars to do field research outside of China. Not only is it increasingly difficult to learn anything in China (due to self-censorship and wooden language), but it makes sense for personal security reasons. Moreover, with the conditions that Beijing requires to grant access to its territory, i.e. no criticism of the Party, **it becomes more legitimate not to go there anymore**, if only not to give up one’s ability to be critical, and *in fine* to ensure that the research is independent. Hence this “internationally renowned researcher” quoted by the newspaper *Libération* who “explains that she has renounced doing field research [in China], precisely to preserve this freedom of speech”<sup>727</sup>. This is obviously easier to do for researchers who are already well known, or in any case who are not in a precarious professional situation, than for young researchers who are more fragile and insecure.

720. Ibid., 6.

721. Ibid., 11.

722. Ibid., 18.

723. Isaac Stone Fish, “The Other Political Correctness: Why Are America’s Elite Universities Censoring Themselves on China?” *The New Republic* (4 Sept. 2018).

724. Ibid.

725. Ibid.

726. Ibid.

727. Defranoux and Piquemal, “Dans les facs françaises, des travaux dirigés par Pékin.”

## 5. Acquiring knowledge and technologies

Another major CCP interest for foreign universities comes from **the acquisition of knowledge and technologies, through legal and unconcealed means: joint research programs** (leading to joint publications, the number of which continues to grow, as shown by the British example with less than 100 articles co-published before 1990, 750 in 2000, 3,324 in 2010 and 16,267 in 2019<sup>728</sup>) **or illegal and concealed means such as theft and espionage** by Chinese students or researchers integrated in foreign teams, or from a distance (cyberattacks). Joint research programs, and more generally research field trips in China are all the more tempting for researchers and visiting professors because Chinese universities – or at least some of them – have significant resources and state-of-the-art equipment that most home institutions do not have. This is true of France, where **“the lack of recognition and means in the laboratories” was quickly identified by Beijing as an “Achilles heel”, i.e. an opportunity.** The Party has had no trouble catching the attention and skills of French students and scientists for whom, as Antoine Bondaz explains, China is “a paradise: brand new labs, significant financial resources and a plethora of research support teams.”<sup>729</sup> The attraction is less strong in the best-endowed French laboratories, which is why **“Beijing seeks to establish itself in priority in medium-sized universities, far from the metropolises. This is where the lack of resources – and therefore the real or potential bitterness of teachers – is more acute.** Poitiers, Angers, Arras, Pau. These are the same faculties where Confucius institutes are often found.” (→ p. 299)<sup>730</sup>

**Concerning theft and espionage, universities are not the only targets. Companies in strategic sectors are also targeted,** with the same tactics and more, including the seduction of executives by female agents, going as far as marriage. “Weddings are another one of the means used by Beijing to catch up on its technological gap in some sectors. In 2009, the DGSE brought the proof that a young Chinese woman, in a relationship with one of the leaders of the EADS group with secret defense accreditation, was transmitting confidential documents to her country’s secret services.”<sup>731</sup>

### *a. Many recruiting programs*

In this context, China developed **numerous talents recruitment programs** which, for the CCP, is a “form of technology transfer.”<sup>732</sup> Alex Joske, in his report *Hunting the Phoenix* (2020) – “phoenix”, because this practice is sometimes described in China as “building nests to attract phoenixes”<sup>733</sup> – counted about **200 of them**, according to a list published in 2018 by the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (which is now part of the Ministry of Science and Technology), while noting that the real number was “probably much greater.”<sup>734</sup> This practice was developed during the 1980s, with a clear acceleration in the 2000s. Most of these programs are controlled by local governments, in the provinces,

728. Jo Johnson et al., *The China question: Managing risks and maximising benefits from partnership in higher education and research*, Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at Harvard Kennedy School and The Policy Institute at King’s College London, March 2021, 19.

729. Ibid.

730. Ibid.

731. *La Chine démasquée*, 103.

732. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 4.

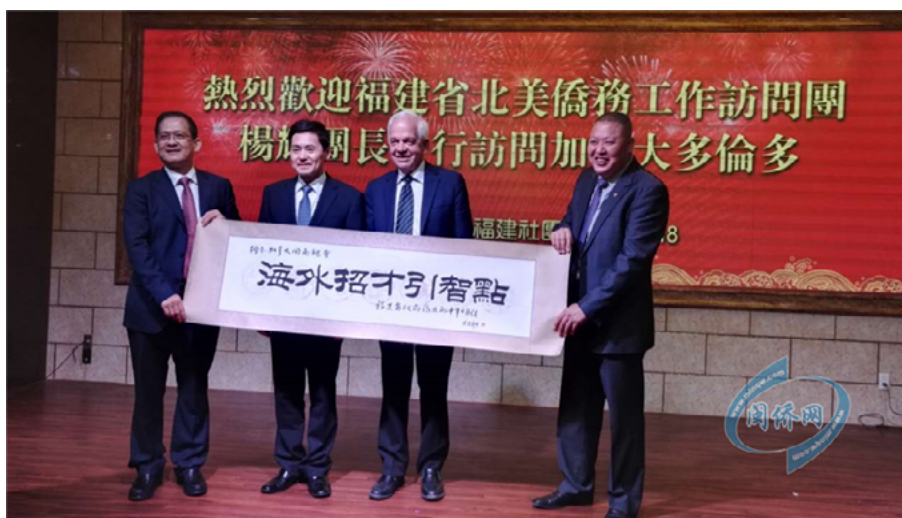
733. Ibid., 3.

734. Ibid., 29.

municipalities and counties<sup>735</sup> – but they are coordinated by several central organizations, including, since 2003, the Central Coordination Group for Talent Work (中央人才工作协调小组). According to official Chinese numbers, **the sole programs run by the local governments enabled the recruitment of 53,900 foreign researchers between 2008 and 2016**, to which are added the national programs, including the Thousand Talents Plan (→ p. 292) and Hundred Talents Plan, which brought 7,000 researchers during the same period.<sup>736</sup>

**These programs cover all activities, from legal and unconcealed actions to illegal and concealed ones, and the grey area in between.** Concretely, they are based on **“talent-recruitment stations” abroad**, in the countries currently the most technologically advanced. The United States is the priority target, with 146 identified stations, then comes Germany (57), Australia (57), the United Kingdom (49), Canada (47), France (46), Australia (46), Singapore (21), New-Zealand (13), and Sweden (12).<sup>737</sup> Overall, Alex Joske identified 600 stations, and believed there were likely more than that. They have existed since 2006, and have increased exponentially after 2015.

Composed of a few individuals, **these stations are more often than not integrated in existing organizations linked to the UFWD** (business offices for Chinese abroad, or other community, student, or professional organizations, companies in the education or technology sectors, or, in at least one case, to a Confucius Institute, etc.), **which is paid extra for this activity:** up to RMB150,000 (€18,700) per year for the running costs and up to RMB200,000 (€25,000) per recruited individual, according to Alex Joske.<sup>738</sup>



John McCallum (→ p. 558), then Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, takes part in the presentation, by the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs of Fujian Province, of a “Foreign Talent Recruitment” plaque to the Fujian Chamber of Commerce in Canada, in July 2016.<sup>739</sup>

735. Pär Nyrén, “China’s brain gain strategy. The role of local governments in the recruitment of ‘talents,’” Swedish Center for China Studies (Feb. 2021).

736. Ibid., 17.

737. Ibid., 12.

738. Ibid., 15.

739. “福建省侨办首批四个海外招才引智点落地加拿大” (“The Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the Fujian Province Approves, for the First Time, Four Foreign Talent Recruitment Websites in Canada”) 东南网 美国频道 (USA FJSEN) (21 Jul. 2016), <https://archive.fo/u8tkw#selection-373.0-376.0>.



They are tasked, not only with recruiting and bringing potential candidates to China, but also with collecting data on the scientists and research programs in the countries in which they are based. For instance, the stations abroad affiliated with the city of Qingdao received the instruction to collect data on at least “fifty individuals per year, of a level at least equivalent to that of associate professor, researcher or company manager.” The objective was 100 individuals and “at least as many innovation projects” for those of the city of Tianjin. This data is then compiled and amounts to millions of profiles: in 2017, a Chinese think tank had established a **base of 6.5 million scientific profiles in the world**. The Thousand Talents think tank (千人智库), tied to the plan of the same name, “claims to hold **data on 12 million overseas scientists**, including 2.2 million ethnic Chinese scientists and engineers.”<sup>740</sup> These stations do not only relay information, they may also “receive instructions to target individuals with access to specific technologies.”<sup>741</sup>

The most famous program is the **Thousand Talents** (千人计划), which “has poured billions of dollars into drawing in tens of thousands of foreign specialists to China and sends out thousands of Chinese scientists overseas to access the latest technology and knowhow.”<sup>742</sup> Created in 2008, its implementation is supervised by the High-Level Working Group on Overseas Talent Recruitment (海外高层次人才引进工作小组) which depends on the Central Committee of the CCP. Initially conceived to attract Chinese talents living abroad, it was extended to foreign citizens in 2011. Beijing offers **prestigious positions in Chinese universities and high salaries**. An advertisement placed in the scientific journal *Nature* in January 2018 thus explained that “all successful applicants can expect a 1 million yuan [126 000 €] starting bonus, and the opportunity to apply for a research fund of 3–5 million yuan [378 000 – 630 000 €]. Foreign scientists receive additional incentives, such as accommodation subsidies, meal allowances, relocation compensation, paid-for visits home and subsidized education costs. Employers are also obliged to find jobs for foreign spouses, or provide an equivalent local salary.”<sup>743</sup>

That being said, living in China is not necessary – on the contrary, **it can be quite advantageous for both parties not to relocate** and leave scientists in their home country. A short-term version of the Thousand Talents Plan exists, allowing the recipients to stay abroad and only spend two months in China each year, which “enables them to maintain multiple appointments at once, which may not be fully disclosed. This may mean that they’re effectively using time, resources and facilities paid for by their home institutions to benefit Chinese institutions.”<sup>744</sup>

Alex Joske mentioned the case of Prof. Steven X. Ding (丁先春) from the University of Duisburg (Germany), who received an affiliation to Tianjin University (China). It showed the advantage for China to have *him* abroad: “I manage scientific research at the university, which has more than 100 projects supervised by me [...]. I can serve as a bridge between China and Germany for technological exchange ... and I can make greater contributions than if I returned to China on my own. Being in Germany I can introduce advanced tech-

740. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 15.

741. *Ibid.*, 6.

742. Anne-Marie Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand, Gripping a Gun in the Other: China's Exploitation of Civilian Channels for Military Purposes in New Zealand*, Kissinger Institute, Asia Program (Jul. 2020), 3.

743. Hepeng Jia, “China’s Plan to Recruit Talented Researchers,” *Nature* (17 Jan. 2018).

744. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 10.



nologies to China, assist communication, exchange and cooperation, and play a role as a window and a bridge [between China and Germany].”<sup>745</sup>

**Many targets are of Chinese origin** (the Party can present these programs “as serving the country’s ethno-nationalist rejuvenation”).<sup>746</sup> One of the most recent example is Gong Chen, born in China, naturalized American, and a mechanical engineering professor at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He was arrested in January 2021 for failing to disclose “that he was acting as an overseas expert on science and technology for the Chinese communist government after China’s consulate office in New York asked him to provide expertise and advice in exchange for financial compensation and awards.” He allegedly received \$29 million in foreign funding, mainly from China, and at least \$355,000 for his “services and expertise.”<sup>747</sup>

**However, the targets are not always of Chinese descent**, as attested by the case of Charles Lieber, chair of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Harvard University, who was arrested in 2020 because he hid the fact that he combined his position at Harvard with a job as a “Strategic Scientist” at the Wuhan University of Technology between 2012 and 2017, as part of the Thousand Talents, and that he received a monthly salary of \$50,000 from China, with an additional grant reaching RMB1 million and a funding of RMB1.5 million (€190,000) to create a joint lab between Harvard and Wuhan.<sup>748</sup>

Among the other programs, there is **Project 111**, which is meant to recruit 1,000 researchers from the 100 best universities in the world; the **Peacock Program** (孔雀计划) of the Shenzhen government “which seeks to attract global talent ranging from Nobel Prize winners and winners of other major academic prizes, senior executives of the world’s top 500 companies or of international financial organizations, members of the International Standardization Organization (ISO) Standards Committee, university presidents, heads of academic associations such as the Royal Society, foreign experts who have won a Friendship Award, editors of leading scientific journals, actuaries, medical specialists, and Olympic coaches.”<sup>749</sup> The PLA also used Horizon 2020, the 2014-2020 European program for research and development, in order to “gain access to international military technology.”<sup>750</sup>

On a different note, the “Gray Temples” program “aims to pamper very young retirees or executives at the end of their careers to benefit from their knowledge. ‘This mainly concerns researchers or engineers,’ noted a French scholar. ‘The Chinese invite them to seminars, pay the plane fare and the hotel expenses, it’s nice. And, if it goes well, they can be offered funding for their research.’”<sup>751</sup>

### *b. Programs that raise a lot of issues*

These programs bring about many issues. First, the copyrights of all research produced, even those co-financed or financed by programs in other countries, have to be registered in China.<sup>752</sup> Furthermore, **these programs often serve as a cover and channel for economic espionage, fraud, and theft pure and simple.** In the annex of his report, Alex

745. Ibid., 10.

746. Ibid., 11.

747. “MIT Professor Gang Chen Charged with Millions In Grant Fraud, Hiding China Ties,” *CBS Boston* (14 Jan. 2021).

748. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 38.

749. Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand*, 7.

750. Ibid., 7.

751. *La Chine démasquée*, 103.

752. Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand*, 6.

Joske enumerated a number of researchers that benefited from these programs and were arrested and convicted for one of these reasons.<sup>753</sup>

Finally, among the Chinese universities involved, those linked to the defense and security sectors are over-represented: **recruited researchers in fact develop Chinese military capabilities.** The modernization of the PLA owes a lot to “an international technology transfer strategy, which includes academic exchanges, investment in foreign companies, espionage, and hacking.”<sup>754</sup>

For instance, one of the recruiting stations in Australia is located within the Northwestern Polytechnic University Alumni Association (西北工业大学, NPU), which has developed numerous links with Australian universities, and famously bragged about having presented no less than five professors from Melbourne at the NPU in less than a month. However, the NPU is one of the main universities in the defense sector in China, specialized in aviation, space, and naval technology; it is one of the China’s “**Seven Sons of National Defense**” (国防七子), which regroup the seven most important universities in the defense sector.<sup>755</sup> Over 41% of its graduates are employed in that sector.<sup>756</sup> Another example: in 2014, the Chinese Academy of Engineering and Physics (中国工程物理研究院, CAEP), which is the main school for research on **nuclear weapons**, had already recruited no less than 57 researchers through the Thousand Talents programs.<sup>757</sup> **The number of scientists from the U.S. Los Alamos National Laboratory that have been recruited by Chinese institutions is so important that “they’re reportedly known as the ‘Los Alamos Club.’”**<sup>758</sup>

Some assume that tie, such as this “Australian participant in the Thousand Talents program speaking of his duty to contribute to the development of China’s national defense,”<sup>759</sup> while others would rather ignore or hide it, which is, in and of itself, another problem. **Often, recruited individuals fail to disclose it.** An investigation at A&M University in Texas found more than 100 staff members “linked to China’s talent programs, but only five disclosed it despite employees being required to do so.”<sup>760</sup> The Thousand Talents Plan however, allows its recipients to be considered as entrepreneurs with one or more companies in China that are supported by the Thousand Talents Plan Venture Capital Center (千人计划创投中心). It is through such a ploy that a **start-up born in an Australian university lab and financed by it provided the Chinese government with the surveillance technology used against Uyghurs, unbeknownst to the university** (see box).

753. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 38-47.

754. Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand*, 2

755. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 18.

756. *Ibid.*, 7.

757. *Ibid.*, 25.

758. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*, 25.

759. *Ibid.*, 10.

760. *Ibid.*, 8.

### When Australia indirectly contributes to the repression of Uyghurs

Heng Tao Shen, a talented computer scientist appointed professor at the University of Queensland in 2011 at 34, was recruited three years later by a Chinese university (University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC)) as part of the Thousand Talents program. He then founded a start-up in artificial intelligence, Koala AI, while maintaining his links to UQ, where he stayed as honorary professor. He used these links to poach several Australians for Koala AI, including researchers at UNSW, UQ, and at the University of Melbourne. Koala AI expanded considerably and was worth more than a billion dollars in 2020. Among its activities, the company provided the Chinese government with a surveillance system installed at the border with Kazakhstan, through which many Uyghurs fled the Chinese repression, to detect and categorize potentially suspect individuals and vehicles. Koala AI also managed a joint lab with the Chinese Ministry of Public Security. This sparked a scandal in Australia because Heng Tao Shen benefited, when he was a researcher there, from public funding (AUS\$2.6 million from the Australian Research Council), of which more than half (1.6 million) was used after he founded Koala AI, to finance research on surveillance technology that are now used in Xinjiang.<sup>761</sup>

**The civil-military fusion, i.e. the policy aiming to develop links between the civilian and military sectors to help China's economic and military growth**, was developed by Hu Jintao in 2007 and Xi Jinping made it a national strategy; he personally heads the Central Committee for the Development of Military – Civil Fusion (中央军民融合发展委员会).<sup>762</sup> Concretely, it means that many Chinese civilian universities contribute to military research, if not to some activities: “[at] **least 15 civilian universities have been implicated in cyberattacks, illegal exports or espionage.**”<sup>763</sup>

The situation for the many foreign universities sharing sometimes tight links with Chinese institutions is problematic insofar as, through research projects or joint articles, exchanges between researchers, **they may indirectly contribute to the development of the PLA and to the elaboration of surveillance, control, and oppression technologies used against the Chinese population.** Several scandals have burst in recent years, such as when Australia was accused of indirectly contributing to repression of Uyghurs (see box). Furthermore, in February 2021, *The Times* revealed that close to 200 British researchers working in a dozen British universities were suspected to be **involuntarily helping Beijing build weapons of mass destruction** by transferring sensitive military technologies.<sup>764</sup> Considering the extent of collaborations with China, and the Chinese civil-military interweaving, this type of scandals will presumably be on the rise in the next few years.

Alex Joske (ASPI) was key in drawing attention to this risk with his famous report *Picking Flowers, Making Honey* (2018),<sup>765</sup> followed by *The China Defence Universities Tracker* (2019) and *Hunting the Phoenix* (2020).<sup>766</sup> In January 2021, Joske also submitted a report on CCP

761. Alex Joske, “The company with Aussie Roots That’s Helping Build China’s Surveillance State,” *The Strategist*, ASPI (26 Aug. 2019).

762. Alex Joske, *The China Defence Universities Tracker: Exploring the military and security links of China’s universities*, ASPI, International Cyber Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Report. 23 (Nov. 2019), 4.

763. *Ibid.*, 3.

764. Matt Dathan and Billy Kenber, “Hundreds of UK academics investigated over weapons links to China,” *The Times* (8 Feb. 2021).

765. Alex Joske, *Picking Flowers, Making Honey: The Chinese Military’s Collaboration with Foreign Universities*, ASPI, Policy Brief, Report 10 (2018).

766. Joske, *Hunting the Phoenix*.

INTRODUCTION

efforts in terms of talent recruitment in Australia to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security in which he explained that he had identified, in Australian research institutions, including some government bodies, no less than 325 participants in the Chinese talent recruitment programs.<sup>767</sup> Similar research also looked at New Zealand,<sup>768</sup> the U.S.,<sup>769</sup> and the Czech Republic.<sup>770</sup>

CONCEPTS

In 2019, Alex Joske created a **database of Chinese research institutions, both military and civilian, classified based on the risk they represent.** This China Defence Universities Tracker (<https://unitracker.aspi.org.au/>) proves very useful for foreign universities and researchers, but also for public and private leaders, to evaluate the risk incurred – included the reputational risk – by an association with certain Chinese institutions. Using this database, Synopsis and Czech Radio (*Český rozhlas*) noted that “14 out of 26 Czech public universities have established collaboration with [Chinese] civilian universities the ASPI database assigns medium to very high risk.”<sup>771</sup>

ACTORS

Likewise, a note of the Embassy of France in China, quoted by *Le Point*, noted that it was problematic that “French institutions signed agreements with more than a dozen Chinese universities tied to the military-industrial complex” while another note indicated that “twenty French academics had been recruited [by the Thousand Talents program] including eight that “continue to hold a permanent position in their home institution in France at the same time.” The note continued by stressing that some “are susceptible to communicate particularly sensitive information.” Hence, France seems to be growing aware of the problem. The French MEP Nathalie Loiseau, who coordinates the Special Committee on Foreign Interference, defended that “we should start by imposing transparency. Omitting to declare [these positions] should be considered as an infraction.”<sup>772</sup>

ACTIONS

These activities raised international concern, in particular from the American government, **Beijing has been concealing the Thousand Talents program as much as possible since September 2018.** A directive signed on September 29, 2018 (see below) asked the recruiters to “stop using emails, and opt for the phone and fax instead, during the recruitment process. Candidates have to be notified at the occasion of an invitation to attend a university conference or a forum in China. The written notifications cannot include the words ‘Thousand Talents Plan.’”<sup>773</sup> The process thus increasingly resembles the practice of intelligence services.

CASE

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767. Alex Joske, *The Chinese Communist Party’s Talent Recruitment Efforts in Australia*, Submission 48 to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, Inquiry into National Security Risks Affecting the Australian Higher Education and Research Sector (Jan. 2021).

768. Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand*.

769. Glenn Tiffert, ed., *Global Engagement: Rethinking Risk in The Research Enterprise*, Hoover Institution (30 Jul. 2020).

770. Filip Jirouš, “Nothing of Interest in a Small Country? Czech-Chinese Academic Exchange in the Age of Military-Civil Fusion,” *Synopsis* (22 Sept. 2020).

771. Ibid.

772. Jérémy André, “Comment Pékin profite de nos chercheurs” (“How Beijing Takes Advantage of our Scholars”), *Le Point*, 2535, (18 Mar. 2021), 48-51 (for the last four quotes).

773. “被美國盯上 傳中國引進人才不再提千人計畫” (“On the United-States Radar – China No Longer Mentions the Thousand Talents Plan to Recruit its Talents”), 中央通訊社 (CNA) (5 Oct. 2018), <https://web.archive.org/web/20191213131433/https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/201810050158.aspx>.



Source: <https://twitter.com/Micheal47238455/status/1048797224669532160/photo/2>.

**Previously-public data was deleted:** universities stopped mentioning the program on their websites; the list of recipients was deleted from the websites of the Chinese government, including the program’s official website 1000plan.org<sup>774</sup>; and the website of the program itself, created in 2010, seems to no longer be functioning in its English version (since February 2020) and even in its Chinese version (since March 2020). Beijing is now laying low but, as explained by Anne-Marie Brady, the **“Thousand Talents continues, as do around 200 similar recruitment plans aimed at transmitting foreign research expertise to China.”**<sup>775</sup>

*c. Strategic infrastructures: the example of the China-Belgium Technology Center (CBTC)*

CBTC is **“the first Chinese hi-tech science park in Europe,”**<sup>776</sup> with construction beginning in 2017. Strategically located **30 minutes from Brussels, close to several universities, the center is built in the Louvain-la-Neuve science park**, which is home to some 20 Chinese and European companies in the life sciences, information and high-tech industry sectors. The British pharmaceutical company GSK Vaccines is also located nearby.

The main shareholder and project leader is United Investment Europe (UI Europe), a Belgian subsidiary of the **Chinese company United Investment Group from Hubei.**<sup>777</sup> The project partners are the **Catholic University of Leuven (UCLouvain)**, the Walloon Export and Foreign Investment Agency (AWEX) and the Intercommunale du Brabant Wallon (InBW). The total investment for this project would amount to 200 million euros.<sup>778</sup>

According to UCLouvain, the project has received political endorsements from both countries. It has been validated by the highest authorities of both states: President Xi Jinping and former Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo both attended the signing ceremony of the framework agreement at its launch in 2014.

774. Smriti Mallapaty, “China Hides Identities of Top Scientific Recruits Amidst Growing US Scrutiny,” *Nature* (24 Oct. 2018).

775. Brady, *Holding a Pen in One Hand*, 6.

776. Presentation brochure: [https://www.cbtc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CBTC\\_Brochure\\_Corporate\\_UK\\_Mail.pdf](https://www.cbtc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CBTC_Brochure_Corporate_UK_Mail.pdf), 8.

777. UCLouvain, “China-Belgium Technology Center (CBTC),” <https://uclouvain.be/fr/decouvrir/china-belgium-technology-center-cbtc.html>.

778. *Ibid.*



According to its website, the CBTC has **three missions**: “to build offices, laboratories and infrastructure to host European and Chinese companies; to help them enter and expand in their respective markets by offering support services; and to invest in economic development and job creation.” The CBTC offers services to facilitate cooperation between European and Chinese high-tech companies and to facilitate their entry and development in their respective markets (company creation, market analysis, tax studies, recruitment, legal support, etc.). The three sectors on which the CBTC focuses are **life sciences, information and communication technologies, and smart manufacturing**.<sup>779</sup>

The CBTC will also have a “privileged connection with the **Leuven Innovation Network** ecosystem,” a network composed of UCLouvain, the Leuven Technology Transfer Office (LTTO), the VIVES – Leuven Technology fund, the UCLouvain incubators, the Louvain-la-Neuve Enterprise and Innovation Center and the Brussels Life Science Incubator, Mind&Market as well as the UCLouvain science parks.<sup>780</sup>

The CBTC construction project – which includes offices, coworking spaces, conference centers, hotel, parking and convenience stores – is divided into three phases, at the end of which the center is expected to be able to **accommodate about 100 companies and 800 jobs on 120,000 square meters**.<sup>781</sup> The first phase was launched in 2017 and completed in 2020. In September 2020 and with the help of real estate agencies Allten and Hendrix, the spaces began to be rented.<sup>782</sup> Several Chinese companies – including the Traditional Chinese Medicine science and Technology Industrial park (Guangdong & Macau), China Medical City (Taizhou), Shanghai Zhangjiang Science Park, Hainan International Medical Pilot Zone, Nanjing Qixia Hi-Tech Industrial Development Zone – have already signed agreements to set up operations there.<sup>783</sup>



Cover page of the CBTC presentation brochure on the cbtc.eu website.

For the Belgian internal security intelligence service, the Veiligheid van de Staat (VSSE), **the CBTC project poses serious espionage risks to Belgian academic and technological research** insofar as, even if the center were not a frontline organization of the

779. Text of the presentation video: <https://www.cbtc.eu/en/china-belgium-technology-center/>.

780. UCLouvain, “China-Belgium Technology Center (CBTC),” <https://uclouvain.be/fr/decouvrir/china-belgium-technology-center-cbtc.html>.

781. Ibid.

782. Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, “China Belgium Technology Center: inauguration fin 2021” (“China Belgium Technology Center: inauguration in late 2021”) <https://www.olln.be/fr/actualites/china-belgium-technology-center-inauguration-fin-2021>.

783. Ibid.

Chinese services, it could be used as an entry point by MSS agents for future espionage operations. There are precedents. According to confidential VSSE reports from 2010 to 2016, revealed in part by EUobserver, **Chinese intelligence services have a particular interest in biological warfare and vaccines.**<sup>784</sup> The VSSE suspects that China has targeted several Belgian experts as well as the British pharmaceutical company GSK. The **Center of Applied Molecular Technology (CTMA)**, also located in the science park of Louvain-la-Neuve, would have been targeted. The Belgian authorities were concerned about the location of two Chinese structures in the same building as the CTMA, the Beijing ZGC Science Park and Shenzhen European Office. From now on, the **China-Belgium Technology Center (CBTC)** will also be located nearby.

## B. Confucius Institutes



**Chinese language is one of the main vectors of the CCP's strategy of seduction.** Not only does language gives an access to the Chinese culture and to Chinese people themselves, which constitutes a powerful motivation for the learners, but it is also used by the CCP to create a narrative, a mystification built around its age and its graphic peculiarities, where the act and art of writing are intertwined. This influence strategy was materialized by the opening of a **constellation of Confucius**

**Institutes since 2004, tasked with promoting the Chinese language and culture.**

### 1. Organization

There are two categories of Confucius Institutes: the institutes themselves, implanted in the universities, and the **Confucius Classrooms**, present mainly in institutions of primary and secondary education. These institutions can obtain the support, and coordinate their actions with, the Chinese cultural centers at the embassies, but they are administrated by the **Hanban** (汉办), which stands for the Office of Chinese Language Council International (国家汉语国际推广领导小组办公室). The Hanban is not an agency *per se*, but an organization affiliated to the Ministry of Education. The Hanban permanent committee is however presided by Sun Chunlan (孙春兰), vice-prime minister, member of the CCP's Political Bureau and former manager of the United Front Department. The director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (侨务办公室) is also in the committee; if the OCAO was formerly attached to the State Council, it was integrated into the United Front Department in 2018. Hence, there is no doubt about the Party's control over the activities of Confucius Institutes.

The implementation of Confucius Institutes (CI) abroad is based on a **tripartite agreement that includes the Hanban, the foreign university that hosts the institute in its facilities and a Chinese university that graciously provides the language teachers.** The financial support offered by the Hanban through the ICs does not only include the learning material and teachers but, since 2009, it offers **scholarships to allow foreigners to come to China to study Chinese and its culture.** Between 2009 and 2020, about 50,000 students from 166 countries received such a scholarship.<sup>785</sup> For example, in Kenya, it is estimated that

784. Andrew Rettman, "China suspected of bioespionage in 'heart of EU,'" *EUobserver* (6 May 2020).

785. <https://www.afpbb.com/articles/-/3254376>.

INTRODUCTION

the CI in Nairobi alone awards at least 15 scholarships per year to African students to study in China for 6 months and up to 10 years – potentially to a doctorate level. It also offers specific language courses for Kenyan officials, including diplomats and customs officers.<sup>786</sup>

CONCEPTS

The institutes are managed by a tandem formed by a Chinese and a local co-director, while all the other employees seem to consistently be Chinese. When a university accepts to welcome a CI, it receives a **financial assistance** of a variable amount to launch its activities, an annual grant amounting to \$100,000 or \$150,000 on average, although it could reach several million dollars according to certain sources. The Hanban then recruits and trains the new teachers who are appointed to the institutes solely based on the Hanban's decision. But, once there, they can receive **instructions from the embassy or the consulate**. The linguistic resources (books, audio or video media) are also elaborated by the Hanban.

ACTORS

CIs have grown rapidly: the first opened in Seoul in November 2004, the first in Africa at the University of Nairobi in 2005, and the first Confucius Classroom in 2006 in a Bangkok high school. South Korea and Thailand remain the Asian countries with the largest numbers of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms. At the end of 2009, there were 282 Institutes, and 272 Classrooms in 88 countries,<sup>787</sup> and the objective was to reach a thousand by 2020.<sup>788</sup> **Their number has stagnated globally since 2018 however** (the official Hanban website mentions 541 but this number has not changed in years even though some CIs have closed while others have been created –the Hanban is likely intentionally ambiguous about the real number of CIs).<sup>789</sup> If we go by the facts mentioned on the official website, there would be 135 CIs in Asia (25%), 61 in Africa (11%) 138 in the Americas (25%), 187 in Europe (35%) and 20 in Oceania (4%). The three countries with the most Confucius Institutes are the United States (75 institutes, including 65 on university campuses, and approximately 500 Classrooms in August 2020),<sup>790</sup> the United Kingdom and Australia (14 Institutes and 67 Classrooms in Australia in July 2019).<sup>791</sup> **This massive expansion allowed the Party to multiply the number of Chinese learners and to extend its influence everywhere in the world.**

ACTIONS

**In France, CIs allow Beijing to strengthen its influence in medium-sized cities,** where they are mainly located. There are 18 of them in the country, where they “lead a seemingly quiet life” as Nathalie Guibert explains, having travelled around France to study these “ever so discreet Chinese relays.”<sup>792</sup> **These institutes appeal not only to universities but also to local political actors who, fully aware of the links between CIs and the Party, hope to be able to use them as communication channels to develop business relations,** as a deputy mayor of Angers acknowledges: “The CIs are considered by Chinese actors to have the seal of the Party, with validated executives, which allows us to get things across better. We want a return other than cultural, the Institute must also promote business.”<sup>793</sup> **Their establishment is encouraged by the widely shared feeling of an inevitable Chinese domination.** It is the discourse according to which “China is moving fast, it is overtaking us in terms of technology. It is going to become a superpower, the question is how to work better with it,” as expressed in particular by the French co-di-

786. From a diplomatic source.

787. [http://english.hanban.org/article/2010-07/02/content\\_153910.htm](http://english.hanban.org/article/2010-07/02/content_153910.htm).

788. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 155.

789. [english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm).

790. <https://www.state.gov/confucius-institute-u-s-center-designation-as-a-foreign-mission/>.

791. James King and Echo Hui, “Confucius Institute Chinese Language and Culture Teachers Must ‘Love the Motherland’ To apply,” *ABC Australia* (16 Jul. 2019).

792. Nathalie Guibert, “Confucius en France: de si discrets relais chinois” (“Confucius in France: such discreet Chinese relays”) *Le Monde* (9 Jul. 2021), 4.

793. *Ibid.*

rector of the Confucius Business at the Ecole supérieure de commerce de Paris.<sup>794</sup> This approach, both fatalistic and opportunistic, is certainly debatable – primarily because it seems to ignore the risks of such cooperation – but the fact is that it is widespread. The academic Gilles Guiheux, former co-director of Paris’s CI, concludes that “**the problem with Confucius Institutes is that they spread a false image of China. But we are partly responsible for this.** The actors of the French network adhere to the idea of an unstoppable Chinese power.”<sup>795</sup>

### The Confucius Institute project in Greenland

CIs allow China to increase its penetration in certain regions where it has little presence at the moment but identifies important current or future interests, such as in Greenland. China manifested a renewed interest for Greenland after the adoption of a self-governing act in 2008 which gave the territory more autonomy from the Danish government, and notably, the possibility to conclude deals with other countries. The Chinese presence in Greenland is first motivated by the abundance of natural resources (illustrated by investment in the mining sector for instance), the infrastructure market (ports, airports, hydraulic etc.),<sup>796</sup> and scientific research: Beijing wishes to establish research stations dedicated, for instance, to climate change.<sup>797</sup> That being said, the CCP envisions its penetration in Greenland within the scope of its Arctic strategy which, since the arrival to power of Xi Jinping and the rise of tensions with the United States, has explicitly become geopolitical and not merely economic.

The continuing Chinese presence in Greenland necessarily goes through a more in-depth penetration of the indigenous society, and particularly its elite. Since 2016, it has led to a cooperation agreement between the cities of Shanghai and Kujalleq (at the southern end of the territory) in order to open a CI in 2018 on the Qaoqortoq campus. A well-conducted targeting of the local elite, which is quantitatively unimportant, could allow to a rapid increase in the influence of Beijing.<sup>798</sup> However, for unknown reasons, the project of a CI in Greenland seems to have aborted.

## 2. The true nature of Confucius Institutes

CI defenders generally present them as harmless language schools, similar to the Alliances françaises, the British Councils and the Goethe Institutes. However, and even if it were the case, we must remember with the Tibet specialist Françoise Robin that “even with language courses, one can convey political ideas, such as showing maps of China that include Taiwan.”<sup>799</sup> Additionally, and most importantly, CIs are in fact fundamentally different, starting with their politicization: contrary to the aforementioned cultural diplomacy institutions, which are particularly careful not to have any link to a political party, **CIs are inherently linked to the CCP.**

Another difference: **their implementation in universities and other foreign educational institutions “gives them leverage over the host institutions.”**<sup>800</sup> There was

794. Ibid.

795. Ibid.

796. Ties Dams, Louise van Schaik, and Adája Stoetman, “Presence Before Power. China’s Arctic Strategy in Iceland and Greenland,” *Cligendael Report* (Jun. 2020).

797. Ibid.

798. André Gattolin and Damien Degeorges, “China in Greenland: A Call for Deeper EU Political Engagement,” *Euractiv* (28 Mar. 2018). See the document (in Danish) put together by the city of Kujalleq here: [http://cak.gl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/PM\\_Kina-i-Kujalleq\\_271016\\_dk.pdf](http://cak.gl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/PM_Kina-i-Kujalleq_271016_dk.pdf).

799. Jérémy André, “Comment la Chine pousse ses pions à l’université” (“How China is pushing its way into the university”), *Le Point*, 2532 (25 Feb. 2021).

800. Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities.”



even a case of an implantation at the heart of the education policy of a target country: the Ministry of Education of New-South Wales hosted a CI – a case presented as unique in the world.<sup>801</sup> In other words, **Beijing had appointed employees (potentially agents) inside an Australian ministry.** This institute operated a Confucius Classroom program which state schools paid at least \$10,000 annually (plus material resources such as books, which were graciously offered) to propose Chinese language and culture classes. Some schools subsequently made them mandatory. This decision shocked many parents, some describing this program “as the infiltration of the Chinese Communist Party into the NSW public school system.”<sup>802</sup> Following this polemic, the state decided to stop the program in December 2019.

Over the past couple of years, China’s efforts have faced an **increasing opposition** that has put a stop, or at least slowed, the implementation of new institutions. Several universities have also decided to shut down the Confucius Institutes they hosted, invoking, in particular, an **infringement of academic freedom.** In July 2020, at least 50 universities in 9 countries stopped the activities of CIs implanted on their campuses – for instance, the University of Chicago and Penn State in the United States, McMaster in Canada or Lyon in France (→ p. 305). **In the United States, at least 15 of them closed in 2018-2019.**<sup>803</sup> In Australia, the state of New South Wales announced, in August 2019, the closure of the 13 CIs in its public schools.<sup>804</sup> In Germany, the universities of Düsseldorf and Hamburg have terminated CIs they hosted, and in several cities, including Ingolstadt and Göttingen, citizens’ collectives have been formed to end public subsidies or cooperation with local CIs.<sup>805</sup> In response to Chinese sanctions against researchers and a German think tank (MERICS) in March 2021, the University of Trier announced the suspension of all activities of its CI, a decision which the Minister of Research welcomed a few months later by stating: “I do not want the Chinese government to influence our universities and our society. Germany must admit self-critically: in some places in the past, **we have given too much space to the Confucius Institutes,** and have done too little ourselves to build up independent China expertise in Germany.”<sup>806</sup> **Everywhere in the world, the problems have multiplied and CIs are shut down.**

The problems stemming from CIs have been summarized by a very thorough study of the National Association of Scholars (NAS) in 2017.<sup>807</sup> The most frequent criticisms leveled against them referred to the pressure exerted on teachers to avoid subjects deemed sensitive in class (Tibet, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Human Rights, etc.), the restrictions on the teachers’ freedom of expression and of religion (prohibition of Falun Gong for instance<sup>808</sup>) and a lack, or very little, of transparency on the nature of the relations between the institutes and the Hanban or other Chinese administrations.

801. *Mission*, Lowy (Aug. 2019).

802. Kelsey Munro, “Behind Confucius Classrooms: the Chinese Government Agency Teaching NSW School Students,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (29 May 2016).

803. “The New Red Scare on American Campuses,” *The Economist* (4 Jan. 2020).

804. “New South Wales to End Chinese-funded Confucius Institute Education Program,” *The Japan Times* (23 Aug. 2019).

805. Thomas Wieder, “Berlin regrette d’avoir ‘laissé trop d’espace’ au réseau Confucius” (“Berlin regrets having ‘left too much space’ for the Confucius network”) *Le Monde* (9 Jul. 2021), 5.

806. “Germany too dependent on Confucius Institutes, minister warns,” *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2486 (8 Jul. 2021).

807. Rachelle Peterson, “Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education,” National Association of Scholars (Apr. 2017).

808. See the documentary *In the name of Confucius* (2018), <https://inthenameofconfuciusmovie.com/fr/>.



• 1) **Teachers.** At the end of 2016, the CI headquarters in Beijing designed **new recruitment criteria for teachers, first implemented in early 2017.** They required “**good political and professional qualities**” (“具备良好的政治和业务素质”) and a “**love for the homeland**” (“爱祖国”) for instance.<sup>809</sup> The word *suzhi* (素质), often translated by “quality” encompasses the behavior, ethic, and education of the individual. It is a marker of belonging to the civilized world. To lack of *suzhi* is to not be “civilized”; the word is thus often used to endorse a paternalistic politics or the refusal to hold elections to choose the country’s leaders, under the pretext that rural people are not of “good enough quality.”<sup>810</sup> According to the former Chinese diplomat Chen Yonglin, who had defected to Australia in 2005, to have a “good political quality” means in this context to “always be faithful to the CCP and nothing else.”<sup>811</sup>

序号	大洲	国家	孔子学院（课堂）名称	派遣人数	中方合作院校	岗位要求	任期
						性别：不限；学历：本科、研究生；学位：学士、硕士；专业：无限制；英语等级：四级、六级、托福、雅思、托福、托福、托福。	

The required candidate profile: “good political and professional qualities, loves the homeland, works voluntarily for the internationalization of the Chinese language, has a dedicated spirit, a strong sense of organizational discipline and team spirit, with good character and no criminal record.”<sup>812</sup>

• 2) **The learning material.** The learning material is prepared by the Hanban and compliant with a Chinese vision of the world. It is actually a preferred resource to convey the Party’s narrative abroad. The work is, in this case, eased by the young age of this “literature’s” public, the children and teenagers, not yet able to confront the propaganda that, despite lacking in subtlety sometimes, can be effective due to the repetition of the same message. The ability of some students to defend themselves against such assaults can also be questioned. Here, the Chinese strategy can be illustrated by an **animated documentary on the Korean War (1950-53), the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea**,<sup>813</sup> proposed by the Hanban to young learners. The video explained that the United States manipulated the United Nations Security Council and that the Chinese army only went to war in response to the American bombings of Chinese villages and in order to protect the homeland (see screenshots below). The Hanban removed the video once its content was exposed.<sup>814</sup>

809. James King and Echo Hui, “Confucius Institute Chinese Language and Culture Teachers Must ‘Love the Motherland’ to Apply,” *ABC Australia* (16 Jul. 2019).

810. See: Paul Charon, *Le vote contre la démocratie. Rationalisation de l’État et processus de politisation dans la Chine rurale post-maoïste (Vote Against Democracy: The Rationalization of the State and the Politization of Post-Mao Rural China)*, PhD Thesis, EHESS (2012).

811. King and Hui, “Confucius Institute Chinese Language and Culture Teachers Must ‘Love the Motherland’ to Apply.”

812. Ibid.

813. Official name of the Korean War in China.

814. It is nonetheless available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13k3AEjHNR0>.



Source: Screenshots from the animated documentary *The War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea*.

• **3) Financial leverage on universities.** The problem with CIs is not so much the propaganda they spread but the **influence they exert on university administrators**, Salvatore Babone explained.<sup>815</sup> Beijing delivers the institutes with the funding, teachers and their remuneration, the learning material, and sometimes even with the dedicated buildings. For universities – particularly those with tight budgets – **being offered a revenue-generating language center free of charge is hard to refuse. This can create a dependence, if not a full subjection**, that allows Beijing to have an influence on certain choices of the university, sometimes on the content of some research programs (to limit the research on Tibet, Taiwan, or China’s influence strategy for instance), on the choice of guest speakers, and ultimately, on the way the university speaks of China and of Chinese interests. In all cases, it creates a form of self-censorship.

• **4) Self-Censorship.** Experience has shown that the presence of CIs on a campus “compromised their institution’s commitment to academic freedom.”<sup>816</sup> There are **numerous documented cases of self-censorship**. In 2008, Tel Aviv University decided to close an exhibition dedicated to the Falun Gong movement at the request of the Chinese Embassy.<sup>817</sup> In 2009, at North Carolina State University, the Chinese director of the CI warned the university management that the Dalai Lama’s conference scheduled on the campus could “damage” the relationship of the university with the Hanban, thus forcing the former to cancel the event.<sup>818</sup> In 2013, the prestigious University of Sydney also “cancelled the visit [of the Dalai Lama] to avoid damaging its ties with China, including funding for its cultural Confucius Institute.”<sup>819</sup> In 2014, Xu Lin (许琳), director of the Hanban, then invited to the annual conference of the European Association of China studies at the University of Minho in Portugal, demanded that the conference programs be rid of several pages mentioning Taiwanese institutions, including the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation.<sup>820</sup> In December 2018, at Victoria University in Melbourne, the screening of a documentary critical of CIs was cancelled at the last minute under pressure from the Chinese consulate, and the university lied to the movie promoter, saying there was no available room. Clive Hamilton highlighted the **irony of this situation: “a documentary arguing that the presence of Confucius Institutes gives them political leverage over their hosts was banned because of the political leverage of a**

815. Salvatore Babones, “It’s Time for Western Universities to Cut Their Ties to China,” *Foreign Policy* (19 Aug. 2020).

816. “China: Government Threats to Academic Freedom Abroad,” Human Rights Watch (21 Mar. 2019).

817. Ofra Edelman, “Court: TAU Bowed to Chinese Pressure Over Falun Exhibition,” *Haaretz* (1 Oct. 2009).

818. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimi, “How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil,” *Foreign Policy* (9 May 2018).

819. “Sydney University criticized for blocking Dalai Lama visit,” *The Guardian* (18 Apr. 2013).

820. Elizabeth Redden, “Censorship at China Studies Meeting,” *Inside Higher Ed* (6 Aug. 2014).

**Confucius Institute over its host.**<sup>821</sup> The integration of these constraints by Beijing's partners is a phenomenon observed in other fields such as cinema (→ p. 348) or professional sport (→ p. 249).

### A closed Confucius Institute in Lyon

In France, where there are 18 Confucius Institutes left,<sup>822</sup> the fate of Lyon's Confucius Institute (CIL) is interesting. Created in 2009 following a proposition of Sun Yat-sen University (Guangzhou) to the University Lyon 3, the relationship between the two parties started to deteriorate in 2012 after the appointment of a new Chinese director: "He questioned our learning material and insisted that the CIL be more integrated in the university in order to be included in the core courses. **We considered this interference from a structure emanating from China inappropriate because it was susceptible to compromise our academic freedom but also the spirit and rules of higher education in the French Republic,**" explained Gregory Lee, professor at the University Lyon 3. He paid the price: "the Hanban director demanded his head and announced the interruption of the annual contribution without notice. [...] Without an agreement, Lee closed the CIL in September 2013."<sup>823</sup>

• **5) Effects on the teaching staff.** Considering what was previously described, the implementation of a CI in a university often brings about controversies, and is susceptible to divide the teaching staff, if not marginalize some of the best specialists on China because they are critical of CIs and, as such, of their colleagues cooperating with the institute, or receiving its funding. In this situation, Christopher Hughes explains that **"even the most well-established experts in Chinese studies can find themselves isolated and at odds with their colleagues when they raise concerns.** The worst-case scenario is when academics no longer feel able to work in a university that does not respect their professional standards, suffering from ostracization, exclusion from the university and denial of promotion [for instance]."<sup>824</sup>

• **6) Effects on other researchers.** Pressure from a CI affects not only immediate colleagues at the university, but it can also extend to the regional or national research and think tank landscape. For example, in April 2021, the Slovak director of Bratislava's CI, Luboslav Štora, attempted to intimidate Matej Šimalčík, the director of the Central European Institute of Asia Studies (CEIAS) and one of the leading China experts in Central Europe. He sent him **a letter attacking him** over the publication of a report on Chinese influence in Slovak universities,<sup>825</sup> **with explicit threats:** "Are you sleeping well? You should be very stressed when you walk down the street...."<sup>826</sup>

821. Hamilton, "Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities."

822. Officially 17 according to the French website of the Confucius Institute (<https://archive.vn/8GHMR>: CI of the University of Poitiers, CI of the University of Paris 7 Diderot, CI of Brittany in Brest, CI of La Rochelle, CI of Alsace in Strasbourg, CI of Clermont-Ferrand Auvergne, CI of the University of Artois, CI of Pays de la Loire, CI of the University of Lorraine, CI of the University of French Polynesia, CI of the Neoma Business School in Reims and Paris, CI of Montpellier, CI of the University of La Réunion, CI of Pau-Pyrénées, CI of the University of Orléans, CI of the ESCP Business School in Paris, IC Côte d'Azur in Nice) but in reality 18 if we also count the one of the Chinese cultural center in Paris.

823. *La Chine démasquée*, 112.

824. Christopher Hughes, "Confucius Institutes and the University: Distinguishing the Political Mission from the Cultural," *Issues and Studies*, 50:4 (2014), 66.

825. Matej Šimalčík and Adam Kalivoda, *China's inroads into Slovak universities: Protecting academic freedoms from authoritarian malign interference*, CEIAS and Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (Dec. 2020).

826. "Le directeur de l'Institut Confucius à Bratislava menace un expert slovaque" ("Director of the Confucius Institute in Bratislava threatens Slovak expert") Euractiv (27 Apr. 2021).

• **7) Espionage.** Jonathan Manthorpe believes that the Confucius program is nothing more than “**a major CCP international propaganda and espionage operation masquerading as a cultural exchange program.**”<sup>827</sup> It is not only, as Li Changchun, a member of the Permanent Committee of the Political Bureau, publicly acknowledged, “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda set-up;”<sup>828</sup> in most cases “**they are espionage outstations for Chinese embassies and consulates through which they control Chinese students, gather information on perceived enemies, and intimidate dissidents.**”<sup>829</sup> However, documented cases of espionage are rare, and Western counter-espionage services do not always have an interest in making them public. Among the most well-known examples is the case of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) CI director, Song Xinning, who, in 2019, was expelled and banned from the Schengen area for eight years after the Belgian services accused him of espionage – and more specifically, of being a recruiter for Chinese intelligence.<sup>830</sup> Following that event, the VUB decided to close its CI.

The wave of Confucius Institute closures gained momentum in the last few years and should further spread as a result of the awareness of Chinese influence strategies, and of the growing tensions between Beijing and Washington. To try to counter this tendency, the CCP decided to rename the Hanban as the Center for Language Education and Cooperation in June 2020.<sup>831</sup> The announcement by the press agency Xinhua did not specify that it was an actual change of name, nor did it explain the reasons behind this change, giving stock to the belief that it might have been a new institution.<sup>832</sup> Xu Lin, likely judged unfit to accompany this change in the image of the institutes, was replaced by Ma Jianfei, her deputy. The Party also created a non-governmental foundation promoting teaching Chinese abroad to oversee the institutes. This structure is thus supposed to act as a buffer between the institutes and the Party.

### 3. Hanyuqiao: the Chinese Bridge Program

Hanyuqiao (汉语桥), literally “bridge to Chinese” (also translated as “gateway to Chinese”), and which has been known in English as the Chinese Bridge Program, started as a **linguistic and cultural competition organized by the Hanban** with help from the network of Confucius Institutes. CIs organize the pre-selections in the various countries where they are implanted and send the best candidates from each country to participate in the semifinals, followed by the finals, in China. The selected candidates only have to pay for their roundtrip plane fare while Beijing takes care of the rest – housing and food.<sup>833</sup> The competition is broadcast on the Hunan Television (湖南卫视) channel and is available on streaming platforms such as Mango TV (芒果TV).<sup>834</sup>

827. J. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019), 192.

828. “A Message from Confucius: New Ways of Projecting Soft Power,” *The Economist* (22 Oct. 2009).

829. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 192.

830. Kinling Lo et al., “Chinese Professor Accused of Spying by Belgium, Barred from Entering Schengen Area,” *South China Morning Post* (30 Oct. 2019).

831. Zhuang Pinghui, “China’s Confucius Institutes Rebrand after Overseas Propaganda Rows,” *South China Morning Post* (4 Jul. 2020).

832. “China Sets Up Language Cooperation Center,” Xinhua (5 Jul. 2020).

833. “About ‘Chinese Bridge,’” *Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)*, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_8080.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_8080.htm).

834. “汉语桥” (“Hanyuqiao”), *Baidu*, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%B1%89%E8%AF%AD%E6%A1%A5>.



It targets an audience of non-Chinese young individuals born outside of China and for whom Chinese is not the mother tongue. Their oral and written comprehension is assessed with their Chinese speaking abilities and artistic qualities. **The winners eventually earn scholarships to study in the PRC.**

This competition has two formats: the first, the **Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students** has been held since 2002 and is open to university students; the second is the **Chinese Proficiency for Foreign Secondary Students**, launched in 2008 for high-schoolers. According to numbers provided by the Hanban, around 800,000 university students and 300,000 high-schoolers participated in the preselection stage and 3,000 university students from over 110 countries, along with 2,700 high-schoolers from over 100 countries, were selected to take part to the semifinals and finals in China.<sup>835</sup>

The objective of these competitions is to **spark interest in the Chinese language and culture** among a young foreign public, and to stimulate international exchanges. As attested by the way the Handan reported on these events, these competitions are an occasion to “build a ‘circle of friends’ worldwide thanks to Chinese,” but also to “show [one’s] talents to follow [one’s] Chinese dream” to “tell together [about one’s] affection for China.”<sup>836</sup>

The Hanban’s Hanyuqiao has in fact expanded to formats beyond the competitions: the **Chinese Bridge Summer Camp invites foreign high school students for a summer camp in China** during which they can attend language classes but also classes on traditional cultural practices (calligraphy, martial arts, traditional dances, tea ceremonies etc.), and meet with other youth with an interest in China from all over the world.<sup>837</sup> This program also aims to stimulate a passion for learning Chinese and Chinese culture in general, along with imbuing these teenagers with official Chinese narratives.

**Schools and teachers** are other targets of the Hanyuqiao. The Chinese Bridge for Foreign Schools invites the teaching staff who have already established a Chinese program at their schools, or who has the intention of doing so, to spend a week in China, not only to promote cooperation between the schools, but also to improve their knowledge of the Chinese education system and promote the learning of Chinese abroad.<sup>838</sup> **European, British and American schools are primarily targeted.** According to the Hanban’s website, it apparently invites, each year, the teaching staff of 100 primary and secondary schools from the European Union,<sup>839</sup> 100 British schools, and, since 2007, it has invited some 450 British delegates in China,<sup>840</sup> along with 3,000 American delegates since 2006.<sup>841</sup>

835. “关于‘汉语桥’”(“About ‘Hanyuqiao’”), 孔子学院总部(国家汉办) (*Confucius Institute Headquarters* (Hanban)), [http://www.hanban.org/chinesebridge/node\\_7489.htm](http://www.hanban.org/chinesebridge/node_7489.htm).

836. “Competition ‘Gateway to Chinese’: the Candidates of 122 Countries Show Their Abilities In Chinese and Make Friends in Changsha,” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), [http://french.hanban.org/article/2019-08/07/content\\_781953.htm](http://french.hanban.org/article/2019-08/07/content_781953.htm); “Competition ‘Bridge to Chinese,’” Confucius Institute Clermont-Ferrand – Auvergne, <https://archive.vn/49wdC>.

837. “‘Chinese Bridge’ Summer Camp,” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_8073.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_8073.htm)

838. “About ‘Chinese Bridge,’” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban).

839. “‘Chinese Bridge’ For EU Schools,” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10084.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10084.htm).

840. “‘Chinese Bridge’ For UK Schools,” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_8072.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_8072.htm).

841. “Overseas Principals’ Tour to China,” Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_8074.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_8074.htm).



## VII. Think tanks

We have previously shown how the Party attempts to build the image of a powerful China, with a power that rests, among other things, on the development of the country's scientific and technological capacities (→ p. 159). The promotion of that narrative is paired with important efforts to impose itself in the field of ideas. It is about **seducing with China's capacity to produce concepts and to raise its voice in international intellectual debates**. To do so, the CCP's strategy is twofold: **on the one hand, setting up branches of Chinese think tanks abroad**, whose mission is to showcase the Chinese intellectual power by inserting themselves in the local intellectual and political debates; **on the other hand**, similarly to the United Front's strategy consisting in using one's friends against one's enemies, the Party-State also tries **to get closer to the existing structures** susceptible to assimilate and share Chinese narratives.

### A. The international development of Chinese think-tanks

Beyond the relays the CCP is susceptible to find in foreign think tanks and foundations, its strategy in the field of ideas consists **in reinforcing the Chinese presence in international debates**. To do so, and in accordance to Xi Jinping's spoken exhortation to the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress to build "new think tanks with Chinese characteristics," these institutions have developed their activities abroad and branches in several target countries, notably in Europe. They **have organized "academic" events** with foreign think tanks and universities, and **tried to sign cooperation agreements**. This strategy allows them to establish a sense of respectability for Chinese think tanks, of which most are tied to the CCP,<sup>842</sup> and to spread official narratives.

For instance, on October 4 and 5, 2018, the **Fudan Institute of Belt and Road Global Governance (BRGG)** participated in an event organized by the Confucius Institute of the University of Edinburgh on "The Belt & Road Initiative: Challenges and Opportunities."<sup>843</sup> On this occasion, the Shanghai-based think tank and the Future Institute of Edinburgh signed a memorandum in order to foster their cooperation and research on the silk roads. Yet, and even if the BRGG presents itself as a think tank tied to Fudan University, a bundle of concordant traces reveal close links with the Party. Its objective is not limited to spreading the Party's narrative – or, to promote the Silk Roads, as it was announced by its director at the launch in 2017<sup>844</sup> – but its director Jiao Yang (焦扬) is also the Party's secretary at Fudan University, after several stints in the propaganda services of the city of Shanghai.<sup>845</sup> In addition, the *China Daily* affirmed, when the Fudan think tank was created, that it was financially supported by the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC Energy).<sup>846</sup> If the Hong Kong-based CEFC describes itself as a non-state think tank dedicated to the promotion of international dialogue, it is a branch of CEFC China Energy Company Limited, which we mentioned before (→ p. 117). It was founded and headed by

842. David Bandurski, "China's New Think Tanks in Europe," *Echomall* (2 Mar. 2020).

843. "第二届"一带一路"国际研讨会在爱丁堡大学举行" ("The Second International Symposium 'One belt one road' Was Held at the University of Edenborough"), Hanban (17 Oct. 2018): <https://archive.vn/FhKRC>.

844. He Wei, "Fudan University Opens Belt & Road Research Institute," *China Daily* (5 Nov. 2017).

845. See her biography here: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E7%84%A6%E6%89%AC/40755>. Also see David Bandurski, "China's New Think Tanks in Europe."

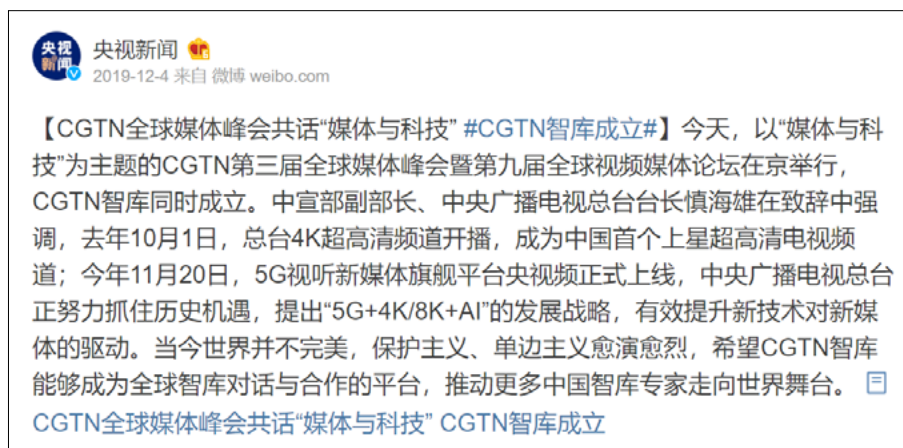
846. He Wei, "Fudan University Opens Belt & Road Research Institute."

Ye Jianming (叶简明) until he declared bankruptcy in March 2020.<sup>847</sup> And his ties to the PLA were known because he had been an assistant secretary of the CAIFC, a structure linked to the PLA's liaison department.<sup>848</sup> In addition, Andrew Chubb highlighted the troubling resemblance between the logos of the CAIFC and the CEFC.<sup>849</sup>

Chinese think tanks are multiplying cooperation agreements with foreign organizations to facilitate the circulation of the Party's narrative. Some go even further and set up **branches abroad**, where the objective is to create tighter bonds with the actors of the target country's intellectual debates, and thus to be able to influence the content of these debates.

## 1. CGTN think tank

On December 4, 2019, during the third CGTN Global Media Summit dedicated to “media and technologies,” Beijing announced the creation of a CGTN think tank. The event was held in the presence of Shen Haixiong (慎海雄), deputy director of the propaganda department.



The CGTN think tank is presented by its instigators as a **media think tank** – a new generation of think tanks that can lean on the enormous information gathering capacities of media outlets like CGTN. The idea is to **combine the capabilities of these two types of structures: the impressive data gathering capacities of the media and the analyzing skills of think tanks.** The Chinese media that reported on the event have explained that this endeavor was motivated by the difficulty to organize a rational debate at the international level, along with the weakness of the Chinese voice in the concert of nations. Beijing's ambition is thus to create an exchange platform that leaves room for the promotion of the opinions of Chinese intellectuals and experts, and to ultimately improve the understanding of China in the world.<sup>850</sup>

According to Chinese media, the CGTN think tank has already signed **about fifty partnerships with foreign think tanks, including the Schiller Institute** (→ p. 326). Twenty-seven institutions were present during the inaugural event on December 4. And several political

847. Ye Jianming was also the economic advisor of the Czech president, Miloš Zeman. He was arrested in March 2018 for corruption (→ p. 265).

848. Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department. Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute* (14 Oct. 2013).

849. Andrew Chubb, “Caixin's Investigation of CEFC and Chairman Ye Jianming,” *southseaconversations* 讨论南海 (29 Mar. 2018).

850. Dr Summer, “CGTN Think Tank: A New Platform for International Dialogue to Promote a Better Understanding of the World,” CGTN (5 Dec. 2019). <https://archive.vn/k6FTL>

personalities gave their support to this initiative, including Ban Ki-Moon (former secretary general of the United Nation), Romano Prodi (former president of the Italian Council of Ministers and president of the European Commission), Esko Aho (former Finnish prime minister), Jenny Shipley (former New-Zealander prime minister), Yves Leterme (former Belgium prime minister) and Han Seung-soo (former South Korean prime minister).<sup>851</sup>

Since the launch, the CGTN think tank has not communicated much on its development, partnerships, or even on its activities; it is then difficult to evaluate its precise place in the field, and *a fortiori*, its impact on the international stage, which altogether seems relatively modest.

CGTN's pseudopod introduced itself on the media's website as a think tank like any other, and, to add stock to this statement, it offered a video that explained "what a think tank is." However, far from showcasing or presenting Chinese think tanks, this video, produced by a Western communication firm, features Western think tanks. In this way, CGTN tried to incorporate its think tank in the international think tank community by association, to benefit from the legitimacy of others.



Overall, CGTN's think tank seems to be yet another relay susceptible to spread China's voice or, in other words, to **broadcast CCP narratives** we previously identified. The advertisement above of a debate organized on the efficiency of Traditional Chinese Medicine (→ p. 152) to cure the Covid-19 is but one example. The Chinese think tank also took part to the campaign that disseminated counter-narratives on the epidemic and highlighted the efficiency of China's crisis management. For instance, CGTN organized debates defending that the virus might not have been from China (→ p. 589).

Strictly-speaking, CGTN's think tank is thus **a networking tool more than an idea-producing institution**.

## 2. Offensive on Central and Eastern Europe (The China-CEE Institute and the SASS)

China specifically targets Central and Eastern European countries through the 16+1 cooperation format created in 2012,<sup>852</sup> and renamed 17+1 with the addition of Greece in 2019, then again 16+1 with the departure of Lithuania in May 2021. The format is asymmetrical – not because China is alone in front of 17 other countries, but because it weights far more than all of its interlocutors combined. Incidentally, it clearly falls within

851. "2019 CGTN Global Media Summit & VMF Opened in Beijing," *AP* (10 Dec. 2019).

852. Bringing together China and 16 countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia).

a logic of “the strong against the weak,” and the Party-State uses this **channel to promote its vision and its initiatives**, notably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is **also meant to divide Europe** since this format brings together European Union members and countries with a pending (or no) membership (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania). Diplomatic sources have confirmed that **Beijing uses this format to try to play countries against the EU**, amplifying existing fault lines, fueling resentment, such as when it spreads the idea that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are “less well treated” than Western European countries. In addition, the Party-State seems to be thinking about expanding this group to other non-EU countries, to diminish the influence of member states and give added influence to EU critics.



Be that as it may, this regional offensive is not simply economic: it also includes cultural influence, as shown, among other things, **by the increased number of Confucius Institutes** (37 in the 17 countries: 6 in Poland, 5 in Hungary, 4 in Romania, 3 in Greece and Slovakia, 2 in Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic and 1 in Slovenia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia)<sup>853</sup>; the **multiplication of programs aimed at the youth** (Bridge for the Future; China-CEE Young Political Leaders Forum) and at the not-so-young (Political Parties Dialogue); the project of a Fudan University campus in Budapest (see below), and the **China-CEE (for Central and Eastern Europe) Institute**, founded in April 2017.



Source: <https://china-cee.eu/2017/09/29/liu-qibao-unveils-china-cee-institute-in-hungary/>.

Its mission is to provide support for the 17+1 system by forging links in the academia and among think tanks in Hungary and in the rest of the CEE. The inaugural event was

853. Ivana Karaskova et al., *Empty shell no more: China's growing footprint in Central and Eastern Europe: Handbook for stakeholders*, China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE) (Apr. 2020), 19.



attended by Liu Qibao, director of the Propaganda Department, Wang Weiguang, president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), and Huang Ping, the executive director of the China-CEE Institute (see picture above).<sup>854</sup>

The China-CEE Institute is **derived from the CASS**. Huang Ping is, in fact, the director of its European Studies Institute, under which authority the China-CEE Institute is. If it proudly displays its independence with respect to European structures, this is due to the refusal of the Institute of World Economy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to cooperate with the CASS, due to the future think tank's then-blurry objectives and governance mechanisms.<sup>855</sup>

The China-CEE conducts two types of activities: organizing conferences and symposiums, with Chinese researchers visiting Europe in particular, and the publication of notes, reports and books. According to its 2019 annual report, it organized four international summits, three workshops, and seven conferences, published 10 studies, 8 books and over 800 weekly notes covering the 17 Central and Eastern European countries that year.<sup>856</sup>

The think tank is, first and foremost, interested in the relations between **China and Central and Eastern European countries, which are systematically presented as positive and mutually beneficial**. In fact, an important part of its work focuses on analyzing these countries. **The image of China in Central and Eastern Europe** is among the topics it closely monitors. A study and numerous books have been published on the topic since 2017: some have dealt with the region in general, others with one country in particular, or with the general image of China, while others have examined foreign representations on specific topics.<sup>857</sup> Unsurprisingly, the think tank played an important role during the Covid-19 crisis, relaying the Party's discourse and evaluating its adherence among European public opinions.

Beyond the diffusion of the Party's discourse, the China-CEE Institute seemingly **plays another, subtler, role** in the CCP's influence machinery. By gathering around the institute and its projects an increasing number of local researchers working closely or indirectly on China, and by forging ties with those countries' authorities to be present in the heart of their research systems, the Institute **prevents the emergence – or the survival – of independent research on China**. In that regard, there is a growingly notable bias in the formulation of questions in some PhD thesis on China. Its considerable financial resources allow the Chinese think tank to dominate this fragile market. The issue however, does not solely concerns Central and Eastern Europe as we saw previously (→ p. 286): the entire field, in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, needs to ensure the conditions for independent research on China.

**China-CEE is not the first Chinese think tank to be implanted in the West. In 2015, China created the Institute for China-American Studies (ICAS) in Washington.** Inaugurated with great fanfare in the presence of Henry Kissinger, and conceived to spread China's voice in Washington's ecosystem, particularly on maritime issues, the ICAS remains an insignificant actor whose work is unknown to most American leaders.<sup>858</sup> Its presence on social networks is negligible, it organized less than an event per month in 2019, and it

854. This position is now held by Chen Xin.

855. Antoaneta Roussi, "China Charts a Path into European Science," *Nature* (8 May 2019).

856. China-CEE Institute, *Annual Report 2019*.

857. As an example, see: Chen Xin, ed., "How the CEE Citizens View China's Development," China – CEE Institute (2017); Chen Xinx, ed., "How Slovakia Perceives the Belt and Road Initiative and China-CEEC Cooperation," China – CEE Institute (2019).

858. Isaac Stone Fish, "Beijing Establishes a D.C. Think Tank, and No One Notices," *Foreign Policy* (7 Jul. 2016).

publishes very little, despite a propitious period.<sup>859</sup> The **ICAS's obvious failure contrasts with the impact of the China-CEE Institute in Central and Eastern Europe**, and the difference is difficult to explain: lack of support from Chinese authorities? Short-term ambitions limited to the arbitral court's decision on the South China Sea in 2016? Lack of skills and of understanding on the functioning of the U.S. think tank ecosystem? Whatever the case may be, **Europe shows that China now knows how to put in place its narrative strategies through its think tanks**. It seems that the implementation of the CASS's branch is not meant to be a unique case, and **other first-rate think tanks will likely develop branches abroad in the near future**.

### Hungary, Europe's soft underbelly for Beijing

Hungary's Prime minister since 2010, and champion of "illiberalism," Viktor Orbán is known for holding sympathetic positions in the EU toward the "great authoritarians" states, Russia (he asked for the withdrawal of European sanctions), Turkey and China. Within a decade, he turned Hungary into the "bridgehead of China in Europe."<sup>860</sup> The first European country to sign a deal with Beijing as part of the Bridge and Roads Initiative (BRI), Hungary is the prime destination for Chinese investment in Central and Eastern Europe. Several big Hungarian companies, such as BorsodChem (the biggest national chemicals producer), were bought by Chinese companies.<sup>861</sup> Beijing initiated several major infrastructure works, including the high-speed railway line between Budapest and Belgrade that, as part of the BRI, aims to shorten the distance between the Greek port Piraeus, which was also ceded to a Chinese company, and the center of Europe; and the construction of "the biggest, most modern rail terminal in Europe," close to the Ukrainian border, which will welcome all the trains coming from China, and was branded the "Western gate" of 'the new silk roads.'"

In Hungary, and contrary to more and more European countries, Huawei can deploy a 5G network. Furthermore, during the Covid-19 epidemic, an "aerial bridge" on which the Hungarian government heavily communicated, delivered more than 90 million masks and 40 million protection cloths from China; and, in late January 2021, Hungary became the first EU country to approve a Chinese vaccine (Sinopharm). In September 2021, the Hungarian government signed a letter of intent with Sinopharm to build an infrastructure for the local production of the Chinese vaccine within ten months.<sup>862</sup> It is also in Budapest that Fudan University will build the first Chinese campus in Europe, on a gigantic 130-hectare plot – the government announced it two years after banning the Central European University (CEU), which was attacked for having been founded and financed by the U.S. billionaire of Hungarian descent George Soros. He is considered by Orbán as an enemy of the state; And yet, the Court of Justice of the EU considered this decision contrary to European law.<sup>863</sup> The construction could be contracted to the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), which has been "suspected of corruption and espionage in many parts of the world in recent years" (this is the company that bugged the African Union headquarters, for example → p. 130). It apparently use mostly Chinese labor and materials, at a cost of €1.5 billion – more than the country spent on its entire higher education system in 2019 – a budget "mainly financed by a Chinese loan, which Hungary would pay for."<sup>864</sup> This Hungarian branch of Fudan University should open in 2024 and quickly grow to accommodate 330 teachers, 150 administrative staff and 5,000 students, including 500 PhD students, by 2028.<sup>865</sup>

859. See ICAS's website: <https://chinaus-icas.org/>.

860. Jean-Baptiste Chastand, "La Hongrie, tête de pont de la Chine en Europe" ("Hungary, a Chinese Bridgehead in Europe"), *Le Monde* (22 Jan. 2021).

861. "The economic Relations between China and Hungary Flourish," *French.China.org.cn* (22 May 2019).

862. "Hungary signs letter of intent to produce Chinese Sinopharm shots," Reuters, September 10, 2021.

863. Jean-Baptiste Chastand, "La justice européenne autorise l'Université Soros à se réinstaller à Budapest" ("European Courts Authorize 'Soros's University' to Settle Again in Budapest"), *Le Monde* (6 Oct. 2020).

864. Panyi Szabolcs, "Huge Chinese Loan to Cover the Construction of Fudan University in Budapest," *Direkt 36* (6 Apr. 2021) (for the last two quotes).

865. Panyi Szabolcs, "To please China, Orbán's government shifted plans to favor Fudan's campus over Student City," *Direkt 36* (14 May 2021).

To complement the efforts of the China-CEE Institute, Beijing has more recently launched **a new initiative, this time aimed at Central Europe alone** – easier to manage at a time when its eastern segment, in particular the Baltic countries, have been questioning their relationship with China. The 17+1 format has been weakened by Lithuania’s departure and calls for others to follow suit (→ p. 644), and the states of the region are less and less naïve about Beijing’s ambitions. Hence, Beijing has focused on the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) by creating a **Research Center for the Visegrád Group** within the **Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS)** in January 2021. Headed by Wang Jian (王健), who also directs the SASS’s Institute of International Relations, the center was notably featured at the second China-Central and Eastern European Countries Fair in June in Ningbo, Zhejiang.<sup>866</sup> The SASS is a powerful vehicle: founded in 1958, the oldest Chinese think tank in social sciences, it is one of the best endowed and politically connected academic organizations in China. Some of its departments also act as cover structures for MSS agents, as the US Department of Justice detailed in the documents of a case of espionage: “since at least 2014, the FBI has assessed that Chinese intelligence officers have used SASS affiliation as cover identities.”<sup>867</sup>



Inauguration of the Visegrád Research Centre at the SASS in January 2021 (source: Polish Presidency of the Visegrád Group, <https://www.gov.pl/web/V4presidency/official-opening-of-the-research-center-for-visegrad-group-v4-in-shanghai>).

## B. The use of local relays

### 1. Think tanks

**The CCP has built a vast network of relationships with think tanks and foundations around the world.** These structures cooperate with China to varying degrees and for a variety of reasons. Some simply organize events with China on an ad hoc basis, while others have developed relatively extensive collaborative programs that espouse the Chinese reading of international relations. Some identify a community of interest or ideology with Beijing, while others are only driven by greed. These partners compensate for the weaknesses of the Chinese presence in international debates.

**A special effort has been dedicated to supporting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with dedicated platforms** such as the Belt and Road Think Tank Cooperation Alliance (一带一路智库合作联盟). The Alliance brings together some 50 Chinese research institutions and its international branch (Belt and Road International Think Tank

866. “Le think-tank du renseignement chinois s’installe en Europe centrale” (“Chinese intelligence think-tank sets up shop in Central Europe”), *Intelligence Online* (22 Jun. 2021).

867. US Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, “Virginia Man Arrested and Charged With Espionage” (22 Jun. 2017).

Cooperation Alliance, 一带一路国际智库合作联盟) was launched in 2016. Other platforms are the Silk Road Think Tank Network (SiLKS, 丝路国际智库网络) inaugurated at the Silk Road Forum in Madrid in 2015; Research and Development International (RDI, 蓝迪国际智库平台); and the Belt and Road Studies Network (BRSN, 一带一路国际智库合作委员会). Nadège Rolland analyzed these alliances for *Sinopsis*.<sup>868</sup>

In the following pages, we distinguish **three categories, or degrees, of Chinese influence through local think tanks**, according to criteria that will be detailed: **occasional partners, circumstantial allies, and accomplices**. To avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to add that here, as elsewhere in this report which focuses on how the Party-State designs and implements its influence operations, **these categories are to be understood from Beijing's point of view, and not from the point of view of local relays**, who generally do not have the impression of being partners, allies or, even less, accomplices. What we are saying is that **this is how Beijing sees and uses them, whether they are aware of it or not**.

We will give examples that are illustrative: they allow us to understand what, in concrete terms, these relations consist of. In no way do they constitute judgments on the quality of the institutions and individuals cited, or even on their positions vis-à-vis China: **it is not a question of whether they are “pro-Beijing” – most are not -, only that the partnerships they establish, especially with the Chinese embassy, the events they organize or in which they participate, the Party magazines in which they publish, or the stories they disseminate, de facto contribute to China's influence**. This is the case even if they also know how to be critical of Beijing, because one does not cancel out the other. **This is not to say that these think tanks should not have relations with the Chinese authorities**. Dialogue is fundamental: it is important to continue to see and talk to each other. Other institutions, including IRSEM, and the authors of this report, also receive Chinese delegations in private, even from the PLA, and carry out missions in China.<sup>869</sup> The difference with the examples given in the following pages is that, in so doing, no resonance or publicity is given to the Party's propaganda – and, moreover, the Party-State can be more freely contradicted, since there is no fear that it will end a partnership.

#### *a. Occasional partners*

This first category refers to think tanks, foundations and research centers which, far from championing the Chinese model, serve as **a sounding board on local markets of ideas**. Actors in this category may be directly solicited by Beijing, especially when it is ‘simply’ a matter of co-organizing events designed by the Party. Other organizations may however volunteer their services. These partnerships are beneficial to the Party because, with limited efforts, they expand its contact area and acceptability on foreign land. When a reputable think tank organizes an event with China, Beijing is looking for that organization's ability to get the Party's message across. Rather than the scientific dimension of the interventions, it is their compatibility with the Chinese discourse and their ability to be heard by a large section of the population that appeals to China.

Think tanks in this category generally have a certain credibility on the national or even international scene, and a pluralistic production. They do not work specifically on China and they maintain relations with a large number of countries, including the United States and

868. Nadège Rolland, “Mapping the Footprint of Belt and Road Influence Operations,” *Sinopsis* (12 Aug. 2019).

869. See Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer's Twitter feed of September 24, 2021: [https://twitter.com/jeangene\\_vilmer/status/1441308634072248323](https://twitter.com/jeangene_vilmer/status/1441308634072248323).



possibly Taiwan. Besides, some may have had a critical discourse and publicly denounced Chinese retaliatory measures (*ad hominem* attacks, lawsuits, sanctions) and censorship when the Party tried to impose it on them. Thus, they cannot be considered “pro-Chinese,” and this is precisely what increases their value from Beijing’s point of view.

### The example of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS)

The **“Paris Forum on the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative”, co-organized since 2017 by the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS) and the Chinese Embassy in France**, belongs to this category. This event makes a laudatory presentation of Chinese narratives on the New Silk Roads. Three sessions have so far been held: November 29, 2017, January 10, 2019 and December 19, 2019.<sup>870</sup> The forums are **systematically introduced by the Chinese ambassador to France. And, according to an observer, “all criticism has been carefully stifled,”** and the events aim **“above all to communicate in order to appease fears about this enormous plan launched in 2013 by the Chinese president, Xi Jinping.”**<sup>871</sup> Commentating on the first edition, the newspaper *La Lettre A* also believed that “the conference gave the impression of a lobbying operation in favor of the Chinese project,” with speakers who, in their large majority, “acted as fervent proponents of a French adhesion to the Chinese project.”<sup>872</sup> Several researchers “have underlined the apparent ‘docility’ of the speakers at these conferences and questioned a possible influence from Beijing’ on the institute. Pascal Boniface [IRIS’ director] firmly denied these accusations.”<sup>873</sup>



During the first forum in 2017, the Chinese embassy handled most of the interventions on the Chinese side. The participating Chinese think tanks were structures of the state apparatus. For example, the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS – 中国国际问题研究所) is the official think tank of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR – 中国现代国际关系研究院) is considered a branch of the Ministry of State Security.<sup>874</sup> The composition of

870. The program is available here: <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Programme-Les-nouvellesroutes-de-la-soie-29-nov-2017.pdf>; <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Programme-Les-nouvellesroutes-de-la-soie-10-janvier-2019.pdf>; <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Programme-Lesnouvelles-routes-de-la-soie-19-decembre-2019-1.pdf>.

871. “La Chine fait la promotion de ses “Nouvelles Routes de la Soie” à Paris,” (“China Promotes the ‘New Silk Roads’”), *Novastan* (11 Jan. 2019).

872. “Pékin intensifie son lobbying parisiens sur la route la soie” (“Beijing Intensified its Parisien Lobbying on the New Silk Roads”), *La Lettre A*, 1800 (30 Nov. 2017).

873. Nicolas Quénel, “La propagande de Pékin à la conquête de la France” (“Beijing’s propaganda set to conquer France”), *Libération* (3 Apr. 2021), 9

874. Although the Chinese regime never mentions this membership, clear links between the two structures can be identified: a large part of the CICIR staff is trained, and even teaches, at the University of International Studies (国际关系学院 – often called Guoguan University). However, in 1965, this university was placed under the responsibility of the Central Investigation Department of the CCP (中共中央调查), which was integrated into the Ministry of State Security when it was created in 1983 (→ p. 81). See also the Baidu pages (in Chinese) of the university and the DCI: <https://archive.vn/pos0t> et <https://archive.vn/pWocZ>.

the forum changed little in subsequent sessions, with most Chinese speakers coming from Party-State structures and passing its narratives on.

It was also striking to note that specific warnings expressed by speakers about the Chinese project, notably that it must respect a number of principles, were coined in the very terms of the debate constructed by the Party. These speakers thus validated the ambitions of the CCP through the vocabulary it had forged. This observation applied especially to **political actors, who are the Chinese authorities' preferred targets as they are "easier" to influence than researchers.** For instance, at the second session on January 10, 2019, Christian Cambon, senator of Val-de-Marne and chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and the Armed Forces, declared about the BRI: "[we] are starting to realize that this is a much more important ambition [that we previously thought] that aims to create a new world order based on the development of exchanges which presents many advantages [...] from this point of view, it seems to us that a certain number of specific points must be respected, notably the win-win principle."<sup>875</sup> The adoption of this Chinese expression placed the debate in some sort of tautology. China is invited to propose a "win-win" project, which happens to be precisely the Chinese leitmotif. The senator borrowed additional elements from the Chinese narrative: first, the inevitability of China's rise to power, which could only lead to the decision to work with it; second, the representation of the Silk Roads as a factor of peace in the world. All this illustrates **the prevalence of the vocabulary conveyed by the Chinese Embassy in the French debate.**

Another feature of this debate was worth noting: the comparison between the United States and China; the idea that, since we cooperate with the United States, there is no legitimate reason to refuse to cooperate with China. According to this idea, France should adopt a kind of **"equidistant diplomacy,"** as if the country was as far away from China as from the US. This way of **equalizing China and the United States** is widespread in France, without being really explained or justified.

Under these conditions, it is evident that, from the embassy's point of view, an event such as the "Paris Forum on the 'Belt and Road' Initiative" **serves first and foremost to promote the Silk Roads in France, while leaving the French public with the impression that China is willing to discuss its foreign policy.** In this way, such an action helps reinforce the positive image of China.

These events are not the only ones in which IRIS interacts with the Chinese embassy. As we will see (→ p. 344), IRIS Director Pascal Boniface and, to a lesser extent, IRIS senior research fellow Barthélémy Courmont have also participated in events organized by or with the Chinese Embassy or Party agencies.<sup>876</sup> As we shall also see, IRIS maintains ties with the **publishing house La Route de la Soie**, founded and directed by Sonia Bressler, which notably published Maxime Vivas's polemical book on Uyghurs (→ p. 335). Not only have Pascal Boniface and IRIS researchers published articles in three of the first eight issues of the journal *Dialogue Chine-France*, which La Route de la Soie co-publishes with an organization dependent on the CCP's Propaganda Department (→ p. 341), but Courmont (IRIS) is also an author and series editor at La Route de la Soie, and IRIS has published a note

875. "La dimension géopolitique et de sécurité des nouvelles routes de la soie, entretien avec Christian Cambon" ("The Geopolitical and Security Dimension of the New Silk Roads, Interview with Christian Cambon"), IRIS Account on Vimeo (10 Jan. 2017), <https://vimeo.com/3124853782>.

876. The IRIS director notably participated in the International Forum on Global Governance and Shared Future co-organized by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies (ACCWS) on August 26, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/pascalboniface/status/1430804547602108418>). The ACCWS belongs to the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), a Party agency under the Propaganda Department (→ p. 321).

by Bressler on “China Bashing” (→ p. 343). IRIS has also published **Pierre Picquart**,<sup>877</sup> a researcher known for relaying Beijing’s positions. The author of several books, all of them apologetic,<sup>878</sup> Picquart frequently appears in Chinese media (but also in Russian media, notably RT and Sputnik), to explain, for instance, that “the violence caused by demonstrators in Hong Kong is disturbing and intolerable,” that “never in world history has a country evolved so favorably than China has in 70 years,” or that “the CCP is leading the Chinese to achieve remarkable accomplishments.”<sup>879</sup> Systematically presented in these media as a “doctor in geopolitics and human geography from the University Paris VIII” as if to better make him play the role of a scientific guarantee, his positions are relayed by the Chinese embassy (→ p. 234), and he has participated in events organized by it.<sup>880</sup>

Despite all this, it is important to note that IRIS also sometimes publishes less China-friendly notes. The structure seems to maintain a relative pluralism, and both Boniface and Courmont know how to be critical of Beijing as well. For example, Boniface publicly defended Valérie Niquet when she announced that she was being sued for defamation by Huawei in November 2019 (→ p. 53),<sup>881</sup> and Antoine Bondaz when he was attacked by the Chinese embassy in March 2021<sup>882</sup> – which, according to *Libération*, may have led IRIS to reevaluate its relationship with the embassy (→ p. 239). In other words, while their occasional relationship with Chinese authorities, such as sometimes giving the floor to Party relays, or participating in CCP-driven publications or events, de facto contributes to Chinese influence operations in France – which justifies the presence of this example in this report – there is no indication that this is a conscious effort. **Unlike other actors described in the following pages, there is no defense of the Chinese model here.** This is why, in the gradation of influence through think tanks that we have established, this is only its first degree.

#### The example of The Bridge Tank (France)

The French think tank **The Bridge Tank** falls into the same category of occasional partners. This association, created in 2013 by the economist **Joël Ruet** and, since then, chaired by him, presents itself as “an innovative exchange tool, present in major global forums, active with innovative companies, mobilized by decision-makers.”<sup>883</sup> It also devotes a significant part of its efforts to China: “China, in particular, is a country with which The Bridge Tank has established working relationships at several levels,”<sup>884</sup> explains Ruet, who

877. *Regards sur la politique internationale de la Chine* (Insights into China’s international policy), interview with Pierre Picquart, conducted by Steve Dhahar, IRIS, Asia Focus #52, November 2017, <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Asia-focus-52.pdf>.

878. *L’empire chinois: mieux comprendre le futur numéro 1 mondial*, 2004 (The Chinese empire: better understanding the future number 1 in the world); *La forme olympique de la Chine* (The Olympic shape of China), 2008; *La Chine dans vingt ans et le reste du monde: demain, tous chinois?* (China in twenty years and the rest of the world: Tomorrow, all Chinese?), 2011; *La Chine: une menace militaire?* (China: a military threat?), 2013; *La renaissance de la route de la soie: l’incroyable défi chinois du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (The revival of the Silk Road: the incredible Chinese challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century), 2018.

879. “Jamais dans l’histoire mondiale, un pays n’aura autant évolué aussi favorablement en 70 années que la Chine” (“Never in the history of the world has a country evolved so favorably in 70 years as China”) Xinhua, (16 Oct. 2019); “le PCC conduit le peuple chinois à accomplir des réalisations remarquables” (“the CCP leads the Chinese people to make remarkable achievements”), Radio Chine Internationale (6 Jul. 2021), <http://french.cri.cn/interview/list/714/20210706/685150.html> (<https://archive.vn/j1Ij>).

880. webinar on May 6, 2020, which the embassy reports on its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AmbassadeChine/posts/257061275673091>).

881. <https://twitter.com/pascalboniface/status/1198548335390535680>.

882. <https://twitter.com/pascalboniface/status/1372929048737947656>.

883. <https://thebridgetank.org/qui-sommes-nous/> (<https://archive.vn/Bg4zJ>).

884. Joël Ruet, Forum for the post-COVID-19 EU-China cooperation, co-organized by The Bridge Tank and the Chinese Embassy in France (15 Oct. 2020), session report, introduction <https://thebridgetank.org/wp-content/>

was once a visiting researcher at the Center for China in the World Economy at Qinghua University in Beijing.<sup>885</sup>

One of the Bridge Tank's policy board members is Kang Rongping (康荣平), a researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中国社会科学院世界经济与政治研究所研究员) and at the Center for China and Globalization (whose president is a DTFU advisor → p. 40). And the Bridge Tank's China associate director is Zhao Wei (赵巍), an associate professor at ESSCA School of Management in Angers as well as a member of the Institute for the Reform and Development of the Pearl River Delta at Sun Yat-sen University (中山大学珠三角改革发展研究院). The team has other China experts, including Wang Xieshu, a researcher specializing in financial issues, or Zhang Yang, who works on cooperation between China, Europe and Africa in addition to her position as a partner in the consulting firm Cibola partners (where Joël Ruet is a member of the advisory committee). It should be noted, however, that the governance of the Bridge Tank's actions with Chinese organizations is not only the responsibility of its president and the Chinese members of its team, but also of other French personalities and experts on its Board.<sup>886</sup>

The Bridge Tank **partners with the Boao Forum, the “Chinese Davos,”** which Joël Ruet has attended every year since 2018, alongside Jean-Pierre Raffarin and many French economic leaders. It should be noted that this forum, founded in 1998, chaired by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and with an international council that includes former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, is a rare place that still provides participants with some leeway with respect to Chinese propaganda.<sup>887</sup> Ruet also regularly intervenes in **the French and Chinese press**, for example in *Le Monde* in 2018, to describe China as having a “Promethean capacity,” and to highlight the “historical opportunity to capitalize on the existing Franco-Chinese industrial relationship, and its extension” to create “one of the driving forces of the post-American world”<sup>888</sup>; or in *La Chine au présent* in 2020, to suggest reading President Xi Jinping's *China's Governance*.<sup>889</sup> The Twitter account of the Chinese embassy has relayed his positions (image below). He also attended (as well as representatives of several other French think tanks not mentioned in this report) the launching ceremony of the English and French editions of another book by Xi Jinping, *The Belt and Road Initiative*, in April 2019 in Beijing, during the second Silk Roads Summit, during which The Bridge Tank supported greening this initiative, which emits CO<sub>2</sub>.<sup>890</sup>

uploads/2020/11/0-Introduction-Verbatim.pdf.

885. In 2010-2011, according to his resume: <https://archive.vn/COS9V>.

886. A clarification provided by the Bridge Tank on October 3, 2021.

887. <https://thebridgetank.org/2021/04/28/le-bridge-tank-au-forum-de-boao-dans-les-medias/> (<https://archive.vn/QBU7V>).

888. Joël Ruet, “La Chine et la France ‘peuvent créer un des axes moteurs du monde post-américain’” (“China and France ‘can create one of the driving forces of the post-American world’”), *Le Monde* (7 Jan. 2018). The title of this article, written during President Macron's 2018 visit to China, refers to American Fareed Zakaria's book, *The Post-American World* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

889. “Perhaps one way to see, in the current context, that the Chinese contribution to the governance of everyday life can be found in reading, in particular, *The Governance of China*, with texts offering lengthy examples on the ‘well-being of the people’” (Joël Ruet, “Nous sommes tous des Wuhanais” (“We are all Wuhanese”), *La Chine au présent* (5 Mar. 2020) (<https://archive.vn/etay2>).

890. Source: <https://twitter.com/JoelRuet/status/1120964112069144577>. The following year, in a webinar with China International Publishing Group (CIPG) on the “Post-Covid” world, French speakers, including The Bridge Tank, also spoke on “the recommended ‘green’ recovery to put the fight against global warming at the heart of global governance” (clarification provided by The Bridge Tank in a September 24, 2021 correspondence with the authors).





On the left, Joël Ruet with Li Baodong (李保东), vice minister of foreign affairs of the PRC (in charge of international organizations and conferences, international economic affairs and arms control) and secretary general of the Boao Forum, in May 2018.<sup>891</sup> In the middle, Joël Ruet is a regular contributor to Chinese state media (here *China Daily* in April 2020<sup>892</sup>) but also Russian media (RT France and Sputnik). On the right, the embassy publishes on Twitter a video of Joël Ruet produced by CGTN.

**The Bridge Tank co-organizes events with the Chinese Embassy in France**, such as the “Forum for the Post-COVID-19 EU-China Cooperation” held on October 15, 2020 or the “Forum on China-EU Cooperation in the New Context” on January 21, 2021. The later was attended by Jean-Pierre Raffarin while Ambassador Lu Shaye opened the proceedings by thanking his “friends” “for [their] support for the **Chinese Embassy in France** and [himself].”<sup>893</sup> On October 11, 2019, at the opening of a “high-level seminar on China and Sino-French relations,” also co-organized by The Bridge Tank, Ambassador Lu Shaye already “thank[ed] the Bridge Tank here for the high quality of its work.”<sup>894</sup> In its dealings with the embassy, The Bridge Tank mobilizes many French personalities, including at least three former prime ministers, six former ministers, five former ambassadors and about thirty experts, practitioners or general officers. Events are generally co-funded, which explains why **The Bridge Tank receives donations from the Chinese Embassy** (€40,000 in 2019) **and Chinese companies** (€34,947.50 from the publishing company Bosheng International in 2019).<sup>895</sup> This transparency is acknowledged and appreciable: unlike other think tanks mentioned in this report, The Bridge Tank publishes detailed financial statements. Moreover, the association specifies that, in total, its financial commitments on China “clearly exceed the subsidies received and are made up for by donations from [its] members or European companies.”<sup>896</sup>

891. Source: <https://twitter.com/TheBridgeTank/status/1001164972439859200>. Joël Ruet specified that he was unaware of Li Baodong’s dual affiliation at the time, and that he only met him in his capacity at Bo’ao (correspondence with the authors dated October 3, 2021).

892. Source: <https://twitter.com/JoelRuet/status/1255602647152963591/photo/1>.

893. “Allocution de l’Ambassadeur LU Shaye au Forum sur la coopération Chine-UE dans le nouveau contexte” (“Speech by Ambassador LU Shaye at the Forum on China-EU Cooperation in the New Context”), Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the French Republic (22 Jan. 2021), <https://archive.vn/QhqAt>.

894. “Discours de S.E.M. l’Ambassadeur Lu Shaye au séminaire de haut niveau sur le 70<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la République populaire de Chine” (“Speech by H.E. Ambassador Lu Shaye at the High Level Seminar on the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the People’s Republic of China”), Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the French Republic (11 Oct. 2019), <https://archive.vn/zeAoP>. The full title of the conference was “China: what keys to the future? Seminar on China and Sino-French Relations” as seen on screen in a CGTN video (14 Oct. 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXmFMtoIWws> (at 0:14). On its website, however, the Chinese Embassy chose to replace this title with the context in which this seminar was taking place, reducing it to a “high-level seminar on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People’s Republic of China” (see next note) – even though it was also the “40 years of economic reforms” and the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Franco-Chinese diplomatic relations.

895. According to the 2019 financial report: [https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/document/associations\\_a/814944260\\_31122019\\_RECTIF1](https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/document/associations_a/814944260_31122019_RECTIF1). The Bosheng grant was largely provisioned for the publication of proceedings from events held in 2020 on the dialogue of civilizations (information provided by The Bridge Tank in correspondence with the authors on October 3, 2021).

896. Correspondence between The Bridge Tank and the authors (3 Oct. 2021).



Events co-organized by The Bridge Tank and the Chinese Embassy, October 15, 2020 (left<sup>897</sup>) and January 21, 2021 (right).<sup>898</sup>

The Bridge Tank also collaborates with **the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies (ACCWS) of the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), a Party agency supervised by the Propaganda Department.**<sup>899</sup> The ACCWS was founded in 2004 as the Foreign Communication Research Center of the Foreign Language Bureau of China. Its website details a team of about 100 permanent researchers working on issues of communication, Chinese storytelling and world public opinion.<sup>900</sup> It also deals with various instruments of influence, such as the **Global Young Leaders Dialogue**,<sup>901</sup> a program that invites to China potential future leaders (Joël Ruet is a member of its international steering committee<sup>902</sup>). On March 8, 2021, The Bridge Tank sponsored a “Think Tank & Media Forum on Global Economic Development” with, among others, Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s FPI and the CIPG of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>903</sup> On May 7, The Bridge Tank and the ACCWS co-hosted a webinar on “Collaboration between France and China in the Post-Covid Era,” again with Jean-Pierre Raffarin.<sup>904</sup> On June 16, 2021, The Bridge Tank signed a memorandum of understanding with the ACCWS, in the framework of a grouping of think tank (named the “Contemporary China and World” Joint Research Centers<sup>905</sup>). The vice-president of CIPG, Gao Anming, attended the ceremony.

**The Bridge Tank works directly with the CIPG**, whose delegation it hosted in Paris in 2019.<sup>906</sup> On October 21-22, 2019, the two organizations organized with the Information Office of the State Council of China a “Sino-French Dialogue on Civilizations” in Paris, with the participation of the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, the President of the French Constitutional Council and former Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, and former

897. Source: <https://thebridgetank.org> (<https://archive.vn/nJxN6>).

898. Source: <https://archive.vn/WTi7k>.

899. “The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CIPG,” *Beijing Review* (5 Sep.2019), <https://archive.vn/qgNw0>.

900. See the “关于我们” (About Us) page of the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies website. [http://www.accws.org.cn/gywm/201212/t20121226\\_45846.htm](http://www.accws.org.cn/gywm/201212/t20121226_45846.htm).

901. [http://www.globalyoungleadersdialogue.com/cn/.](http://www.globalyoungleadersdialogue.com/cn/)

902. As the Global Young Leaders Dialogue website states: <https://archive.vn/mC13b>.

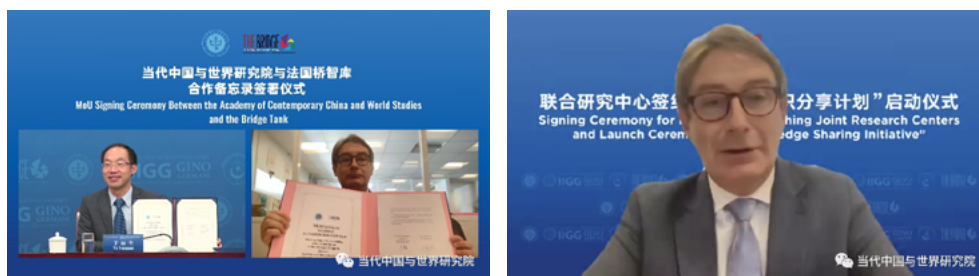
903. “Think Tank & Media Forum on Global Economic Development,” ACCWS (17 Mar. 2021), <https://archive.vn/oxnYj>.

904. “Webinar eyes closer China-France collaboration in post-COVID-19 Era,” ACCWS (4 Sep. 2020), <https://archive.vn/xnpR2>.

905. Other international partners of the ACCWS are the Gino Germani Research Institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires and the Pakistan-China Institute. See “Joint research centers and knowledge sharing initiative launched,” ACCWS (17 Jun. 2021), <https://archive.vn/yWz90>.

906. As indicated in the 2019 financial report since this hosting involved an expense of €2105 ([https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/document/associations\\_a/814944260\\_31122019\\_RECTIF1](https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/document/associations_a/814944260_31122019_RECTIF1)).

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin.<sup>907</sup> It was an exercise in parallel diplomacy (track 2), in this case cultural diplomacy, with the launch of a video on the Château de Versailles.<sup>908</sup> On March 8, 2021, the Bridge Tank and CIPG, this time with the FPI, organized a forum on global economic development.<sup>909</sup>



MoU signing ceremony between The Bridge Tank and ACCWS, June 16, 2021, and speech by Joel Ruet (source: <https://archive.vn/yWz90>).

Finally, among the other Chinese actors with whom the Bridge Tank interacts, we should mention:

- the **Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA)**, which is linked to the DTFU (→ p. 40) and which Joël Ruet met in September 2018 in Xi'an on the sidelines of the delegation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Franco-Chinese Cultural Forum co-organized by WRSA and the Fondation Prospective et Innovation (FPI → p. 323),<sup>910</sup>
- the **CGTN Think Tank** (→ p. 309), which a biography of Joël Ruet actually states that he “co-launched.”<sup>911</sup> Among other projects, the two organizations co-organized the “Forum on the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals” on September 17-18, 2020<sup>912</sup>;
- the **China Institute of International Studies (CIIS)**, the official think tank of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with which the Bridge Tank co-organized an online conference (“France-China Cooperation: Identifying Common Values and Visions for Shared Action”) on August 29, 2021,<sup>913</sup> with the participation of two former Chinese and two former French ambassadors. Yu Jiang, the vice president of CIIS, also attended. He is a French-speaking Chinese diplomat, French National School of Administration (ENA) alumnus, former political counselor at the Chinese Embassy in France, and, since 2020, he has also been deputy secretary-general of the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought Research Center (习近平外交思想研究中心), set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and affiliated to the CIIS.<sup>914</sup>

While these interactions make The Bridge Tank an occasional partner of Chinese authorities, it is important to note that **this think tank does not defend the Chinese model, nor does it disseminate Party narratives**. As its name indicates, it acts rather as a “bridge.” For

907. “Un consensus parvenu lors du ‘Dialogue sino-français sur les civilisations’” (“A consensus reached at the ‘Sino-French Dialogue on Civilizations’”), Xinhua (24 Oct. 2019).

908. A clarification provided by the Bridge Tank on September 24, 2021.

909. “China’s ‘Double Assembly’: the Bridge Tank Co-Hosts the Think Tank and Media Forum on Global Economic Development,” The Bridge Tank (8 Mar. 2021), <https://archive.vn/16CaN>.

910. Source: <https://twitter.com/JoelRuet/status/1042787279528493056>.

911. <http://www.globalyoungleadersdialogue.com/archives/766>.

912. “Forum on the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,” The Bridge Tank (18 Sep. 2020), <https://archive.vn/IB8vA>.

913. Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RzwN-fd34k>.

914. From his page on the CIIS website: <https://archive.vn/3kCzq>. The proliferation of research centers on Xi Jinping’s thought in recent years is one of the symptoms of a strengthening of the personality cult in China.



example, it organized, during the summer of 2021, a meeting between the presidents of the two liberal and socialist internationals with the objective of seeking coordination in the face of the rise of illiberalism and other anti-democratic fronts.<sup>915</sup> And a bridge can be used in both directions: in this case, The Bridge Tank uses the multiple channels it maintains with Chinese authorities **to defend French positions**, particularly in the fight against global warming and for the preservation of biodiversity, a subject it has frequently addressed since the COP21. During a January 21, 2021 seminar co-organized with the embassy, for instance, several French speakers mentioned France's strategic interests and pointed out certain shortcomings in the draft comprehensive agreement between the EU and China on investments.

### *b. Circumstantial allies*

Actors in this category not only collaborate occasionally with the Chinese Embassy and/or Party agencies but, without sharing the CCP's ideology or even its strategic objectives, they believe that it is in their interest – of whatever nature they may be – **to spread the Party's narratives on a regular basis**. Their motivations are diverse: for some, it may be anti-Americanism, which means opposing American power rather than adhering to Chinese values; for others, it may be opportunism, as China can help struggling institutions increase their influence or help them reinvent themselves. In any case, these institutions often act as spokespersons for China by providing an effective vehicle for Beijing's discursive strategies. In doing so, they too participate in **building a positive image of China's power**.

The fact that these think tanks are pluralistic, sometimes formulating criticisms of the Party-State, and working on other subjects, including the United States and Europe, does not change anything, since they nonetheless reproduce Chinese narratives. From Beijing's point of view, **this dissemination is even more efficient when it is diluted in a pluralistic whole, since the transmitter will be less suspected of playing into China's hands**.

#### The example of the French Prospective and Innovation Foundation (FPI)

In France, the **Fondation Prospective et Innovation (FPI)** illustrates this second category. Created in 1989 by François Dalle and René Monory, who was then a president of the Vienne General Council, minister of the Economy and president of the Senate, it initially ambioned to create a discussion about “continuities inherited from the past” and the “factors of the future.” It was symbolically established at Poitiers' Futuroscope (imagined by René Monory). Today, Jean-Pierre Raffarin (a former prime minister) leads the foundation. Since 2006, however, it moved from its original objectives to focus on three main areas<sup>916</sup>: understanding and appreciating rising new powers, such as China or Africa; stimulating competitiveness by enlightening and supporting companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and intermediate-sized enterprises (ISEs); and participating in the design of a new global, national, and local governance.

Over the past decade, China has clearly become the preferred theme of the foundation. **At least half the publications and the majority of its activities have dealt with China**, with continued growth over the period that could indicate that the foundation prefers, when it comes to China, organizing events rather than publishing documents – perhaps

915. A clarification provided by the Bridge Tank on September 24, 2021.

916. “La Fondation Prospective et Innovation: presentation,” Fondation prospective et innovation, <http://www.prospective-innovation.org/la-fondation-prospective-et-innovation/presentation/>.



because it is a more appropriate vehicle to influence the political elite.<sup>917</sup> The real number is probably even higher because some publications and activities officially dedicated to current affairs were in fact almost exclusively about China, and usually at its advantage. This was notably the case of the forum organized by the FPI at the Futuroscope on August 27, 2021. Behind a neutral title (“Les vertiges du monde. Retrouver l’équilibre” [*The Vertigo of the World. Finding a Balance Again*]), it was indeed devoted to the relations to Beijing.<sup>918</sup> Among the speakers, and in addition to Jean-Pierre Raffarin, were Pascal Boniface, director of IRIS (→ p. 316);<sup>919</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, one of the main pro-Chinese intellectuals on the international scene and in the Singaporean debate (→ p. 515) – the interrogative title of his latest book (*Has China Won?*) has interestingly been translated by an affirmation in French (*Le jour où la Chine va gagner* [*The Day China Wins*]<sup>920</sup>) – or André Chieng, the vice-president of the Comité France-Chine, a group of French companies with interests in China that Xi Jinping personally thanked for having “played an active role in Franco-Chinese economic exchanges. [The Committee] has contributed a lot to the economy of our two countries.”<sup>921</sup>

The figures are revealing, but the **content of the publications and interventions** of FPI members is even clearer in setting the institution’s role in **incorporating and propagating many narratives constructed by the Party**:

- **On China as the savior of an international order sabotaged by the United States:** “At a time when the United States paralyzed the WTO by refusing to renew the members of the Dispute Settlement Body, after it dealt a major blow to the Paris Climate agreements, after it refused to redistribute voting rights at the IMF, after it killed the Iranian nuclear agreement, it is essential to encourage China to participate actively in defining and adapting the international order.”<sup>922</sup>
- **On a “win-win” China as an opportunity for France:** “China is adept of ‘win-win’ solutions. It is constantly striving to develop formulas where each of the stakeholders can benefit from their engagement. For the French, who are used to a highly organized market, being forced to adapt to a constantly changing market is a great opportunity.”<sup>923</sup>
- **On the “community of common destiny” dear to Xi Jinping** (which is nothing more than a project of Sinicization of the international system): “In recent times we have been able to measure the importance of China’s choices, notably through concrete support for the euro, during our debt crisis, or on the occasion of the Paris Climate agreements. We can also recall China’s positive attitudes toward international organiza-

917. In January 2021, the IPF website listed 26 publications (since October 2011) out of 52 on China, compared to only 10 on foresight and innovation, 7 on Africa and the Middle East, 5 on European democracy and multilateralism, 2 on the state of the world, and 2 on culture and religion; as well as 98 events (since April 2008) out of 177 (<https://archive.vn/OfAJv>). Since then, the site has been redesigned, with new headings and a different distribution, but you can see on the books page, for example, that about half of them are about China (<https://prospective-innovation.org/publications/livres/>).

918. Richard Arzt, “La Chine face au monde: ce qu’en disent des spécialistes français” (“China and the world: what French experts say”), *Slate* (8 Sep. 2021).

919. The program is available online: <https://prospective-innovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/FPI-Programme-Futuroscope-actualise.pdf>.

920. Kishore Mahbubani, *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2020; *Le Jour où la Chine va gagner. La fin de la suprématie américaine*, Paris, Saint Simon, 2021. Note that the subtitle is also more affirmative, since it moves from a “challenge” to American supremacy to its outright “end.”

921. A quote from the France-China Committee website: <https://www.comitefrancechine.com/qui-sommes-nous/>.

922. “Compte rendu de la conférence/Débat des 55 ans de relations diplomatiques Franco-Chinoises,” Fondation Prospective et Innovation (25 Mar. 2019). <https://archive.vn/FamHC>.

923. *Ibid.*

tions such as the UN and UNESCO. “A Community of common destiny for mankind” can bring people together.”<sup>924</sup>

- **On the United States as a more significant threat than China:** “one can well imagine that once the compromise with China has been found and finalized, it will be Europe’s turn. One can wonder what interest Europe can still find in being an ally of the United States. There is talk of a Chinese threat, but it is a potential one: America’s threat is present. Between the two, Europe must seek independence and balance.”<sup>925</sup>

- **On Chinese companies as a counterbalance to U.S. companies:** “Currently, the GAFAs (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) dominate the world, and the only ones that can balance them are the BATXs (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi). The GAFAs operate without counterweight on French territory: neither France nor Europe has anything to oppose to them. The BATXs weight a lot on the Chinese market but not on the international market: there is something to be negotiated there.”<sup>926</sup>

- **On the BRI as the vector of a new era from which Europeans would be wrong to remain on the sidelines:** “[China’s] Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is charting a path for this global synergy from which China intends to create a new global era in the future. China is astonished and deplores that Europeans are so reluctant to commit themselves to the BRI but it no longer waits for them. From now on, China is moving forward. We are wrong to remain petrified in the face of the [the BRI]. For it is good news.”<sup>927</sup>

- **On the diversity of political regimes, which are different but respectable:** “Our systems are different and not meant to be similar”;<sup>928</sup> “We need a delicate discourse to defend our interests precisely, but without attacking others. We must acknowledge Xi Jinping’s unambiguous statement: his country wants to be socialist with Chinese characteristics. We need to respect his opinion while making clear that we do not share this approach.”<sup>929</sup>

- **On Xi Jinping as a Gaullist figure whose vocation is to bring the country to the place it deserves:** “Often misinterpreted by Western media as a Stalin-like return to personal power, he has in fact a Gaullist character: The proof of this is publicly given by the formation of a very high-quality management team and the elevation of the status of the new helmsman by one rank.”<sup>930</sup>

- **On power put at the service of peace:** “China is introducing itself as a peaceful power, aspiring to more regulated and profitable exchanges based on mutual respect.”<sup>931</sup>

- **On the fact that opposing China’s legitimate expansion would be both vain and childish:** “In the face of the rising tide, only kids can build sand dams. Faced with this China, which, as we can see, has profoundly and impressively renewed itself, pretending to stand in the way of its ambitions is illusory and counterproductive; they are, after all, perfectly legitimate.”<sup>932</sup>

924. Jean-Pierre Raffarin, “Communiqué de presse de la conférence/ débat en l’honneur des 55 ans de relations diplomatiques franco-chinoises,” Fondation Prospective et Innovation (19 Mar. 2019), <http://www.prospective-innovation.org/wp-content/uploads/CP-55ans.pdf>.

925. Jean-Pierre Raffarin, “Compte rendu de la conférence/Débat des 55 ans de relations diplomatiques franco-chinoises.”

926. Ibid.

927. “XIX<sup>e</sup> Congrès: XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” Fondation Prospective et Innovation (5 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/eCod7>.

928. Raffarin, “Compte rendu.”

929. “Compte rendu de la Conférence/Débat des 55 ans de relations diplomatiques Franco-Chinoises.”

930. “XIX<sup>e</sup> Congrès: XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle”.

931. Ibid.

932. “Compte rendu de la Conférence/Débat des 55 ans de relations diplomatiques franco-chinoises.”

INTRODUCTION

These examples show how the FPI reproduces Chinese narratives. It reveals that it is in the Party's interest to carry out this type of narrative strategies relying on local relays capable of acting as sounding boards.

C ONCEPTS

*c. The accomplices*

A third category involves **think tanks and foundations that share a common vision of the world with the CCP and whose interests are mainly convergent**. That makes them collaborate with the Chinese authorities and relay their stories but also defend China's image in all circumstances.

The example of the International Schiller Institute

**The Schiller Institute illustrates this third category.** It was founded in 1984 by Helga Zepp-LaRouche,<sup>933</sup> who wished to give substance to the ideas of Friedrich von Schiller, a 18<sup>th</sup>-century poet, playwright and art theorist. These ideas were delineated during the Third International Conference that the Institute organized on November 24 and 25, 1984, in Washington, and which led to the "Declaration of the Inalienable Rights of Man." This charter was meant to denounce the excesses of supranational financial institutions and the "tyranny" that they inflict on less developed countries.<sup>934</sup> The Schiller Institute wished to bring about a new world in which "war, poverty and the wounds that affect us will appear as the relics of an outdated world."<sup>935</sup> While promoting peace through economic development and respect for the sovereignty of nations, the Schiller Institute has also been active in the dialogue of cultures and insisted on a better understanding of the "advantage of others," a concept that Jacques Cheminade described as inspired by the Peace of Westphalia (1648).<sup>936</sup>

ACTORS

The Schiller Institute has developed its activities in many countries. Five seem to receive special attention, with sister structures working under the umbrella of the International Schiller Institute: Germany (Schiller-Institut, Vereinigung für Staatskunst e. V.), the United States (Schiller Institute Inc.), France (Institut Schiller), Denmark (Schiller Instituttet) and Sweden (Schiller Institutet → p. 536).<sup>937</sup> The French website mentions a 'presence' in more than 30 countries, although the exact nature of this presence is not specified.

ACTIONS

One of the Institute's main projects is based on the idea of a "Eurasian Landbridge"<sup>938</sup> that would link the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean via three major communication corridors: a northern route via the Trans-Siberian Railway, a central route through Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan and China, and a southern route via Turkey, Iran and Central Asia to China. These routes were imagined as a way to bring an end to age-old conflicts through broadly beneficial Euro-Asian cooperation and economic development.<sup>939</sup> Through this project, LaRouche aspired to a fairer global economic order that would replace failing

CASE

933. She was Lyndon LaRouche's wife.

934. "The Inalienable Rights of Man," The International Schiller Institute. <https://schillerinstitute.com/inalienablerights-man/>.

935. "L'Institut Schiller, ses idées, ses engagements" (6 Nov. 2011) (<https://www.institutschiller.org/Institut-Schiller-idees-engagements.html>).

936. Jacques Cheminade, "L'identité de l'Europe: l'avantage d'autrui dans le nouveau paradigme," speech at the 30 Anniversary of the Institut Schiller, Institut Schiller (4 Nov. 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJd7pMp6NiA>.

937. "Stay in Touch with the Schiller Institute," The International Schiller Institute, <https://schillerinstitute.nationbuilder.com/join> (consulted on May 1, 2020).

938. [https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid\\_97-01/fid\\_landbridge\\_map.html](https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid_97-01/fid_landbridge_map.html).

939. "About Us," The International Schiller Institute, <http://newparadigm.schillerinstitute.com/our-campaign/aboutus/>; Jonathan Tennenbaum, "Eurasian Alliance for Infrastructure: Key to World Peace," Executive Intelligence Review, 19:28 (Jul. 1992), 20-28, <https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1992/eirv19n28-19920717/eirv19n28-19920717.pdf>.

financial systems. Since the project's inception during the 1990s, and the appearance of the Chinese project in 2013, the Eurasian Landbridge concept has expanded to include new economic and maritime routes.

**Since 2013, there has been a gradual convergence between LaRouche and the Schiller Institute's ideas on the one hand and the Chinese objectives on the other.** In an interview for Xinhua, Helga Zepp-LaRouche's husband, Lyndon LaRouche, stated that China was a key nation in the advent of a new world economic order.<sup>940</sup> Not long afterwards, Helga Zepp-LaRouche published a paper called "New Economic Order Begins with New Silk Road." Therein she invited the UN to cooperate and stressed the role that Xi Jinping's New Silk Road project could play in the organization of a new world order capable of taking into account 'non-aligned' countries.

As a result of the LaRouches' positions, **the head of the Schiller Institute became a favorite with Chinese media.** For instance, she was invited to Yan Rui's famous TV show "Dialogue" on China's national CCTV channel, which introduced her the "New Silk Road Lady" and a founder of the "Eurasian Landbridge" project.<sup>941</sup> Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche was also interviewed on China Radio International's "People in the Know" program. During the interview, she asserted that the New Silk Road could pave the way for a new credit system between sovereign nations to replace our "unjust financial system."<sup>942</sup>



Source: <https://schillerinstitute.com/our-campaign/about-us>.

In September 2014, Helga Zepp-LaRouche participated in several conferences on the Silk Roads in China. At an event organized by *China Investment Magazine* (中国投资),<sup>943</sup> Helga Zepp-LaRouche was introduced by Colonel Bao Shixiu (鲍世修), a former professor at the PLA Academy of Military Science (中国军事科学院), translator of Russian and specialist in military theory.<sup>944</sup> In fact, Bao Shixiu had previously participated in a conference for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Schiller Institute in June 2014, during which he delivered a speech describing Obama's "pivot" policy as an attempted hegemonic strategy in Asia. He

940. "An agreement Among Leading Nations Can Change the direction of History," *Executive Intelligence Review* (Aug. 2013), 23-26, [https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2013/eirv40n31-20130809/23-26\\_4031-lar.pdf](https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/2013/eirv40n31-20130809/23-26_4031-lar.pdf).

941. "A Silk Road for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – CCTV Interview with Helga Zepp-LaRouche", Schiller Institute (23 Apr. 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRz40SGhmaw>.

942. "Helga Zepp-LaRouche Interview with China Radio International 'People in the Know,'" Archive Schiller Institute (Sept. 2014), <https://archive.vn/OrEWY>; "Zepp-Larouche sur China Radio International: Concentrons nous sur les objectifs communs de l'Humanité" ("Zepp-Larouche on China Radio International: Let Us Focus on our Common Objectives for Humanity"), Schiller Institute (18 Apr. 2014), <https://archive.vn/TmeV5>.

943. Party journal dedicated to business and investment. In May 2016, the journal launched an African edition with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the International Department of the Central Committee.

944. See its Baidu page archived here: <https://archive.vn/BjWRU>.



therefore advocated for an American withdrawal from Asia by adopting Xi Jinping's leit-motif, detailed at the founding of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA): "security problems in Asia should be solved by Asians themselves. Outsiders should consciously exit the game."<sup>945</sup>



**Gradually, the common positions turned into a common strategy.** Both Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche's statements in Chinese media and the participation of Chinese intellectuals in events organized by the Schiller Institute have gradually built a positive image of China. They have given way to an **increased coordination between the two actors and an unremitting support of the Schiller Institute to China's influence operations.**

This coordination crystallized on December 4, 2019 when CGTN announced the **creation of CGTN Think Tank**, a network of foreign think tanks and institutions the Schiller Institute immediately joined (→ p. 309).<sup>946</sup> According to Zheng Bijian (郑必坚),<sup>947</sup> president of the China Institute for Innovation and Development

Strategy (中国科学院国家创新与发展战略研究会), CGTN Think Tank could "play an outstanding role in the process of deepening and expanding the 'understanding of China and the world.'"<sup>948</sup> At this event, Helga Zepp-LaRouche addressed the first panel of experts as a founding member of the project. She stressed the need to extend the Eurasian Landbridge concept worldwide (World Landbridge), which would make it possible to replace outdated institutions such as NATO.<sup>949</sup>

The day after the summit, Zepp-LaRouche was invited on China Radio International's "World Today" program. She asserted that the model of Chinese development for eradicating poverty created a new paradigm that contrasted with the Western neo-liberal model, which was doomed to fail.<sup>950</sup>

The positions adopted by the Schiller Institute and its president, on social networks and in their publications, illustrate the converging strategies and the unfailing support given by the think tank to the dissemination of the Party's narratives. All the Institute's publications have unfailingly praised the projects included in the Silk Roads. To this end, the Institute does not hesitate to appropriate the Party's narratives. The Schiller Institute's publication *The New Silk Road becomes the World Landbridge: A Shared future for humanity* illustrates this by taking up the slogan of the community of common destiny.<sup>951</sup>

945. "Bao Shixiu: A New Silk Road and a New Security Architecture for Asia," Archive Schiller Institute (15 Jun. 2014), <https://archive.vn/hlsb2>.

946. "CGTN Think Tank Launches in Beijing," CGTN (4 Dec. 2019), <https://archive.vn/Yu5m5>.

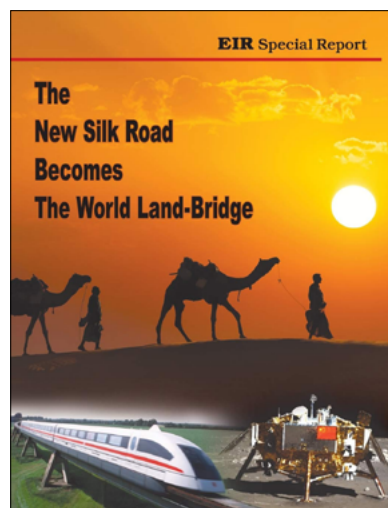
947. Nicknamed the Chinese Henry Kissinger, he promotes the theory of China's peaceful emergence.

948. Wu Guoxiu, "CGTN Summit Overview," CGTN, (4 Dec. 2019), <https://archive.vn/8xF0n>.

949. "Schiller Institute Becomes Founding Member of CGTN Think Tank," Schiller Institute, <https://archive.vn/fo7W4>.

950. "World Today," *China Radio International* (5 Dec. 2019); "Zepp-Larouche Interview on china-US Relationship," *Executive Intelligence Review* (20 Dec. 2019), 49, [https://larouche.pub.com/eiw/public/2019/eirv46n50-20191220/47-49\\_4650-hzl.pdf](https://larouche.pub.com/eiw/public/2019/eirv46n50-20191220/47-49_4650-hzl.pdf).

951. "The New Silk Road Becomes the World landbridge, Vol. II," The Schiller Institute, <https://archive.vn/IyP9P>.



Each national branch of the Schiller Institute targets local officials to convince them to join the Chinese project. Thus, following Rome's decision to join the Silk Roads project, the Schiller Institute urged France to do the same.

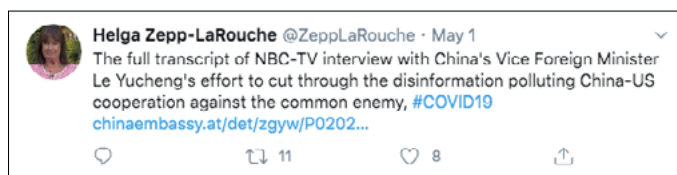


Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche is also committed to defending China against its Western critics. This posture was evident during the Covid-19 crisis, which led Zepp-LaRouche to cross swords with China's critics.<sup>952</sup> Her criticisms were notably aimed at the United Kingdom, presented as the cornerstone of the opposition to China. Zepp-LaRouche described London as resisting dialogue with China and set a somewhat fallacious historical continuity between the Opium Wars and Covid-19.



952. Helga Zepp-Larouche, "China Deserves Praise and Cooperation in the Fights against the Coronavirus," Schiller Institute, <https://archive.vn/ZUppP>.

The messages also concern the perceived disinformation presumably suffered by China, Xinjiang or the debt diplomacy that Beijing is accused of implementing via the Silk Roads.<sup>953</sup>



Think tanks such as the Schiller Institute are therefore **essential nodes in the export and dissemination of Chinese narratives**, which aim above all to build a positive image of China. Additionally, as per the examples above, they can also act as intermediaries exerting a certain pressure on Beijing's critics. In this case, **with the Schiller Institute, Beijing can count on the entire LaRouche movement**, which has many branches around the world. In Australia, for example, the Australian Citizens Party, a political party affiliated with the LaRouche movement, regularly attacks CCP critics – to the delight of Chinese authorities and media.<sup>954</sup> Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian praised those “very well-written articles,” a comment echoed by the Chinese embassy in Australia.<sup>955</sup>

These relays can also **provide a “scientific” legitimacy** (even though their work is precisely not scientific). For example, when a large number of researchers around the world

953. Christine Bierre, “Schiller Institute in China – Xinjiang province: China Rejects All Accusations,” *Schiller Institute*, <https://archive.vn/6oLIE>.

954. See, for instance, the following compilation: <https://citizensparty.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/china-narrative.pdf>.

955. “Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Remarks,” Embassy of the PRC in Australia (15 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/Eqra3>; see also: “Commentaire: D’où vient le courage des conspirateurs occidentaux de jouer la carte du Xinjiang?” (“Commentary: Where are the Western Conspiracy Theorists Playing the Xinjiang Card From?”), RCI (15 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/vMp09>.

denounced the oppression of Uyghurs in March 2021, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesperson invoked a list of "real researchers" defending China concocted by the Schiller Institute (image below).



<https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1376163186290749441> (28 mars 2021).

## 2. Publishers

Chinese narratives, such as the representation of China as a benevolent power, are not solely supported by think tanks and foundations but also by actors in the publishing industry. In France, **the La Route de la Soie publishing house** is an interesting case of relatively advanced cooperation with China.

### a. *The example of La Route de la Soie – Editions (The Silk Road Editions, France)*

**The publishing house La Route de la Soie was created in 2017 by Sonia Bressler**, a former journalist who holds a PhD in philosophy and has created a communication and strategy consulting firm (Bressler Conseil<sup>956</sup>). She justified her decision to open a publishing house by the partiality of the publishing sector in France, which presumably systematically rejects Chinese or Iranian manuscripts.<sup>957</sup> She also expressed her admiration for “Xi Jinping’s (*sic*) project One Belt One Road, that I find absolutely gigantic, and which is economical, structured and, to my mind, represents an axis that should be developed to pacify the world”<sup>958</sup> – hence the name she gave to the company.

Sonia Bressler visited China for the first time in 2005, arriving in train from Moscow and she ultimately visited the country six times between 2005 and 2019; it allowed her to “see the progress made in the social development of China,” according to Xinhua, in one of her many interviews with the Chinese press agency.<sup>959</sup> Between March 2015, when she said that Xi Jinping’s book *The Governance of China* “[marked] a milestone for the country and the Communist Party of China (CPC),”<sup>960</sup> and March 2021, she was quoted by Xinhua in no less than 55 articles written in French and English,<sup>961</sup> all introducing her as a “French

956. <https://www.bresslerconseil.com/>.

957. Zhu Shanshan, “Une maison d’édition unique pour comprendre la Route de la Soie,” *Chine-info.com* (29 Aug. 2017), <https://www.soniabressler.com/app/download/11200738193/Une+maison+d%27e%CC%81dition+unique+pour+comprendre+la+Route+de+la+Soie+-chine-info.pdf?t=1512027794>.

958. Ibid.

959. “Sonia Bressler: pour mettre en accord ‘le rêve chinois’ avec ‘les rêves des autres peuples du monde’ (interview),” (“Sonia Bressler: Aligning the ‘Chinese Dream’ with the ‘Dreams of the Other Peoples in the World’), Xinhua (19 Mar. 2019), <https://archive.vn/oEnXh>.

960. “French Writer Lauds Xi’s Book on Governance of China,” Xinhua (10 Mar. 2015), <https://archive.vn/n9iBf>.

961. Results compiled through Europress on March 28, 2021.



Sinologue,” “French expert on China,” or “famous writer and French Sinologue.”<sup>962</sup> In her interviews, **she adopts the Party’s talking points:**

- **On the overall role of China in the world:** “China has a good system... China should be proud of itself”<sup>963</sup>; “[according] to me, China is opening the eyes of the world [...] It is a motor, a force that tends to link cultures and civilizations together according to a “win-win” exchange;”<sup>964</sup> “[the] Sino-French friendship is the key to the pacification of the world and to the creation of a new system of thoughts and for the realization of humanity”;<sup>965</sup> “the Chinese civilization is the oldest on the planet and, saying that, we should understand that we have everything to learn from it”;<sup>966</sup> “China does not look for hegemony, [it] has decided to share and not to dominate”;<sup>967</sup> “we ought to draw inspiration from what China has implemented, for instance education designed for people in poverty, creative social welfare mechanisms, local and national joint development plans, and so on”;<sup>968</sup> and she said that Xi Jinping’s opening speech at the 73<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly, in May 2020, confirmed “that China is open to the world and the idea of a shared collective responsibility”;<sup>969</sup>

- **On Tibet**, which she visited three times between 2007 and 2016, and on which she published four books:<sup>970</sup> “[without] the help of the Chinese government, it would be very difficult to preserve the Tibetan culture”;<sup>971</sup> “[the] improving living conditions led to an expansion of the life span, education put an end to illiteracy [...] I discovered that 5G had been set up in Lhasa. In France, we do not even have it yet”;<sup>972</sup> “I was able to see the incredible transformation of Lhasa, between traditions and absolute modernity”;<sup>973</sup> and so on;

- **And on Xinjiang**, which she also visited several times and on which she wrote three books<sup>974</sup>: “I saw people’s life [in Xinjiang] was getting better and better. I believe it will

962. “Il faut dissiper les fausses craintes afin d’assurer un avenir meilleur à l’ensemble de l’humanité (experts)” (“False Fears Must be Dispelled to Ensure a Better Future to the Whole Humanity”), Xinhua (14 Feb. 2020), <https://archive.vn/q7nUs>.

963. “La vie des habitants au Xinjiang s’améliore selon une femme écrivain française (interview)” (“The Life of Xinjiang Inhabitants Improves According to a French Female Writer (Interview)”), Xinhua (3 Oct. 2015), <https://archive.vn/s0Hb1>.

964. “La Chine est en train d’ouvrir les yeux du monde’ (interview)” (“China is Opening the Eyes of the World (Interview)”), Xinhua (2 Nov. 2015).

965. Xu Yongchun and Tang Ji, “Des personnalités et des experts français font écho à la tribune du président chinois sur les relations sino-françaises” (“French Personalities and Experts Echo the Tribune of the Chinese President on Chinese-French Relations”), Xinhua (24 Mar. 2019), <https://archive.vn/sXvNG>.

966. “L’Asie est un élan vital,’ selon une sinologue française (interview)” (“‘Asia is a Vital Impulse,’ According to a French Expert on China (interview)”), Xinhua (11 Apr. 2019), <https://archive.vn/q89ny>.

967. “Roundup: White Paper Gives Transparent, Comprehensive Picture of China’s National Defense in New Era: Experts,” Xinhua (25 Jul. 2019), <https://archive.vn/n9D86>.

968. “Le succès de la Chine en matière de réduction de la pauvreté est une inspiration, selon des experts” (“China’s Success in Reducing Poverty is an Inspiration, According to Experts”), Xinhua (26 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/JyNzu>.

969. “Les propositions de Xi Jinping à l’Assemblée mondiale de la santé sont essentielles pour la lutte contre la pandémie, selon des universitaires” (“Xi Jinping’s Proposals to the World Health Organizations are Essential to Fight Against the Pandemic, According to Scholars”), Xinhua (19 May 2020), <https://archive.vn/x7hUX>.

970. Sonia Bressler, *Voyage au cœur du Tibet* (Journey to the Heart of Tibet) (Paris: Jacques Flament Editions, 2013); *A travers le Tibet* (Through Tibet) (Paris: Jacques Flament Editions, 2014); *A la découverte du Tibet* (On Our Way to Discover Tibet) (Paris: Editions Horizon Oriental, 2016); *Découvrir le Tibet* (Discovering Tibet) (Paris: Editions La Route de la Soie, 2019).

971. “Interview: Chinese Gov’t Efforts to Promote Development and Preserve Culture in Tibet Significant: French Author,” Xinhua (27 Mar. 2017).

972. “Le vrai Tibet aux yeux d’une philosophe française” (“The True Tibet in the Eyes of a French Philosopher”) Xinhua (4 Apr. 2019), <https://archive.vn/QDZZh>.

973. “L’Asie est un élan vital.”

974. Sonia Bressler, *La vie du Xinjiang* (Life in Xinjiang) (Paris: Jacques Flament Editions, 2016); *Xinjiang: les mille & une merveilles de la Route de la soie* (Xinjiang: the Thousand and One Wonders of the New Silk Road) (Paris: Editions La Route de la Soie, 2017); *Les travailleurs du Xinjiang* (The Xinjiang Workers) (Paris: Editions La Route de la Soie, 2018).

be more beautiful in the future”;<sup>975</sup> “the Chinese government is making a huge effort to preserve heritage, be it places of worship or old buildings”;<sup>976</sup> “[the] commitment to government policies successfully created jobs and developed the region’s economy [...] the living conditions of the population have improved, along with the feeling of happiness.”<sup>977</sup>

This corpus is completed by **her blog, on which she also systematically defends Beijing’s positions and promotes Chinese achievements**, from the “14<sup>th</sup> Chinese five-year plan”<sup>978</sup> to the Belt and Road Initiative (“which will simply “pacify the world” and invent “a new system of values”),<sup>979</sup> but also Hong Kong (“a symbol of the ending undivided Western domination”)<sup>980</sup> and Paris (while returning the favor to Xinhua: “[not] far from Matignon, at 85 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, you can find the Xinhua Gallery, a beautiful space where you can discover exhibitions on China and its history all year long”).<sup>981</sup> Besides, she insists on the **superiority of the Chinese model** (“China represents the oldest civilization. It has seen everything, experienced everything, and invented a thousand techniques (that we stole afterward) ... and today, we fail to draw lessons from China [...] as usual, China listens, tries to integrate [ideas] while Westerners try to impose their thinking and their rhythm. On the one side China embraces, while the West orientates, closes, segments [on the other]”) before inviting her readers to “leave modernity by re-formatting the Enlightenments.”<sup>982</sup>

Between 2013 and 2018, **Sonia Bressler wrote for China-info.com**,<sup>983</sup> a website which is the French-speaking version of *Nouvelles d’Europe* (欧洲时报), “the first Chinese-language daily newspaper circulated in Europe,”<sup>984</sup> created in 1983, with headquarters in Ile-de-France, and **owned by the Guang Hua Cultures and Media group**. It describes itself as “the European media leader of the Chinese community”<sup>985</sup> as the group owns “five large weeklies (published in France, in the United Kingdom, in Germany, Australia and Italy), three news websites (Oushinet.com, Chine-info.com, Oushidai.com), a video program, a travel agency, a cultural animation center and a publishing house.”<sup>986</sup> Additionally, it publishes the monthly magazine *Le 9*, subtitled *Le monde chinois*, to which Sonia Bressler also contributed.<sup>987</sup> The Guang Hua group organizes events such as the *Salon de l’emploi franco-chinois* [the Franco-Chinese Job Fair] and the *Salon d’échanges culturels et créatifs franco-chinois* [the Franco-Chinese Cultural and Creative Exchange Fair]; one of the latter’s edition was

975. “Life in Xinjiang is Getting Better and Better: French Writer,” *China Daily* (3 Oct. 2015).

976. “Interview: Reality in Xinjiang Different from Preconceptions, says French Writer,” Xinhua (25 Jun. 2020), <https://archive.vn/5usg9>.

977. “Les experts applaudissent les efforts du gouvernement chinois pour promouvoir le développement socioéconomique du Xinjiang” [Experts Applaud the Efforts of the Chinese Government to Promote Socioeconomic Development in Xinjiang], Xinhua, 30 septembre 2020 (<https://archive.vn/mCfke>).

978. Sonia Bressler, “Comprendre le 14<sup>ème</sup> plan quinquennal chinois” (“Understanding the 14<sup>th</sup> Chinese Five-Year Plan”), *Rebelle.blogspirit.com* (12 Dec. 2020), <https://archive.vn/comME>.

979. Sonia Bressler, “La Route de la Soie réveille les craintes occidentales” (“The Silk Road Awakens Western Fears”), *Rebelle.blogspirit.com* (31 Jan. 2017), <https://archive.vn/qQ88J>.

980. Sonia Bressler, “Hong Kong (toujours) sous un autre angle,” *Rebelle.blogspirit.com*, cited in *Chine-info.com* (29 May 2020), <https://archive.vn/QXrTa>.

981. Sonia Bressler, “L’éducation en Chine” (“Education in China”), *Rebelle.blogspirit.com* (2 Oct. 2020), <https://archive.vn/h8a7o>.

982. Sonia Bressler, “Trump, la Chine et ses voisins” (“Trump, China, and its Neighbors”), *Rebelle.blogspirit.com* (23 May 2017), <https://archive.vn/71HZ3>.

983. <https://www.soniabressler.com/articles/> (Archived: <https://archive.vn/CVbjm>).

984. “Les Amis de Nouvelles d’Europe,” *Culture Oushi*, <https://archive.vn/GXu70>.

985. “SKEMA, grand partenaire du Salon de l’emploi Franco-Chinois” (“SKEMA, Great Partner of the Franco-Chinese Jobs Fair”), Skema Business School (21 Oct. 2020), <https://archive.vn/RdIoI>.

986. 2020 Franco-Chinese Jobs Fair, <https://archive.vn/E3G15>.

987. With an article on Xinjiang: Sonia Bressler, “A la découverte de l’Ouest” (“Discovering the West”), *Le 9*, n°8 (Jul.-Aug. 2018), <https://archive.vn/v0eai>.

actually co-organized by the Chinese Cultural Center in Paris, which is subordinate to the Embassy of China.<sup>988</sup>

The president of Guang Hua Media, editor-in-chief of the *Nouvelles d'Europe* and *Le 9*, is **Zhang Xiaobei** (张晓贝),<sup>989</sup> who also manages the Horizon Oriental publishing house<sup>990</sup> that published one of Sonia Bressler's books on Tibet (she also penned a chapter in a collective book he edited on *50 years of friendship France – China*).<sup>991</sup> The *Les Amis de Nouvelles d'Europe* [Friends of Nouvelles d'Europe] association, created in 1992, opened a **cultural center** in Gentilly in 2013 as well, and it then congratulated itself on being “**the first Confucius Classroom opened in France**, and recognized by the Hanban”<sup>992</sup> (→ p. 299).



On March 1, 2015, Qiu Yuanping (裘援平), head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, a structure subordinate to the UFWD (→ p. 66), visited the Nouvelles d'Europe Cultural Center and its Confucius Classroom, accompanied by Zhang Xiaobei, president of Guang Hua Media and the newspaper *Nouvelles d'Europe*, Zhong Cheng, executive vice-president of the newspaper, Chen Xiaoyan, its vice-president, and Liang Yang, its editor-in-chief.<sup>993</sup>

This was the context during which Sonia Bressler opened her publishing house, La Route de la Soie, in 2017. **Her own books, on Tibet and Xinjiang, give an apolitical, uncluttered, almost unreal vision of it** compared to the tragic situation in these regions.



Hence, she contributes to spreading positive narratives about China and to disseminating counter-narratives intended to deflect criticism about the Chinese regime's repressive nature. This commitment led her to publish, in December 2020, a book by **Maxime Vivas** untitled *Ouighours. Pour en finir avec les fake news* (*Uyghurs: To Put an End to Fake News*). The

988. The Paris Creative Fair 2018, <https://archive.vn/Ajl0H>.

989. [https://data.bnf.fr/16759679/xiao\\_bei\\_zhang/](https://data.bnf.fr/16759679/xiao_bei_zhang/) (2014); <https://archive.vn/0B02O> (2019); <http://entreprises.lefigaro.fr/guang-hua-cultures-et-media-ghm-94/entreprise-330431081>.

990. <http://entreprises.lefigaro.fr/edition-horizon-oriental-94/entreprise-513982371>.

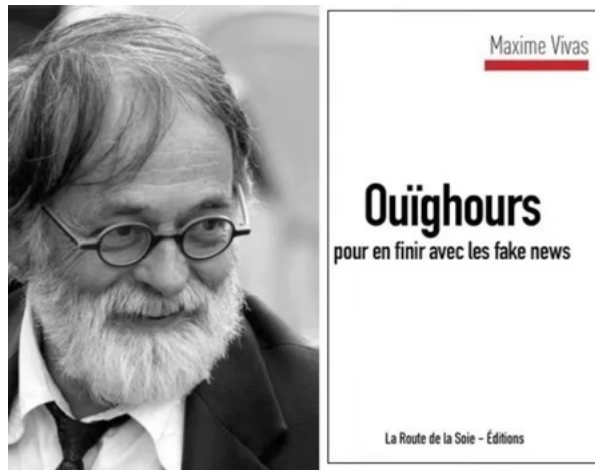
991. Sonia Bressler, “La culture en avance sur la diplomatie,” in Zhang Xiaobei, ed., *50 ans d'amitiés, Chine-France* (*China-France: A 50-Year Friendship*) (Paris: Editions Horizon Oriental, Vitry-sur-Seine; Nouvelles d'Europe, 2014).

992. “Les Amis de Nouvelles d'Europe.”

993. “La visite du centre culturel de QIU Yuanping, directrice du Bureau des Chinois d'outre-mer” (“Visit of QIU Yuanping, Director of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, to the the Cultural Center”), *Les Amis de Nouvelles d'Europe* (5 Mar. 2015), <https://archive.vn/zBbxs>.



book intended to shed light on the situation in Xinjiang. Maxime Vivas stated bluntly that “the fable of the Uyghur ‘genocide’” was fabricated by the CIA using “fake photos” and “false testimonies.” According to him, the reality is quite different since the autonomous province “is pulling itself out of its backwardness and poverty with the help of the whole of China.”<sup>994</sup>



Contrary to the impression that the French-speaking public discovered the author with this controversial book, Maxime Vivas is not an unknown actor of Chinese influence in France. Born in 1942, this former postal worker and ergonomist is resolutely positioned on the left of the French political spectrum: a former CGT trade unionist,<sup>995</sup> still host for a militant radio created by the CGT<sup>996</sup>; the former literary referent at ATTAC (an alterglobalization organization);<sup>997</sup> he is a “long-time personal friend” of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the political party *La France Insoumise*, whom he publicly supported in previous elections and who prefaced two of his books.<sup>998</sup> Vivas has been **an administrator of the website of “alternative news” *Le Grand Soir***,<sup>999</sup> which “for many years has made itself known with readily **conspiratorial** content, emanating either from its own editorial staff or from notoriously conspiratorial friendly websites such as Réseau Voltaire, Mondialisation.ca [→ p. 602] or ReOpen911.info.”<sup>1000</sup> Vivas is also a regular contributor to the Russian channel RT France, which invites him to speak on various topics, including Venezuela (as he does not hide his sympathy for the Bolivarian revolution) and China.

994. Maxime Vivas, *Ouighours. Pour en finir avec les fake news* (Uyghurs. To put an end to fake news), Paris, La Route de la soie, 2020, back cover.

995. The CGT (*Confédération générale du Travail*) is one of the oldest and largest trade unions in France.

996. “A sorting center occupied by postal workers: I was their CGT section secretary” (Maxime Vivas, “J’avais un ami journaliste, clanique” (“I had a journalist friend, clannish”), *Le Grand Soir* (22 Nov. 2020), <https://archive.vn/e4OuE>; Radio Mon País, created in 1980 in Toulouse by the CGT departmental union ([https://www.schoop.fr/ficheradio.php?id\\_radio=1240](https://www.schoop.fr/ficheradio.php?id_radio=1240)). His chronicles broadcast between 2002 and 2007 are gathered in his book *Chroniques littéraires et impertinentes sur Radio Mon país* (*Literary and impertinent chronicles on Radio Mon País*) (Angeville, Editions la Brochure, 2008). His more recent interventions can be found on <https://www.radiomonpais.fr/component/finder/search.html?q=vivas&Itemid=106>.

997. A press article presented him at the time as a “national cultural leader” of ATTAC (“Attac en douceur,” *La Nouvelle République du Centre-Ouest* (Sept. 6, 2002), 10), but Vivas presents himself as “former literary referent” of ATTAC on his Twitter profile.

998. Parti de Gauche en Haute-Garonne, “Maxime Vivas soutient Jean-Luc Mélenchon, le PG, et le Front de Gauche”, <https://archive.vn/5wB7G>; “C’est la différence entre ce que j’ai vu au Xinjiang et ce que disent nos médias qui m’a poussé à écrire” – Entretien avec Maxime Vivas, auteur du livre ‘Ouïgour pour en finir avec les fake news’, *Chine-info.com*, 23 février 2021 (<https://archive.vn/rxaEN>).

999. <https://www.legrandsoir.info/>.

1000. <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/le-grand-soir>.





Maxime Vivas with the “red shirts” in a demonstration in Caracas, June 2, 2007 (image published by Jean-Luc Mélenchon on his blog<sup>1001</sup>). Vivas is the author of a novel titled *Rouges Les Collines de Caracas* (Arcane, 2015) which he notably presented and autographed at the stand of the Bolivarian Alliance at the “Fête de l’Huma” in September 2015.<sup>1002</sup>

**Vivas has defended Beijing since the late 2000s** by going after its adversaries: first, at the end of 2007, in a book **attacking RSF** (*La face cachée de Reporters sans frontières: de la CIA aux faucons du Pentagone*),<sup>1003</sup> precisely when the NGO was campaigning to denounce human rights violations in China ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.<sup>1004</sup> When the media spoke about it in 2008, the author was “on vacation in China.”<sup>1005</sup>

In 2010, he travelled to **Tibet**, in a trip admittedly “organized by the Chinese authorities. ‘We could even say ‘supervised’”; he reported on it in an article untitled “Choses vues au Tibet,”<sup>1006</sup> a daring reference to Victor Hugo. The following year, he published a book attacking **the Dalai Lama** (*Pas si zen: la face cachée du dalai-lama*),<sup>1007</sup> which was abundantly relayed by Chinese media, including some presenting Vivas as a “researcher on Tibet”.<sup>1008</sup> Then, in 2015, in an interview with Xinhua, he revealed that he had finished “a new book on China in which I examine the issue of laicity in Tibet.” The book was untitled *Tibet: Quelques vérités à ne pas dire aux libres censeurs, aux nostalgiques de la théocratie safran et aux ennemis de la laïcité*, and he hoped “first to publish it [...] in China. He wanted, as he explained, to show Chinese readers that they have friends in France.”<sup>1009</sup> That said, the book was neither published, in France or in China.

Then, he turned to **the Uyghur issue**, by travelling to Xinjiang twice, in 2016 and 2018, during trips organized by the Chinese authorities. The second time, he was invited by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (新疆生产建设兵团, also called

1001. “Systémique en diable,” blog de Jean-Luc Mélenchon (13 Aug. 2007), <https://archive.vn/Hk2z3>.

1002. Viva Venezuela, French chapter of the international campaign of solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution, <https://archive.vn/lJSpQ>.

1003. Maxime Vivas, *La face cachée de Reporters sans frontières: de la CIA aux faucons du Pentagone* [The Hidden Face of Reports Without Borders: from the CIA to the Pentagon Hawks] (Brussels: Editions Aden, 2007).

1004. “Un an avant les JO de Pékin 2008, Reporters sans frontières se mobilise à Paris, New York, Pékin et Montréal” (“One Year Before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Reporters Without Borders are Mobilizing their Troops in Paris, New York, Beijing, and Montreal”), RSF (7 Aug. 2007), <https://archive.vn/5EBmi>.

1005. Marie-Christine Tabet, “Révélations sur le financement de Reporters sans frontières” (“Revelations on the Funding of Reporters without Borders”), *Le Figaro* (21 Apr. 2008), 2.

1006. Maxime Vivas, “Choses vues au Tibet (2)” (“Things I’ve Seen in Tibet (2)”), *Le Grand Soir* (2 Aug. 2010), <https://archive.vn/sIWjt>.

1007. Maxime Vivas, *Pas si zen: la face cachée du dalai-lama* (Not so zen: The Hidden Face of the Dalai Lama) (Paris: Max Milo, 2011).

1008. “French Writer Presents Real Tibet in New Book,” Xinhua (12 Aug. 2011).

1009. “Maxime Vivas: un nouveau livre discutant de la laïcité au Tibet (interview)” (“Maxime Vivas: a New Book Discussing Laicity in Tibet (Interview)”), Xinhua (30 Aug. 2015) (for the two quotes).

Bingtuan),<sup>1010</sup> “a paramilitary organization subordinate to the CCP [...] and directly involved in the implementation of a complete program of surveillance, detention, and indoctrination in Xinjiang, which target the Uyghurs, and members of other ethnic minorities.” The organization’s first secretary was sanctioned by U.S. authorities in July 2020 for his role in “grave human rights violations.”<sup>1011</sup> These supervised trips provided the content of the book published by La Route de la Soie. From the perspective of Chinese authorities, and of their trolls on social networks, they provided the author with his legitimacy – because he went to see it “there for himself.”

Once his manuscript was completed, Vivas submitted it to nine “leftist” publishing houses, to no avail. He then turned to **Sonia Bressler, who “accepted it even before reading it.”**<sup>1012</sup> By August 2020, **and even though the book had yet to be published, Maxime Vivas’ remarks on Uyghurs were already relayed by the Chinese embassy in France**, which later promoted the book upon its release, as did Chinese state media and other Chinese diplomatic social media accounts (see images below). The Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi himself promoted the book during a press conference, noting that Vivas “[based] on his two trips to the autonomous region, [...] tells a real Xinjiang that enjoys prosperity and stability.”<sup>1013</sup> The Ministry’s spokesperson also “[gave] him a thumbs-up for his courage to reveal the truth and hope[d] more people will cheer him on”<sup>1014</sup>. Despite this Chinese media hype, four months after its release only a few hundred copies of the books had been sold in France.<sup>1015</sup> From Beijing’s point of view, this is not an underperformance however, since it is **propaganda for internal use**: in promoting Vivas’ book, the objective is not to convince the French but to show, in China, that the Party-State has support abroad.



1010. Thaïs Chaigne, “Qui est Maxime Vivas, ce Français qui dénonce des ‘fake news’ sur les Ouïghours et fait le bonheur de Pékin?” (“Who is Maxime Vivas, that Frenchman who Denounces “Fake News” on Uyghurs and makes Beijing’s Day?”), *Libération* (30 Mar. 2021).

1011. US Department of State, “On Sanctioning Human Rights Abusers in Xinjiang, China” (31 Jul. 2020), <https://archive.vn/1VS02>.

1012. Maxime Vivas, “C’est la différence entre ce que j’ai vu au Xinjiang et ce que disent nos médias qui m’a poussé à écrire”.

1013. “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press,” *Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United Republic of Tanzania* (9 Mar. 2021).

1014. “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on April 20, 2021,” ministère des Affaires étrangères de la RPC, 20 avril 2021 (<https://archive.vn/wH3g8>).

1015. Julien Lecot, “Ouïghours: l’étrange comédie musicale de propagande chinoise,” *Libération*, 8 April 2021, p. 17.



Also for internal propaganda purposes, Vivas was honored on September 14, 2021 at the Beijing International Book Fair with a “**Special Book Award of China**,” the highest award for foreign authors, translators and publishers. His “great friend, the journalist Zheng Ruolin”<sup>1016</sup> (→ p. 628) represented him at a ceremony presented by Huang Kunming (黄坤明), director of the Propaganda Department and member of the CCP Political Bureau (→ p. 64).<sup>1017</sup> These awards, created in 2005 by the General Administration of Press, Publishing, Broadcasting, Film and Television (→ p. 193), recognize individuals “who have made significant contributions to the promotion of Chinese culture abroad.”<sup>1018</sup> The winners receive 50,000 yuan (€6,700) each.<sup>1019</sup>



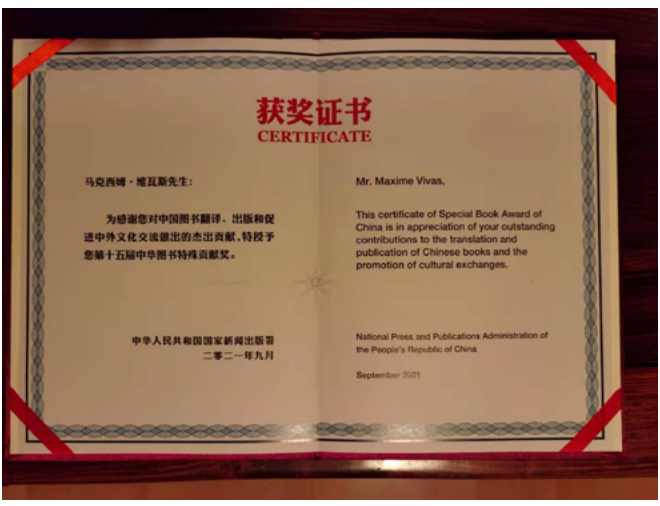
1016. Maxime Vivas, “Un prix littéraire chinois pour 15 auteurs étrangers, dont moi” (“A Chinese literary prize for 15 foreign authors, including me”), *Le Grand Soir* (Sept. 25, 2021), <https://archive.vn/55pp9>.

1017. “Senior Chinese official stresses making China better known globally,” *People’s Daily Online* (Sept. 15, 2021), <https://archive.vn/drzrc>.

1018. Yang Yang, “Beijing International Book Fair to kick off on Tuesday,” *China Daily* (Sept. 9, 2021), <https://archive.vn/kBIIq>.

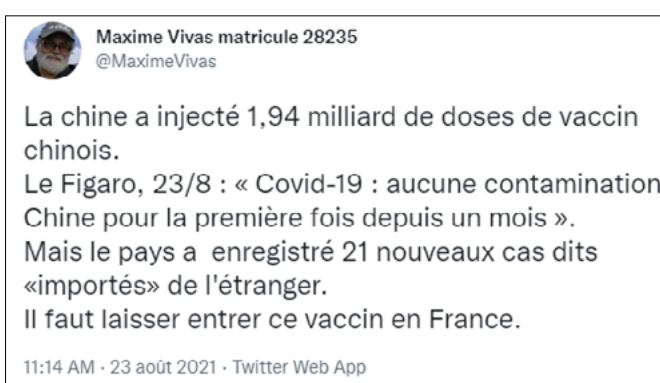
1019. See the Baidu page for the prize: <https://urlz.fr/gzWr>, <http://www.chinabookinternational.org/2012/0905/33455.shtml>.





Above, “Special Book Award of China” award ceremony on September 14, 2021.<sup>1020</sup> Zheng Ruolin representing Maxime Vivas is on the far left.  
 Bottom left, the 15 winners;<sup>1021</sup> right, the certificate published by Vivas on Twitter.<sup>1022</sup>

**Maxime Vivas has since co-edited a collective book, *La Chine sans œillères* (*China without blinkers*), published by a communist<sup>1023</sup> (or “Marxist” according to the Chinese embassy) publishing house that had been hosted by the Chinese ambassador to France. The latter is also promoting it on social networks. Both Vivas and Beijing have a vested interest in **diversifying their vectors** and therefore in working with other publishing houses. Finally, **Vivas is also promoting the Chinese vaccine** on social networks (below).**



1020. Source: <https://twitter.com/EmbajadaEcuChi/status/1437712689409703943/photo/2>.  
 1021. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/beijingbookfair/photos/a.318670725176610/1481600432216961>.  
 1022. Source: <https://twitter.com/MaximeVivas/status/1445281486064824321/photo/1>.  
 1023. “Above all, we are communist militants who refused the liquidation of our ideal”, explains Aymeric Monville when asked where the Delga Editions he directs come from (“Aymeric Monville: ‘Il n’y a pas d’idées à droite, il n’y a que la force des préjugés.’” *Le Comptoir*, 10 June 2015).



### When Maxime Vivas attacks the IRSEM

Reacting to an article in *Le Monde* announcing the imminent publication of this report and mentioning him, Maxime Vivas published an article on his website *Le Grand Soir* entitled “An IRSEM report, in the shadow of a senior US officer. Where it is proven that **Le Monde draws its articles on China from the NATO swamp**.”<sup>1024</sup> In this text, at the turn of which he called Tristan Mendès France a “swine” (*crevure*), the argument against us is twofold: on the one hand, one of the two authors of the report, Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, is “a member of the Academic Advisory Board of the NATO Defense College” (which is false, he used to be, but not since 2019); on the other hand, an American officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jordan Becker, is among the associated researchers of IRSEM. And Vivas focuses on him, adding that IRSEM “communicates to *Le Monde* materials for anti-Chinese articles” (image below). He even makes it the tagline of his Twitter post, summarizing the IRSEM report as the work of “a Yankee lieutenant colonel.”



The procedure is crude and is a **string of fallacies**. First, an **ad hominem** argument, i.e. attacking the person instead of the thing (*ad rem*) being discussed. Instead of answering on the merits (what *Le Monde* or IRSEM have said), Vivas tries to find a link, whatever it may be, between the person and the United States and/or NATO – a link that would have, for him, an explanatory value for the positions defended in the report. He had already done it with Antoine Bondaz (“dubbed by the State Department” because he participated in an exchange program a few years earlier<sup>1025</sup>); he did it again here. Furthermore, he uses a **“bad company fallacy,”** or **“dishonor by association,”** because the link with the United States and/or NATO is – at least in Vivas’ mind – discrediting. The detour via the NATO Defense College or an American associate researcher is also a **diversion** since it has no bearing on the discussion (on Chinese influence operations or on the role of Maxime Vivas in Chinese influence in France). Last but not least, there is a **causal fallacy** since Vivas deduces from a simple correlation (the presence of an American researcher in the team) a causal link (which supposedly explains that IRSEM “communicates to *Le Monde* materials for anti-Chinese articles”), without any proof of course, by the sole work of his imagination, in a construction that may seem conspiratorial.

To answer on the merits, **Jordan Becker** is not only an American soldier, he is first and foremost a **researcher**, holding a Ph.D. in political economy, regularly publishing in reputable scientific journals and it is in this capacity that he is “associated” with IRSEM, without being part of the resident team (associate researchers are not physically present at IRSEM, in this case Jordan Becker lives and works in the United States). His expertise is in transatlantic security and defense economy, not in China or influence operations. **He was obviously never involved, in any way, in the preparation of this report. He was not even aware of it until its publication.** And the authors did not need Americans to find “materials” that the Party-State itself, and its relays of influence throughout the world, leave lying around freely, as the sources of this report show.

Finally, IRSEM has a team of about thirty resident and thirty associate researchers. Among these sixty or so names, Vivas only named the sole American. But there is also on the team (as resident, which should be worse) a researcher from the Singapore Ministry of Defense,

1024. <https://archive.vn/sC5PD>.

1025. Maxime Vivas, tweet published on July 11, 2021. The International Visitor Leadership Program, in 2019. But Antoine Bondaz also did the Chinese equivalent in 2016, which neutralizes Vivas’ fallacious argument that should logically infer that Bondaz is just as much “sold out to China” as the interested party points out to him (tweet from @AntoineBondaz on July 11, 2021).

and, in the past four years, a German researcher from a think tank funded by the Federal Chancellery. The fact that in this diversity the U.S. associate researcher is chosen and the rest not even considered as potential explanatory factor is **another fallacy of incomplete evidence or “cherry-picking.”** If one follows Vivas’ logic, there would actually be more reason to believe that the report was influenced or fed by Singaporean or German authorities than by U.S. authorities.

This fallacious reasoning would not deserve a detailed response if we had not anticipated that **this U.S./NATO card would be played extensively to try to discredit the authors and/or the IRSEM**, among other *ad hominem* attacks which the Party and its trolls have now customarily used against those who dare criticize its practices.

Sonia Bressler’s cooperation with the CCP has also resulted in the birth of a **French-language journal, *Dialogue Chine-France***, published by the magazine *La Chine au présent* (*China Today*). There are, in fact, two magazines with the same title, both meant to build “a bridge between the Chinese and French populations.”<sup>1026</sup> A digital journal was launched in March 2020,<sup>1027</sup> while a monthly printed journal has been published “in cooperation with La Route de la Soie”<sup>1028</sup> since its first issue in July 2020. We can find in these pages contributions from several individuals mentioned above. This initiative, launched in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, can be interpreted as tied to Beijing’s efforts to muscle its influence in Europe precisely when its image was hit.



Joël Ruet, founding president of The Bridge Tank (→ p. 318) reacts to the release of the first issue of the digital journal *China-France Dialogue* in March 2020. The dialogue he refers to, co-organized with the “Beijing Press,” is the “Sino-French Dialogue on Civilizations” that The Bridge Tank had co-organized with the CIPG on October 21-22, 2019 in Paris (→ p. 321).

1026. [http://www.dialoguechinefrance.com/qson/202008/t20200803\\_800216532.html](http://www.dialoguechinefrance.com/qson/202008/t20200803_800216532.html).

1027. See for example issue #6 (the last of 2020, published on January 7, 2021): <https://fbook.com.cn/c/Nd1GsHpP7a#page/1> (<https://archive.vn/I31ft>).

1028. Masthead, 2. Moreover, we note a change: up to and including issue 3 (September 2020), the masthead indicated that the journal was “edited by *China Today* [...] in cooperation with La Route de la Soie”, but from issue 4 (October 2020) onwards it was “edited by La Route de la Soie Publishing, in partnership with *China Today*.” This inversion may have been motivated by a desire to put the French partner forward in order to be less susceptible to criticism of the role of *China Today*, i.e., the Party.

The monthly magazine, printed at approximately 2,000 copies, is sold for 3 euros and widely distributed free of charge to influencers, including think tanks and ministers' offices, which did not fail to attract attention.<sup>1029</sup> The link with the CCP is obvious since *Dialogue Chine-France* is published by *La Chine au présent*, which is none other than the French version of the magazine *China Today*. The latter is published by the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), an organization under the CCP's Central Propaganda Department (→ p. 288). The La Route de la Soie publishing house assumes this link since it indicated on its website that it “co-produced” this magazine with “*La Chine au présent* (part of China International Publishing Group).” Besides, Sonia Bressler is a member of both their editorial board and committee of experts,<sup>1030</sup> along with Wang Shuo, deputy director of the European Department of the CICIR, the MSS think tank (→ p. 126), Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), the think tank of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Christian Mestre, honorary dean of the Faculty of Law, Political Science and Management at the University of Strasbourg (→ p. 409).

From Beijing's point of view, this collaboration with a French publishing house is useful not only because it brings local relays but also, and above all, to “blur the tracks' as to the real origin of this magazine financed by the Chinese Communist Party” as Antoine Bondaz explained.<sup>1031</sup> For the same reasons, this monthly magazine tries to integrate French and international authors who are not necessarily stamped “friends of China.” For instance, the 6<sup>th</sup> issue (December 2020) included an article by the mayor of Brest, François Cuillandre, which he did not write: it “was directly commissioned by the municipality of Qingdao,” Brest's twin city.<sup>1032</sup>



Presentation of the magazine on the website of the publishing house La Route de la Soie (as of September 10, 2021, <https://archive.vn/9d8sh>).

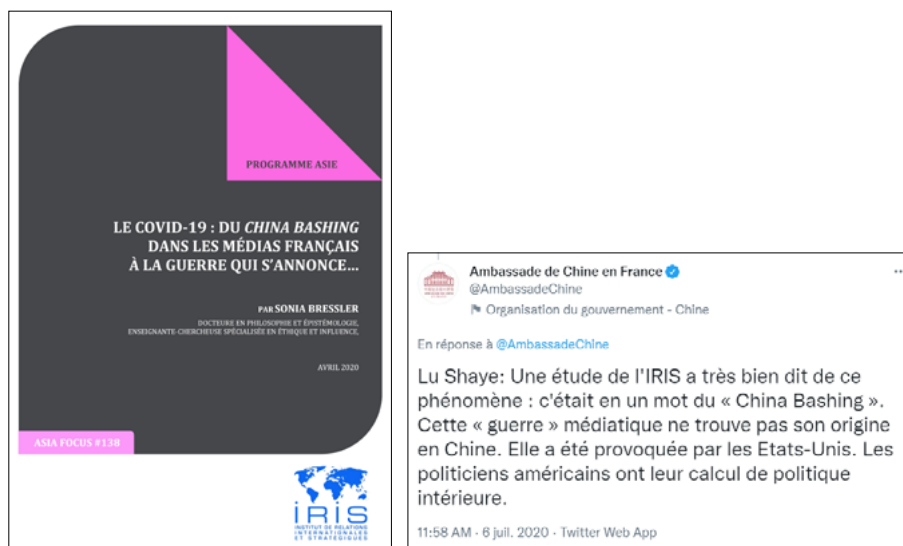
1029. Jenny Che, “Dialogue Chine-France, l'étrange revue d'influence chinoise” (“Dialogue France-China: the Strange Review of Chinese Influence”), *Intelligence Online*, 210315 (15 Mar. 2021).

1030. See masthead on page 2 of the magazine.

1031. Nicolas Quénel, “La propagande de Pékin à la conquête de la France” (“Beijing's Propaganda Tries to Conquer France”), *Libération* (3 Apr. 2021), 9.

1032. François Cuillandre, “Au bénéfice des peuples de Brest et de Qingdao” (“To the benefit of the Inhabitants of Brest and Qingdao”), *Dialogue Chine-France*, 6 (Dec. 2020), 56-60; Quénel, “La propagande de Pékin à la conquête de la France,” 8.

Sonia Bressler has long strived to denounce forms of “China Bashing”: in 2016, she criticized the fact that Beijing had become “an enemy of choice for French media.”<sup>1033</sup> In 2019, she told Xinhua she planned to “write a book to analyze the narratives in French media on China. I started this work for which I have set aside all the negative expressions they constantly read.”<sup>1034</sup> Covid-19 provided her with a perfect opportunity. On April 23, 2020, she published a note for IRIS (→ p. 316) titled *Le Covid-19: du China bashing dans les médias français à la guerre qui s’annonce...* (Covid 19: From China Bashing in French Media to the War Lurking Ahead...).<sup>1035</sup>



Sonia Bressler’s note on China Bashing, published by IRIS (left), and recommended by the Chinese Embassy on Twitter (right).

Therein, she denounced the criticisms formulated against China in the context of the epidemic, which she assimilated to a form of racism or, at the very least, to unfounded stereotypes. She also referred to it as a form of cynicism which entailed accusing China to divert the attention of public opinion. Her paper also tried to demonstrate that China had managed the crisis well, which was one of the Party’s narratives – namely, that China showed incredible generosity and, above all, that there was no evidence that the virus originated in China – which was a subtle way of **giving credence to the thesis of an American origins of the virus** (→ p. 589).

1033. Sonia Bressler, “La Chine: un ennemi tout désigné par les médias français,” (“China: An Enemy Designated by French Media”), *Rebelle.blogspirit.com* (27 Nov. 2016), <https://archive.vn/p8YFu>.

1034. “Sonia Bressler: pour mettre en accord le rêve chinois.”

1035. Sonia Bressler, *Le Covid-19: du China Bashing dans les médias français à la guerre qui s’annonce...* (Covid-19: From China Bashing in French Media to the Coming War), IRIS, Programme Asie, Asia Focus #138 (Apr. 2020), <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Asia-Focus-138.pdf>.





On the left, in her review of the first session of the IRIS/Chinese Embassy forum on the Silk Roads, published on her blog and reproduced on the website of La Route de la Soie, Sonia Bressler proposes a definition of the New Silk Roads.<sup>1036</sup> On the right, two and a half years later, the Chinese Embassy on Facebook recommends reading it.<sup>1037</sup>

The choice of IRIS to publish Sonia Bressler's note is part of a relationship that seems well-established by now. In 2017, Bressler had already published a laudatory review of the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the Silk Roads Forum co-organized by IRIS and the Chinese Embassy.<sup>1038</sup> In 2020, IRIS published Bressler's note in a series edited by Barthélémy Courmont, senior research fellow at IRIS, and who was reciprocally published by Bressler at La Route de la Soie Editions (a book on Cambodia in April-May 2020,<sup>1039</sup> and then an article in *Dialogue Chine-France* in October<sup>1040</sup> – a journal to which another researcher and the director of IRIS also contributed, as we already mentioned → p. 317). Since January 2021, Courmont has also been the editor of a book series at La Route de la Soie.<sup>1041</sup>

Generally speaking, **this French ecosystem is characterized by a regular, even circular, overlap of actors who gravitate around the Chinese embassy** and who are generally the same ones participating in the same events. As seen in the previous pages, we find Pascal Boniface (IRIS) at FPI events, and conversely Jean-Pierre Raffarin (FPI) at IRIS events co-organized with the Chinese embassy and publicized by Joël Ruet (Bridge Tank).<sup>1042</sup> Raffarin participates in events co-organized by The Bridge Tank and the Chinese Embassy; FPI is a partner to other events sponsored by The Bridge Tank; etc.

1036. Ibid.

1037. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/AmbassadeChine/posts/213710613341491>.

1038. Sonia Bressler, "Les nouvelles Routes de la Soie" ("The New Silk Roads"), *Rebelle.blogspot.com* (29 Nov. 2017), <https://archive.vn/J092k>.

1039. Barthélémy Courmont, *Innocence* (Paris: Editions La Route de la Soie, 2020).

1040. Barthélémy Courmont, "Une balance commerciale à rééquilibrer, des investissements à renforcer" ("Rebalancing the Trade Deficit, Reinforcing Investments"), *Dialogue Chine-France* (4 Oct. 2020), 18-21.

1041. "Nouvelle collection dédiée à la géopolitique: Mondes actuels" ("A New Collection Dedicated to Geopolitics: Mondes Actuels") (Paris: Editions La Route de la Soie, 13 Jan. 2021), <https://archive.vn/6DdJ8>.

1042. For instance, telling Xinhua that the first edition of the Paris Silk Roads Forum "has well presented the points that the French have not yet understood about 'the Belt and Road,' as well as those that interest them about this initiative. This is good progress" (Joel Ruet, quoted in "Pourquoi 'la Ceinture et la Route' intéresse de plus en plus les Français?" ("Why 'the Belt and Road' is increasingly interesting to the French"), Xinhua, December 21, 2017).



On the left, an event organized by the Chinese Embassy on June 11, 2020 with the participation of Ambassador **Lu Shaye**, **Barthélémy Courmont** and **Pascal Boniface** (IRIS), as well as **Joël Ruet** (The Bridge Tank) and others, including **Hubert Védrine**, former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Lionel Vairon**, a sinologist who, until his death in December 2020, was part of the committee of experts of the journal *Dialogue Chine-France*, and **Emmanuel Dupuy**, president of the “Institute Prospective and Security in Europe (IPSE),”<sup>1043</sup> guest professor at Wanli University in Zhejiang<sup>1044</sup> and expert at the Ningbo Maritime Silk Road Institute in China<sup>1045</sup>. He is a regular contributor to the Chinese (and Russian) media<sup>1046</sup> who had already participated in the event co-organized by The Bridge Tank and the Chinese Embassy on October 11, 2019 and would also participate in the October 15, 2020 Forum for EU-China cooperation co-organized by The Bridge Tank and the Chinese Embassy. Right, event on “Post-COVID Ecology and Environment” organized by the Chinese Embassy on September 28, 2020 at the Château du Rivau, featuring again Ambassador **Lu Shaye** and **Pascal Boniface** (IRIS) among others.<sup>1047</sup>

1043. An entity presented as a “think tank,” which has accounts on social networks, but whose website (institut-ipse.eu) is inactive at the time of writing (12 September 2021). In the archived versions of the site, the “Our team” page contains only one person, Emmanuel Dupuy, “president,” who is described as “having a number of people gathered around him” (<https://archive.vn/OCJiE>).

1044. The university does not seem to indicate it on its website but this is how he presents himself in several interviews and on social media (<https://twitter.com/Emdupuy/status/1113724147866185728>).

1045. <https://archive.vn/haB41>.

1046. See for instance “Pourquoi les médias français sont-ils hostiles à la Chine?” (Why are the French media hostile to China?), CGTN, 6 May 2020 (<https://archive.vn/DRYb7>), shared by the Chinese Embassy on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AmbassadeChine/status/1257958869038518272>.

1047. Source: Facebook page of the Chinese Embassy in France (29 Sep. 2020), <https://www.facebook.com/page/100399834672570/search/?q=iris>.

## VIII. Culture

Chinese influence on culture is twofold: influence on the production and export of cultural products to seduce foreign publics; and influence exerted on foreign cultural productions to make them conform to the Party's interests.

### A. The production and export of cultural products

"Culture is a country and nation's soul," Xi Jinping said in his speech to the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress: "Our country will thrive only if our culture thrives, and our nation will be strong only if our culture is strong." Therefore, he called for the "develop[ment of] a socialist culture" to "add new luster to Chinese culture" and "to develop a great socialist culture in China."<sup>1048</sup> Three five-year plans have successively delineated China's strategy for cultural development since 2006.<sup>1049</sup> This strategy supports and promotes the production and export of Chinese cultural products abroad.

**Cultural products, such as movies and TV series, music, and books, are powerful vectors of influence** if they manage to penetrate foreign markets and adjust to consumers' tastes who do not necessarily share the same cultural codes. **Today, movies and TV series are undoubtedly the most powerful and attractive among these vectors.** In 2017, China's Ministry of Commerce announced \$90 billion worth of exported cultural products that year, including more than \$400 million for cinema and other television products, based on data by the National Radio and Television Administration.<sup>1050</sup> Chinese TV series have always been particularly successful in Asia,<sup>1051</sup> and in Southeast Asia mostly. However, China wants to diversify and export its television products to other markets in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and in North America. In 2017, *China Daily* reported that China had translated more than 1,600 films and television products into 36 foreign languages, including English, French, Russian, and Arabic. These were being broadcast in about 100 countries.<sup>1052</sup>

**Several organizations are key in selling cultural products abroad.** For example, **China International Television Corporation (CITVC, 中国国际电视总公司)** is a subsidiary of China Media Group (CMG) founded in 1984 to promote Chinese television products abroad. It has established partnerships with foreign channels to broadcast Chinese programs, such as the "China Hour" broadcast on the Portuguese channel Porto Canal since 2018, the first Chinese program on a Southern European channel.<sup>1053</sup> The China Radio, Film and Television Programs Exchanging Center (CHNPEC), one of the main organizations marketing and promoting Chinese films and TV series worldwide, is

1048. "Texte intégral du rapport de Xi Jinping au 19e Congrès national du PCC" ("Full Report by Xi Jinping at the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress"), *Xinhuanet* (3 Nov. 2017), <http://archive.vn/QRvzM>.

1049. The National Plan on Cultural Reform and Development published in 2006 is available on the government's website (in Chinese) and archived at <http://archive.vn/q0bwo>. An English translation is provided by Rogier Creemers on his website, "Outline of the National '11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan' Period Cultural Development Plan," China Copyright and Media (13 Sept. 2006). The 2012 and 2017 plans, also published on the government's website, are archived here: <http://archive.vn/vVmPo> and <http://archive.vn/lt9oz>.

1050. Sun Wenyu, "China's Cultural Exports Hit \$90 billion in 2017: Ministry of Commerce," *People's Daily* (9 Feb. 2018), <http://archive.vn/dFH79>; Xu Fan, "China's Television Dramas are Spreading Their Wings Across Asia," *The Nation Thailand* (3 Jun. 2018).

1051. A relative success compared to the power of South Korean, Japanese, or even Taiwanese movies.

1052. Xu Fan, "Chinese TV Shows Win Foreign Fans," *Global Times* (27 Nov. 2017), <http://archive.vn/B3kxh>.

1053. "'China Hour' Officially Kicks Off in Portugal," CHNPEC (28 Nov. 2018), <http://archive.vn/0jQWL>.

supervised by CMG and CITVC.<sup>1054</sup> In order to accelerate the distribution of Chinese TV products abroad, CITVC and the CHNPEC have set up various other platforms:

- **The China International Film and TV Programs Exhibition (CIFTPE, 中国国际电视总公司联合展区):** an annual exhibition showcasing China's products for export and its progress in international cooperation. The last, 16<sup>th</sup> edition was held in September 2019. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in June 2019 between CITVC and the American National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) which included, among other things, the promotion of the CIFTPE.<sup>1055</sup>
- **The Film and TV Import and Export Association (FTIEA, 影视文化进出口企业协展区),** created in 2017 with the support of the State Council Information Office and the National Radio and Television Administration, has more than 50 members now.<sup>1056</sup> The FTIEA organizes and takes part in international forums and other events to promote Chinese creations abroad.<sup>1057</sup>
- **The Belt and Road Media Community (BRMC, 丝路电视国际合作共同体)** meets yearly since 2016, during an annual summit organized by CITVC and CHNPEC, to promote cooperation in the media and cultural sectors and to develop the influence of the "BRI community" internationally.<sup>1058</sup>

## 1. TV shows

Chinese TV shows can be broadly categorized into three genres, depending on the time period of the plot: "costume" or "traditional" series (古装剧), whose story takes place – more or less realistically – in ancient or imperial China; series that have the – often hagiographic – history of the CCP as a backdrop; and "realistic" or "modern" series that take place in the present-day China. Several "traditional" shows have been met with dazzling success abroad, such as *Story of Yanxi Palace* (延禧攻略), *Empresses in the Palace* (甄嬛传), *Nirvana in Fire* (琅琊榜), and *Princess Agents* (楚乔传).<sup>1059</sup> This type of series seduces with elegant costumes and sets, and it feeds the image of a rich, refined and powerful past Chinese civilization. This image reinforces the legitimacy of the Chinese narrative according to which the emergence (or rather the re-emergence) of China is a natural fact, as the country is just regaining the status of power it had enjoyed before Westerners inflicted "a Century of Humiliation" on it (百年耻辱).

Despite some domestic successes, series and films on the Party's history, which are always challenging to evaluate since their broadcast is often imposed on TV channels, are difficult to export. This category is best illustrated by *Diplomatic Situation* (外交风云),<sup>1060</sup> a 48-epi-

1054. "GM Speech," CHNPEC, <http://archive.vn/hpSwk>.

1055. "CITVC Signs Partnership Deal with NATPE," NATPE, <https://www.natpe.com/citvc-signs-partnership-deal-with-natpe/>.

1056. "Film and TV Import & Export Association: Telling Good Chinese Story," CGTN (17 May 2018), <http://archive.vn/RSp99>; TMTPOST, "Who Are the Buyers of Mainland Produced Drama Series Going Global?" *Medium* (29 Oct. 2019).

1057. "People's Daily: Chinese TV Series 'Go Abroad Collectively,'" CHNPEC (25 Jun. 2018), <http://archive.vn/FRvkU>.

1058. "2017 Belt and Road Media Community Summit Forum was Held in Beijing," CHNPEC (22 Dec. 2017); "2019 Belt and Road Media Community Summit Forum to Be Unveiled Soon," Belt and Road Media Community (20 Jun. 2019), <http://archive.vn/R2FqS>.

1059. "People's Daily: Chinese TV Series 'Go Abroad Collectively'; Xu Fan, "Chinese TV Shows Win Foreign Fans."

1060. This was one of the broadcasts made mandatory as the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the regime approached.



sode series that painted an apologetic portrait of historical leaders of the Party (notably Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yi) and recounted their diplomatic successes at the Bandung or Geneva conferences. This category struggles to reach international audiences and contributes little to propagating a universally applicable Chinese narrative.



“Modern” series, such as *Ode to Joy* (欢乐颂) or *Stay with Me* (放弃我, 抓紧我) – which have been very successful abroad – convey another image that Chinese authorities are just as eager to disseminate. Whatever the plot, these stories, which take today’s society as their backdrop, show an economically developed, modernized and prosperous China – an image that the Party welcomes because it sees itself as the architect of this modern China. More importantly, these series are seen as a powerful vehicle to “more adequately tell” China’s history and to “better understand” today’s China as the victim of many prejudices.

## 2. Movies



Other cinematographic achievements defend the country more straightforwardly. *Operation Red Sea* (红海行动) and the *Wolf Warrior* series (战狼) are patriotic action films that have been very successful upon their release, both at home and abroad. The first, released for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PLA’s creation, and concurrently to the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress, honored the PLA naval forces who were tasked with evacuating Chinese nationals stranded in the midst of the civil war in Yemen. *Wolf Warrior* – the second opus was **China’s biggest box-office success** (it brought \$870 million) – follows the adventures of a former Special Forces member who goes to Africa to protect his fellow countrymen in danger. **Movies like these defend the image of a responsible China, a “mother country” ready to make any sacrifice to protect its citizens**

in danger, a message that undoubtedly primarily targets a domestic audience (to strengthen its sense of national pride and confidence in the ruling authorities). These movies also show (off) the projection and combat capabilities of the PLA, the talents and the sense of honor of the Chinese military. They convey an image that seeks to impress and

seduce foreign audiences in the same way that many Hollywood action films tend to reinforce the attractiveness of U.S. armed forces.

The science fiction movie *Wandering Earth* (流浪地球) is another example: in a future world where humanity is facing imminent extinction and in which not a single American is represented, a group of Chinese dares to fight to the end and manages to revive hope, unify the remaining people, and thus **to save humanity**. The message is forceful and corresponds to a PRC narrative: China cares about the well-being of others and, in this sense, offers an alternative to the American way.



The dissemination of these cultural products abroad – when they manage to make room for themselves and take hold in the market – makes it possible to make Chinese culture, history, language and civilization known and loved and they serve as a powerful vehicle to defend a specific image of China: powerful, rich, developed, refined and caring.

### 3. Video games

China also exerts a cultural influence through video games, an industry where it is a **major player**. In 2018, four of the top five global companies in the sector were Chinese, with Tencent leading the way. The Chinese market is the world's second-largest market behind the United States and was estimated to be worth \$92 billion in 2020.<sup>1061</sup> Video games are one of the very first cultural goods exported by China and, therefore, a significant vector of influence. They offer cultural worlds that are more easily adaptable to the expectations of the global market than cinema and even more so than literature. They allow China to export and make known typically Chinese characters or heroes such as the monkey Sun Wukong from the *Journey to the West*. The Chinese market is undergoing two important developments that could eventually facilitate the development of national companies on the international market: the expansion of games on cell phones and on the cloud. The first, known as mini-games, are mainly the work of Tencent, which offers them on its social network WeChat and on QQ. Cloud games offer streaming access without the need for downloads, and Tencent is also a leader in this market.

In recent years, Chinese video game companies have embarked on a **very aggressive strategy of acquiring foreign companies**. Tencent, for example, now owns the U.S. company Riot Games (*Legends of Runeterra*), the Finnish company Supercell (*Clash of Clans*) or the New Zealand company Grinding Gear Games (*Path of Exile*). The Chinese company also owns 40% of the capital of Epic Games, the developer of *Fortnite*. In France, Tencent holds a 5% stake in Ubisoft, the national leader in the sector. China's penetration of this market increases its influence and its ability to control anti-Chinese narratives or positions contrary to its interests. However, video games are less readily associated with Chinese culture and are, therefore, only a secondary vector of seduction for Beijing. On the other hand, it constitutes an excellent tool for disinformation.

1061. Wang Junwei, "China's Gaming Industry Continues Explosive Growth," *China Daily* (31 Jul. 2020).

## B. Influence on foreign cultural productions

### 1. Influencing the cinema of others: the example of Hollywood

China's strategy in the cultural sector and particularly in the production of cultural goods is often summarized by the expression "borrowing a boat out to sea" (借船出海). This *Chengyu* means in common parlance: "to benefit from someone's help" or "to borrow someone else's resources to achieve one's own goals." And, as the journalist Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian puts it, "**Hollywood** is the world's largest and most powerful boat,"<sup>1062</sup> in the sense that it is arguably the **most influential artistic and cultural medium**. In a particularly comprehensive report on the subject, the NGO PEN America, which defends freedom of expression in the country and around the world, shows how, in **order not to upset Beijing and maintain an access to the gigantic Chinese market, "[as] U.S. film studios compete for the opportunity to access Chinese audiences, many are making difficult and troubling compromises on free expression: changing the content of films intended for international – including American audiences; engaging in self-censorship; agreeing to provide a censored version of a movie for screening in China; and in some instances directly inviting Chinese government censors onto their film sets [...]."**<sup>1063</sup>

This **growing acceptance of Chinese censorship**, PEN America points out, is all the more disturbing because, while regularly producing "patriotic" films that contribute significantly to American *soft power*, Hollywood does not hesitate to chip away at the U.S. political life and is seen as being out of Washington's control – but not of Beijing's.

The problem is even more acute today as the **Chinese film market is on its way to become the world's largest market**. China's quarterly box office revenues exceeded those of the United States for the first time in the first quarter of 2018 and were expected to surpass yearly U.S. revenues in 2020, becoming the world's largest market, according to estimates made prior to the Covid-19 pandemic that hit the film industry hard around the world. Even though China became the world's first market to regain its box office in August 2020,<sup>1064</sup> the latest estimates indicated that the Chinese market will have to wait a few more years before outperforming the U.S. market.<sup>1065</sup> In any case, a trend is observable, and because of its size, **the Chinese market has become unavoidable for major American studios**. In recent years, blockbusters such as *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (2019), and *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw* (2019) generated more money in China than in the U.S.<sup>1066</sup>

**Chinese investments in Hollywood films have also grown considerably** in recent years: in the top 100 most profitable films worldwide, China contributed to financing 12 Hollywood films in 17 years (between 1997 and 2013), and 41 in just 5 years (between 2014

1062. Cited in *Made in Hollywood, Censored by Beijing: The U.S. Film Industry and Chinese Government Influence*, PEN America (August 2020), 21.

1063. *Made in Hollywood*, 2.

1064. Rebecca Davis, "China is World's First Market to Achieve Full Box Office Recovery, Says Analytics Firm," *Variety* (27 Aug. 2020).

1065. Marrian Zhou, "China's Movie Industry Won't Surpass US in 2020 After All: Report," *Nikkei Asia* (23 Sept. 2020).

1066. *Made in Hollywood*, 8.



and 2018).<sup>1067</sup> The offensive is blatant, and these Chinese investments give Beijing considerable leverage over the U.S. studios that benefit from them.

**This dependence is not reciprocal: while Hollywood needs China more and more, China needs Hollywood less and less,** not only because the technical progress made by the Chinese film industry in recent years allows for more Chinese productions to satisfy their audiences' thirst for blockbusters, but also because the "Cold War" with the United States makes Chinese authorities and its public more hostile to U.S. productions. Whereas Hollywood productions dominated the top 10 biggest hits in China before 2018, in 2020, only one did, the other spots being taken by Chinese and Hong Kong films.<sup>1068</sup> **As the Chinese market becomes increasingly important but also competitive, American studios are encouraged to double down on their efforts to please Beijing.**

#### *a. Access to the Chinese market*

**There are three ways to access the Chinese market. The first is quota:** according to a Sino-American agreement of 2012, American films have 34 spots per year on the Chinese market. These coveted seats are, in fact, almost exclusively occupied by blockbusters. For some, this ceiling is more problematic than content censorship: **the limited number of American films authorized in China "is the real censorship** that is going on. That is the real limit on [freedom of] expression," explained a Hollywood writer.<sup>1069</sup> The decision-making process – the acceptance or rejection of a film – is vague. And this opacity contributes to self-censorship because, as the **limits of what is acceptable are blurred, studios take as few risks as possible to maximize their chances.**

**The second way to distribute a film in China is the fixed fee or buy-out model,** whereby the foreign studio agrees to transfer all profits made in China to the Chinese distributor in exchange for a flat fee. Thirty to forty films a year enter the Chinese market this way, primarily independent films (blockbusters occupying most of the quota spots), to which censorship is also applied.

**The third way, which is increasingly used, is the co-production of a foreign movie with a Chinese studio.** It has several advantages, as the films in question are not considered foreign (e.g., they are not affected by the periods during the year when Beijing prohibits the screening of foreign films to promote its domestic film industry).<sup>1070</sup> However, co-production is also **the formula that allows Beijing to exert the most significant influence on content,** with the Chinese partner playing an intermediary role with the censors: they are present from the beginning and at each stage of the film's creation. Besides, the China Film Coproduction Corporation (CFCC), a division of CFGC, sets artistic limitations: at least one-third of the financial investment and casting must be Chinese, and at least one scene must be shot in China. For example, when a Chinese production company funded 40% of *Looper* (2012), reclassifying the film as a co-production, the character played by Bruce Willis, who was to divide his time between Paris and Kansas, finally split it between Paris and Shanghai, and was united with a Chinese woman played by Xu Qing.<sup>1071</sup> Similarly, in the book on which the film *The Meg* (2018) was based, the events took place in Hawaii,

1067. Amy Qin and Audrey Carlsen, "How China Is Rewriting Its Own Script," *The New York Times* (18 Nov. 2018).

1068. *Made in Hollywood*, 8.

1069. *Ibid.*, 34.

1070. *Ibid.*, 36.

1071. Jonathan Landreth, "Endgame, DMG Team to Make Rian Johnson's 'Looper,'" *Hollywood Reporter* (18 Jan. 2011).



INTRODUCTION

whereas the film script of a U.S.-China joint production relocated it to China. In addition, the scientists who were Japanese in the book became Chinese.

CONCEPTS

**Co-productions are sometimes more or less hidden.** For example, *China: Times of Xi*, a three-episode documentary series aired on Discovery Channel in October 2017, was presented as “an independent television production” when, in fact, it was the brainchild of “a three-year content coproduction deal inked in March 2015 between Discovery Networks Asia-Pacific and China Intercontinental Communications Centre (CICC), a company operated by the State Council Information Office (CSIO) – the Chinese government organ sharing an address with the Central Propaganda Department’s Office of Foreign Propaganda (OFP).”<sup>1072</sup>

PEN America pointed out that what appears to be a protectionist measure on the outset has another dimension in an authoritarian state where production companies are almost all state-owned or controlled in some way by the state, where the actors are those authorized by the Party, and where the authorities decide which scenes should be shot in China, where and how, to **portray only “a sanitized image of China.”**<sup>1073</sup>

ACTORS

Furthermore, co-productions must also comply with a set of rules (*Provisions on the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films*, 2004). Article 6(a), for example, obliges co-productions to “be in accord with the Constitution, laws, regulations and the relevant provisions of China,” to “respect the customs, religions, beliefs and living habits of all ethnic groups in China”, to “facilitate the propagation of the refined indigenous culture and traditions of China” and “the social stability of China” (social stability which, PEN America noted, is one of the arguments used against dissidents or ethnic minorities, especially the Uyghurs). Furthermore, Article 16 states that the film can only be screened “inside or outside China” after it has passed the government’s “examination,” or censorship, which occurs at any time, from the preliminary examination of the script to the verification of the finished film, – and is conducted by the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department. Government censors were present on the Chinese campus of DreamWorks Animation to oversee the creation of *Kung Fu Panda III* (2016) for instance, a Chinese-American joint production (China Film Group, DreamWorks Animation and Oriental DreamWorks).<sup>1074</sup>

ACTIONS

*b. Blacklists*

CASE

The turning point came in 1997, with the successive release of *Kundun*, on the youth of the Dalai Lama; *Seven Years in Tibet*, which showed, among other things, the invasion of Tibet by China; and *Red Corner*, the story of an American lawyer wrongly accused of murder in China. Not only did Beijing refuse to authorize their release in China, but their directors and main actors were allegedly blacklisted and the production companies involved prevented from working in China for five years.<sup>1075</sup> Although China’s market was modest in size at the time, comparable to Peru’s, Hollywood immediately got the message. Michael Eisner, the then-CEO of Disney, which had produced *Kundun*, met with Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji in October 1998 in Beijing, apologized, and promised that it would

CONCLUSION

1072. Christopher Walker, “China’s Foreign Influence and Sharp Power Strategy to Shape and Influence Democratic Institutions” (U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, National Endowment for Democracy, 16 May 2019).

1073. *Made in Hollywood*, 37.

1074. *Ibid.*, 37.

1075. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

not happen again.<sup>1076</sup> Indeed, the U.S. studios gradually conformed to the expectations of the Chinese government afterward.

**The blacklistings of producers, directors, or actors deemed hostile to China are of varying intensity: they may be limited to a warning; one or more visa refusals; or last for decades.** Brad Pitt, who was (presumably) blacklisted for acting in *Seven Years in Tibet*, was able to return to China in 2014 solely, while the director Jean-Jacques Annaud was asked as early as 2009 to direct a Franco-Chinese co-production. On this occasion, in a letter in Chinese published on Weibo, which is now deleted but preserved and reproduced by PEN America, Annaud issued an apology. He expressed his “deep regret” for the negative impact that *Seven Years in Tibet* had in China and declared that he had “never participated in any organization or association related to Tibet.” Furthermore, he had “never supported Tibetan independence, nor [...] had personal contact with the Dalai Lama, let alone been his friend.”<sup>1077</sup> After making amends in 2009, Annaud made up for his past decision by making a film co-produced by a Chinese company (*The Last Wolf*, 2015). He also signed “a strategic partnership agreement with China for two films in the next three years,”<sup>1078</sup> also becoming a member of the Strategic Committee of the France China Foundation (→ p. 268)<sup>1079</sup> (and his biography on their website, which cited many of his films, still omits to mention *Seven Years in Tibet*).<sup>1080</sup>

### c. Cut or modify to suit

One of Beijing’s objectives is to censor content perceived as threatening, particularly the five “poisons” (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners, pro-democracy activists and Taiwanese independence supporters) but also, more broadly, anything that could question the CCP’s authority.

The simplest censorship is **removing a scene, a shot or a line of dialogue following a demand by Chinese authorities as a condition to access to the Chinese market.** Thus, in *Pirates of the Caribbean 3* (2007), half of the appearances of Captain Sao Feng, played by the Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-Fat, were suppressed in a completely assumed manner (according to Xinhua), as Beijing considered them to be “vilifying and defacing the Chinese.”<sup>1081</sup> Similarly, the Chinese version of *Men In Black 3* (2012) is 13 minutes shorter than the original one: among the deleted scenes are references to Internet censorship by the Chinese government – an ironic and self-defeating censorship, since it confirms what they intended to conceal – but also the scene of a fight in Chinatown.

Hollywood studios also produced a Chinese version of *Mission Impossible III* (2006) without the scene in which Ethan Hunt kills a Chinese henchman and without a shot showing tattered underwear hanging from the clothesline of a Shanghai apartment; or a Chinese version of the James Bond movie *Skyfall* (2012) without the scene during which a Chinese security guard is killed and without lines of dialogue referring to prostitution and torture by the police. Same-sex kissing was also removed from the films *Cloud Atlas* (2013), *Star Trek*

1076. Ben Cohen, Erich Schwartzel, and James T. Areddy, “NBA Stars study Hollywood’s playbook in China,” *Wall Street Journal* (12 Oct. 2019).

1077. Letter of December 28, 2009 published on Weibo and reproduced in *Made in Hollywood*, 17.

1078. “Annaud signe un nouveau film en coproduction avec la Chine” (“Annaud Signs for a New Movie coproduced with China”), *France Info* (27 Mar. 2014).

1079. On the FCF, see Harold Thibault and Solenn de Royer, “Dans les coulisses de la France China Foundation, pépinière à élites entre Paris et Pékin” (“Behind the Scenes of the France China Foundation, an Incubator for the Elites Between Paris and Beijing”), *Le Monde* (26 May 2020).

1080. France China Foundation, Strategic Council, <https://francechinafoundation.org/strategic/?lang=fr>.

1081. “Disney’s ‘Pirates 3’ Slashed in China,” *China Daily* (15 Jun. 2007).

*Beyond* (2016) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017).<sup>1082</sup> Of course, PEN America noted that China is not the only country in the world to censor films. However, the size of its market gives it unparalleled leverage over Hollywood: **while other states cut foreign films themselves, after their initial release, sometimes in an artisanal way, and without informing the producers, Beijing can force U.S. studios to produce an altered version of their film, i.e. to do “the dirty work for them,”** which also has the advantage of concealing censorship.<sup>1083</sup>

**U.S. studios have an interest in internalizing the constraint because external and post facto censorship can cost them time and money:** time for the Chinese censors to evaluate the film once it is made, to ask for the withdrawal or the modification of certain scenes, which sometimes have to be entirely re-shot. All of this has a cost – and a delayed Chinese release may incur additional costs if it comes after the U.S. release and requires to reschedule the planned communication plan. Therefore, **U.S. studios had adopted internal and ex-ante censorship, i.e., self-censorship, producing from the outset the most irreproachable film possible, being complacent toward Beijing** to maximize their chances of quickly obtaining an *imprimatur* from Chinese authorities. Meanwhile, and to know in advance what Beijing’s red lines could be, the studios call on consultants, open informal channels of communication with Chinese authorities, and use their Chinese partners – their Chinese distributor or instance – as “cultural intermediaries between Hollywood and the censors.”<sup>1084</sup> Throughout filmmaking (at the script, casting, shooting, production stages), they hope to anticipate and avoid potential irritants, hence ensuring that the film remains within the limits of what is acceptable to Beijing.

The examples of censorship cited above deal with Chinese versions that exist alongside the original version. **In some cases, however, self-censorship implies modifying the original version,** as shown by several examples involving Sony. The best-known is the film *Red Dawn* (2012), which was supposed to tell the story of a group of Americans resisting a Chinese occupation of the United States. That was the plan, and that is what the studio filmed. However, after the filming, the Chinese soldiers were replaced by North Korean soldiers “by digitally altering the Chinese flags and insignias into North Korean ones” (see image below).<sup>1085</sup> This change occurred after Chinese diplomats made the film’s producers aware of the issue by using a production company with offices in both the US and China “as a go-between and mediator.”<sup>1086</sup>

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1082. *Made in Hollywood*, 21.

1083. *Ibid*, 22.

1084. *Ibid*, 23

1085. *Ibid*, 24

1086. *Ibid*, 24.



Similarly, Sony also altered the film *Robocop* (2014) to downplay the historical ties between the US company Omnicorp and the Chinese government in the storyline, while acknowledging in an email that this was indeed “censorship” (see below).<sup>1087</sup> Also, Sony had several scenes removed from the film *Pixels* (2015), including one in which extra-terrestrial beings pierced the Great Wall: they decided to blow up the Taj Mahal instead. Justifying the decision to change the original version of the film, one of Sony’s executives explained in an email that changing the sole Chinese version would have attracted the attention of “the press to call us out for this when bloggers invariably compare the versions.”<sup>1088</sup>

**From:** Odell, Steven  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 12, 2013 8:29 PM  
**To:** Blake, Jeff  
**Cc:** Bruer, Rory; Weinstock, Marc; Clark, Nigel; Bruno, Steve  
**Subject:** FW: Robocop - China  
**Importance:** High

Jeff,

Below is Steve B’s reaction while we try to get the film to Li and Joe as well. Changing the China elements to another country should be a relatively easy fix. There is only downside to leaving the film as it is. Recommendation is to change all versions as if we only change the China version, we set ourselves up for the press to call us out for this when bloggers invariably compare the versions and realize we changed the China setting just to pacify that market. You advised Gary a while back based on Nigel’s notes at the script phase so none of this should be a surprise to them.

Source: <https://wikileaks.org/sony/emails/emailid/182471>.

1087. Clare Baldwin, “How Sony Sanitized Films to Please China’s Censors,” *Japan Times* (26 Jul. 2015).

1088. *Made in Hollywood*, 24.



**From:** Chow, LI  
**To:** Belgrad, Doug; ODell, Steven  
**Cc:** Bruer, Rory; Blake, Jeff; Bruno, Steve; Dickerman, Sam; Minghella, Hannah  
**Sent:** Wed Dec 18 02:35:20 2013  
**Subject:** RE: Pixels China

Dear Doug,

I read the script when it was initially sent out and gave my comments, as per the below. Even though breaking a hole on the Great Wall may not be a problem as long as it is part of a worldwide phenomenon, it is actually unnecessary because it will not benefit the China release at all. I would then, recommend not to do it. As to relocating the Pac Man action from Tokyo to Shanghai, this is not a good idea because it will involve destruction all over the city and may likely cause some sensitivity. In other words, it is rather hard to say whether it would be a problem because the unwritten rule is that it is acceptable if there is no real intention in destroying a certain building or street and if it is just collateral damage. But where would you draw the line?

-Breaking a hole on the Great Wall: this is fine as long as this is shown as part of a big scale world-wide destruction, meaning that it would be good to show several recognizable historical sites in different parts of the world being destroyed.

when the Ambassador Porter, CIA Chief and President Cooper are guessing who was responsible for the attacks: China can be mentioned alongside other super powers but they would not like "Russia and China don't have this kind of technology". And in view of recent news on China hacking into government servers, they may object to "a communist-conspiracy brother hacked into the mail server..."

Best regards,

LI

Source: <https://wikileaks.org/sony/emails/emailid/184517>.



Other examples of rewriting include changing a dialogue about the origin of the virus in the zombie movie *World War Z* (2013), which was China in the original script based on Max Brooks' (2006) eponymous novel (based on the SARS epidemic of 2002-2004). Dialogues were changed to conceal this Chinese origin, at the request of the production company Paramount in the hope of passing Beijing's censorship – but this was evidently not enough, since the film was not allowed in China, perhaps for other reasons (Brad Pitt, perhaps still blacklisted, starred in it and also co-produced it).<sup>1089</sup> A Tibetan character was replaced by a Celtic one in *Dr. Strange* (2016) and the Japanese and Taiwanese flags on Tom Cruise's leather jacket were erased from the trailer of *Top Gun: Maverick* (2020), a movie partly produced by Chinese Tencent Pictures. It did not go unnoticed.

**Hollywood is a spectacular yet not unique case: there are other examples, elsewhere in the world, of films modified to avoid displeasing Beijing.** A famous case is the decision to cut the contribution of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, a figure of the Chinese political opposition, from the German collective movie *Berlin, I Love You* (2019), a compilation of ten short films.<sup>1090</sup>

**“Over time, writers and creators do not even conceive of ideas, stories, or characters that would flout the rules [established by Beijing], because there is no point in doing so. [...] This all means, that censorship is most notable not for its presence, but for the absence it creates: the absence of films, stories, characters, and plotlines that would have existed – or existed in a different form – were it not for the power of the censor.”**<sup>1091</sup>

1089. *Made in Hollywood*, 28-29.

1090. Scott Roxborough, “Ai Weiwei Was Cut from ‘Berlin, I Love You’ Because Backers Feared a China Backlash,” *Hollywood Reporter* (18 Feb. 2019).

1091. *Made in Hollywood*, 4.

d. Add or modify in order to please

Chinese authorities do not simply have a negative objective (avoiding some content), they also have a positive objective: to promote certain other content, i.e. to shape the Hollywood narrative on China in order to show the country in a positive, powerful, rich, stable, harmonious way. Speaking in Los Angeles in 2013, the president of the China Film Group Corporation (CFG), the largest state-owned film production and distribution company in China, reached out to US filmmakers (“We have a huge market and we want to share it with you”), but with one condition to cooperation: “[we] want films that are heavily invested in Chinese culture, not one or two shots [...]. We want to see positive Chinese images.”<sup>1092</sup>

Some had understood this for a long time, taking several measures such as **including “good”** and empowered **Chinese characters** (which in itself is a good thing if it corrects racist stereotypes on Asians previously found in Western cinema). But also **filming more in China and giving China the “right” role in screenplays, that of a country helping others and even saving the world** – the films *2012* (2009), *Gravity* (2013) and *Arrival* (2016) are examples of this trend.<sup>1093</sup> Additionally, it can mean depicting China as the future of the world: in *Looper* (2012), a character from the future invites the hero to go to China.

Correlatively, the same desire to please explains that, **for some years now, “there [has been] no more Chinese villains in American films.”**<sup>1094</sup> Americans are sometimes even described in a less flattering way than the Chinese: in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014), for example, the bad guys were CIA agents whereas the Chinese government was responsible, efficient and benevolent, and on the “good” side – which made journalist David S. Cohen say that it was “A Splendidly Patriotic Film, If You Happen To Be Chinese.”<sup>1095</sup> As a result, the film broke audience and revenue records in China. Another example that put a smile on people’s faces was the Megalodon in *The Meg* (2018), whose action took place in China: it seemed to prefer to devour and cut Westerners to pieces, while Chinese characters fared better.<sup>1096</sup>



Other cases are more political. In *Abominable* (2019), a Sino-American co-production (Pearl Studio and DreamWorks Animation), a map of the region that appeared in one scene displayed the **“nine-dash line,”** i.e., Beijing’s territorial claim on the South China Sea, a claim contested by its neighbors. The UN Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in 2016 on a dispute between China and the Philippines that this claim was contrary to international law (maritime law in that case). This judgment, however, did not prevent

China from defending the “nine-dash line” by printing it in its passports, on T-shirts worn by Chinese tourists (→ p. 405) or by slipping it into a Hollywood film. This practice did not escape the notice of its neighbors: Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines were outraged

1092. Qin and Carlsen, “How China Is Rewriting Its Own Script.”

1093. *Made in Hollywood*, 31.

1094. Yuval Bustan, “Why are There No More Chinese Villains in American Films?” *Forbes* (18 Nov. 2018).

1095. David S. Cohen, “Transformers: A Splendidly Patriotic Film, If You Happen To Be Chinese (Opinion),” *Variety* (3 Jul. 2014).

1096. Josh Ye, “Is Global Box Office Smash the Meg Pandering to China?” *South China Morning Post* (16 Aug. 2018).

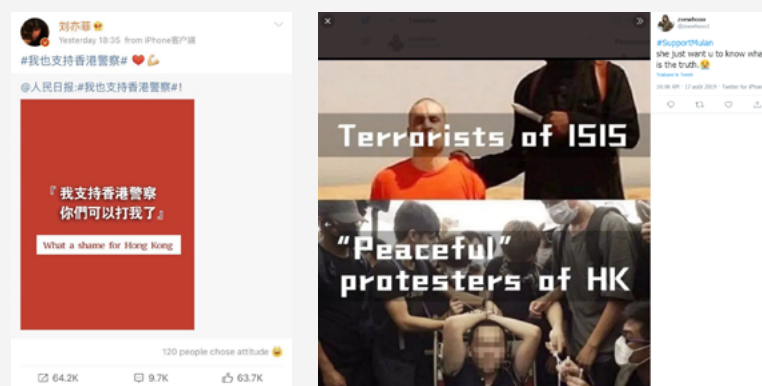
and called to boycott the film. The Malaysian government demanded that a version without this controversial plan be produced for the Malaysian public, which DreamWorks refused, leading the Malaysian government to ban the film. This case is an example of “a major Hollywood studio refusing censorship from one government, for the purpose of better adhering to the propagandistic expectations of another government – in essence, prioritizing the wishes of one country’s censors over another’s.”<sup>1097</sup>

### #SupportMulan (2019)

In August 2019, when the shooting of the film *Mulan* (2020) neared completion, the Chinese-American actress Liu Ximei (刘茜美子) better known by her stage name Liu Yifei (or Crystal Liu) shared on Weibo an image supporting Hong Kong police forces that read: “I support the Hong Kong police. You can beat me up now. What a shame for Hong Kong.” She also added the hashtag #ISupportHongKongPolice. It was shared more than 65,000 times in less than 24 hours.

Supporters of Hong Kong demonstrators then called for a boycott of the film using the hashtag #BoycottMulan, after it first emerged on the Hong Kong discussion forum LIHKG and quickly spread around the world. Beijing seized the opportunity to make the film a “loyalty litmus test”<sup>1098</sup> by supporting a counter-campaign using #SupportMulan on social networks, going so far as to associate this hashtag with images comparing Hong Kong militants to the terrorist group Islamic State. This coordinated campaign proved “inauthentic” because it used fake accounts and bots – pushing Twitter and Facebook to delete incriminated accounts and their associated pages.<sup>1099</sup>

Disney, which produced the film, was careful not to intervene in this controversy. PEN America blamed it for its silence, which “further enabled Beijing to utilize the studio’s movie as a tool of antidemocratic propaganda without pushback. [In conclusion,] the #SupportMulan government-backed “movement” goes to show that even if Hollywood studios aim to make their movies as inoffensive as possible – with the definition of “inoffensive” being highly responsive to what Beijing declares as offensive – the CCP is more than willing to impose a political agenda on these films, leveraging even unanticipated controversies as opportunities to pursue their creative propaganda while pulling studios along for the ride.”<sup>1100</sup>



1097. *Made in Hollywood*, 40.

1098. *Ibid.*, 32.

1099. Jude Dry, “Twitter Deletes Chinese Accounts That Spread Misinformation About ‘Mulan’ Boycott,” *IndieWire* (20 Aug. 2019).

1100. *Made in Hollywood*, 32.



Sometimes, studios produce a Chinese version that goes even further, adding scenes, products, dialogues, and cultural references for the Chinese audience. For example, the Chinese version of *Looper* (2012) contains several scenes shot in Shanghai absent from its international version. Another known example is *Iron Man 3* (2013). The film had benefited from a significant investment by a Beijing production company and had partly been filmed in Beijing.

Subsequently, Marvel Studios made a Chinese version with several additional scenes to include Chinese actors (including the actress and singer Fan Bingbing) and Chinese product placement: For instance, to revitalize himself, Iron Man drank “Gu Li Duo,” a milky drink from the Yili brand (which could be an attempt by the company to regain credibility after a health scandal revealed abnormally high levels of mercury in their mother’s milk). Other Chinese brands are also highlighted (TCL, Zoomlion). A group of Chinese schoolchildren and Chinese doctors was also featured trying to save Iron Man’s life. In exchange, the film received many “benefits, including an optimal release date, a more permissive government attitude toward their film advertisements, and a ‘high degree of media access in China’ [and] a promotional segment for the film on CCTV’s annual Chinese New Year gala, a highly visible placement that would not have been possible without the Party’s active acquiescence.”<sup>1101</sup>

## 2. Other cultural sectors

The case of Hollywood is emblematic of China’s willingness and ability to influence the messages conveyed by cinema. However, **other cultural sectors are also victim of pressure from Beijing to produce art that is compatible with the CCP’s expectations.**

**Denying access to the Chinese market is a common practice that targets all artists critical of the Party-State**, especially those supporting one of the five “poisons.” Many musicians, including Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, Oasis, Guns N’ Roses, Elton John, Maroon 5, Linkin Park, Björk and Katy Perry, are *persona non-grata* in China because they have supported Tibet, Taiwan, or “Chinese Democracy” (the title of a Guns N’ Roses album).<sup>1102</sup> Through other types of pressure, Beijing hopes to **encourage artists to alter their works, to stop showing them elsewhere in the world, and even to do the work of Chinese censors.** In the following lines, we will only provide a few examples of this practice.

First, regarding **museums**. In a context of “a hardening [in the summer of 2020] of the Chinese government’s position against the Mongolian minority,” Beijing put pressure on the Museum of Nantes, which had been planning an exhibition on Genghis Khan and the Mongolian empire. To that end, Nantes’ museum had signed a piece loan agreement with the Inner Mongolia Museum in Hohhot (China), but the authorities wanted them to remove the words “Genghis Khan,” “empire,” and “Mongolian” from the title. Subsequently, the Chinese authorities sent a new contract to the museum in Nantes indi-

1101. Ibid., 26.

1102. Amy X. Wang, “Justin Bieber Joins the Illustrious List of Musicians Banned from China”, *Quartz* (21 Jul. 2017).



cating “that all the exhibition and catalog texts and the cartographic elements need to be sent to China for validation,” as well as a new text introducing the exhibition in which “the word Mongol appears on the twelfth page, Genghis Khan completely disappeared, and the viewpoint centered on the Han dynasty.”<sup>1103</sup> In other words, Beijing wanted to **make the Mongolian culture disappear and to use this exhibition as propaganda for its national narrative**. “Inner Mongolia, an autonomous territory, in theory, is very much controlled by the central government, which intends to impose its language and religion, those of the Hans. [For Beijing,] it is not acceptable that the exhibition puts forward a discourse that breaks with the national narrative,” explained historian Marie-Dominique Even.<sup>1104</sup> Hence, Nantes’ museum decided to postpone its exhibition until 2024 to find pieces from European and American museums instead.

Second, the **video game** industry. On October 6, 2019, during the Hearthstone Grandmasters in Taiwan, Ng Wai Chung (吳偉聰), a Hong Kong-based professional gamer known as “Blitzchung,” opted for mask similar to those worn by Hong Kong protesters. He then declared “Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our times.” Shortly afterwards, electric power was cut off at the event. The next day, the Blizzard Company, in which Tencent owns 5%, announced that Blitzchung was banned from participating in its tournaments for one year because he had allegedly offended the public and damaged the company’s image. The Party, in this case, did not necessarily ask Blizzard to sanction the professional gambler. However, **the risk of seeing its market share decline in China led the video game company to anticipate the Party’s demands**.

**In theater also, Chinese diplomats regularly try to ban performances they consider contrary to the CCP’s interests**. For example, in 2017, the Chinese embassy put pressure on the Royal Danish Theatre to stop a planned performance by the Shen Yun dance company, which is linked to Falun Gong. **Sometimes the coercion is so internalized by China’s partners that the Party no longer needs to exert pressure; local authorities volunteer**. For example, in 2018, the Royal Court Theatre in London gave up performing a play about Tibet, not after being pressured by Chinese authorities, but by the British Council, which noted that performing the play could harm the Royal Court Theatre’s activities in China.<sup>1105</sup> It was, therefore, a case of British self-censorship, so as not to risk harming business in China. Notwithstanding, the play was eventually performed in 2019.<sup>1106</sup> **Self-censorship – allowing Beijing to win without a fight – is the desired end effect**.

Finally, in areas where the work needs a medium to be disseminated, such as pictures on websites or social network accounts, **Beijing frequently succeeds in having the content removed by putting pressure on publishers**. This is what the photographer Patrick Wack, author of a **photography** book on Xinjiang (*Dust*, André Frère Editions, 2021), was made to understand. Kodak had initially asked him to publish a dozen images on their Instagram account, which they did, with an accompanying text provided by the author that denounced the repression in Xinjiang. Then Kodak suddenly removed them, explaining that “the views

1103. Pierre-Baptiste Vanzini, “À Nantes, la Chine tente de censurer une exposition sur l’empire mongol” (“In Nantes, China Tries to Censor an Exhibition About the Mongol Empire”), *Le Parisien* (14 Oct. 2020) (All the quotes in the paragraph are taken from this article).

1104. Sylvie Kerviel, “Une exposition sur Gengis Khan au Musée d’histoire de Nantes censurée par la Chine” (“An Exhibition on Gengis Khan at the Nantes Museum of History Censored by China”), *Le Monde* (13 Oct. 2020).

1105. Ben Quinn, “Royal Court Dropped Tibet Play after Advice from British Council,” *The Guardian* (4 Apr. 2018).

1106. Georgina Choekyi Doji et al., “Pah-La – A shallow and Confusing Examination of Tibetan Non-Violent Resistance,” *Tibetan Review* (18 Apr. 2019).

expressed by Mr. Wack do not represent those of Kodak and are not endorsed by Kodak. We apologize for any misunderstanding or offense this post may have caused.” “I think they got harassed by Chinese nationalists, and management got scared,” Wack believed.<sup>1107</sup> The message published by Kodak is indeed very similar to those published by the many private companies that yield to Chinese censorship → p. 247).

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1107. Laurence Defranoux, “Photos du Xinjiang: Wack assume, Kodak s’écroule” (“Xinjiang photos: Wack assumes, Kodak crashes”) *Libération* (21 Jul. 2021).

## IX. Information Manipulations

According to our analysis from our namesake 2018 report, information manipulations are intentional (thus assuming the intention to harm), clandestine (their victims are unaware of it), and coordinated campaigns of dissemination of false or deliberately distorted news.<sup>1108</sup> They are therefore distinct from propaganda and public diplomacy, which are carried out openly, in an assumed way. These manipulations correspond to what Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, in a 1984 study on Soviet “active measures,” called *covert disinformation*, defined as “a non-attributed or falsely attributed communication, written or oral, containing intentionally false, incomplete, or misleading information (frequently combined with true information), which seeks to deceive, misinform, and/or mislead the target. [...] In comparison with overt propaganda, covert disinformation usually is employed in a selective and discriminatory manner. This technique may be advanced through rumors, forgeries, manipulative political actions, but also agents of influence, front organizations, and other means.”<sup>1109</sup> Today, the tools have changed – the Internet and social networks have changed the information environment – but the idea remains the same.

For Beijing, information manipulation, or secret disinformation, is **just one lever among others to infiltrate and coerce**, as suggested by the position of this section in this report, **but an exceptionally dynamic and well-documented lever**. Here, the main actors are the PLA, notably Base 311 (→ p. 89), the CYL (→ p. 72), state media – it is well established that, generally speaking, state media aligned with authoritarian powers, notably Russia, China, Iran and Turkey, are both producers and amplifiers of online information manipulation<sup>1110</sup> – but also private intermediaries such as content farms.

### A. Simulate authenticity

#### 1. Trolls, sock puppets and astroturfing

The creators of disinformation have a wide array of possibilities at their disposal on social networks. **False accounts** or **sock puppets** are social accounts created under *fake personas* by a person or group of persons to promote certain ideas or spread false information. These accounts are administered “manually,” by real people (they are not who they claim to be) – unlike **bots**, which are automated accounts (robots), amplifying an activity.<sup>1111</sup> **Trolls**, for their part, are Internet actors whose objective is to provoke controversy and polemics. When these tools are used massively, it may create the illusion of authentic and popular support for a policy or, if the actor is a company, for a product. In the latter cases,

1108. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcía, Marine Guillaume, and Janaina Herrera, *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*, Policy Planning Staff (CAPS), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM), Ministry of the Armed Forces, Paris (Aug. 2018), 21

1109. Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia, Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1984), 38.

1110. Katarina Rebello et al., *Covid-19 News and Information from State-Backed Outlets Targeting French, German and Spanish-Speaking Social Media Users*, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford (29 Jun. 2020).

1111. Ben Nimmo, “Les techniques d’amplification sur les réseaux sociaux” (“Amplification Technics on Social Networks”), in Céline Marangé and Maud Quessard, eds., *Les Guerres de l’information à l’ère numérique (Information Wars in the Digital Era)* (Paris: PUF, 2021), 90-93.

the practice – disinforming by simulating a spontaneous popular movement – is called **astroturfing**, in reference to AstroTurf, a carpet brand imitating grass (and a wordplay based on the word *grassroots*).<sup>1112</sup> **Almost systematically included in Russian informational operations,<sup>1113</sup> these tactics have been adopted by China, first internally, to target its population, and then on the international scene.**

*a. Domestically: A distraction strategy to prevent dissident collective action*

In 2017, an empirical study estimated that “**the [Chinese] government fabricates and posts about 448 million social media comments a year**, [whose purpose is] to avoid arguing with sceptics of the party and the government, and not even discuss controversial issues. [But rather] to distract the public and change the subject, as most of these posts involve cheerleading for China, the revolutionary history of the Communist Party, or other symbols of the regime”<sup>1114</sup>. What is commonly referred to as the “50 Cent Army,” or “50 Cent Party,” because they are presumably paid 50 cents (€0.06) per post – a false rumor<sup>1115</sup> – are more formally known as “Internet commentators” (网络评论员).<sup>1116</sup> A 2021 study shows that the Party has 2 million paid commentators, directly employed by Cyber Affairs Commissions (网络安全和信息化委员会) and Propaganda Bureaus nationwide,<sup>1117</sup> along with more than 20 million part-time trolls, most of them students and CYL members.<sup>1118</sup> The objective is to have as many of them as possible defend the same discourse so that genuine network users do not dare express divergent opinions because they would seem to be in the minority. Therefore, the goal is to frame the debate or, to use the Chinese government’s terminology, to “guide” (引导) **public opinion**, i.e., to manipulate it.

E-mails written in 2023-2014 and leaked from the Zhanggong district Internet Propaganda Office, in which these “commentators” reported on their activity, provided the authors of this study with a sample of more than 43,000 comments posted by Internet users identified as members of this “50 Cent Party.” King et al. maintained that they searched in vain for evidence that some of these comments had been created automatically by bots. But evidence pointed to the conclusion that “each was written by a specific, often identifiable, human being under direction from the government.”<sup>1119</sup>

They concluded that there was a **“strategy of distraction,” with peaks in the activity of these commentators during events with “collective action potential”,** like demonstrations or an explosion, but also during vacations, when idle people are more likely to mobilize for causes, and before political meetings (strategic periods during which strategic distraction is used in conjunction with, and complementary to, redistribution and repres-

1112. Thomas Zerback, Florian Töpfl and Maria Knöpfle, “The Disconcerting Potential of Online Disinformation: Persuasive Effects of Astroturfing Comments and Three Strategies for inoculation Against Them,” *New Media & Society* (4 Mar. 2020).

1113. Clint Watts, “Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns,” Statement Prepared for the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Hearing (30 Mar. 2017). See also: Tania Rakhmanova, “Le trolling, au service du Kremlin” (“Trolling Serving the Kremlin”), *Arte*, (2017). <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/079332-017-A/le-trolling-au-servicedu-kremlin/>.

1114. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument,” *American Political Sciences Review*, 111:3 (2017), 484.

1115. Ibid.

1116. Ibid.

1117. Ryan Fedasiuk, “Buying Silence: The Price of Internet Censorship in China,” *China Brief*, 21:1 (12 Jan. 2021).

1118. Ryan Fedasiuk, “A Different Kind of Army: The Militarization of China’s Internet Trolls,” *China Brief*, 21:7 (12 Apr. 2021).

1119. Ibid, 489.



sion measures).<sup>1120</sup> **In these sensitive periods, Internet commentators are asked to “promote unity and stability through positive publicity”** and “actively guide public opinion.”<sup>1121</sup> Approximately 80% of the posts fall into this category, which the authors call *cheerleading*, i.e. promotion, positive advertising instead of debate and argumentation.<sup>1122</sup> Contrary to the dominant thesis, which the authors call the “state critique theory” (censorship aimed at suppressing dissent), they defend a theory of “collective action potential.” Accordingly, **“censorship aims to prevent collective actions not generated or controlled by the state,”** whatever their purpose or, in other words, whether or not this collective expression opposes the state or is even political in nature.<sup>1123</sup>

Another study identified several cases of mass publications of comments supported by the Chinese government, including one connected to the G20 summit in Hangzhou in 2016 and another to the explosions in the port of Tianjin in the summer of 2015.<sup>1124</sup> In both cases, the effort was chiefly about writing “positive energy” comments (正能量) in support of the Chinese communist regime. During the G20 summit, many messages such as “I firmly believe that the Chinese people will be more united under President Xi” and “let’s trust that our nation will be more prosperous and stronger under President Xi’s leadership” poured onto Chinese networks while the Internet was being severely censored. It was partially meant to block humorous references to Xi Jinping’s gaffe during his speech. He said “宽衣” (*kuan yi*) rather than “宽农” (*kuan nong*) – the characters *yi* and *nong* being close – hence calling for “taking off one’s clothes” rather than to “ease agricultural policy.”<sup>1125</sup>

Similarly, after the explosions in the port of Tianjin, astroturfers massively relayed praises for the firemen and first-line workers, and support for the victims, keeping the discussion away from any reference to corruption or to the government’s mismanagement of the crisis. It involved messages such as: “Do not believe in rumors or spread rumors. Rumors cease with the wise people. Let us all pray for [victims] and hope for their safety.”<sup>1126</sup> Once again, it was meant to “guide” the population and prevent the spread of feelings that could lead to collective actions against the government and opinions that could tarnish the regime’s reputation.

Finally, a more recent study based on the theft of more than 3,200 directives and 1,800 internal notes from the Cyberspace Administration Offices in Hangzhou City at the onset of the coronavirus epidemic in January-February 2020 showed **a more sophisticated censorship that involved discretion.** According to the instructions, “[as] commenters fight to guide public opinion, they must conceal their identity, avoid crude patriotism and sarcastic praise, and be sleek and silent.”<sup>1127</sup> The Cyberspace Administration issued its first directives in the first week of January, instructing news websites “to use only government-published material and not to draw any parallels with the deadly SARS outbreak in China and

1120. Ibid.

1121. Ibid.

1122. Ibid, 490.

1123. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review*, 107:2 (2013), 326-343.

1124. Blake A. Miller and Mary Gallagher, “Astroturfing in China: Three Case Studies,” source (17 Feb. 2017). Blake Miller, “Automated Detection of Chinese Government Astroturfers Using Network and Social Metadata,” source (21 Apr. 2016).

1125. Catherine Lai, “President Xi Jinping’s ‘Take Off Clothes’ G20 Gaffe Censored in China,” *Hong Kong Free Press* (6 Sept. 2016).

1126. Miller and Gallagher, “Astroturfing in China,” 7.

1127. Raymond Zhong, Paul Mozur, Jeff Kao, and Aaron Krolik, “No ‘Negative’ News: How China Censored the Coronavirus,” *The New York Times/ProPublica* (19 Dec. 2020).

elsewhere that began in 2002.” In early February, a directive required them to do more than simply control information in China but to work to “actively influence international opinion.” The press was asked not to use words such as “incurable” or “fatal” to describe the virus or “lockdown” to describe restrictions on movements. A directive invited them to avoid “giving the false impression that our fight against the epidemic relies on foreign donations.” The documents also reveal that each of the “commenters” mobilized to shape opinion about the coronavirus in Guangzhou alone received **\$25 for an original message longer than 400 characters, 40 cents to report a negative comment to be deleted, and one cent per repost.**<sup>1128</sup>

*b. Internationally: A more offensive strategy to defend Chinese interests*

**On the international stage, trolls are a lot more aggressive. They defend, attack, sustain polemics, insult, and harass.** In March 2019, many Reddit users felt that trolls supported by the Chinese government were engaged “in a **coordinated effort to spread propaganda and bury anti-China messages on Reddit.**”<sup>1129</sup> Many newly created accounts were massively intervening in the discussion, systematically defending Beijing and attacking anyone critical of China. They upvoted or downvoted posts to promote them or, on the contrary, make them disappear accordingly. The battle raged on certain forums, including /r/geopolitics and Canadian subreddits (notably threads on Huawei → p. 133). **The scale of this Chinese offensive was beyond what Reddit users had become accustomed to with Russian trolls.** A person knowledgeable on the moderation of the /r/geopolitics forum explained that “in the past, /r/geopolitics had been targeted by Russian trolls, who are generally the most well-known and active across various social media platforms. However, in our situation, the pro-CCP effort vastly overshadows any operation by the Russians.”<sup>1130</sup> Here, again, it is **difficult to know whether these trolls worked for the Chinese government or were simply patriotic users.** The fact that they were so numerous, seemingly coordinated, and all repeated the same elements of language (“You mention Falun Gong and it’s amazing, they just come out of the woodwork and all say the same thing,” remarked one user),<sup>1131</sup> however, seemed to indicate a certain degree of organization.

While **the PLA** has developed its capacity to conduct trolling and sock-puppet operations, particularly on the domestic front (the so-called “50 Cent Army”), **the Communist Youth League (CYL) is also capable of conducting this type of operations** both domestically and abroad. It was behind the trolling campaign that hit the swimmer Mack Horton after he defeated the Chinese champion Sun Yang in the 400m freestyle at the Olympics.<sup>1132</sup> The Australian athlete was subjected to a campaign of insults on his Facebook page, receiving more than 40,000 messages from Sun “fans.” The CYL is better able to work with targets between the ages of 14 and 28,<sup>1133</sup> who make up a large proportion of athletes’ fans.

1128. Ibid. for all the citations of the paragraph.

1129. Craig Silverman and Jane Lytvynenko, “Reddit Has Become a Battleground of Alleged Chinese Trolls,” *BuzzFeedNews* (14 Mar. 2019).

1130. Ibid.

1131. Ibid.

1132. Peter Farquhar, “Olympic Champ Mack Horton’s Facebook Bombarded with 40,000 Insults from Chinese Swim Fans,” *Business Insider Australia* (8 Aug. 2016).

1133. Tara O, “Chinagate: Chinese Trolls, Sockpuppets in South Korea to Manipulate Public Opinion Online, Impact Politics, and Intervene in Internal Affairs,” *East Asia Research Center* (8 Mar. 2020).

To conduct operations against foreign targets, the CYL often uses Chinese students, who are the largest overseas student community, as well as Chinese of foreign descent, to improve the quality of messages both in their substance – to resonate with the target’s concerns – and in their form – so that the message appears to have been written by a local. For example, Beijing uses Chinese of Korean origin (朝鮮族 or *Joseonjok* in Korean),<sup>1134</sup> a minority that is very present in northeast China (*dongbei*) and among Chinese students living in Korea.



Message in Chinese giving instructions to sign the petition in favor of Moon Jae-in.

Tara O unveiled a Chinese operation of active measures in South Korea based on the student community of Korean origin mentioned previously.<sup>1135</sup> At the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic, president Moon Jae-in decided not to prevent Chinese nationals from entering Korean territory – against the advice of the Korean Medical Association, which feared a rapid spread of the virus. The Blue House subsequently received a lot of criticism. A South Korean citizen started a petition on the presidential website on February 4, 2020, calling for the removal of Moon, believing that his failures no longer conferred him the legitimacy to perform his duties.

By February 25, the petition had been signed 300,000 times, and it passed the one-million mark two days later.<sup>1136</sup> On February 26, as the number of signatures approached 800,000, a second petition, “We Support President Moon Jae-in,” appeared on the Blue House website. In two days, it obtained more than 800,000 signatures, an exceptional phenomenon (it took 21 days for the first petition, against President Moon, to reach that number). The fact is even more disturbing since this mass signing occurred when the epidemic was growing on Korean soil, in other words, when discontent against Moon was high. On February 27, a Chinese of Korean origin revealed the existence of messages in Chinese calling on PRC citizens present in Korea to sign the petition in support of President Moon (see screenshot above). Of course, there is no irrefutable evidence of the CCP’s involvement in this affair, but the cluster of evidence points to Beijing and, more specifically, to the CYL. **In just a few days, this operation reached nearly a million signatures, which could only have been possible with a mobilization organized by an extremely powerful structure like the CYL (it can mobilize student networks in South Korea).** In this case, it would constitute a new example of active measures implemented by the Chinese to support a leader considered to be a friend of China, and to prevent the emergence of a popular anti-China sentiment in a public opinion abroad. That said, the revelations in this affair made it probably counterproductive.

1134. O, “Chinagate.”

1135. Ibid.

1136. Tara O, “Over 1,000,000 Urge the Impeachment of Moon Jae-in of South Korea for his Poor Handling of the Wuhan Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak,” *East Asia Research Center* (27 Feb. 2020). The text of the petition appears in the body of the article.

## 2. Hiring middlemen

Another way to simulate authenticity is to **have content published by third parties in exchange for money** – hence “hiring” intermediaries. A simple way, and one regularly used by Beijing, is to use content farms: they create news for money. The purchase can also target a one-time message or influence on a page or on an account, that page or account altogether, or the recruitment of a person.

### a. Content farms

Content farms (内容农场) are platforms hiring independent contributors to create “clickbait” content that looks journalistic, but that is usually poorly-written and not very original, uses keywords so as to be well ranked by search engines, maximize their views, and generate advertising revenue.<sup>1137</sup> “After creating the articles, content farm operators recruit – and often financially compensate – individual social media users to help spread them.”<sup>1138</sup> **The origin of this content, created by third parties and distributed by yet another set of actors, is therefore difficult to trace**, which is why Beijing makes extensive use of this subcontracting. **“The PLA relies on outsourced freelancers in Malaysia or overseas Chinese nationals to disseminate [disinformation] content” via content farms,<sup>1139</sup> paying between RMB100 and 1,000 (from €12.6 to €126) per message, based on the length).**<sup>1140</sup>

#### Earning money with KanWatch

The KanWatch Content Farm “was designed explicitly for users to be remunerated for sharing its content. To sign up for an account, a user must first fill out basic information along with an associated PayPal account. There are two ways to make money off of the platform: a user can either share articles on their social media accounts or they can write articles. According to the *Taiwan Gazette*, a single user can make about 10 Singapore dollars [6.2 euros] [...] for every thousand views a shared article receives. Users can also easily rewrite articles by pushing a clone button. Other features on the KanWatch platform make it user-friendly and simple to use. For example, a user can track their cash flow to see how much money they have made. Offering monetary incentives for users to produce and disseminate content, regardless of veracity, has proven to be a highly effective strategy for the CCP.”<sup>1141</sup>

An interesting development, notably observed during the 2020 general elections campaign in Taiwan (→ p. 461), is **the use of artificial intelligence (AI) by these farms to generate content**. The use of AI in Chinese influence operations targeting Taiwan had already been mentioned in a May 2019 report by Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council

1137. Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, *A Dictionary of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Jason Liu, Ko Hao-hsiang, and Hsu Chia-yu, “How A Content Farm in Malaysia Turned Fake News Directed At Taiwan Into A Moneymaker,” *The Taiwan Gazette* (12 Mar. 2020).

1138. Alicia Fawcett, *Chinese Discourse Power: China’s Use of Information Manipulation in Regional and Global Competition*, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (2020), 22.

1139. *Ibid.*

1140. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military’s Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 28.

1141. Fawcett, *Chinese Discourse Power*, 23.



(MAC) and has since been confirmed by Peng Kuan Chin (彭冠今). He “created a ‘Content Farm Automatic Collection System’ that crawled the Internet for Chinese articles and posts and reorganized the words and sentences into new text, generating thousands of articles per day. Peng’s software was modeled on automated software he saw in China, which he believed no one else outside the mainland had.”<sup>1142</sup>

According to the Taiwanese fact-finding group MyGoPen, at least 60 % of controversial content and misinformation disseminated in Taiwan from these content farms came from abroad. Most of the posts and articles that resonated with Taiwanese Internet users appeared not to be spread from Taiwan.<sup>1143</sup> In 2016, mobile01.com, teepr.com, bomb01.com, ptt01.cc, shareonion.com, buzzhand.com and gigacircle.com were among the 100 most visited content farms in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore.<sup>1144</sup> Some are successful as quickly as they are forgotten; others thrive lastingly.

In general, websites referred to as “content farms” catch the attention of Internet users on social networks. Facebook, which is used by more than 80 % of the Taiwanese population,<sup>1145</sup> is a preferred platform to circulate these articles via pages that users can subscribe to or within groups that they can join. Other networks can also be used: YouTube, Twitter or LINE (a private messaging system from which users can receive website articles).

### Mission

In Taiwan, the “Mission” content farm (密訊) was successful, particularly among communities that were politically positioned with the far right, sympathetic to the “Pan-Blue” coalition around the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and opposed to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and its President Tsai Ing-wen.<sup>1146</sup> A study by Cheng Yu-chung (鄭宇君), a professor at the National Chengchi University, confirmed that **Facebook pages supporting the KMT tended to share Mission’s content. The latter even became the first source cited in the week preceding the 2018 local elections in Taiwan.**<sup>1147</sup> In October 2019, Facebook decided to suspend several content farms, including Mission, for violating the platform’s rules.<sup>1148</sup>

To circumvent Facebook’s filters, Mission repeatedly resurrected itself by copying its content onto various other domains such as missiback.com, pplomo.com, gyfunnews.com, kowwno.com – which all share a common Google Analytics Tracking ID (UA-135651881). The existence of this ID reveals at least two pieces of information: the first is that the public was made up of Internet users who used Google; the second is that the same webmaster, who managed the traffic on these websites to improve the statistics, hid behind the same ID, so that the link between the domains that share the same

1142. 孔德廉 (William Kung), 劉致昕 (Liu Chih-hsin), “寫手帶風向不稀奇：AI產文、侵入私人LINE群，輿論軍火商已全面升級” (“It is Not Uncommon for Writers to Fuel the Fire: AI Produces Literature, Invades Private Groups on LINE, and Dealers of Public Opinion Have Been Promoted”) (6 Jan. 2020), <https://www.twreporter.org/a/information-warfare-business-weapons>. Cited in Insikt Group, “Chinese Influence Operations Evolve in Campaigns Targeting Taiwanese Elections, Hong Kong Protests,” *Recorded Future* (29 Apr. 2020), 5.

1143. “The Content Mill Empire Behind Online Disinformation in Taiwan,” *The Reporter* (26 Dec. 2019).

1144. Wan Qing Tung, 1, note 6.

1145. “Internet Usage in Asia,” *Internet World Stats*.

1146. Nick Monaco, Melanie Smith, and Amy Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints: Tracing Chinese Disinformation in Taiwan*, joint report by Graphika, the Institute for the Future’s Digital Intelligence Lab, and the International Republican Institute (Aug. 2020), 36.

1147. The Reporter, “Uncovering the Money and China Factor Behind ‘Mission’ – Taiwan’s Most Controversial Content Farm,” *The Taiwan Gazette* (24 Jul. 2020).

1148. Monaco, Smith, Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 36; Insikt Group, “Chinese Influence Operations,” 5, reference 3.

ID was very strong. It is a sign that allowed us to identify an entire network of content farms that, at first glance, did not seem to be linked, as we will see later. Despite the measures taken by Facebook, Mission broke the record of the most widely-shared website among Facebook users in Taiwan in one week in April 2019, with five times more shares than the *Liberty Times* (自由時報).<sup>1149</sup>



Screenshot of the mission-tw.com domain taken on 03/15/2021.

The presence of content farms such as Mission was problematic because of their ability to produce content that can influence political debates and opinions. **Mission fueled narratives critical of Tsai Ing-wen's government.** It relayed information based on real facts but framed in a misleading manner, for example, by creating the illusion that the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense (MND) was going to waste money by investing in an old model of fighter plane (F-16A/B) when it was in fact a new model (F-16V). Or, by distorting the \$71 million in aid granted to Paraguay under President Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) for social housing construction: they claimed that \$102 million was spent by the Tsai government in Paraguay which supposedly resulted in Taiwanese “deaths.”<sup>1150</sup>

An investigation by *The Reporter* (報導者) revealed **links between Mission and the Taiwanese New Party (NP) (→ p. 447), which defends a pro-reunification position, as well as with Chinese media.**<sup>1151</sup> The original source code of the Mission website contained the names of Lin Cheng-kuo (林正國) and of the Fang Hang Integrated Business Marketing Co. Ltd. The spouses Lin Cheng-kuo and Liu Fang-yu (劉芳妤), the latter being the Fang Hang company representative, are both members of the Taiwanese New Party's Youth Committee.<sup>1152</sup> An analysis of the content shared by Mission also showed that it often mentioned the Chinese website China-Taiwan.net (中國台灣網, taihai.net). The website was piloted by the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) in Beijing. Once these links were established, it was not surprising to observe the Mission platform relaying news under-

1149. The Reporter, “Uncovering the Money and China Factor Behind ‘Mission.’”

1150. Ibid.

1151. Ibid.

1152. Publication on the account of the Taiwanese New Party's Youth Committee (新黨青年委員會), *Facebook* (31 Dec. 2017), <https://archive.vn/jZZ5L>.

mining the legitimacy of the ruling party and promoting a pro-China and pro-unification discourse.

### Evan Lee and Yee Kok Wai

When Mission was confronted with Facebook's suspension measures, the pages that regularly shared its content on this platform turned to other farms with similar content, such as Big Durian.<sup>1153</sup> Mission's content was also copied onto other domains such as beeper.live.<sup>1154</sup> **Big Durian and beeper.live are part of the same extensive network of content farms linked to an Evan Lee.** Research conducted by *The Reporter* and Nick Monaco, Melanie Smith and Amy Studdart's investigations, showed that **431 Malaysia-based content farms had links to Evan Lee.**

*The Reporter* described him as a man with a rich experience managing content farms and as someone who would share his expertise with those experiencing difficulties via a discussion group on Telegram.<sup>1155</sup> In an interview with them,<sup>1156</sup> "Evan Lee" denied having a political agenda and asserted that his platforms are places of free expression. The biggest "content farm", according to him, is YouTube. He said he knew of six Chinese-controlled content farms and three Taiwanese content farms with over 100 million subscribers, which work in conjunction with Facebook and LINE, but refused to name them.<sup>1157</sup>

The purely commercial motivation of most players in content farms does not prevent some "farmers" from using them to advance their personal political opinions. Previous work, notably by *The Reporter*, have identified **a Yee Kok Wai (余國威), a member of Evan Lee's extensive network**, allegedly from Puchong, Malaysia, and whose account was already suspended by Facebook for violating the platform's regulations. According to Yee Kok Wai, the pages he manages on Facebook have some 300,000 subscribers,<sup>1158</sup> and the shared content generally comes from content farms already mentioned, such as kanwatch, beeper.live and qiqu.news.<sup>1159</sup> The pages he had allegedly created after 2014 generally have a name that begins with "全球華人" (*Global Chinese*), such as *Global Chinese Military Alliance* (全球華人軍事聯盟), *Global Chinese Golden Age Union* (全球華人盛世聯盟), and *Global Chinese Weather Union* (全球華人風雲聯盟). **His positions in favor of the Chinese Communist Party – celebrating the CCP's anniversary or supporting the Hong Kong police for example – are in line with the pro-Chinese content that is massively broadcast from the platforms he manages.**<sup>1160</sup> Yee Kok Wai has also made Chang Dong-nan (張東南), from Taiwan's Chinese Unification Promotion Party (中華統一促進黨), one of the administrators of his Global Chinese Alliance Facebook community.<sup>1161</sup> He may also be associated with the "Qiqi" network, for which he reportedly manages some Facebook pages.<sup>1162</sup>

1153. The Reporter, "The Content Mill Empire Behind Online Disinformation in Taiwan."

1154. The Reporter, "Uncovering the Money and China Factor Behind 'Mission.'"

1155. The Reporter, "Meet Boss Evan – The Man Behind Taiwan's Zombie Content Farms," *The Taiwan Gazette* (16 Mar. 2020).

1156. Ibid.

1157. Ibid.

1158. The Reporter, "The Content Mill Empire Behind Online Disinformation in Taiwan."

1159. The Reporter, "How A Content Farm in Malaysia Turned Fake News."

1160. Ibid.

1161. The Reporter, "The Content Mill Empire Behind Online Disinformation in Taiwan."

1162. Ibid.

## Qiqi

**The Qiqi network**, which relayed the false information according to which Hong Kong protesters offered rewards of up to \$2.5 million for those who killed police officers,<sup>1163</sup> **is also part of the nexus to which Yee Kok Wai and Evan Lee belong.** This fake news, released in November 2019, originated from the official Weibo account of the party's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (中共中央政法委员会).<sup>1164</sup> The Qiqi News Network is made of many pages whose names begin with “Qiqi” (琪琪 or 琦琦), such as “Qiqi World” (琪琪看世界), “Qiqi News” (琦琦看新闻), “Qiqi Military” (琦琦看军事), “Qiqi life” (琪琪看生活). According to *The Reporter*, these pages operate similarly to the *Global Chinese* network and were created by Yee Kok Wai after 2017. They have reached several tens of thousands of subscribers.<sup>1165</sup> The Google Analytics Tracking ID of these pages is also the one mentioned above, which links back to Evan Lee: UA-19409266904.<sup>1166</sup> According to a joint report by Graphika, the Institute for the Future's (IFF) Digital Intelligence Lab and the International Republican Institute (IRI), **they act in a coordinated manner: in the months preceding the 2020 Taiwanese presidential election, at least 48 Facebook pages simultaneously promoted the same content from the same domains of the Qiqi network.**<sup>1167</sup>

During the campaign, Qiqi promoted discourses hostile to President Tsai Ing-wen and to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in general. For example, Qiqi helped popularize the expression “Green Terror” used to denigrate the DPP (whose color is green, while the KMT's is blue); it refers to the “White Terror” (白色恐怖), the authoritarian period in the country's history (between 1947 and 1987). The website “Qiqi pushes a worldview closely aligned with the CCP, frequently uses mainland Chinese phrasings, and recycles articles from other news outlets, often Chinese state-owned media.”<sup>1168</sup>

**However, the Qiqi network, like other farms, publish content that is often apolitical** (cooking, fashion, lifestyle, etc.). This phenomenon can be interpreted in two ways according to Nick Monaco, Melanie Smith, and Amy Studdart. Firstly, as a way to build a much larger audience than the one interested in political content, so that when the time comes, political messages can be distributed to many more people. Secondly, as a more discreet way to convey a political vision of the world within or between these seemingly innocuous messages – a technique proven efficient by Moscow according to a former employee of the Russian IRA (Internet Research Agency).<sup>1169</sup>

1163. “[錯誤] 網站文章「香港暴徒的酬勞曝光：『殺警』最高給2000萬！」？” (“[False] Revelations Concerning the Article Claiming that Hong Kong ‘Thugs’ Would Pay Up to 2 Million for the Killing of Policemen”), *Taiwan FactCheck Center* (15 Nov. 2019).

1164. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 45.

1165. The Reporter, “How A Content Farm In Malaysia Turned Fake News.”

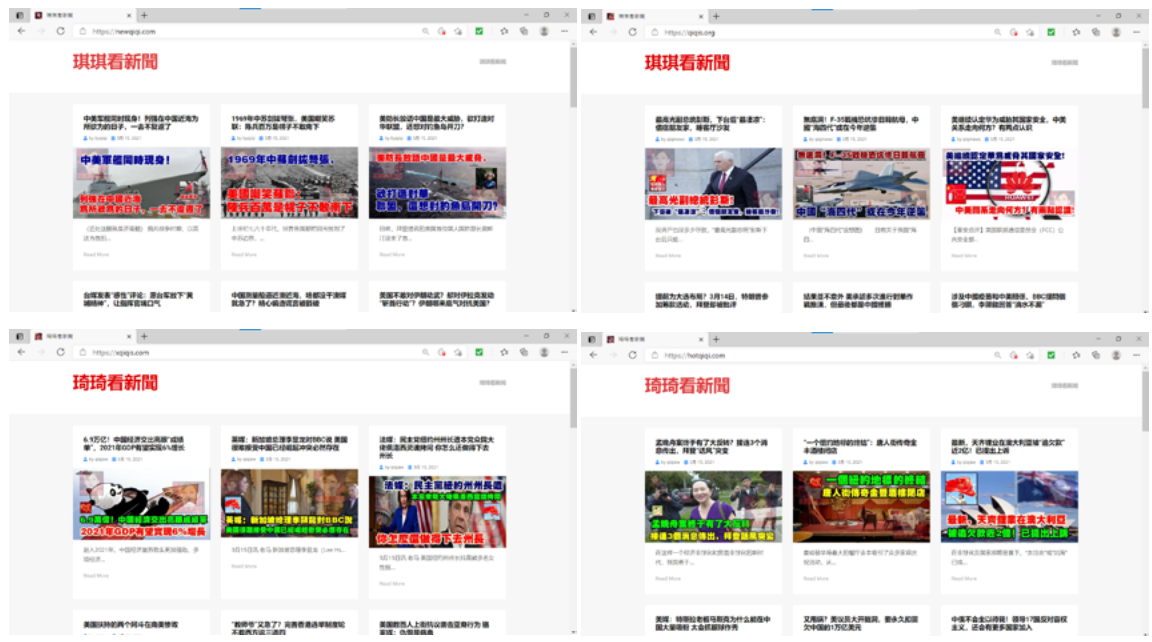
1166. The Reporter, “Meet Boss Evan — The Man Behind Taiwan's Zombie Content Farms.”

1167. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 46.

1168. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

1169. *Ibid.*, 45, reference 80.





Screenshots of the homepage of the domains (from top to bottom, from left to right) newqiqi.com, qiqis.org, xqiqis.com, hotqiqi.com, taken on 03/15/2021.

A series of new “Qiqi” domains have been created with the Covid-19 pandemic. The “Qiqi News” page (琦琦看新闻 or 琪琪看新闻) has multiplied in several domain names: newqiqi.com, qiqis.org, allqiqi.com, iqiqis.com, xqiqis.com and hotqiqi.com. According to Cutestat data, the first four websites were created in February 2020, the last two in June 2020. This new wave seems to be more sophisticated than the previous ones: none of these domains gives an access to their source page, and they are not linked to the same Google Analytics ID,<sup>1170</sup> contrary to the examples previously mentioned, which makes the visualization of the entire network less apparent. The topics covered by the “Qiqi News” pages are much more politicized: the articles often deal with the management of the coronavirus epidemic, particularly the efficiency of Chinese management and the American mismanagement, Sino-American relations, Sino-Taiwanese relations, and political news from the Asia-Pacific region in general. According to Alexa and Cutestat data, however, these websites do not attract much traffic. The dissemination of their content is, once again, done via Facebook pages and groups, most notably the namesake “Qiqi News” (琦琦看新闻), which has some 30,000 subscribers,<sup>1171</sup> as well as the “Global Chinese” network mentioned earlier.<sup>1172</sup>

During the pandemic, this network spread many false news, including the conspiracy theory of the American origin of the virus (→ p. 589), either directly, via iqiqis.com for example (one article entitled: “Confirmed: America is the source of the Coronavirus. America has lied to the whole world,” one week after the Chinese MFA itself launched this rumor);<sup>1173</sup> or indirectly, by suggesting that non-Chinese sources came to the

1170. The Google Analytics domains newqiqi.com, qiqis.org, allqiqi.com et iqiqis.com are the following: UA-161511720, UA-161524355, UA-161578722 and UA-161561752.

1171. <https://www.facebook.com/qiqi.news/>.

1172. Like the Global Chinese Military Alliance Facebook page (全球華人軍事聯盟) which is followed by over 70,000 people, <https://www.facebook.com/cbarmy/>.

1173. “定了！新冠源头就在美国，美国欺骗了全世界！” (“Confirmed: America is the Source of the Coronavirus. America Lied to the Whole World”), 琦琦看新闻 (*Qiqi kan xinwen*) (19 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.is/upoO6>.

same conclusion: for example, a video from another website belonging to the Qiqi network claimed that the Japanese television channel Asahi Shimbun (ANN) suspected that the virus originated in the United States (a theory also pushed by Chinese state media) – which was false, as shown by the Taiwan FactCheck Center.<sup>1174</sup>

Moreover, a DFRLab investigation proved that Qiqi and Qiqu (趣享网), another Malaysian-based content farm, fed two pro-Chinese and anti-Trump Facebook networks through coordinated inauthentic behavior.<sup>1175</sup>

### Happytify

Happytify (歡享網) is another successful network with KMT-sympathetic communities that has promoted sensationalist anti-DPP articles, especially in 2018-2019.<sup>1176</sup> Interestingly, the network was **created by the Chinese company Nothing Tech Inc.** (無為科技, or Wuwei Technologies),<sup>1177</sup> which is owned by Wu Junxian (吳俊顯) and opened in 2014 with its headquarters in the Hebei Province.<sup>1178</sup> The company presents itself as “the world’s largest overseas Chinese we-media operator,” offering various services, including software development.<sup>1179</sup> “We-Media,” or “self-media” (自媒體), refers to media platforms whose content can be produced by anyone such as with a personal blog. **Nothing Tech offers to help its clients promote their products on Facebook, design multimedia content, and develop an international audience.** Nothing Tech’s flagship product would be Happytify, presented as a We-Media platform in traditional Chinese that operates outside of China. The platform apparently attracts more than 6 million daily viewings – mainly Internet users based in Taiwan, Malaysia, and in other Chinese-speaking regions – and appears to be **the most important platform producing traditional Chinese content on Facebook.**<sup>1180</sup> More than 114,000 subscribers follow the @happytify page created in 2017.<sup>1181</sup> However, some Facebook initiatives call for caution: the “Content Farm Terminator” page (終結內容農場) published a list of 84 domains affiliated to Happytify in January 2019 to teach users to be wary of content farms.<sup>1182</sup> The domain happytify.cc also changed its name and visual identity in 2018 to Huayu Redian (華語熱點), to cast off the tarnished reputation undoubtedly.<sup>1183</sup> Investigations on Happytify, however, could not prove any link between the platform and Chinese state actors. The motivations may, therefore, not be political.

By mass broadcasting their articles on social networks to attract attention rather than inform, content farms have become powerful vectors of misinformation, but also platforms that actors with an agenda can easily exploit. While **it is difficult to prove a clear and direct link between Chinese state actors and coordinated campaigns to manipulate information via these farms**, the examples presented above do add some clues.

1174. <https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/articles/2867>.

1175. Iain Robertson, *Descendants of the Dragon: China Targets its Citizens and Descendants Beyond the Mainland*, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (Dec. 2020), 10-16.

1176. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 18.

1177. 龔雋嶂 (Gong Juanwei), “歡享網揭密 只靠1萬人民幣起家 日流量今號稱破千萬” (“Revelations about the Happytify Network: Only RMB10 000 of Capital, but the Daily Traffic Tops 10 Million Visits”), 今周刊 (*Business Today*) (13 Apr. 2018). Gong Juanwei, “看不見的黑手? 泛藍社群遭「內容農場」攻陷” (“Invisible Manipulators? Pan-Blue Coalition Groups are Infested with ‘Content Farms’”) *Business Today* (27 Mar. 2018).

1178. “秦皇島市無為網絡科技有限公司” (“Nothing Tech Inc.”), 愛企查 (*Aiqicha*).

1179. Company homepage: <http://0335.com>. Archived here: <https://archive.vn/yqVa1>.

1180. “秦皇島市無為網絡科技有限公司” (“Nothing Tech Inc.”), 大街 (*Dajie*), <https://archive.vn/0MXQU>.

1181. <https://www.facebook.com/happytify/>.

1182. Publication of Content Farm Terminator (終結內容農場) (24 Jan. 2019), <https://archive.vn/77bLw>.

1183. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180625074428/http://happytify.cc/>.

INTRODUCTION

They show that the Taiwanese public is indeed manipulated to divide the population and break the bond of trust with the government, which benefits Chinese interests, as we will see in the case study on Taiwan (→ p. 453).

CONCEPTS

b. Other methods

To simulate authenticity by hiring intermediaries, operators can also use the following methods:

• **1) Purchase one-time messages.** The objective is to **have a pre-written message published by credible third parties.** And this practice is used both online and offline. For example, in April 2020, **an intermediary offered 20,000 pesos (about 200 euros) to the editors of several Argentinean newspapers** – including *El Cronista Comercial*, *Diario Popular* and the online platform *Infobae* (which allegedly asked for a higher price, without success).<sup>1184</sup> The intermediary wanted them **to publish an anti-Falun Gong article** in “poorly written Spanish,” which contained false information intending to discredit this practice in the Argentinean opinion. It claimed that Falun Gong practitioners in Argentina did not allow themselves to consult a doctor or seek hospital treatment. It thereby suggested, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, that they would not make themselves known to health authorities if they were carriers of the coronavirus, thus putting the rest of the population at risk.<sup>1185</sup> “What would happen,” the article asked, “if a large number of these people refuse to go seek medical services in the midst of a global pandemic?”<sup>1186</sup> The article used the slanderous and demonizing expressions generally used by Chinese propaganda to characterize Falun Gong practitioners<sup>1187</sup> and a misleading version of the facts to present the history of the practice.<sup>1188</sup> The case reached public audiences thanks to one of the Argentine editors approached by the intermediary who opted to contact an Argentine colleague who practiced Falun Gong instead. As a result, the Falun Dafa Information Center and the *Epoch Times* newspaper obtained a draft and exposed the attempt. The intermediary who made the proposal reportedly confessed that he was working for “some Chinese” without any further details, while one media outlet speculated that it was a request from the Chinese Embassy in Argentina.<sup>1189</sup>

ACTORS

**ACTION**

Another example of one-off message buying, this time on social networks: **some owners of Chinese-speaking Twitter accounts with more than 10,000 subscribers were offered via private messages to publish posts for money, from RMB400 to 2,500 (€51 to 320) per post.** The Australian artist of Chinese origin Badiuca (73,500 Twitter subscribers) was offered RMB1,700 (€217) per message. He shared with ProPublica the 15-second propaganda clip he was supposed to post. His correspondents had apparently not understood that Badiuca, one of China’s most prominent political cartoonists, was an activist in exile because he was deemed a dissident by Beijing. This incident gave credence to the **thesis of the use of commercial intermediaries who “are marketing**

CASE

1184. Nicole Hao, “Media Outlets in Argentina Offered Money to Run Articles Defaming Falun Gong,” *The Epoch Times* (12 Apr. 2020).

1185. “News Outlets in Argentina Offered Cash to Publish Articles Defaming Falun Gong,” *Falun Dafa Infocenter* (27 Apr. 2020).

1186. Hao, “Media Outlets in Argentina.”

1187. “News Outlets in Argentina Offered Cash.”

1188. Hao, “Media Outlets in Argentina.”

1189. “Embajada China en Argentina Ofrece Dinero a Periodista Para Difamar Disciplina Espiritual, Falun Dafa en Medio de Pandemia,” *Miami Diario* (5 Apr. 2020).

pros but, they do not have a nuanced political understanding.”<sup>1190</sup> Another example: in May 2019, the Canadian YouTuber J.J. McCullough (250,000 subscribers),<sup>1191</sup> who was not particularly pro-Chinese (to say the least),<sup>1192</sup> received an email from a certain “Franco” offering him **\$500 (later \$1,350) to broadcast an anti-Falun Gong video** – an offer that he not only refused but to which he devoted a video entitled “Chinese propaganda and me.”<sup>1193</sup>

• **2) Purchase influence over an account.** The YouTubers SerpentZA (South African, 781,000 subscribers) and laowhy86 (American, 544,000 subscribers), both married to Chinese women and who have lived in China for more than a decade, are among the most-watched YouTubers on the topic of China and they often collaborate to create videos. They admitted that they were approached on numerous occasions by **Chinese “organizations” that offered them money and a very large audience if they altered their content.** For example, they explained that they were “offered [financial] compensation to play down some of the western media claims that Tibet and Xinjiang CCP governments are oppressive toward their citizens, and even offered to fly us out to shoot some positive videos promoting tourism in the region.”<sup>1194</sup>

• **3) Purchase an account or a page.** Facebook is a major vector of disinformation in Taiwan, and therefore logically a principal vector of diffusion for content farms. However, many of the pages they used were removed in 2019. Therefore, content farms have tried to buy Facebook fan pages: **several page moderators were contacted by individuals (whose origin was revealed by the expression “管管,” more commonly used in mainland China to designate moderators) offering to buy their page.** At the time, the researcher Puma Shen (沈伯洋) recalled that “many people [...] were selling fan pages that they weren’t using anymore. This was just a way to make money.”<sup>1195</sup>



Examples of proposals to buy Facebook fan pages.<sup>1196</sup>

1190. Jeff Kao and Mia Shuang Li, “How China built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on Coronavirus,” *ProPublica* (26 Mar. 2020).

1191. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyhOl6uRlxryALIT5yifldw>.

1192. He has written articles that he has called “highly critical of the Chinese government” in *The Washington Post*.

1193. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mQ8plzW19g&t=329s>.

1194. Thomas Brown, “How China is Influencing YouTubers Into Posting State Propaganda,” *medium.com* (21 Jan. 2020).

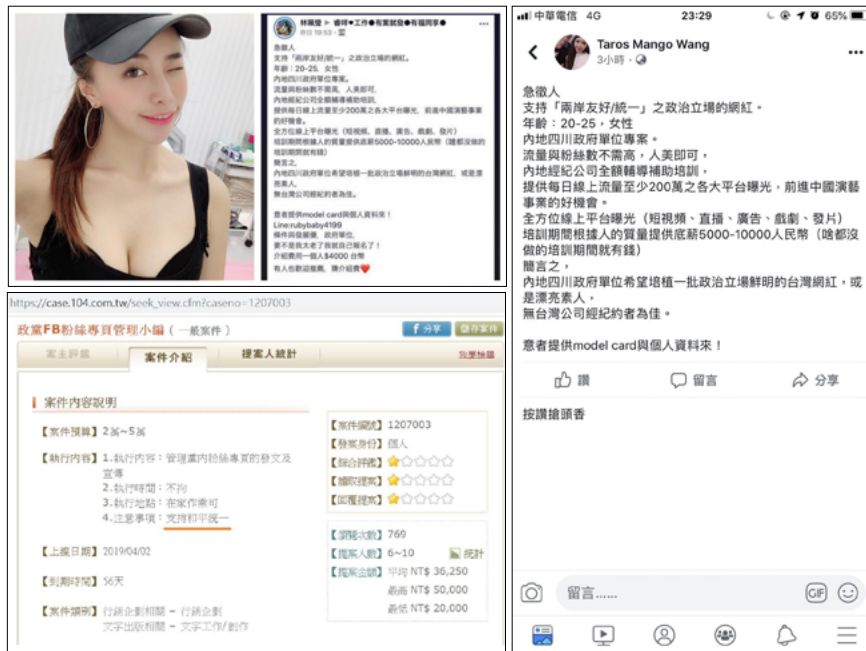
1195. Brian Hioe, “Fighting Fake News and Disinformation in Taiwan: An Interview with Puma Shen,” *New Bloom* (6 Jan. 2020).

1196. *Ibid.*



During Taiwan's 2020 presidential campaign, PTT accounts, the island's most popular bulletin board system, were also sold – some on Taobao, China's leading online sales website. The most expensive accounts, the oldest and therefore most credible, sold for no less than 200,000 Taiwanese dollars (€5,874).<sup>1197</sup>

• 4) **Recruit a person.** Social networks can also be used to recruit paid intermediaries. Amidst the political war against Taiwan, for example, there have been advertisements to recruit streamers, especially attractive young women between 20 and 25 years old, paid between RMB5,000 and 10,000 (630-1,260 €) per month to spread pro-unification propaganda.<sup>1198</sup>



Examples of pro-unification influencer recruitment ads.<sup>1199</sup>

1197. Robertson, *Chinese Messaging Across the Strait*, 19.

1198. Brian Hioe, "Is China Attempting to Influence Taiwanese Elections Through Social Media?" *New Bloom* (3 Apr. 2019).

1199. Sources: 李虎門 (Lee Hu Men), "收買《大學生了沒》前女星招募台網紅? 國台辦: 自導自演的假新聞" ("Former University Star Recruits Taiwanese Internet Celebrities? The Taiwan Affairs Office Retorts that this is Fake News Created Out of Thin Air"), 香港01 (HK 01) (10 Apr. 2019), <http://bit.ly/3nR0ZSd>; Hioe, "Fighting fake news and disinformation in Taiwan."

## The fake articles that supported the takeover bid on Club Med by a Chinese company



Chroniques de Marc Fortin  
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Dernières chroniques de Marc Fortin

**Surenchère de Bonomi sur le Club Med : projet industriel ou simple opération financière ?**

Chronique de Marc Fortin (MFR Business)

L'OPA sur le Club Med qui oppose Andrea Bonomi au conglomérat chinois Fosun ne semble pas prête de se terminer alors que l'homme d'affaires italien a annoncé une nouvelle surenchère. Il relève le montant de son OPA à 24 euros par action, soit 0,50 euro de plus que l'offre de Fosun, la holding de Fosun, son concurrent et espère par la même occasion une bataille boursière à haut risque pour le fleuron du tourisme français.

A lire | 12/01/2015 | 14:00:00 | 1/1

At the end of 2014, the French tourism company Club Med was the subject of a takeover bid that pitted the Chinese conglomerate Fosun against the Italian businessman Andrea Bonomi. At the time, several articles attacking the Italian bid flourished in the French press,<sup>1200</sup> all published under false identities. Some of them had been built up over several months and were present on several social networks, testifying to a relatively sophisticated influence operation.<sup>1201</sup> These articles were apparently the work of a communication agency. The well-known technique consists in publishing opinion articles benefitting the client, under false identities: “Invent a false name,” “both banal and singular,” “present yourself as an employee of a renowned institution,” or “create a digital universe to give credibility to the false identity.”<sup>1202</sup> The client in question is usually easy to guess since they are the one who benefit from the maneuver.

## B. Coordinated campaigns on social networks

Since 2019, Twitter, Facebook and Google (YouTube) no longer refrain from identifying coordinated campaigns as originating from China. In August 2019, Twitter announced that it had deleted about 200,000 accounts (and publicized information about the 936 most active ones) participating in “a significant state-backed information operation.” The accounts in question, “originating from within the People’s Republic of China (PRC),”<sup>1203</sup> attacked Hong Kong demonstrators. Twitter did not imply any formal attribution, but the evidence was clear. The ASPI described it as “a relatively small and hastily assembled operation rather than a sophisticated information campaign planned well in advance.”<sup>1204</sup> In September 2019, Twitter published data from 4,301 additional accounts involved in this operation.<sup>1205</sup> In June 2020, Twitter exposed two sets of accounts, one of 23,750 accounts, the other of about 150,000 accounts, which published pro-CCP and anti-democracy content in Chinese about Hong Kong; social network moderators said they “attributed” this operation to the PRC.<sup>1206</sup> In September 2020, Facebook announced that it had detected and deleted two networks displaying coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB), one of which originated in China (155 accounts, 11 pages, 9 groups and 6 Instagram accounts) and targeted the Philippines and Southeast Asia, but also the United States. Facebook established that this network had “links to individuals in the Fujian province of China.”<sup>1207</sup>

As part of its “investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China,”<sup>1208</sup> Google suspended several tens of thousands of YouTube channels in

1200. In *Le Journal du Net*, *Les Échos*, *Economie matin*, *Challenges* or in a *Médiapart* blog.

1201. Nicolas Arpagian, “OPA sur le Club Med: de l’intox sur le Net !” (“IPO on Club Med: Propaganda on the Net”), *Journal du Net* (5 Jan. 2015); “Club Med: soupçon de manipulation de l’OPA” (“Club Med: Suspicions of IPO Manipulation”) *Le Figaro* (6 Jan. 2015).

1202. Justine Brabant, “Faux analystes pour influencer une opération en bourse (JDN)” (“Fake Analysts to Influence a Stock Market Operation”), *Arrêt sur images* (5 Jan. 2015).

1203. [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/information\\_operations\\_directed\\_at\\_Hong\\_Kong.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html).

1204. Tom Uren, Elise Thomas, and Jacob Wallis, “Tweeting through the Great Firewall: Preliminary analysis of PRC-linked information operations against the Hong Kong protests, ASPI, Report No. 25 (2019), 3.

1205. [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html).

1206. [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/information-operations-june-2020.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/information-operations-june-2020.html).

1207. <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/09/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-china-philippines/>.

1208. <https://blog.google/threat-analysis-group/tag-bulletin-q2-2020/>.

2020. The Threat Analysis Group's bulletins revealed that between April and June 2020, 2,596 channels had been suspended, as well as 3,773 channels between July and September and another 7,479 channels in October alone.<sup>1209</sup> Over the same period, between April and October 2020, Google suspended only 200 other YouTube channels worldwide, 124 related to Russian operations. Hence, the overwhelming majority of suspended channels were tied to China. While these channels mainly published apolitical content (entertainment, music, lifestyle, cooking, etc.), often referred to as "spam," a small portion was political in nature and was published in English and/or Chinese. This technique makes it possible to create an audience before sharing political content more broadly. Among the political topics these channels covered, Google cited the U.S. management of the Covid-19 crisis, the protests for racial justice of the Black Lives Matter movement, the fires that ravaged the United States, but also the events in Hong Kong. Google did not reveal the names of the channels in question but specified that the results of its investigations were consistent with those of Graphika (→ p. 379).<sup>1210</sup>

As we will see in subsequent pages, **most of the information relayed by these false accounts was poorly created, not very elaborate and easily identifiable** – particularly in the Chinese case where these operations are often botched. This differs from Russian operations, in particular, a comparison we address in the conclusion (→ p. 620). However, it is crucial to understand that **their impact depends less on sophistication than on repetition, which can create an "illusory truth effect."** The more an idea is repeated, the more familiar it becomes, and the more likely it is to convince the public (whatever its intrinsic weaknesses).<sup>1211</sup> Therefore, actors involved in disinformation campaigns will not always bother adopt an appearance of authenticity for the information they propagate. This is the reason why Chinese actors, in particular, seem to put quantity before quality.

## 1. A persistent campaign since 2017

In 2019, the ASPI identified a **campaign led by Chinese actors and targeting Hong Kong demonstrations** but which had already begun targeting critics of the Chinese regime as early as April 2017 (see the report *Tweeting through the Great Firewall*). In 2020, they wrote that **this campaign had continued on Twitter and Facebook**, that it was therefore "persistent," consistently "large-scaled," targeting primarily Hongkongers and, to a lesser extent, all Chinese abroad. The themes were well-known: first and foremost, **Hong Kong** and exiled Chinese billionaire **Guo Wengui**, but also, to a lesser extent, **the Covid-19 pandemic** and **Taiwan** (their report *Retweeting through the Great Firewall*). The **attribution to actors located in China** (even though Twitter is technically banned there) was confirmed by the fact that 90% of messages were posted very routinely Monday to Friday, 8 am to 5 pm Beijing Time, with a clear drop at lunchtime: the accounts did not seem to be used the rest of the time (early morning, late afternoon, evenings, weekends), which could indicate a professional rather than personal endeavor.

The **inauthenticity** was further confirmed by the fact that 78.5% of the Twitter accounts examined had no subscribers at all; recently created accounts with only a few subscribers

1209. Threat Analysis Group, "TAG Bulletin: Q2 2020", *Google* (5 Aug. 2020); "TAG Bulletin: Q3 2020" (15 Sept. 2020); "TAG Bulletin: Q4 2020" (17 Nov. 2020).

1210. Ben Nimmo, Camille François, C. Shawn Eib, and Léa Ronzaud, *Return of the (Spamouflage) Dragon: Pro-Chinese Spam Network Tries Again*, Graphika (Apr. 2020).

1211. Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein, and Thomas Toppino, "Frequency and the Conference of Referential Validity," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 16:1 (2017), 107-112.

were reaching record levels of engagement with hundreds or even thousands of “likes”; and among the rest of the accounts, some were “potentially purchased, hacked or stolen.”<sup>1212</sup> **The work was usually sloppy: the authors did not bother cover their tracks or make the accounts appear authentic.** The ASPI gave the example of an account initially held by a Frenchman who, in March 2020, suddenly started tweeting only in English and Chinese. The photo had been changed (it was then a young woman) but the biographical presentation still referred to the original Facebook page, i.e., that of the French man. Another French-speaking account tweeted “Test123” in Chinese before launching attacks against Guo Wengui. Its operators did not even bother delete previous French tweets or the test tweet. The ASPI termed this a **“lazy approach”** on both Twitter and Facebook: most of the time, **only the profile picture of the acquired accounts was changed, but not the content nor the previous photos.**<sup>1213</sup> In other words, **concealment was not an issue: putting quantity before quality, they wanted to act fast and rake it in.** Moreover, there was some **coordination between platforms:** different accounts, under different identities were posting the same thing on different platforms (Twitter and Facebook) simultaneously. This is another symptom of inauthenticity.

It is likely the **same information operation since 2017. The campaign was adapted to the events (Hong Kong, pandemic, but also the U.S. presidential campaign)** and it was particularly robust since it resisted successive takedowns. The ASPI, which also emphasized that its results converged with those of Graphika and Bellingcat,<sup>1214</sup> noted that this network could **“have sourced, created or activated new accounts within a matter of days.”**<sup>1215</sup>

In September 2021, a study by the U.S. cybersecurity firm Mandiant (FireEye) provided new evidence. First, the campaign was much larger than previously thought, as it involved no less than **30 different social network platforms and more than 40 websites and forums, in numerous languages including Russian, German, Spanish, Korean and Japanese.** Then, the attackers **“have actively sought to physically mobilize protestors in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”**<sup>1216</sup> This attempt, which does not appear to have been successful, is typical of what Russians had also attempted to do in previous years with greater success (**pushing communities to demonstrate and clash in order to divide a society**) and is thus a **further manifestation of the Russification of Chinese operations** (→ p. 620).

## 2. Spamouflage Dragon: an enduring network using fake accounts and fake AI-generated human faces

Since 2019, Graphika has exposed a **pro-Chinese network involved in at least three operations. The first**, from which Graphika drew a first report,<sup>1217</sup> seems to have begun, in the summer of 2019, **to attack pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong in**

1212. Jake Wallis et al., *Retweeting Through the Great Firewall: A persistent and Undeterred Threat Actor*, ASPI Policy Brief Report No. 33 (Jun. 2020), 4.

1213. *Ibid.*

1214. Benjamin Strick, “Uncovering a Pro-Chinese Government Information Operation on Twitter and Facebook: Analysis of the #MilesGuo Bot Network,” *Bellingcat* (5 May 2020).

1215. Wallis et al., *Retweeting Through the Great Firewall*, 52.

1216. Ryan Serabian and Lee Foster, “Pro-PRC Influence Campaign Expands to Dozens of Social Media Platforms, Websites, and Forums in at Least Seven Languages, Attempted to Physically Mobilize Protesters in the U.S.,” FireEye Threat Research blog, September 8, 2021.

1217. Ben Nimmo, C. Shawn Eib, and L. Tamora, *Cross-Platform Spam Network Targeted Hong Kong Protests*, Graphika (Sept. 2019).



**Chinese and the exiled billionaire and CCP critic Guo Wengui.** The network used hundreds of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter accounts (those involved were among the 936 accounts identified by Twitter on August 19, 2019 as participating in “a significant state-backed information operation”; the accounts “originat[ed] from within the PRC”).<sup>1218</sup> **Most of the accounts were hijacked or reused:** despite having Western, Slavic, and Bangladeshi names and profiles, they published in Chinese. **The videos they published were then amplified (shared, commented on) by groups of fake accounts.** Some political messages (in this case, attacking Hong Kong demonstrators and Guo Wengui) were interspersed within a mass of harmless photos and videos (landscape, poetry, sport) – perhaps used as camouflage – hence the name chosen by Graphika: “Spamouflage.”<sup>1219</sup> **Sometimes “different accounts posted the same content in the same order, suggesting that they were automated.”**<sup>1220</sup> In September 2019, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube thought they had dismantled this network by deleting the accounts and pages involved. In reality, the network simply downsized and depoliticized its activity to pass “under the radar.”

The network was back for a **second operation** in early 2020, from which Graphika drew a second report.<sup>1221</sup> This operation’s **objective was to defend China, which received much criticism at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.** The operation seems to have been “galvanized,” in late January, by the decision of U.S. authorities to ban travelers from China.<sup>1222</sup> The network **reactivated dormant accounts.** For example, one of them, the Facebook page 画苑之花 (“Flower of the Garden”), was created in January 2019 under a Bangladeshi name. The page started by publishing landscape images in English, then participated in the first operation on Hong Kong and Guo by posting a mixture of political messages and landscapes (“spamouflage”), before laying low in the last months of 2019, and finally returning at the very end of January 2020 to defend Beijing against criticisms of its management of the epidemic. The Graphika team deduced that **the Flower of the Garden page “was a commercial acquisition, created by users unrelated to the network (perhaps in Bangladesh), obtained by the operation around the time of the first disruption, but then run in an online variation on “stealth mode” until the operators decided to turn up the volume.”**<sup>1223</sup> Another example on Twitter: one of the accounts involved in this second operation, in March 2020, @kstaceee (Kathryn Stacey), was created in 2009, published in English, then turned silent in 2013; it republished a few commercial tweets between 2016 and 2019, then began posting in Chinese in October 2019, participating in the first operation against Hong Kong demonstrators. Therefore, it could be “an account created by a genuine individual but abandoned in 2013, hijacked and repurposed by a commercial operator in 2016, and then taken over by Spamouflage Dragon in late October 2019.”<sup>1224</sup> Examples like these are numerous.

**As it reactivated old accounts, this network also acquired or created others, some to disseminate content, others to amplify it. Disseminated and amplified videos, often taken from Chinese state media, praised the CCP’s handling of the health crisis.** Like the first time, some accounts interspersed them with a mass of innocuous messages and videos taken from TikTok. On Facebook, the involved pages usually had between

1218. [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/information\\_operations\\_directed\\_at\\_Hong\\_Kong.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html).

1219. Ben Nimmo, Camille François, C. Shawn Eib, and Léa Ronzaud, Spamouflage Goes to America: Pro-Chinese Inauthentic Network Debuts English-Language Videos, Graphika (Aug. 2020), 2.

1220. Nimmo, François, Eib, and Ronzaud, *Return of the (Spamouflage) Dragon*, 2.

1221. Ibid.

1222. Ibid., 22.

1223. Ibid., 7-8.

1224. Ibid., 9

4,000 and 4,900 users, just below 5,000, without ever reaching this threshold beyond which the transparency settings automatically show where the page is administered from; it may seem intentional. Moreover, their engagement rate was far below what could have been expected from a page actually followed by such a high number of (real) people: it could “indicate a policy of purchasing enough followers to make the assets look authoritative, without obtaining so many that they triggered the transparency setting.”<sup>1225</sup>

The effectiveness of this maneuver was limited because, as Graphika observed, it “failed to break out of its own echo chamber. All the likes, shares, and comments on the network’s posts [...] came from other members of the network.”<sup>1226</sup> In other words, Spamouflage Dragon’s activity was circular. Like for the first operation, as soon as the maneuver was exposed (in April), the platforms deleted the accounts involved.

The network came back in June 2020 for a **third operation**, which resulted in a third Graphika report.<sup>1227</sup> **This time it targeted the United States and the Trump administration** in the context of the Sino-American “Cold War.” It particularly battered “its foreign policy, its handling of the coronavirus outbreak, its racial inequalities, and its moves against TikTok.”<sup>1228</sup> There were **two novelties compared to previous campaigns: first, this one was conducted in English**, mainly through videos. The quality was not perfect (“the videos were clumsily made, marked by language errors and awkward automated voice-overs.”),<sup>1229</sup> but the attackers showed a certain reactivity to current events, such as with a speech by an American official. They were **able to create and broadcast videos in English within 36 hours. Then, some of the accounts posting them on YouTube and Twitter had profile pictures created by generative adversarial networks (GANs, i.e. AI): they were the fabricated faces of non-existent people.** This relatively new technique had already been observed in another case in 2019<sup>1230</sup> and on LinkedIn, where some fake profiles are sometimes illustrated with photos generated in this way, notably by intelligence services that use LinkedIn as a recruitment method.<sup>1231</sup> For example, the nine faces below, which are profile pictures of YouTube users who have commented on one of the videos in question, are fake: they were all generated in this way.



Profile pictures of the YouTube accounts [Irina Ivanova](#), [Adrian Mishatkin](#), [Larissa Caiden](#), [Klavdii Oshitkov](#), [Oktiabr Usikov](#), [Polina Novikova](#), [Anton Cherkasov](#), and [Lilia Iuruskova](#), all of which commented on the above-mentioned video. On the right, the eight profile pictures rendered opaque and superimposed on one another. Note how the eyeballs align, and how each individual profile picture is set against a blurred and indeterminate background, typical of GAN-generated images.

Source: Ben Nimmo, Camille François, C. Shawn Eib and Léa Ronzaud, *Spamouflage Goes to America: Pro-Chinese Inauthentic Network Debuts English-Language Videos*, Graphika, August 2020, p. 28.

1225. Ibid., 15.

1226. Ibid., 1.

1227. Nimmo, François, Eib, and Ronzaud, *Spamouflage Goes to America*.

1228. Ibid., 2

1229. Ibid., 1

1230. Ben Nimmo et al., *#OperationFFS: Fake Face Swarm*, A joint report by Graphika & the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensics Research Lab (Dec. 2019).

1231. Raphael Satter, “Experts: Spy Used AI-generated Face to Connect with Targets,” *AP News* (13 Jun. 2019).

The same increasingly-common method of creating faces using artificial intelligence has been used in other operations, one of which – named “Naval Gazing” by Graphika – focused on the Sino-American rivalry in the South China Sea between 2016 and 2020.<sup>1232</sup> Fake Facebook accounts whose profile pictures had either been stolen or generated by artificial intelligence attacked the Taiwanese president and supported the presidents of the Philippines and Indonesia. Some were also posing as Americans supporting different candidates in the 2020 presidential campaign. In all cases, the interventions were dominated by maritime security and **the defense of Chinese maritime interests**. Another operation, also exposed by Graphika, used images generated by artificial intelligence to create fake profiles, on Twitter this time, to defend Huawei against the project of the Belgian government to limit the access of Chinese companies to its 5G network in 2020.<sup>1233</sup>

Meanwhile, the Spamouflage network continued to grow, with some interesting developments that prompted Graphika to publish a fourth report.<sup>1234</sup> First of all, the network’s three initial operations, to attack Hong Kong demonstrators, defend China during the Covid-19 pandemic, and attack the United States, only had a limited impact, despite their switch to English with the third operation; **operators were unable to “break out” of their own echo chamber**, i.e., to develop a sufficient reach outside their network. However, in late 2020 and early 2021, they were met with some success: **the network’s messages were actually amplified by important external accounts**, including “the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, a Pakistani politician, a senior figure at Huawei Europe, UK commentator and former member of parliament George Galloway, and four YouTube channels for Chinese viewers with tens of thousands of followers.”<sup>1235</sup> Another shift identified by Graphika was **the development of seemingly authentic accounts**, in the sense that, unlike hundreds of others who did not even bother to conceal their inauthenticity, they invested in persona development. As a result, the authenticity of these new accounts drove more engagement with the content. Spamouflage also broadened its focus, which largely overlapped with Chinese diplomats who had themselves retweeted the network’s accounts several hundred times, leading Graphika to say that **“spamouflage increasingly resembles a state-aligned propaganda network that boosts, and is boosted by, the Chinese government.”**<sup>1236</sup> Moreover, the network was also increasingly aggressive toward the United States. The decline of America. Became its main narrative, which carried a broader message: the superiority of the Chinese model over liberal democracy.

### 3. More than 10,000 fake Twitter accounts linked to the Chinese government

Between August 2019 and March 2020, ProPublica also identified **“more than 10,000 suspected fake Twitter accounts involved in a coordinated influence campaign with ties to the Chinese government.”**<sup>1237</sup> Some of these accounts had been hacked: ProPublica gave examples of the initially authentic accounts of “a professor in North Carolina; a

1232. Ben Nimmo, C. Shawn Eib, and Léa Ronzaud, *Operation Naval Gazing: Facebook Takes Down Inauthentic Chinese Network*, Graphika (Sept. 2020).

1233. *Fake Cluster Boosts Huawei: Accounts with GAN Faces Attack Belgium Over 5G Restrictions*, Graphika (Jan. 2021).

1234. Ben Nimmo, Ira Hubert, and Yang Cheng, *Spamouflage Breakout: Chinese Spam Network Finally Starts to Gain Some Traction*, Graphika (Feb. 2021).

1235. *Ibid.*, 3.

1236. *Ibid.*, 4.

1237. Kao and Li, “How China built.” All quotes in this section are taken from this article.

graphic artist and a mother in Massachusetts; a web designer in the U.K.; and a business analyst in Australia,” stolen from their owners and which subsequently posted pro-Beijing propaganda in Chinese and/or English. Other accounts **used vernacular Cantonese with traditional Chinese characters to impersonate Hongkongers** – but errors sometimes appeared with simplified Chinese characters, revealing the account operator’s mainland origin. Those who held the accounts at the time were not necessarily the ones who stole them: they could simply have bought them on **a black market, where pirates sell existing accounts that have the double advantage of already having (sometimes many) subscribers and of appearing credible** since they were initially real accounts, with no link to the causes for which they can be used afterward. The most credible accounts, because they were initially real accounts and kept a real profile picture (of a real person), were used to spread the messages first, which were then amplified (republished, liked, commented on) by an army of more obviously false accounts.

Here again, **a cluster of clues linked this network of false accounts to the CCP:** not only were the timeline and content of the messages aligned with the Chinese political agenda (first Hong Kong, then the pandemic), to the point that the messages were sometimes literally copy-pasted from official CCP communiqués, but these accounts (of people supposedly located all over the world) were mainly active during Beijing working hours – an observation also made by the ASPI in another study.<sup>1238</sup> Furthermore, ProPublica linked these accounts and this informational operation to **a Beijing-based digital marketing company, OneSight Technology Ltd, which “bills itself as the top overseas social marketing company in China.** It contracts with domestic companies and government agencies to help them market their brands or goods on social media seen outside of China.” It offered, among other services, “to post messages en masse across a number of accounts on overseas social media platforms including Twitter and Facebook.” Its CEO, Li Lei, was apparently a former employee at Beijing’s Foreign Propaganda Department. Among his clients: *China Daily*, CGTN, and the country’s two main news agencies, Xinhua and China News Service (which are supervised by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) and, since 2018, by the UFW (United Front Work Department), which absorbed OCAO). ProPublica obtained a copy of a contract worth RMB1,244,880 (€159,136) between OneSight and China News Service to increase the latter’s Twitter visibility.<sup>1239</sup>

#### 4. Targeted botnets from Serbia to Xinjiang

**A substantial rapprochement between China and Serbia has been taking place** since 2014, and has accelerated since 2017. Beijing is more broadly interested in the Balkans and countries of Central and Eastern Europe (→ p. 310). And Serbia has a twofold advantage: it is not a EU member (therefore *a priori* more sensitive to a vision, concepts, and initiatives hostile to the EU), but a candidate (and therefore well-positioned to serve as a Trojan horse when the time comes). **The Balkans are a strategic priority for Beijing, and Serbia is at the “heart” of this strategy.**<sup>1240</sup>

1238. Uren, Thomas, and Wallis, *Tweeting Through the Great Firewall*.

1239. Kao and Li, “How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine.”

1240. Vuk Vuksanovic, “Light Touch, Tight Grip: China’s Influence and the Corrosion of Serbian Diplomacy,” *War on the Rocks* (24 Sept. 2019).



China opened a Confucius Institute in Belgrade in 2006, another in Novi Sad in 2017, signed a large number of academic partnerships, has provided content to the Serbian media, poured billions of euros into Serbia, built a €45 million cultural center in place of the Chinese embassy bombed by NATO in 1999, and it carries out very active propaganda in the country with the help of local relays. One of them is the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development. This Serbian think tank was partly funded by the conglomerate CEFC China Energy (before it went bankrupt in March 2020 → p. 165) and promoted the BRI and Sino-Serbian friendship.<sup>1241</sup> Since 2020, there have also been joint patrols of Serbian and Chinese police in the streets – the visible part of a cooperation between security forces that could, in the future if not already, enable Beijing to better monitor and control all those belonging to the vast and diffuse category of “overseas Chinese” (→ p. 165) in Serbia. The rapprochement is so spectacular that it has been said that “China [had] overtaken Russia as Serbia’s Great Ally.”<sup>1242</sup>

**Thus, Serbia was logically a Chinese priority during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Chinese aid was greatly amplified on social networks. An analysis of 30,000 tweets posted by Serbian accounts between March 9 and April 9, 2020 containing the words “Kina” (China) and “Srbija” (Serbia) showed that bots produced no less than 71.9% of them.**<sup>1243</sup> Some of the used accounts were old (created as early as 2009), but many (954) were created for the occasion in the first quarter of 2020. More than 85% of the tweets from these bots were retweets: their objective was, therefore, to amplify existing content rather than distribute new content. They **praised the Sino-Serbian friendship and the Chinese aid given to Serbia during the pandemic, as well as the Serbian government for its management of the crisis, while criticizing the inaction and lack of solidarity of the European Union** (despite the fact that the EU immediately released 15 million euros to assist Serbia). One of the accounts most often mentioned in these tweets was Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić’s, who stated that he trusted his “friend and brother” Xi Jinping, that China was the only country that could help them, as “European solidarity does not exist.”<sup>1244</sup> The accounts of the Serbian Prime Minister and the Chinese ambassador to Serbia were also, but to a lesser extent, regularly mentioned.

In December 2019, the ASPI uncovered **another similar network of false accounts that tried to influence the discussions on Xinjiang.**<sup>1245</sup> The campaign was launched during the adoption of a bill by the US House of Representatives calling for sanctions against Chinese Party-State executives responsible for the mass internment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.<sup>1246</sup> All of the identified accounts used the profile picture of a celebrity (Emma Stone, Chris Evans, Lily Collins, Keira Knightley...) and retweeted content from Chinese media to amplify it, in particular the *Global Times* and Chinese government sources. They strived to impose sources in line with the Chinese version of the facts concerning the camps which, according to the official narrative, are education centers.

1241. Ibid.

1242. Vuk Velebit, “China Has Overtaken Russia as Serbia’s Great Ally,” *BalkanInsight* (8 Jul. 2020).

1243. Digital Forensic Center, “A Bot Network Arrived in Serbia Along with Coronavirus,” *Digitalni forenz ički centar* (13 Apr. 2020).

1244. Sofija Popović, “‘Steel Friendship’ Between Serbia and China Criticized by European Commentators,” *European Western Balkans* (30 Mar. 2020); Jean-Baptiste Chastand, “Serbie: un sas d’entrée vers l’Europe pour Pékin” (“Serbia: a Gateway to Europe for Beijing”), *Le Monde* (22 Mar. 2021), 18.

1245. Masha Borak, “New Swarm of pro-China Twitter Bots Spreads Disinformation about Xinjiang,” *South China Morning Post* (5 Dec. 2019).

1246. “US House approves Uyghur Act Calling for Sanctions on China’s Senior Officials,” *The Guardian* (4 Dec. 2019).

## #forzaCinaeItalia

A study showed that **nearly half (46.3%) of the tweets that quoted the hashtag #forzaCinaeItalia (“Go China and Italy”)** and more than a third (37.1%) of those quoting the hashtag **#grazieCina (“Thanks China”)** between March 11 and 23, 2020, were created by bots.<sup>1247</sup> The Chinese Embassy in Italy had initiated the movement by tweeting an image untitled “Forza Cina e Italia!” on February 24; then the hashtag #forzaCinaeItalia was used on March 11. After that date, it was abundantly reproduced.



## C. Discredit, divide, and scare opponents

An essential aspect of these campaigns, especially the one identified by the ASPI and other likeminded groups (Graphika, Bellingcat), which have been persistent on Twitter and Facebook since 2017, is that they do not solely defend China. **Promoting the Chinese model means degrading other models at the same time, especially liberal democracies, something that Russian influence operations have been doing for years** (→ p. 620). At least three tactics are regularly employed to this end.

**First, they discredited the adversary’s capability** – which is also, correlatively, a way of praising China’s own resources by comparison. This process was frequently used during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several tweets were published in a globally coordinated campaign that targeted different countries (Canada, Finland, Japan, and the United States). They presented themselves as personal testimonies of Chinese living abroad, with local references, but they were, in reality, the same text with gaps filled depending on the context:

\_\_\_\_\_ has already lost control of the pandemic. I heard from a friend in a \_\_\_\_\_ hospital that numberless people are trying to get diagnosed every day, but there are no tests, they just get sent back home. \_\_\_\_\_ has a large elderly population; lots of them just have to die at home. If you do not get diagnosed, then you do not count as having got the disease, which is how \_\_\_\_\_ is keeping its num-

1247. Gabriele Carrere and Francesco Bechis, “Così la Cina fa propaganda in Italia, con i bot. Ecco l’analisi su Twitter di Alkemy per Formiche,” *Formiche* (30 Mar. 2020).

bers so low. It's so scary. I already reserved my plane tickets home. In critical moments we have to concentrate efforts to tackle a great challenge!<sup>1248</sup>



The attacks against liberal democracies were not limited to their capacity to manage health crises: they targeted above all the legitimacy of their institutions, and therefore the democratic model itself. One of the most widespread ideas here developed was that democracies are not only inefficient but also unstable and chaotic. Any image of disorder (demonstrations, damage to public property, burning cars, crimes, etc.) was amplified to confirm the superiority of the Chinese authoritarian model. From this point of view, **the assault on the Capitol by supporters of Donald Trump on January 6, 2021 provided Chinese media and trolls with an almost inexhaustible source of criticisms against the democratic model – presumably embodied in Washington – and a powerful example to denounce the alleged “double standards” between the said-comparable situations of Hong Kong and Washington, as illustrated by montages published by the *Global Times* (see below).**



1248. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 67.





Source: “Chinese netizens jeer riot in US Capitol as ‘Karma,’ say bubbles of ‘democracy and freedom’ have burst,” *Global Times* (7 Jan. 2021).

**Second, they fuel the flames of divisive issues**, particularly racism and police violence in the United States. Some messages were purely critical, giving the image of a country fighting a civil war, without making any connection to China – this is the “Russian” approach (→ p. 620). Others drew a parallel between the violence in the United States and in Hong Kong to denounce the supposed hypocrisy (i.e. double standards) of the Americans.

**China’s campaigns on social networks that targeted the United States during the presidential campaign** were not clearly partisan. But, following the example of the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) four years earlier, they **supported both sides of a divisive issue to add fuel to the fire**. A special effort was dedicated to the racial issue (because it was particularly divisive). For example, Chinese operators broadcast “messages in support of both the Black Lives Matter and pro-police Blue Lives Matter movements. The point was not to take a side but rather to boost divisiveness by amplifying competing, emotionally-charged view points.”<sup>1249</sup>



Source: <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1266741986096107520>.

A report showed that, on Twitter, “CCP followers started focusing on the demonstrations in the US, sparked by the killing of George Floyd on 25 May [2020].” The tweets within this narrative have several aims: **exacerbating domestic tensions over police bru-**

1249. Tatlow, “Exclusive: 600 U.S. Groups Linked to Chinese Communist Party Influence Effort with Ambition Beyond Election.”



tality against Black Americans; video and images illustrating the often violent suppression of protests by police and; comparing the Trump administration's response to the demonstrations to the protests in Hong Kong. [...] Official CCP accounts used the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #BLM, and #GeorgeFloyd more than 500 times combined in the weeks after Floyd's death. Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Hua Chunying also used Floyd's dying words as a rebuttal to a U.S. State Department tweet condemning China's actions in Hong Kong" (see image above).<sup>1250</sup>



1250. Raymond Serrato and Bret Schafer, *Reply All: Inauthenticity and Coordinated Replying in pro-Chinese Communist Party Twitter Networks*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and Alliance for Securing Democracy (Jul. 2020), 20.



Source (for the 6 pictures): Wallis et al., Retweeting through the great firewall, 13-16.

On the Bilibili platform, the CYL distinguished itself in June 2020 by broadcasting **videos exploiting the death of George Floyd to “denounce” the racism of the U.S. government.** One of them, published on June 3, which is captured below, was entitled: “In a few words: they obtained freedom in 1862, so why is it that black Americans still can’t breathe.” “In a few words” is a series broadcast by Guanchazhe (观察者 – “the observer”), a medium created in 2012 that presents itself as a forum analyzing international issues. It displays views close to the government’s. In the video mentioned above, the authors presented African Americans as an oppressed nation within the United States; they also suggested that the FBI was responsible for the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. In addition, the video claimed that white Americans created the superhero Black Panther to obscure the true history of the Black Panther movement. This statement was evidently false. One only needs to check the chronology of events to ascertain the truth: the Marvel hero made his first appearance in *Fantastic Four* in July 1966, whereas the African-American Maoist movement was created the following October. Marvel was, therefore, unable to create the character to fight against the Black Panthers. Nor has it been established that Marvel’s hero exerted any influence in the choice of the Black Panthers’ name.





George Floyd's death has thus been used in many media content and in a number of ways, including artistic images such as the one titled *To Breath* by “warrior wolf artist” **Wuheqilin** (also known for creating the piece featuring an Australian soldier slitting the throat of an Afghan child → p. 223).



Wuheqilin, *To Breath* (source: *Global Times*, <https://archive.vn/WhBcy>).

**Anti-Chinese racism** – which is sometimes real, there is no denying it – also gives rise to manipulated information. For example, in April 2021, a video circulated on social networks in China and Southeast Asia in which an Asian man, on the ground and bleeding, was violently beaten by dozens of Spanish-speaking men, armed with sticks. The video (captured below) was posted with the following message: “In California, USA, blacks and whites kill Chinese. Forward to the whole of China!”



In fact, this video was shot in February 2021 during a prison riot in Ecuador and was originally released by the Twitter account of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Justice.<sup>1251</sup> This is

<sup>1251</sup> Jane Tang, “China’s Information Warfare and Media Influence Spawn Confusion in Thailand,” *Radio Free Asia* (13 May 2021).

not an isolated case: **the exploitation of racist anti-Asian acts, whether real, alleged, or fabricated**, is one of the leitmotifs used by Chinese propaganda to denigrate the United States but also, more generally, “the West” – especially countries with large Asian communities, such as Australia and Canada.

**The United States is not the only one affected by attempts to divide the country. In Seoul, too, there have been more repeated attempts to intervene in divisive debates to inflame tensions.** Suspecting that Chinese agents were invading Korean-language forums and discussion groups, some Internet users started an experiment in early 2020. They created a fake online debate by posting links pointing to websites banned in China to trap Chinese Internet users. A significant number of those who clicked on the links then started posting the same comment, simply saying, in Korean, “I am an individual” – an incomprehensible phrase that some interpreted as a kind of code to indicate to the Chinese services monitoring the web that they had found themselves on these banned websites against their will. This experience sparked a debate, with some politicians stressing the need to legislate to prevent this kind of manipulation.<sup>1252</sup>

### Psychological manipulation: gaslighting

The psychological manipulation of **denying proven facts and defending false assertions with the effect of destabilizing the convictions of the target audience and disturbing their sense of reality** is called *gaslighting*, which refers to the eponymous movie directed by George Cukor – itself inspired from the play *Angel Street* written by Patrick Hamilton – in which the husband manages, using various stratagems, to make his wife doubt her own mental health.<sup>1253</sup> Beyond the abusive interpersonal relationship, this psychological concept can be applied on a broader scale, such as between those who govern and those who are governed: the behavior and words of President Donald Trump, for example, have more than once been described as *gaslighting*.<sup>1254</sup> **The CCP has also engaged in this kind of manipulation.** If one cannot scientifically prove someone’s intention, one can at least identify **many cases where the Party openly lied, distorted reality, or sought to rewrite history, with the effect of creating possible confusion among the public.** To take a recent example, **the Party sought to deflect from its short-sightedness at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis**, glorifying doctor Li Wenliang who had previously been accused of spreading false rumors, censoring the first testimonies of the crisis that contradict the official version of controlled management.<sup>1255</sup> This distortion was carried out by downplaying the public number of infected people and deaths,<sup>1256</sup> and by criticizing foreign countries for not having taken the virus seriously – although, at the beginning of the crisis, China claimed that the situation was under control and that foreign countries should not suspend their air links with it. Through Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian (and other figures), China has also caused unrest among domestic and foreign audiences by spreading the rumor according to which the virus was brought to China by U.S. military personnel (→ p. 596). Similarly, Chinese authorities distorted the reality of the protests in Hong Kong by claiming that the protesters

1252. Tae-jun Kang, “Suspicious Grow in South Korea Over China’s Online Influence Operations,” *The Diplomat* (27 Mar. 2020).

1253. G. Alex Sinha, “Lies, Gaslighting and Propaganda,” *Buffalo Law Review*, 68:4 (Aug. 2020), 1088.

1254. Alfie Eltis, “Trump, and the History of Political Gaslighting,” *Varsity* (2 Oct. 2020); Nicole Hemmer, “Donald Trump Is Gaslighting America,” *United States Studies Center* (16 Mar. 2016). Stephanie Sarkis, “Donald Trump is a Classic Gaslighter in an Abusive Relationship with America,” *USA Today*, (10 Mar. 2018). George Hagman, “Gaslighting the Pandemic: Donald Trump, Lies, Manipulation and Power,” *International Association for Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* (20 Jun. 2020); Jennifer Rubin, “Trump’s Convention is the Ultimate Gaslighting Exercise,” *The Washington Post* (24 Aug. 2020).

1255. Christoph Koettl, Muye Xiao, Nilo Tabrizzy, and Dmitriy Khavin, “China Is Censoring Coronavirus Stories. These Citizens Are Fighting Back,” *The New York Times* (23 Feb. 2020); Jordan Schneider, “All the Early COVID-19 Stories Censored Off Chinese Internet,” *Sup China* (7 Apr. 2020).

1256. Nick Paton Walsh, “The Wuhan files: Leaked Documents Reveal China’s Mishandling of the Early Stages of Covid-19,” CNN (1 Dec. 2020).



were ultra-minority or violent troublemakers or that protests were fomented by a foreign actor aiming to destabilize the authorities. They used the same technics that in their attempts to erase the Tian'anmen Square events of 1989 from collective memory, or when they claim that the camps in Xinjiang are merely educational centers to improve the participants' living conditions with these "vocational education and training institutions."<sup>1257</sup> The presence of these competing versions of reality so zealously defended in the media and on the networks takes effect as soon as the public is so troubled that they no longer know which version of the facts to believe. **Even without creating a definite adherence to one's own discourse, the gaslighter hits its target as soon as the latter no longer manages to trust the proven version of the facts**, which, at least in the case of China, makes it possible to reduce the extent or vehemence of the criticisms it faces on these subjects.

**Third**, another tactic is to fuel the fire of fear and try to **create a panic**. In **March 2020**, **millions of Americans received alarmist text messages** that exaggerated the magnitude of the pandemic and announced an imminent containment, and a suspension of New York City's public transportation. It also encouraged them to stockpile food, medicine, etc., and asked them to relay this message to their contacts. One of the messages that circulated, allegedly sent by the Department of Homeland Security, stated that the government would make its announcement as soon as troops were properly deployed to contain any riots. **Within 48 hours, the rumor had already become so widespread that the National Security Council publicly denied** the information via its Twitter account: "Text message rumors of a national #quarantine are FAKE. There is no national lockdown."<sup>1258</sup> This was a text message version of the traditional email chain: "not something that is new, but it is something that is effective," said Graham Brookie, director of the DFRLab at the Atlantic Council.<sup>1259</sup> According to U.S. intelligence, **Chinese services contributed to this operation, not necessarily by creating the messages, but by amplifying them on social networks and messaging apps**, including encrypted messaging, a practice that make identification and fighting against misinformation all the more difficult.<sup>1260</sup>

## D. The PLA is also waging war through social networks

While attribution to the Chinese state is generally difficult, mainly because of so-called "nationalist" or "patriotic trolling" which is not necessarily directed or controlled by the state. It is even more **challenging to know which agencies or departments within the state are involved**. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase estimated that the accounts deleted by Twitter in August and September 2019 were operated by **the Propaganda Department and/or UFWD**.<sup>1261</sup> Attention is generally focused on the UFWD, but the authors rightly believed that "**the PLA should be recognized as another key driver of these Chinese efforts**. Recent events in Taiwan as well as writings and patents filed by Chinese military researchers suggest that the PLA is increasingly interested in leveraging social media for such political interference in foreign countries, including in the

1257. "Scholars Spreading Rumors about Uyghur Detention Work for US Intel Agency: Spokesperson," *Global Times* (3 Dec. 2019), <https://archive.vn/hLbF4>.

1258. Tweet of the NSC (@WHNSC) (16 Mar. 2020).

1259. Mihir Zaveri, "Be Wary of Those Texts from a Friend of a Friend's Aunt," *The New York Times* (16 Mar. 2020).

1260. Edward Wong, Matthew Rosenberg, and Julian E. Barnes, "Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages That Sowed Virus Panic in U.S., Officials Say," *The New York Times* (22 Apr. 2020).

1261. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*.

United States.”<sup>1262</sup> While the main actors manipulating social media are undoubtedly the PLA, the UFWD, and the MSS, there does not seem to be a clear division of labor between them, or at least it remains unknown to us.

The PLA uses social networks for “open” influence first, i.e. circulating propaganda, for deterrence and psychological warfare; then, it uses them to conduct clandestine and hostile operations against foreign targets. On the first point, the PLA has its own vectors, notably the *PLA Daily* and the China Military Online website, and it uses Chinese state media, notably Xinhua, *China Daily*, and the *Global Times*. It has also been managing a large number of accounts on Chinese social networks (Weibo and WeChat) since 2010 (the first of which was probably the *PLA Daily*’s Weibo account in March 2010). It had 700 accounts in February 2017 and probably more today.<sup>1263</sup> The PLA does not yet have accounts on Western social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram) however, where it is indirectly present, passing on its messages through other Chinese accounts, especially news agencies. That said, it could join them soon.

Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase’s report gives valuable insights because it is based on Chinese military literature (doctrine, articles published in the *PLA Daily*, the monthly *Military Correspondent*, and other military newspapers). It thus provides a better grasp of what military researchers think, especially when talking about the “war of public opinion online” (网络舆论战), an effort to which we contributed with the analysis of different PLA actors, in particular Base 311, in the second part of this report (→ p. 89).

**Doctrinal documents insist on the importance of the informational field:** a 2013 book on the *Science of Military Strategy* (战略学) published by the Department of World Military Research of the Academy of Military Science (军事学学院战略研究部), stated that “informational dominance is the foundation of the initiative on the battlefield”<sup>1264</sup>; and the 2015 Chinese White Paper on Defense spoke of the “informationization” of war.<sup>1265</sup>

**Similarly to Russia, the information field is conceived in a broad sense:** “the PLA views cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare as interconnected subcomponents of informational warfare writ large.”<sup>1266</sup> Moreover, Chinese informational warfare, in general, is probably coordinated by the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission (中央网络安全和信息化委员会), chaired by Xi himself<sup>1267</sup> – while at the PLA’s level, coordination probably falls to the SSF (Strategic Support Force).

**The PLA first focused on online media, which were quickly seen as power multipliers** that could “double the results for half the effort when trying to mislead and confuse people with information.”<sup>1268</sup> **Then, in 2009, the PLA became aware of the importance of social networks in informational warfare**, seeing how they were used by Western powers to encourage the post-election uprisings in Iran. An article in that year’s *China Defense News* talked about “cyber-subversion” and noted how, “through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other websites, the US, Britain and Israeli intelligence have spread sensation-

1262. Ibid., viii-ix.

1263. Ibid., 43.

1264. 战略学 (*Science of Military Strategy*), 军事学学院战略研究部 (Department of Military Strategy of the Academy of Military Science), Pékin, 军事科学出版社 (Academy of Military Science Press) (2013), 130.

1265. [http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm).

1266. Joe McReynolds and John Costello, *China’s Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era* (Washington: National Defense University, 2018), 5.

1267. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 28.

1268. 刘轶 (Liu Yi), “博客新闻在信息化战争中的运用” (“The Use of Blog News in Informatized Warfare”), 军事记者 (Military Correspondent), May 2007.

INTRODUCTION

alist information to poison the Iranian people.”<sup>1269</sup> In 2003 already, before the emergence of social media, the PLA had been closely monitoring how the Americans used mass media to shape public opinion about their intervention in Iraq. The PLA generally **follows what the Americans did in terms of influence, considering that they are “the best in the world” in this domain.**<sup>1270</sup>

CONCEPTS

From this point of view, it is crucial to understand that the **Chinese posture – like the Russian one – is primarily defensive:** the threat that these methods could be used to encourage revolts in China increased the latter government’s interest in mass media: “[from] China’s perspective, influence operations are undertaken by all countries, and it is other countries, especially the United States, that use social media to interfere in the political processes of countries like Iran and the Middle East. Whatever actions the PLA takes to counter this perceived subversion are considered ‘defensive’ and necessary to protect and defend the military and the Party.”<sup>1271</sup> **It took them a few years only, however, to perceive their offensive potential.**

ACTION

Thus, in a 2011 article, PLA researchers presented **the social networks’ potential as a “subtle disguise” for psychological warfare** or a “sugar-coated pill” as the target’s psychology can be affected without their knowledge.<sup>1272</sup> Here, disinformation (虚假信息) is a tool of psychological warfare. A 2013 book of the Academy of Military Sciences explained that it could be used in various ways: **“the deprivation of information, the creation of informational chaos [...], the implantation of erroneous information into the enemy’s information system, causing the enemy command to make the wrong decisions.”**<sup>1273</sup> A 2006 article recommended **“misleading” enemy leaders by “mixing true and false information,” making them indistinguishable.**<sup>1274</sup>

ACTIONS

In 2015, the *PLA Daily* devoted a whole page to **“Social Media Warfare,”**<sup>1275</sup> not only from the point of view of China’s adversaries, and therefore of the risks that it poses China’s stability, but also considering the opportunities it gives the PLA. This shows how what was initially perceived as a vulnerability – therefore defensively – quickly became a weapon as well, with the PLA now assessing its **offensive uses.**

According to Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, **the PLA has three main objectives on social networks, the first two of which are open, the third clandestine: “First, it seeks to achieve narrative dominance** through the use of official social media accounts to overtly spread Chinese propaganda and, thereby, shape public perceptions and policies toward China and its military. **Second, the PLA seeks to use official social media accounts for deterrence purposes** to communicate deterrence signals, which specifically

1269. 迟延年 (Chi Yannian), “网络颠覆: 不容小觑的安全威胁” (“Cyber Subversion: Security Threats that Must Not be Taken Lightly”), 国防报 (*China Defense News*) (6 Aug. 2009), 3.

1270. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 34. See, for instance: 朱金平 (Zhu Jinping), “假新闻: 现代战争中的重要杀手: 以美国21世纪前后发动或主导的4次战争为例” (“Fake News: The Important Killer in Modern Warfare: Examples of Four Wars Initiated or Led by the United States before and after the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”), 军事记者 (Military Correspondent) (2008), 37-39.

1271. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 4.

1272. 吴银胜 (Wu Yinsheng) and 梅建兵 (Mei Jianbing), “社交媒体的迅猛发展及心理战运用的几点启示” (“Some Inspirations Drawn from the Application of Booming Social Media in Psychological Warfare”), 国防科技 (National Defense Science & Technology), 3 (2011), 77-80.

1273. 叶征 (Ye Zheng), 信息作战学教 (Lectures on the Science of Information Operations), 军事科学出版社 (Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press) (2013), 105.

1274. 盛沛林 (Sheng Peilin) and 李雪 (Li Xue), “论‘舆论斩首’” (“On ‘Public Opinion Decapitation’”), 南京政治学院学报 (*Journal of the PLA Nanjing Institute of Politics*), 5 (2006), 114-117.

1275. 陈航辉 (Chen Hanghui), 芳鹏 (Fang Peng), 杨磊 (Yang Lei), and 夏育仁 (Xia Yuren), “社交媒体战: 信息时代战争新维度” (“Social Media Warfare: A New Dimension to Warfare in the Information Age”), 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*) (25 Sept. 2015).

demonstrate China's capabilities and credibility while also undermining an enemy's resolve through psychological warfare. **Third, the PLA seeks to leverage social media for political interference** in order to degrade the credibility of a foreign political system, undermine support for a foreign government and its policies, as well as support China's preferred political candidates in an election."<sup>1276</sup>

In this vein, several articles published in military journals suggested that **"the PLA is developing technologies to manipulate foreign social media platforms,"**<sup>1277</sup> including "deep fakes" and "public sentiment analysis." A 2018 article from the PLA's leading psychological warfare unit advocated for more research and investment in digital information operations, particularly into the use of big data and automatic language processing.<sup>1278</sup> Another proof of the **PLA's interest in the use of databases and artificial intelligence** was the interest aroused by the Cambridge Analytica scandal. In a 2018 article, a professor at the National Defence University defended that "lessons [had to] be learned," particularly in terms of China's ability to **"exploit big data analysis, AI processes, bots and astroturfing, grasp the different personalities of selectors"**<sup>1279</sup> and **realize large-scale guidance of public opinion and changing their [political] orientation.**<sup>1280</sup> The author also emphasized "the value of tailoring messages based on the beliefs, value system, political orientation, and targeting of different countries, political parties, and cultural groups, among others."<sup>1281</sup> All of this suggests that at least some PLA members are interested in **"using social media and next-generation tools to influence voters in foreign countries."**<sup>1282</sup> Finally, a June 2019 article co-authored by a Base 311 researcher "explicitly suggested that **the PLA should use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to manage its network of social media bots, which would be able to create content based on human advice, select the appropriate time to publish on social media and coordinate these fake (马甲) accounts.**"<sup>1283</sup>

## E. Satire and irony

**Chinese information-manipulation operations often use humor, particularly satire and irony,** to amplify the scope of their message or to undermine the credibility of their opponents.<sup>1284</sup> We have provided several examples of this, notably taken from the CYL during the scandal over George Floyd's death (→ p. 387). **The power of these rhetorical tools was identified very early on by Greek and Roman orators. Because of its abil-**

1276. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 14.

1277. *Ibid.*, 23.

1278. 刘惠燕 (Liu Huiyan), 熊武 (Xiong Wu), 吴显亮 (Wu Xianliang), and 梅顺量 (Mei Shunliang), "全媒体环境下推进认知作战装备发展的几点思考" ("Several Thoughts on Promoting the Construction of Cognitive Domain Operations Equipment in the Whole Environment") 国防科技 (*Defense Technology Review*), October 2018.

1279. Selectors are key data necessary to target an individual (i.e. a phone number, credit card number, email and so on).

1280. 董涛 (Dong Tao), "推进军事新闻分众化的国际传播" ("Advancing International Communications for Military News [Toward] Differentiated Audiences"), 军事记者 (Military Correspondent) (26 Sept. 2018).

1281. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 95.

1282. *Ibid.*, 96.

1283. 李弼程 (Li Bicheng), 胡华平 (Hu Huaping), and 熊尧 (Xiong Yao), "网络舆情引导智能代理模型" ("Intelligent Agent Model for Online Public Opinion Guidance"), 国防科技 (National Defense Science & Technology) (Jun. 2019), 73-77; cited in Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 22.

1284. Satire is also a weapon cherished by Internet users seeking to circumvent censorship: Séverine Arsène, "La satire, ou la ringardisation de la censure sur le web chinois" ("Satire, or the Nerding out of Censorship on the Chinese Internet"), CERJ (2010).



ity to quickly turn a hostile opinion around,<sup>1285</sup> the joke is almost a magical weapon that every speaker must know how to handle. A witticism can, in a few seconds, convince an initially reluctant audience. As Cicero and Quintilian showed, the strength of a joke is that it allows one to play on the three methods of persuasion: *docere*, *delectare*, and *mouere*. Because the joke can be the vector of an honest thought, including (and more importantly) the most difficult to hear, it acts on *docere* (translation of the Greek *logos* that refers to the factual and objective dimension of the discourse). It is notably in the form of the witty word that the joke is the most effective in mobilizing this tool of persuasion. The joke is particularly useful for the second method, *delectare* (translation of the Greek *ethos*), because it can build complicity with the audience and attract sympathy with the speaker (*conciliare*). Finally, the joke makes it possible to set in motion *mouere* (“to move”), such as throwing opprobrium on the adversary by discrediting them with a scathing remark. Animalization or association with unpleasant or ridiculous characters is also a proven method of positively moving and engaging the audience.

In April 2020, Xinhua Agency posted a video on YouTube called “Once Upon a Virus.” This 1-minute-46-second montage was a perfect illustration of the CCP’s use of humor and satire in its propaganda operations. Featuring Lego characters participating in a play, the video was structured around a dialogue between China and the United States about the Covid-19, the first represented by a group of Terracotta Warriors and the second by the Statue of Liberty. The video explicitly stated that the health situation in the United States was due to the refusal of the authorities to listen to the warnings that China issued. The comic tone was in the contrast between the words of the Statue of Liberty (i.e., the United States), which insisted that forcing people to wear masks was contrary to human rights or accused China of building concentration camps, and the progressive deterioration of its health ostentatiously suggested by the image. While making people smile, the message emphasized the absurdity of Washington’s narratives when Beijing was seemingly simply trying to alert Americans to the risks they were taking with this attitude. The use of Lego, by association of ideas, reinforced the demonstration of the infantile character of the U.S. posture.



The CCP’s use of satire also takes the form of hijacking Western fables and folk tales. Two recent illustrations are very evocative: on May 12, 2021, Xinhua broadcast, via Western social networks, a criticism of what the media presented as the hegemonic posture of the United States. To do this, Xinhua created an analogy between Washington’s attitude and that of the stepmother in the Grimm brothers’ fairy tale, *Snow White*.

1285. Cicéron, *De Oratore*.



In Xinhua's cartoon story, the Statue of Liberty, symbolizing the United States, asks her magic mirror if the U.S. order dominates the world, and when it answers in the negative, the statue breaks it. The idea conveyed is that the United States cannot stand any competition and is not ready to hear the truth, in other words that the world is no longer subjected to them. We understand implicitly that this world is opening its arms to China, which is proposing a new international order. The second example, already cited in the section on the "wolf warrior" diplomats (→ p. 243), dates from March 31, 2021, when the Chinese embassy in Ireland hijacked Aesop's fable, retold by La Fontaine, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, on Twitter. The message was ambiguous: on the one hand, the embassy seemed to be saying that it was innocent of accusations bearing on the so-called wolf warrior diplomacy, and thus a victim, like the lamb in the fable; but on the other hand it ended its message with a threat, explaining that China was not a lamb. The country would not let itself be "devoured." In both cases, the instrumentalization of Western popular culture is a process that allows China to develop a critique of the United States in a metaphorical and amusing way. Without being too ferocious, the criticism creates suggestive images that are likely to be imprinted on the public mind.

## F. Doxxing, or inciting hatred online

**Doxxing is the practice of "publishing a user's personal information online with the aim of harming them."**<sup>1286</sup> From online harassment to physical attacks, cyber-attacks, death threats, pressure on family and friends, etc., the consequences can be severe. It was **used mainly against pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong**, first during the 2014 crisis and then again in 2019. By September 2019, this phenomenon had reached an "unprecedented" level on forums such as LIHKG and messaging services such as Telegram, so much so that Hong Kong's privacy commission had identified nearly 1,000 cases that were likely to be investigated and prosecuted.<sup>1287</sup>

1286. "Doxxing: pourquoi certains internautes divulguent les données privées de leurs cibles" ("Doxxing: Why Some Internet Users Divulgate the Private Data of their Targets"), *Le Monde* (21 Nov. 2017).

1287. Erin Hale, "Hong Kong Protests: Tech War Opens up With Doxxing of Protesters and Police," *The Guardian* (20 Sept. 2019).

There are even websites dedicated to this activity, publishing standardized profiles for each person reported, with photo, personal information, contact details, etc. – all in a staged presentation reminding these individuals that they are “targeted” (see below).



Screenshot of the HKLeaks website on 03/14/2021.

The best-known website in this register is **HKLeaks**, which was initially registered on hkleaks.org on August 15, 2019, and which was on as hkleaks.pk and hkleaks.ml when this report was written. Among the “targets” profiled on this website were “eight teachers that are seen as supporters of the protests (including the director of the Chinese University of Hong Kong), 61 journalists and editors of *Apple Daily* (one of Hong Kong’s biggest newspapers), 23 individuals who allegedly ‘doxxed’ the Hong Kong police, numerous pro-democracy lawmakers and opinion leaders, and more than 900 protesters.”<sup>1288</sup> These profiles were then shared on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and Weibo).

**Several signs suggest that Chinese authorities were behind this initiative or at least supported it.** Not only did the very professional nature of the website seemed to suggest a level of financial resources and expertise, but the accounts promoting it on social networks were the same that several platforms removed for “coordinated inauthentic behavior linked to state-backed actors.” Moreover, state media were promoting HKLeaks (CCTV’s Weibo account featured HKLeaks asking its followers to “act together” and “tear off the masks of the rioters,” a message later shared by Chinese police and the CYL, among others).<sup>1289</sup> Most importantly, information that only Chinese authorities knew was contained in the profiles of the targeted individuals, such as a false address that was given to the Chinese police or a passport photo that was only used on a travel permit to China.<sup>1290</sup>

**Another doxing website, hongkongmob.com, paid users who provided new targets or new information about existing targets.** In January 2020, the website, which has since been discontinued, reported that it had doxxed 62 protesters and distributed HKD78,019 (€8,273) in rewards.<sup>1291</sup> Insikt Group (Recorded Future) believed that the actors behind this website “are likely not Hong Kong natives, but are attempting to pass off as such. Although most of the website is written in traditional Chinese characters [...]

1288. Insikt Group, “Chinese Influence Operations,” 15.

1289. Ibid., 19.

1290. Ibid., 15-16.

1291. Ibid., 16.



and the content mirrors written and spoken Cantonese [...], some terms and wording used on the website are not commonly used by Hong Kong-born Cantonese speakers.”<sup>1292</sup>

Insikt Group also noted that the two websites, hkleaks.pk and hongkongmob.com (the second website is no longer online) were **hosted in Russia**, by the same company (DDoS-GUARD), with a partly similar IP address (185.178.208.149 and 185.178.208.143 other) and they used the same Russian e-mail service (Yandex).<sup>1293</sup>

## G. Language as a clue to the Chinese origin of the manipulations

*A priori*, Beijing can easily penetrate Chinese-speaking environments, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, or even English-speaking environments, such as Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada – even if local variations can make it more difficult. On the other hand, countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and especially Japan feel relatively protected by the language barrier since few Chinese have a perfect command of their national languages. However, this seems to be less and less the case. **Three years ago, Chinese informational attacks on Japan contained syntax errors in Japanese or characters that were only used in China and that were therefore easily spotted. But Chinese services have improved in recent years:** “APT10’s emails are now very good, their Japanese is excellent, not distinguishable.”<sup>1294</sup>

**In Hong Kong and Taiwan, the difference between the traditional Chinese widely spoken and the simplified Chinese from mainland China remains the principal way to detect the origin of a message**, but with several limitations. First, it is not obvious for Taiwanese to spot suspicious simplified Chinese characters because, in their daily life, Taiwanese people are constantly exposed to simplified Chinese on television, in the subtitling of TV series, on social networks, or in many cultural products. Eventually, they do not notice it anymore, and when they do, it is not necessarily perceived as something suspicious.<sup>1295</sup> Second, simplified Chinese is found in articles from continental media shared by Taiwanese on social networks, without being a symptom of any Chinese clandestine operation. The use of simplified Chinese can also be explained by an assumed strategy of targeting different audiences: in this case, the parts of the population favorable to Beijing. Part of the public is aware that these messages come from China. However, it still works because they do not care whether they are authentic or manipulated as long as these messages say what they want to hear, comfort them in their certainties – a well-known psychological phenomenon that helps explain the persistence of information manipulation despite corrections, warnings and other demystifications.

**Attackers attempt to conceal their continental origin by translating simplified Chinese into traditional Chinese. However, this can be detected in long texts, into which a few simplified characters may slip by mistake.** In the disinformation about the pandemic, for example, one of the terms that revealed the Chinese origin of the messages was “corpse,” which is written 屍體 in traditional characters (in Taiwan) but 尸体 in simplified characters (in the PRC). However, many messages wrote 尸體, correctly converting the

1292. Ibid., 17.

1293. Ibid., 18.

1294. Interview with the authors, Tokyo (Mar. 2019).

1295. According to a Watchout civilian group executive interviewed by the authors (Apr. 2019), confirmed by the Taiwan FactCheck Center (Jan. 2020).



second character, but not the first, thus revealing their continental inception.<sup>1296</sup> **Another clue is that the change of language on Microsoft leaves some traces** (in the way the characters are presented) so that it is still possible to determine that a text in traditional Chinese came from a computer usually running in simplified Chinese. **It is also possible to identify expressions used exclusively in mainland China** (such as “Taiwanese authority” rather than Taiwan).

**Aware of these difficulties, attackers have refined their methods and are increasingly using Taiwanese intermediaries: messages are either produced locally or in China and then sent to relays that “Taiwanize” them before disseminating them.** These relays can be public relations agencies in Taiwan or Taiwanese living in mainland China. In 2017, a student at the PLA National Defence University created a manual to help the PLA “relocalize” and thus better conceal its social network interventions into Taiwan: “[the] author explains how to alter the sentence structure and vocabulary used by Mandarin speakers [...] to sound more like that of Southern Min, the language used in Taiwan, because he is from Fujian, where the local dialect is closest to Taiwanese. He [explains] that sounding local will reduce the emotional distance between the two sides.”<sup>1297</sup>

“Since 2018, one minister explained, we have noted that **simplified characters are making themselves rare: China subcontracts to groups located in Taiwan and uses local expressions.**”<sup>1298</sup> J. Michael Cole corroborated this information: “At first, they were using Chinese citizens, but the audience quickly realized it because they were using simplified Chinese and phrases. [...] Now, he said, the content appears to be produced in Taiwan.”<sup>1299</sup> This method is more interesting than the previous ones because it goes beyond simple translation, as the Taiwanese interpreter can insert cultural references in the content. It is nothing less than **cultural intermediation**. If the Chinese sponsor correctly erases its traces, the message disseminated is therefore much harder to attribute.

**Language remains a relevant clue, but to a lesser extent, and the foreseeable use of artificial intelligence to generate false news will probably further reduce the importance of the language factor.** Another problem is that the importance of words needs to be put into perspective: a significant proportion of information manipulation involves images, memes, or a few messages that are too short to leave an indication of the language of origin.

**At least three other clues must be considered: first, the timing.** The Taiwanese have found that during Golden Week (annual vacations in mainland China), there was a decrease in misinformation targeting Taiwan, suggesting that some does come from mainland China. **Second, recycling;** some of the false news that targeted the DPP during the last electoral campaign was obviously repurposed from Hong Kong to Taiwan (producing a Taiwanese version of the same false story → p. 485). **Third, the themes:** some attacks have cultural markers. For example, the CCP is characterized by its tendency to think in ethnic terms: having foreign ancestors, whether true or not (a false rumor that Joshua Wong was Vietnamese for instance), is not a problem in a multicultural society like Taiwan and reveals a perspective from mainland China. So, attacks on Taiwanese using these representations, like the Japanese name of the president’s spokesperson, Kolas Yotaka, are culturally signed.

1296. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 66.

1297. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 84–85.

1298. Interview with a Taiwanese minister in Taipei (Apr. 2019).

1299. M. Cole, cited after *One Country, One Censor: How China undermines media freedom in Hong Kong and Taiwan*, A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (Dec. 2019), 26.

## X. Other levers

In this non-exhaustive list of other tools of leverage used in Chinese influence operations, we also need to add citizen movements, Chinese tourists, influencers and hostages.

### A. Citizen movements

#### 1. Pro-independence movements: New Caledonia and Okinawa

**Encouraging independence movements fits Beijing’s agenda as it seeks to regain market shares and make potential adversaries more fragile**, two non-mutually exclusive goals that can be found in these **two examples**.

**First: New Caledonia.** There were suspicions of Chinese interference in the 2018 referendum on the independence of New Caledonia,<sup>1300</sup> and Beijing is known to be closely following the progress of the pro-independence camp – something confirmed by the 2020 referendum – precisely because **an independent New Caledonia would *de facto* find itself under Chinese influence**. This would bring two key benefits for the Party-State. First, China would be able to rely on New Caledonia to “become the cornerstone of the Chinese anti-encirclement strategy,” while at the same time isolating Australia “since, in addition to relying on Noumea, Beijing would be able to rely on Port Moresby, Honiara, Port-Vila and Suva.”<sup>1301</sup> It would also ensure a supply of raw materials, i.e. nickel, to China. So, there are several reasons why Beijing pushes for independence while maintaining relationships with the local political and economic elite. **“China moves forward by gaining control of the economy from within, by getting closer to political and tribal leaders**, because that is the most efficient and discrete method. China’s strategy is perfectly well-oiled and has worked elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>1302</sup>

**The Association de l’amitié sino-calédonienne [Sino-Caledonian Friendship Association] plays such a role, carrying out a United Front work locally.**<sup>1303</sup> We should note that its former president, Karine Shan Sei Fan, is also the former chief of staff of the pro-independence leader<sup>1304</sup> “whose previous two chiefs of staff are valued members” of the association.<sup>1305</sup> Generally, the **Chinese “diaspora and its representative organizations, at least some of them, are extremely close to some pro-independence officials.”**<sup>1306</sup> Karine Shan Sei Fan invited the Chinese ambassador to France on the island in October 2017, a year before the referendum. The ambassador spent the week there with his spouse and some advisers: “they saw everybody, they

1300. Antoine Pecquet, “Nouvelle-Calédonie: ‘Si c’est ‘oui’, on deviendra une colonie chinoise,” (“New Caledonia: ‘if It’s a ‘Yes’, We’ll Become a Chinese Colony”), *Liberation* (9 Oct. 2018).

1301. “Quoi de mieux pour entrer en Nouvelle-Calédonie que de s’emparer du nickel”, explique Bastien Vandendyck, analyste en relations internationales” (“What Better Way to Get into New Caledonia then by Seizing Nickel,” according to international relations analyst Bastien Vandendyck”), France Info (25 Jan. 2021). See also, from the same author, *Le développement de l’influence chinoise dans le Pacifique océanien (The development of Chinese influence in the Pacific Ocean)*, Asia Focus #61, IRIS, February 2018; “Pacifique: la position chinoise renforcée par la crise sanitaire?” (“Pacific: the Chinese position strengthened by the health crisis?”) *Revue juridique politique et économique de Nouvelle-Calédonie*, n°36, 2020, 173-177.

1302. Ibid.

1303. Harold Thibault, “China is Eying New Caledonia and its Nickel Reserves,” *Le Monde* (2 Oct. 2020).

1304. During three terms, in 2012, 2013-2014 and 2019-2020. Karine Shan Sei Fan is also a founding member of the Sino-Caledonian Friendship Association, which she chaired between 2016 and 2018, and from which she resigned on August 31, 2020 (source: letter from Karine Shan Sei Fan to Patrice Faure (24 Sept. 2021)).

1305. “What Better Way to Get into New Caledonia.”

1306. Ibid.

asked what we needed: tourism, aquaculture, anything that could be of interest, they would offer it,” parliament member Philippe Gomès remembers.<sup>1307</sup>

**Okinawa is another example.** Japan has a strong national identity, even a sense of insularity (→ p. 191). But Okinawa – as well as the entirety of the Ryukyu Islands – is an exception because its inhabitants were abused by the Japanese during the Second World War. The population is divided on the subject of Japan. **Pro-Chinese feelings are then widespread and sustained** by the fact that inhabitants benefit from trading with China. For Beijing, this is a weakness that can be exploited, and a strategic opportunity: their location ensures an access to the second chain of Pacific Islands. With these islands, **they kill two birds with one stone, by hindering both the Japanese and the Americans** who are present there.

**Okinawa is a fertile ground for such operations because indigenous pro-independence movements, who are also hostile to the presence of an American base on the island, already exist.** The majority of the island is anti-Tokyo and anti-central government, as evidenced in the election of Denny Tamaki as governor (a longtime opponent to the American presence), in October 2018. The Okinawa prefecture hence advocates for the departure of some of the troops (navy and air forces). The risk of Okinawa unilaterally declaring its independence in the future is taken seriously by Tokyo. At the same time, **“China encourages this objective through diplomacy, disinformation, and investments in the northern part of the island near the U.S. bases.”**<sup>1308</sup>

In 2013, the *Global Times* already warned about Beijing potentially **“fostering forces that seek the restoration of the independence of the Ryukyu Chain in Okinawa,” and, in doing so, “threatening the country’s integrity,”** as it tries to defend China against the US-Japan alliance.<sup>1309</sup> Beijing did just that. In December 2016, the Japanese Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA) revealed that Chinese universities and think tanks were trying to **foster connections with pro-independence activists in Okinawa.** Meanwhile, the Chinese press regularly publishes articles questioning Japan’s sovereignty on Okinawa. According to Professor Yuichi Hosoya, **Beijing is “influencing Okinawan public opinion to push for Okinawan independence and the removal of U.S. forces.”**<sup>1310</sup>

“There are also **increasing economic ties** between China and Okinawa: Chinese investors are engaged in the northern areas of Okinawa, which are rich in natural resources and populated by U.S. military facilities. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in the number of **Chinese tourists** in Okinawa in recent years, as well as an increasing number of **sister-city** relationships formed between Chinese cities and Okinawa. The PRC government has also actively courted members of the former Okinawan royal family. In 2018, Shō Masamu, the great grandson of the last Ryukyu king, visited China. In March of that year, Masamu led a 22-member delegation to visit Fujian for a four-day ‘root-seeking’ tour [while at the same time a conference] was organized to explore the historical ties between Okinawa and China.”<sup>1311</sup> Beijing also develops **relationships between Chinese researchers, think tanks (the Academy of Social Science) and pro-independence activists:** they invite them to China to improve their image and provide a platform to them.

There also is a **convergence between, on the one hand, independists and those opposed to the U.S. presence in Okinawa and, on the other hand, leftist and pacifist activists,** who oppose the revision of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution (renouncing war) and the rein-

1307. Thibault, “China is Eyeing New Caledonia and its Nickel Reserves.”

1308. Devin Stewart, *China’s Influence in Japan: Everywhere Yet Nowhere in Particular*, CSIS (Jul. 2020), 3.

1309. “Ryuku Issue Offers Leverage to China,” *Global Times* (10 Mar. 2013).

1310. Stewart, *China’s Influence in Japan*, 10.

1311. Russel Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Japan,” *China Brief*, 19:12 (26 Jun. 2019).

forcement of Japanese self-defense capabilities. **Beijing thus supports these movements as well, which fits neatly with China's agenda by impeding and inhibiting Japanese military developments.** This is particularly the case for the Buddhist group Soka Gakkai, and its political party Komeito, which are working toward a Sino-Japanese rapprochement. As a result, it is for example commonplace to see Japanese left-wing activists and pacifists share Chinese articles against the U.S. base in Okinawa.

## 2. Pacifist movements: the example of the group No Cold War



The CCP put together a support group that blames U.S. actions, its interpretation of the “wolf warrior” diplomacy, and the establishment of a new Cold War era.<sup>1312</sup> Among the first signatories were: Dianne Abbott, Max Blumenthal, Barbara Finamore, Martin Jacques, Wang Wen, Ken Loach, and Yanis Varoufakis. We find not only anti-American organizations in this list, but also **front organizations in the Soviet sense, in other words intermediaries working for Beijing.** The

movement adopted a logo symbolically re-interpreting the U.S. flag to better highlight U.S. aggressiveness and warmongering. The No Cold War inaugural conference was a conference with 48 academics from a number of countries organized on July 25, 2020 to speak out against the risk of a cold war imposed by the United States on the rest of humanity. Chinese diplomatic authorities quickly spread the word about the event.



On the left, an extract from the No Cold War website (<https://www.nocoldwar.org/statement>). On the right, a conference organized by the Stop the War coalition.

Wang Wen, director of the Chongyang Institute,<sup>1313</sup> summed up the event on his institution's website.<sup>1314</sup> The event was simultaneously broadcast on Zoom, Facebook and

1312. See the No Cold War website (<https://www.nocoldwar.org/>) on which we find a list of organizations that supported the call as soon as it was published: ANSWER Coalition (US); Black Alliance for Peace (US); Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (UK); Coalition Against US Foreign Military Bases; CODEPINK (US); Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War (Canada); International Action Center (US); No to War – No to NATO; Peace for Okinawa Coalition; Pivot to Peace (US) Simon Bolivar Institute for Peace and Solidarity Among Peoples (Venezuela); South African Peace Initiative; Stop the War (UK); US Peace Council

1313. Attached to the People's University of China (人民大学).

1314. “48国学者警告美国‘活动惊动全球，近2亿人关注，’人大重阳” (*Chongyang Institute*) (29 Jul. 2020).



YouTube, and viewed by 200 million people, according to the Chongyang Institute. The institute also published screenshots of public comments. Several Chinese state media, such as the *China Daily*, CCTV, China News Network, *Guancha*, reported on the event the following day. CYL outlets were also very active, and multiples messages were shared on WeChat. The *Global Times* launched a thread called “48 academics warn the United States” (#48国学者警告美国) that generated more than 82 million views. Hua Chunying put herself forward as the spokesperson for this movement, which she painted as a transnational movement against U.S. policies, using quotes from John Ross, a researcher at Renmin University (→ p. 48). Ross actually relayed an open letter on Twitter and on the website of No Cold War that denounced Ofcom’s decision to withdraw CGTN’s broadcasting rights in the United Kingdom (Ofcom is the British telecommunication regulatory agency).<sup>1315</sup> These initiatives show that the CCP has probably increased its coordination capacities for this kind of operation, a new development that would deserve further and more in-depth investigations.



The CCP’s narrative strategy consists in **highlighting over and over the bellicosity of the United States and the consequences of its policies on the rest of humanity**. The goal of this strategy is undoubtedly to turn the international public opinion against Washington, by making it responsible for the tensions. Bill Bishop noted in *Sinocism* that Beijing seems to be ready for a rupture and wishes to control how it will be narrated. This concomitant evidence suggests that **Beijing does not intend to reverse its course from this Machiavellian turn** (→ p. 619). In fact, the anti-cold war movement was not founded on a unique event, but instead seems to be here for the long haul. Other mobilization drives have already been announced. The narratives circulated by No Cold War are also endorsed by other movements and members of political parties. Diane Abbott, for instance, a Labour member who signed the first petition launched by No Cold War, participated in a conference on the threat of a new cold war organized by the Stop the War coalition, along with other Labour members (see images above).

1315. <https://twitter.com/JohnRoss43/status/1369216867517267970>; “News: Letter: Opposing Ofcom’s Ban on CGTN and Defending Free Speech,” No Cold War, <https://archive.vn/qM1Gg>.

## B. Chinese tourists

Chinese tourists have been the sector's biggest market since 2012, because they are the most numerous, the biggest spenders, and because this is a fast-growing market.<sup>1316</sup> Controlling the number of tourists is an important leverage for Beijing to pressure some foreign governments. This weapon has been used in Taiwan (→ p. 453) and in Australia, where Chinese tourism increased by 297% between 2009 and 2019, as reported by *Global Times*. The newspaper added that this number could drastically decrease in 2020, not only because of the pandemic, but also because the Chinese Ministry for Culture published a warning advising against traveling to Australia because of the “racial discrimination” and “violence” against Chinese people that it claimed to have witnessed<sup>1317</sup>. In reality, both tourists and trade sanctions are part of the leverage used by Beijing in its standoff with Canberra (→ p. 246).<sup>1318</sup> This weapon was also used against Sweden (→ p. 528), South Korea (where the decreased number of Chinese tourists was one of the retaliatory measures implemented by Beijing against the deployment of the anti-ballistic missile defense system THAAD) and others. It was identified as an important vulnerability in a lot of countries, including Japan, which is quite dependent on Chinese tourists (they make up around 30% of the overall number of tourists and 34% of the money spent by foreign tourists).<sup>1319</sup>

In addition to controlling the number of tourists, Beijing can also use them to circulate messages, as seen in Vietnam. Chinese tourists in Vietnam – there are more than 4 million of them every year, more than 30% the total number of tourists – are usually badly perceived. In May 2018, some of them led provocative actions: they landed in the Cam Ranh airport, in the south of the country, wearing **T-shirts displaying the South China Sea and the nine-dash line**, a delineation contested by China's neighbors, including Vietnam. In fact, the delineation was rejected by the Permanent court of Arbitration in The Hague in 2016. The images triggered strong reactions, both in the airport and on social media, many Internet users calling for their expulsion from the territory.



Source: <https://twitter.com/georgewilluk/status/996440699162845185>.

1316. Alex Dichter et al., *Chinese Tourists: Dispelling the Myth. An In-Depth Look at China's Outbound Tourist Market*, McKinsey & Company, New York (Sept. 2018); *Guidelines for Success in the Chinese Outbound Tourism Market*, UNWTO and China Tourism Academy (2019).

1317. Yin Yeping, “Australia could lose all Chinese tourists post-COVID-19 this year if safety issue not addressed: industrial insider”, *Global Times*, June 6, 2020 (<https://archive.vn/JHStF>).

1318. Kath Sullivan, “China's List of Sanctions and Tariffs on Australian Trade is Growing. Here's What Has Been Hit So Far,” *ABC* (16 Dec. 2020).

1319. Rupakyoti Borah, “Japan's Successful Wooing of Chinese Tourists May be Too Much of a Good Thing,” *South China Morning Post* (10 Feb. 2020).

The same nine-dash line can be found on a page of the Chinese passport that, for this reason, some agents at the Vietnamese border frequently refuse to stamp.<sup>1320</sup> Chinese tourists are also criticized for bringing their own touristic guides, who are accused of rewriting history (and maritime law), thus provoking opposition from local tourist guides.

Since 2013, **China has also been using tourism as a leverage to strengthen its claims in the South China Sea.** Two Chinese companies, the Hainan Strait Shipping Co Ltd (HNSS) and the Nanhai Cruise Enterprise (NHC) offer **cruises in the Paracel Islands**, also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam. Since then, more than 10,000 Chinese tourists paid between RMB4,280 and RMB29,300 per person (€550 and €3,800) for the trip.<sup>1321</sup> Beyond economic issues, the development of these activities fits within a wider policy of integration of the South China territories to the Chinese area. When the town of Sanya, in the south of the Hainan Island, became a prefecture in 2012, to administer the entirety of the territories inside the nine-dash lines, the same political message was being conveyed: these territories are Chinese.

The government overtly recognizes the political significance of these touristic activities. According to Wang Zhifa, former director of China's National Tourism Administration, "developing Xisha [Paracel islands] tourism can be conducive to defending the border, declaring our sovereignty, and solving the problems of other islands in the South China Sea."<sup>1322</sup> As noted by Yan Huang and Samid Suliman, tourism is indeed perceived by Beijing as a **tool to reinforce the legitimacy of its claims on this area.** The presence of Chinese tourism proves, in the eyes of the Party, that China has been managing this area regularly, which in return legitimates China's rights over these territories. This tourism also allows the construction of **the Chinese population's "territorial consciousness."**<sup>1323</sup> Cruises are indeed deploying all available tools to **favor the emergence and consolidation of patriotic feelings toward South China Sea islands.** Tourists were invited to watch a 1976 movie, *The Story of the South China Sea*, recounting the events of the Vietnam War, and had to pledge to love the Paracel Islands and China.<sup>1324</sup> Finally, the development of tourism in the area is **an undeniable tool to apply pressure on its neighbors**, some of which have also started to develop touristic activities. Beijing also wishes to extend touristic activities in the South China Sea to the Spratly Islands farther to the south.

### C. Foreign influencers

For various reasons – because they are forced, bought or simply seduced – many foreigners act as relays or vectors of Chinese influence in the world. Beijing particularly appreciates those of them who are Westerners, since they come from the opposite camp. "It is **a strategy of envelopment, using as levers a priori contrary currents to give the illusion of unanimity around Chinese positions,**" explained Emmanuel Lincot.<sup>1325</sup> The

1320. Decision which has been taken by the Ministry of Public Security without informing the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

1321. Serenitie Wang, "Contentious Cruising: China's Paracel Island Tourism is About More Than Travel," CNN (25 Jan. 2021).

1322. Yan Huang and Samid Suliman, "Geopolitics, (Re)territorialization, and China's Patriotic Tourism in the South China Sea," *Geopolitics* (Jul. 2020).

1323. Ibid.

1324. Wang, "Contentious Cruising."

1325. "Situation des Ouïghours en Chine: qui sont ces 'sino-béats' qui dénoncent des fake news de l'Occident?" ("Situation of the Uyghurs in China: Who are the "Sino-beats" Denouncing Western Fake News?"), AFP (4 May 2021).

preceding pages have already given numerous examples of this, of different calibers, more or less aware of being instrumentalized and more or less useful to the regime (which is why not all of them fall into the Soviet category of “useful idiots”). This section will present two additional categories of influencers particularly sought after by the CCP: YouTubers and academics.

## 1. YouTubers

The Canadian YouTuber J.J. McCullough (→ p. 375) is a good case of **a Westerner used to hide the origin of a message**, because in this case not only did a person by the name of “Franco” (a non-Chinese name) tried to release a video via the Canadian YouTuber, but the video itself, while being Chinese propaganda, was also narrated by a Western individual.

Among other examples of **YouTubers relaying Chinese propaganda**, the most famous is undoubtedly **Nathan Rich**, an American living in China, followed by half a million subscribers,<sup>1326</sup> who holds pro-Beijing and virulent anti-American views. He is particularly involved in defending Beijing’s action in Hong Kong. Many other YouTubers in China are convinced that he is “paid to publish propaganda, either by the CCP, or by agents in the name of the CCP.”<sup>1327</sup> Can also be added to the list **Barrett**, a British father-and-son duo living in China (268,000 followers),<sup>1328</sup> also very aggressive in their defense of the Chinese regime, as shown by the titles of their videos (“Western media lies about China”, “Camera surveillance is great in China”); **Jason Lightfoot** (120,000 subscribers),<sup>1329</sup> another British citizen who has been living in China for about ten years, and who record videos on Xinjiang have been widely relayed by the Chinese authorities (below); or **Gweilo60** (85,000 subscribers),<sup>1330</sup> a retired Canadian married to a Chinese woman and living in China. Of course the question arises of their motives, which can be diverse: **have they been forced to do it, bought, or simply seduced?**

Whatever their motives may be, **some of them have led full-fledged harassment campaigns against YouTubers who criticized the Chinese regime.** SerpentZA and laowhy86 (→ p. 375) who were initially mostly neutral, have gradually become critical of the Chinese regime, and have incidentally become the targets of hate and harassment campaigns on YouTube (including from other YouTubers, particularly the Barretts) and on other social media. For instance, they were denounced on a website set up in 2019 by the government to allow Chinese to denounce “foreign spies.”<sup>1331</sup> And the pressure exerted by authorities has increased: monthly police inspections of their homes, their spouses and their children were harassed – including SerpenZA’s family in South Africa (trolls even attacked people in South Africa who merely had the same last name). They were branded as racists paid by “the West” or by the CIA, and so on.

1326. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaSlyjhR4WC7QhYuaivxb6g/videos>.

1327. Brown, “How China is Influencing.”

1328. [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1XG7bJnYqta\\_ezr12WZp7w/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1XG7bJnYqta_ezr12WZp7w/videos).

1329. <https://www.youtube.com/user/JasonLightfoot>.

1330. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChXOhG9bRDdb3vSTg-qkPAZg>.

1331. “China Launches Website to Report Foreign Spies, Corrupt Officials,” *South China Morning Post* (16 Apr. 2018).





On April 3, 2021, CGTN released this video of Jason Lightfoot refuting Western accusations about Xinjiang.<sup>1332</sup> It was widely relayed by the authorities, for example the Chinese embassy in France.<sup>1333</sup>

## 2. Academics

**Foreign academics are additional levers at the Party's disposal.** We already mentioned several researchers who defended Chinese positions or promoted Party narratives. An operation of seduction usually starts with an invitation to China, all expenses paid. Laurent Grosclaude, the former vice-president for international relations of the University of Toulouse I-Capitole, testified that “the Chinese artfully flatter our ego.” First-class plane tickets, nice hotel, a driver... “Sometimes, a Mercedes came to pick me at the hotel to bring me to my meeting with the president of a university. It gave me the feeling that I was a minister.”<sup>1334</sup> Not everyone falls for it however. Moreover, the foreign academics that become relays for the CCP have various motivations. We can distinguish **three main categories: the opportunists, who do not necessarily share Beijing's views** and are simply looking for (in kind or symbolic) benefits; **those for whom China is a simple rhetorical instrument to denounce the United States**, Beijing taking on what used to be the USSR's role during the Cold War; **finally, those who develop an apologetic pro-Chinese discourse out of conviction.** We must immediately note that these categories are not mutually exclusive, some academics being both admirers of the Chinese model and anti-American. This is likely the case for **Martin Jacques**, who seems to see a viable form of Marxist-Leninism in the Chinese system, while clearly showing his anti-American views.<sup>1335</sup>

Among those defending the Chinese model, **Daniel Bell** deserves to be introduced. A Canadian national, Daniel Bell is dean of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University. He also teaches at the University of Tsinghua in Beijing. He has published **many books and articles painting the Chinese political system as a model for the West.**<sup>1336</sup> He found the possibility of a Chinese humanism, and even a solution to the crisis of liberal democracies, in the Confucian renewal running through the Chinese society since the 1990s. In his opinion, representative democracies

1332. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dQnupERMuQ>.

1333. <https://twitter.com/AmbassadeChine/status/1379786496987791361>.

1334. Jérémy André, “Comment la Chine profite de nos chercheurs” (“How China Takes Advantage of Our Scholars”), *Le Point*, 2535 (18 Mar. 2021), 48-51.

1335. See Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (New York: Penguin, 2012); “Where will the Pandemic Take the US?” *Global Times* (1 Dec. 2020).

1336. See, for example: *The China Mode: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (2015); *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (2006); and *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life for a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

suffer from two main ills: on the national scale, they make it structurally impossible for elected officials to take into account the interests of future generations or of the rest of the world; and then, insofar as they base their policies on the erratic decisions of voters, they are condemned to be inefficient. In that regard, Bell picked up on Bryan Caplan's thesis on the irrationality of *homo politicus*.<sup>1337</sup>

**Bell suggests adopting the Chinese system** as a way forward, with the selection of officials through meritocratic contests. These contests, he argued, are the only one able to produce wise leaders, the idea being that leaders will be better able to take rational decision that take into account the next generations and global issues when they are not constrained by elections. He believes that such a system wouldn't be authoritarian, but simply more efficient. If this report does not intend to discuss Bell's theories, we should note that his hypothesis ignores the fundamental question of the consent to be governed, and clumsily avoids to discuss the nature of the authority vested with the power to select the wisest leaders.<sup>1338</sup>

In any case, these stances taken by Westerners largely serve the CCP's interests, which sees its authoritarian model presented as superior to the liberal democratic model and, as such, legitimized by outsiders. Hence, the CCP benefits from encouraging these academics to speak out, as they contribute to the diffusion of a positive image of the Chinese regime. Besides, these intellectuals, who are often active in public debates, offer a possibility for the Party to externalize the fight against its critics, in conformity with the strategy of the United Front.

#### The case of Dean Mestre (France)

On February 25, 2021, Jérémy André, the correspondent of the French weekly *Le Point*, published an article untitled "How China pushes its pawns in universities,"<sup>1339</sup> which highlighted a problem to which other countries had been cognizant for years (Australia first, followed by Canada and the United States) but that had remained under the radar in France. This was a symptom of what we call the "French Awakening" in the conclusion of the report (→ p. 640). This article opened with the example of Christian Mestre. While he was **the honorary dean of Strasbourg's Faculty of Law**, Mestre travelled to Urumqi (capital of the Xinjiang) in September 2019 to participate in an "International Seminar on Counter-terrorism, De-radicalization and Human Rights Protection" during which, according to Chinese state media, he declared that he had "found that efficient measures had been taken in the region against terrorism and extremism, and that these measures had improved the socio-economic development of the region."<sup>1340</sup> He subsequently shared his hope that "France and other European countries could adopt the solutions used in Xinjiang," adding that "these people are not sent to jail but to compulsory training." His colleague Thomas Boutonnet, director of the Department of China studies at the University of Strasbourg, believed that "**this is no longer sheer naivety, it amounts to a negationist stance.**"

Several years before, in May 2013, the same Christian Mestre had "proposed to install a Confucius Institute in his [law] department," to the dismay of his China Studies colleagues who

1337. Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

1338. For a more in-depth discussion on Daniel Bell's theories, see Paul Charon and Guillaume Dutournier, "Confucianism, a Political Model? An Answer to Daniel A. Bell," *La Vie des Idées* (15 Jun. 2020).

1339. Jérémy André, "Comment la Chine pousse ses pions à l'université" ("How China Pushes Its Pawns at the University"), *Le Point*, 2532 (25 Feb. 2021), 46-50. Unless stated otherwise, all the quotes from this box are taken from this article.

1340. "Séminaire sur l'anti-terrorisme, la déradicalisation et la protection des droits de l'homme tenu au Xinjiang" ["Seminar on Counterterrorism, deradicalization and the protection of Human Rights held in Xinjiang"], *French.China.Org.Cn* (7 Sept. 2019), <https://archive.vn/V6H1E>. See also Xie Wenting and Bai Yunyi, "French Professor Praises China's de-Radicalization Measures in Xinjiang," *Global Times* (10 Sept. 2019), <https://archive.vn/Zr7IN>.

found it surprising that Mestre, an expert on European Law, started to “**champion Beijing at the University.**” In September 2014, “following a demand of the General Consulate of China in Strasbourg,” the Faculty of Law hosted a series of events on Tibet, including “an inaugural conference which defended that Tibet had never be annexed, and that the 1950 Chinese intervention had been demanded by the Tibetans.” In 2015, responding to an initiative of the Chinese Society for the Study of Human Rights, a pseudo-NGO (GONGO → p. 220), whose executives are members of the Propaganda Department and other CCP agencies,<sup>1341</sup> Mestre “co-organized a China-Europe forum on human rights at the European Court of Human Rights” – which was nothing less than “a **whitewashing operation** at the heart of European institutions.” Since at least 2018, he has been an adjunct professor at the Southwest University of Political Science and Law, in Chongqing, China.<sup>1342</sup> In 2020, Lu Rucai, the French editor-in-chief of *La Chine au présent* (French version of *China Daily*), a monthly magazine of the CCP Propaganda Department, invited Mestre to join the committee of experts of the new magazine *Dialogue Chine-France* (→ p. 341).<sup>1343</sup>

Finally, in December 2020, he was appointed ethics officer to the Strasbourg Eurometropolis, “a key position to assess conflicts of interest knowing that Alsace will soon host a Huawei mega-factory and debates the implementation of the 5G.” According to Jérémy André, “the very fact that Christian Mestre teaches at Changqing University puts him in a **conflict of interest in a region that welcomes very important Chinese investments.** Remunerated by the Chinese state, he was in no position to [conveniently] scrutinize whether elected officials were receiving money or exercising activities that tied them to Chinese investors.”<sup>1344</sup> MEP Raphaël Glucksmann, president of the Special Commission for Foreign Interference, also reacted to his appointment: “this cocktail of cynicism and naivety creates legitimate problems for the national security and the sovereignty of democratic institutions. **If the elite sells itself to China and mandarins turn themselves into lobbyists, whitewash the largest mass internment of our time, this shows that there is a grave ethical problem among the French elite.**” One day after the revelations of *Le Point*, Christian Mestre resigned from his position as ethics officer for the Strasbourg Eurometropolis.<sup>1345</sup>

### The case of Professor Lange (Germany)

From influence to espionage, there is only one step, as illustrated by the case of Klaus Lange, a **German political scientist specialized in international relations**, who for 50 years, and in parallel to his academic career, was also **an agent of the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND)**, which he informed in particular on Asian issues. But in 2010, on the occasion of a lecture he gave at Tongji University in Shanghai, **he was recruited by the Chinese services (the MSS).** They seem to be interested in him at first to obtain information on Uyghurs, knowing that the World Uyghur Congress is based in Germany, in Munich, and because Klaus Lange had directed a publication on Islamist terrorism four years earlier for which he had entrusted a chapter to a Chinese colonel, deputy defense attaché of the PRC in Berlin.<sup>1346</sup> As founder and director of the German think tank Institute for Transnational Studies (ITS) and senior consultant for the Hanns Seidel Stiftung, a political foundation named after the co-founder of the CSU (Christian Social Union) party in Bavaria, **he was particularly well placed and politically connected** to be useful to Beijing. His wife, Klara Knapp, deputy director of the ITS, was recruited at the same time. Initially, in 2010, Lange had informed the BND of the Chinese approach, and the German service had agreed that he should continue the relationship, in order to learn more about what

1341. Geoffrey Roberts, “One Chinese GONGO’s War Against Global Human Rights,” *China Change* (1 May 2020).

1342. His academic page was archived: <https://english.swupl.edu.cn/academics/faculty/286653.htm>, <https://archive.vn/8RQh8>. He already had this title in November 2018, as indicated by this academic conference: <https://archive.vn/q80Gr>; and the December 2018 Issue of this *Review of Rural Law*: <https://archive.vn/0s1go>.

1343. Jenny Che, “Dialogue Chine-France, l’étrange revue d’influence chinoise” (“Dialogue China-France, the Strange Review of Chinese Influence”), *Intelligence Online*, 210315 (5 Mar. 2021).

1344. Jérémy André, “Strasbourg: pressions de la Chine dans les universités, ‘Christian Mestre est un exemple, mais il y en a d’autres’” (“Strasbourg: Chinese Pressures in Universities, ‘Christian Mestre is an Example, but there are Others’”), *France Info Grand Est* (28 Feb. 2021).

1345. “Soutien à la Chine: le déontologue de la métropole de Strasbourg démissionne” (“Chinese Supporters: The Ethics Officer of the Strasbourg Metropolis Resigned”), *Le Point* (26 Feb. 2021).

1346. Volker Foertsch and Klaus Lange (Hrsg.), *Islamistischer Terrorismus und Massenvernichtungsmittel*, Hanns Seidel Stiftung, 2006 (le chapitre rédigé par le colonel Chuan Chen se trouve p. 127-133).



they were looking for. But gradually, Lange reported less to the BND, which “was not aware of the deepening [of his] contacts with the Chinese.”<sup>1347</sup> This is precisely what he is accused of today. Arrested a first time in November 2019 “when the couple was about to fly to Macau, to meet their Chinese secret service officer,” Lange was **imprisoned, released, and then arrested again** in July 2021. The Karlsruhe public prosecutor’s office accuses him of “**intelligence activities for the benefit of a foreign power.**”<sup>1348</sup>

The investigation could have a bilateral cooperation component, and investigations could lead to South Tyrol because of the nationality of his wife, Klara Knapp, who comes from the village of Gais (Italy). The investigation will have to determine when Klaus Lange crossed a red line, first by taking on more and more autonomy vis-à-vis the BND, and then what was **the nature of the information transmitted**. At this stage, little information has been released on this point. It is likely that Lange did not pass on sensitive information about internal BND files (to which, as an honorable correspondent, he did not have access), but rather that he put his political expertise on Asia, on the German political landscape on the positions of these countries on China, and of course his very extensive address book, at Beijing’s service. He was, however, a close associate of Volker Foertsch (with whom he co-edited the aforementioned 2006 publication), who for years headed the BND’s China department: through him, he could therefore have had knowledge of the service’s operations in China.

His dense network of contacts, especially within the Uyghur and Tibetan diasporas (he organized a summit between ministers and representatives of the Tibetan parliament in exile in Dharamsala in 2009), legitimized by his functions as a political science researcher, allowed him to collect valuable data **in terms of political intelligence**. The fact that he had risen through the ranks of the Hanns Seidel Stiftung (director of the Security Studies Department) gave him an inside view on Bavarian decision-makers and security issues. **Bavaria is particularly targeted by China**, and its CSU leaders are particularly accommodating given the weight of Chinese economic and scientific interests in the state. His regular travels and his exchanges with the director of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Pakistani ambassador and numerous think tanks around the world, made him an attractive target for a foreign intelligence service.

Money does not appear to have been Lange’s primary motivation: investigators have found evidence of only one payment. Rewards appear to have taken the form of all-expenses paid trips and “support programs.”<sup>1349</sup>

## D. Hostages

**China practices “hostage diplomacy”** (such as Iran, Turkey, and North Korea), and it was confirmed by the release of the “**two Canadian Michaels**”<sup>1350</sup> (→ p. 546) only hours after Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou, who had been under house arrest in Canada, was allowed to return to China on September 25, 2021. Arrested in China shortly after she was arrested in Canada at the request of the United States in late 2018, **the transactional nature of this exchange was clear from the beginning: “It was give and take: Meng against the two Michaels.”**<sup>1351</sup> By releasing them the same day, Beijing was fully assuming this hostage diplomacy and sending a message to the rest of the world. In fact, the Party-State has been developing this practice for years. The best-known case, apart from the “two Canadian Michaels,” is that of the **Swedish citizen Gui Minhai** (→ p. 527), Yet, Beijing also took **Australian** citizens

1347. David Philippot, “Le couple espionnait pour la Chine en Allemagne” (“The couple was spying for China in Germany”), *Le Figaro* (6 Aug. 2021), 6.

1348. Ibid.

1349. Lea Sahay and Ronen Steinke, “Der Vorwurf: Spionage für China” (“The accusation: Espionage for China”), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 6, 2021. See also: “Spionage: Auch gegen Südtirolerin wird in Deutschland ermittelt” (“Espionage: South Tyrolean woman is also investigated in Germany”), *Tagesschau* (7 Jul. 2021).

1350. Brice Pedroletti, “Deux Canadiens détenus en Chine sont inculpés pour espionnage” (“Two Canadians detained in China are charged with spying”), *Le Monde* (19 Jun. 2020).

1351. David Webster, “Meng contre les deux Michael: des leçons pour le Canada et le monde” (“Meng vs. the Two Michaels: Lessons for Canada and the World”), *The Conversation* (28 Sept. 2021).



as hostages, including writer Yang Jun (known as Yang Hengjun) and the TV anchor Cheng Lei. An Australian citizen of Chinese origin, she was working for CGTN when she suddenly disappeared in August 2020. Locked up in a prison in Beijing, she had no access to a lawyer and was not allowed to talk on the phone to her two children, aged 11 and 9, who lived in Melbourne. In February 2021, Chinese authorities revealed that she was accused of “illegally supplying state secrets overseas,” without more details. Since then, a series of anonymous messages on WeChat have rewritten her biography and disseminated elements supporting this thesis – messages “written by Ministry of State Security (MSS) people to set the public tone,” according to Feng Chongyi, an academic who had himself been detained in China four years earlier. A hypothesis reinforced by the fact that one of the first articles incriminating Cheng Lei came from the WeChat account that had also been the first to spread false information about Vicky Xu (→ p. 167), another CCP target – an anonymous account presumably operated by Chinese services.<sup>1352</sup> Another case of an Australian citizen of Chinese origin arbitrarily arrested in China is that of researcher and writer Yang Hengjun, detained since 2019, also for “espionage,” in reality for being the author of writings critical of the regime.<sup>1353</sup>

Some **Japanese** citizens have also been arrested. Recently, a professor of Chinese History at Hokkaido University, Nobu Iwatani, was arrested on spying charges while in Beijing for a conference to which he had been invited by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The Academy booked the hotel Iwatani was staying at, which was searched by MSS agents who then claimed to have found “illicit” publications in his room (books and newspapers on the 1937-45 Sino-Japanese War that he had bought second-hand from a Beijing bookseller). He was detained in Beijing from the beginning of September 2019 to November 15. Before him, and since 2015, thirteen other Japanese visitors had been arrested in China for spying, nine of whom are still detained today.<sup>1354</sup>

The case of Taiwan has been less discussed because it is less publicized internationally. It does not theoretically fit the hostage “diplomacy” since – from Beijing’s point of view – Taiwan is not a foreign state with which they have diplomatic relations. But there is indeed **an established practice of kidnapping Taiwanese people, one of the means to pressure the island**. Some examples are known: Lee Ming-Che, a Taiwanese human rights activist and former DPP member, was arrested in March 2017 as he entered continental China through Macao. Charged with subversion – probably because he was exchanging on WeChat with Chinese friends about the Taiwanese democracy – he was sentenced to five years in prison in November 2017.<sup>1355</sup> Tsai Chin-shu, a Taiwanese academic, was arrested in July 2018 and detained in a jail near Fujian.<sup>1356</sup> His case is interesting because he is on the “blue” side – pro-unification – and supported former President Ma, contrary to the other two, who were clearly “green.” Morrison Meng-chu Lee, another Taiwanese citizen, was arrested when he entered China in September 2019 after participating in pro-democracy protests in Hong-Kong.<sup>1357</sup> But there could be many more cases that we do not know of.

1352. Bill Birtles, “Australian Mother Marks Nine Months in Chinese Prison as Curious Online Posts Emerge,” ABC News (28 Apr. 2021).

1353. Bill Birtles, “Australian Yang Hengjun Faces Court in China on Espionage Charges after Two Years in Detention,” ABC News (27 May 2021).

1354. Andrea A. Fischetti and Antoine Roth, “Why Did China Detain a Japanese History Professor?” *Tokyo Review* (30 Dec. 2019).

1355. Brian Hioe, “Status of the Taiwanese Prisoners in China Unclear on the Third Anniversary of Lee Ming-Che Kidnapping,” *New Bloom* (20 Mar. 2020).

1356. Ko Yu-hao and Chung Li-hua, “Academic Held in China for 420 days,” *Taipei Times* (14 Sept. 2019).

1357. Brian Hioe, “Taiwanese Citizen Detailed in China After Participating in Protests in Hong Kong,” *New Bloom* (12 Sept. 2019).

## SUMMARY OF THE THIRD PART

The actions carried out by Beijing as part of its influence operations abroad fulfill two non-mutually exclusive goals:

- **On the one hand, to seduce and subjugate foreign audiences** by painting China in a positive light. Four key narratives testify to this goal: **the “Chinese model”** (a spectacular economic growth, an alleged administrative efficiency and a political regime superior to liberal democracy); **tradition**, illustrated by Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); **benevolence**, to demonize the “Chinese threat” that constrains the implementation of the Party’s foreign policy (and to which is then opposed the theory of the “peaceful emergence”); **and power**, which has become China’s main appeal in the past two decades. It is embodied in its military might but also in architectural, scientific and technological achievements, as well as in the organization of global events.

- **On the other hand, to infiltrate and constrain** – a “harsher” category of operations that do not involve seducing its opponents but rather bending them. Through infiltration, Beijing seeks to slowly penetrate these societies to hinder any potential action against the Party’s interests. Constraining them fits within a wider dynamic: a “punitive” or “coercive” diplomacy is gradually becoming a systematic policy of sanctioning any state, organization, company, or individual that threatens the Party’s interests. The CCP uses an incredibly wide range of retaliatory measures, targeting all players in all fields – with a significant increase in these tactics since 2018. Infiltrations and constraints are usually carried out through a nexus of intermediaries. And these practices target the following categories:

- **The diasporas**, defined ethnically by Beijing. Beijing aims to create and sustain a feeling of belonging to one nation by blurring the distinction between Chinese citizens and overseas Chinese, hence homogenizing very heterogeneous communities. Its goal is twofold: on the one hand, to control these diasporas so that they do not threaten the government – Beijing is leading what the NGO Freedom House described as the “most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world.” In practice, this involves surveilling these communities, identifying the members and infiltrating them, maintaining constant pressure on them, intimidating, threatening, and/or constraining them one way or another, even physically assaulting them; but also pressuring the states where they reside to possibly getting them arrested and extradited. On the other hand, the Party mobilizes these communities to serve its interests, benefitting from their knowledge of their country of residence. To convince and galvanize them, the Party uses more or less “gentle” cooptation methods.

- **The media**, Beijing explicitly aims to establish a “new world media order.” To do so, the government has invested €1.3 billion per year since 2008 to better control its image in the world, via state media that “must work to speak for the party’s will and its propositions, and protect the party’s authority and unity.” These big media companies, which include CGTN, CCTV, *China Daily* and *People’s Daily*, China Radio International, Xinhua and China New Service, enjoy a worldwide presence in several languages and on several continents. Still, the lack

of credibility of news reports and the Chinese media's propagandist tone plays a key role in the difficulties they encounter when competing with Western media and when trying to establish themselves on the international market. Chinese state media are present on all social networks, including those blocked in China (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram), and they invest a lot of money to increase their online audience. Several elements indicate an artificial inflation of their number of followers, a substantial part of which could in reality be bots and fake accounts.

Beijing also tries to control Chinese-speaking media abroad through different means – including buybacks, cooperation and/or pressure from local Chinese associations – that have proved quite successful, as the CCP is in a situation of near-monopoly. Its main leverage is not funding, but rather the WeChat social media, whose rules push Chinese-speaking media to register on its Chinese version, hence in China, where they are subjected to Party censorship. Because they do not know the red lines, i.e. what is allowed, they tend to censor themselves to avoid being suspended.

To influence non-Chinese mainstream media, Beijing uses a few tools. That includes penetration (by diplomats, the “China Watch” from *China Daily* and content provision); acquisition (with consequences on the editorial line); cooptation (with compensations such as adds, all-expenses paid trips/training courses in China, contracts for other companies of the same group, political appointments); training and networking (thousands of journalists from all over the world are trained in China, on the condition of “correctly depicting China,” and Beijing also creates professional networks via regular events); constraint; using the visa weapon against journalists critical of the regime; family members and relatives who remain in China; but also various intimidation methods, including lawsuits (lawfare).

Finally, Beijing is also versed in container control, influencing every step of the global information supply chain, with television, web platforms (WeChat, Weibo, TikTok) and smartphones. Despite these many efforts however, Chinese media remain relatively unpopular abroad, particularly compared to Russian media, because they focus on China and rarely on local issues.

- **The diplomacy:** two elements stand out. First, influence on international organizations and norms: Beijing holds several key positions at the UN, provides a large portion of the funding, deploys classic diplomatic efforts as well as clandestine influence operations (economic and political pressures, cooptation, coercion, and corruption) to strengthen its presence, frame debates and control narratives, obtain timely endorsements, impose its agenda and influence the elaboration and interpretation of international norms. Its revisionist goal is to “change the rules of the game.” The example of the WHO during the Covid-19 pandemic, the way Beijing succeeded in controlling and shaping the international discussion on organ trafficking (of which China was accused), in putting roadblocks on the work of Human Rights Council, or in hijacking the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations for political reasons – all show its influence, which also extends to regional organizations, as evidenced in the Chinese efforts to infiltrate European institutions and convince elites into relaying the Party's propaganda, all in the name of a Chinese-European “friendship.”

Second, the so-called “wolf warrior” diplomacy refers to the behavior of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokespersons and of a dozen diplomats who are all exhibiting increased aggressiveness. Attacks can take traditional or newer shapes, using social media for instance, and an unabashed use of invectives, reprimands or even intimidation. The Chinese position is to systematically counter any speech running against the official CCP line, by blurring the line between the CCP and China as a country-culture. While this practice has emerged publicly during the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, some particularly aggressive ambassadors had pioneered it before, first and foremost Gui Congyou in Sweden and Lu Shaye in Canada. One of the symptoms of this evolution is the “Twitterization” of the Chinese diplomacy: between March 2019 and March 2020, the number of Twitter accounts belonging to embassies, consul-

ates, and Chinese ambassadors has grown by 250% – accounts often artificially amplified by a network of fake accounts. France has also observed a radical change in the embassy’s posture since Lu Shaye’s arrival in Paris in 2019.

Globally, this aggressive turn from Chinese diplomacy is counter-productive and has largely contributed to the sharp deterioration of China’s image in the world these past years – which actually raised a debate within the Chinese Party-State itself. Still, there are reasons to believe that this is a long-lasting evolution, particularly because the aim is not so much to please us as it is to please Beijing. Zealous diplomats probably hope to be perceived by Beijing as particularly loyal and thus benefit from a career boost.

- **The economy:** economic dependence to China is often the first leverage used by Beijing. Chinese economic coercion takes extremely various forms: denial of access to the Chinese market, embargo, trade sanctions, and investment restrictions, but also limitations in the number of Chinese tourists (because some regions depend on them), or the organization of popular boycotts – all these have hit many countries these past few years, such as Japan, South Korea, and now Australia. Additionally, Beijing is increasingly making censorship a prerequisite to access the Chinese market, and many companies end up caving under pressure. Economic sanctions in the world of professional sports are widespread and used by the CCP, with the NBA in 2019 for instance. Germany is another interesting case to study, because the exposure (or over-exposure) of the German economy to the Chinese market is the first policy variable in Berlin’s attitude toward Beijing. Besides, Western companies include members of the CCP, all potential sources of information for the Party.

- **Politics.** The overall goal is to penetrate target societies to influence public policy mechanisms. To do so, Beijing develops relationships directly with political parties. Through the networks woven by the ILLD, it can identify and secure the loyalty of individual leaders who are ready to defend China’s image, and also learn about local political dynamics, or identify potentially exploitable sources of tensions and vulnerabilities. Sustaining direct relationships with influential political figures of a given country allow Beijing to infiltrate target societies, to gather official and non-official support, and potentially circumvent obstacles within governments by relying on opposition or “retired” politicians. So, in parallel to its relationships with political parties, Beijing also cultivates ties with individuals, and these ties can take different shapes (contacts, “useful idiots,” agents of influence, or real recruits).

Beijing also interferes in elections (during the past decade, China has apparently interfered in at least 10 elections in 7 countries). Taiwan’s case is the most documented example, but there were also cases of verified interference in local elections in Canada and Australia, each time in the most Chinese-populated constituencies.

- **Education,** universities first and foremost, is among the Party’s most important targets. In some places, such as Australia, universities are financially dependent on China (because Chinese are the biggest group of foreign students by far), which makes these institutions less capable of resisting Chinese influence operations. This dependence actually pushes institutions to actively self-censor. Another problem is the surveillance and intimidation of Chinese students on foreign campuses, especially targeting students who are viewed as dissidents, the organization of violent counter-protests, and sometimes physical assaults. Intimidations also target university professors and staff members, pushing them to modify course content, teaching material and planned events. These actions are carried out by a minority of Chinese students and, in some cases, encouraged by Chinese authorities, through embassies and/or consulates. The main tool used to maintain some amount of control over Chinese students abroad and to galvanize them into defending China are the local branches of the Association of Chinese Students and Researchers (CSSA).

Another of Beijing’s goals is to shape China Studies, by giving researchers incentives (luxurious trips, part-time or full-time jobs in Chinese universities) and by pressuring them (visa denial, intimidation, pressures on publishing houses to deter them from publishing books criticizing



the regime, pressures on relatives in China, even kidnappings and arbitrary arrests) which usually lead to self-censorship.

The Party-State also uses universities to acquire new knowledge and technologies, either openly and legally through joint-research programs, or illegally and covertly through theft or espionage. To do so, China developed many recruitment programs, relying on a plethora of “recruitment stations” abroad, which are tasked to recruit and bring potential candidates to China, and also to collect information on scientists and research programs in the host countries. Several Chinese databases contain millions of profiles of scientists in the world. In many cases, the work of recruited researchers actually contributes to the development of Chinese military capacities. Through joint programs involving researchers holding several positions, dozens of universities unintentionally help Beijing in building weapons of mass destructions or in developing surveillance technologies that serve to oppress the Chinese population. Several related scandals broke out in 2020 and 2021.

Finally, Confucius Institutes and Classrooms are another important player of Chinese influence on education, and they are found everywhere in the world. And, under the pretense of teaching Chinese language and culture, they can leverage influence over host institutions. A revenue-generating and all-expense-paid language center is difficult to refuse and it creates a form of dependence (even subordination). Besides, Confucius Institutes (ICs) often threaten academic freedom: teachers, often chosen by Beijing, must display “good political and professional capacities” and “love for the motherland”; all teaching materials are provided by Beijing and are consistent with a Chinese representation of the world; altogether, there are many documented cases of self-censorship in universities hosting ICs. It also creates divisions inside the teaching staff. Additionally, some think that ICs are potentially used to conduct espionage. For all these reasons, a growing number of ICs have been closed these pasts few years.

- **Think tanks**, where Beijing’s strategy is dual. Firstly, Beijing is looking to settle branches of Chinese think tanks abroad, like the CGTN Think Tank which has signed about fifty partnership agreements with foreign think tanks, or the China-CEE Institute which shows Beijing’s interest in Central and Eastern European countries. These countries are also gathered in a 17+1 format where Beijing can promote its views and initiatives and divide Europe, trying to turn these countries against the EU. Second, Beijing exploits local intermediaries, sometimes think tanks. This usually follows one of three scenarios: occasional partners that allow Beijing’s voice to be heard locally (such as IRIS and its “Paris Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative,” co-organized with the Chinese embassy); circumstantial allies spreading the Party’s narratives on a regular basis (such as, also in France, the *Fondation Prospective et Innovation*), and accomplices sharing the CCP’s worldview and whose interests are in line with the Party (such as the Schiller Institute). Local intermediaries can also be publishing companies, as shown in France again by the La Route de la Soie publishing company.

- **Culture**, first through the production and export of cultural products such as movies or TV shows, music or books, which are powerful seduction tools, as we saw with the patriotic action movies *Operation Red Sea* and *Wolf Warrior I and II* – all promoting the image of a responsible China, of a “motherland” ready to any sacrifice to protect its citizens in peril. These cultural products also demonstrate the PLA’s force projection and combat forces capacities. Chinese influence also reaches foreign cultural productions, including cinema, for example in Hollywood: to avoid upsetting Beijing and maintain an access to the Chinese market, many American film studios make compromises, or are even compromising themselves, while the Party-State blacklists producers, film directors, and actors seen as hostile to China. Film studios cut and change scenes to avoid displeasing Beijing. The goals of the Chinese authorities are not only negative (i.e. preventing certain content) but also positive (i.e. promoting different content). Beijing thus requires more filming in China, more “good” narratives on China, and “good” Chinese characters helping others, or even

saving the world (hence the fact that, in recent years, evil Chinese characters have disappeared from American movies).

Cinema is not an isolated case: other cultural sectors are under pressure from Beijing and are asked to produce art that is compatible with the interests of the CCP. Refusing access to the Chinese market is a systematic practice enforced against any artist criticizing the Party-State. Amongst other types of pressures, Beijing hopes to push artists to change their art, or to stop those who show their art in other parts of the world. It even pushes some to carry out the work of Chinese censors. This is shown by several examples in museums, the video games industry and in theaters, where some artists have censored themselves, which is the final goal – allowing Beijing to win without fighting.

- **Information manipulation** is one of the most dynamic and documented tools. Beijing simulates the authenticity of its operations by using fake accounts on social media, trolls and *astroturfing* (to simulate spontaneous popular movements) – tactics almost systematically found in Russian operations. These tactics were picked up by China, first on a national level to target its own population, and then on an international level. The Party-State carries out a “distraction strategy” over its entire territory to prevent collective actions that it does not generate or control by using a high number of “Internet commentators” (incorrectly labelled “fifty cents’ armies”) to “guide” public opinions. These commenters are paid (for example \$25 for a new message of more than 400 characters, 40 cents for reporting a negative comment that will be deleted). On the international stage, trolls are much more aggressive. Usually controlled by the PLA or the CYL, they defend, attack, feed controversies, insult, and harass. Another way to simulate authenticity is to ask third parties to publish content in exchange for a compensation – which Beijing does by cultivating content factories (freelance Chinese-speakers based in Malaysia or elsewhere who produce content paid between €12 and €126 per piece, depending on the length), to use AI more and more often to generate texts, and to use other methods such as buying one-time messages, buying an influence over an account, buying an account or a page, and finally, recruiting an “influencer.”

Actually, since 2019, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have been keener on sounding the alarm about some campaigns from China. Dozens of thousands of accounts have been suspended for that reason. Among them was found an enduring campaign that started in 2017 and that has targeted critics of the Chinese regime, adapting itself to various events (Hong Kong, the pandemic, and the U.S. elections), surviving successive interventions from these platforms because of their capacity to create or activate new accounts in a few days. The “Spamouflage Dragon” network was identified and analyzed by Graphika in four consecutive reports, which focused on dormant accounts and bought or stolen accounts amplifying Chinese propaganda and attacking the United States in Chinese or in English. Some of these accounts had AI-generated profile pictures – a practice now often observed in Chinese operations on social media. Other campaigns also highlighted the importance of the language used (use of vernacular Cantonese with traditional Chinese characters to pose as Hong Kong citizens) and the role played by private intermediaries, including by digital marketing companies.

An important component of these campaigns is that they do not only defend China: promoting the Chinese model involves degrading others, including liberal democracies, similarly to what Russian operations have been doing for years. At least three tactics are used to that end: discredit the opponent’s capacities; fan the flames of controversial topics, particularly regarding racism and police violence in the United States; and try to create panics.

The PLA is at the center of these maneuvers: it uses social media for “overt” influence by spreading propaganda, often for dissuasion and psychological warfare, and for covert hostile operations against foreign targets. Many publications have shown that its researchers do not confine themselves to learning Russian and U.S. techniques, they also theorize “war through social media,” acknowledging using it for offensive purposes, including political interference. The PLA

also displays interest in the use of database and artificial intelligence to “guide public opinion on a large scale,” including to “influence electors in foreign countries.”

- Among **other tools** used by Beijing in its influence operations, we found **citizen movements**, particularly pro-independence movements (the Party-State has deployed the same strategy in New Caledonia and in Okinawa. They hope to gain control of the economy from the inside, getting closer to local political leaders through several friendship associations, even manipulating information to encourage pro-independence movements following Beijing’s interests) and pacifist movements, as shown by the No Cold War group. **Chinese tourists** (who make up the sector’s biggest market, because they are the most numerous, and spend the most) are another important leverage: by controlling the number of tourists, Beijing pressures other governments. Beijing also uses tourists to spread messages and strengthen its claims in the South China Sea. **Influencers** are another category that the Party relies on, especially Western YouTubers, used to spread Chinese propaganda, whatever their personal motivations (they can be forced, bought or simply seduced). Foreign academics, whose motivations are similarly diverse, can be used as well. Finally, Beijing carries out a so-called “**hostage diplomacy**,” a significant tool in power relations and influence operations, as evidenced by cases in Sweden, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan.

Fourth Part

**CASE  
STUDIES**





**Taiwan and Hong Kong are at the forefront of Beijing’s “political warfare,”** both democratic and liberal strongholds over which China claims sovereignty. China’s willingness to intervene is made more important and facilitated by a few factors, such as a common language (notwithstanding a few variations), an economic dependency, and the freedom of the press that is the rule in these territories – which allows China to influence local narratives. For all these reasons, Taiwan and Hong Kong have been **outposts**, the first ones confronted to Chinese influence operations. But for Beijing, these territories are also **training grounds, “R&D labs” for operations that can subsequently be refined and implemented in other targets globally**<sup>1</sup> – such as Georgia and Ukraine were for Russian operations (→ p. 626). As such, they are important cases to study because they amount to **sentinels, “canaries in the mine,”**<sup>2</sup> and indicators of what could happen next.

For a long time, one could question the similarity in the trajectories, because there are essential differences between Hong Kong and Taiwan on the one hand, and all of the other cases on the other: Beijing does not claim sovereignty over Australia, Canada, and Sweden, for example, and people do not speak Chinese there. How could Taiwan and Hong Kong be seen as relevant precedents for these countries and for the rest of the world? Yet, two things have happened in recent years: one, **intensified attacks against Hong Kong and Taiwan** (so much so that, since 2019, Twitter and Facebook have formally attributed to Beijing dismantled operations on their platforms)<sup>3</sup> and, second, **some tactics, hitherto limited to Taiwan and Hong Kong, have been extended to other targets**. A difference remains, admittedly, but in the intensity of the operations, not in their nature. Currently, there is no doubt that Beijing implements tactics against these two targets that will later be used against the rest of the world.

**The first step in the expansion of Chinese operations occurred in Australia and New Zealand.** Retrospectively, from a European or North American perspective, these two countries appear to have been used as “guinea pigs” of Chinese interference – John Garnaud uses the same metaphor of the “canary in a coal mine” to describe their respective situations and that of Australia<sup>4</sup> – because **they had noted very early on the implementation of tactics subsequently used elsewhere in the world**. Why these two countries?

1. Chris Horton, “China Uses Taiwan as R&D lab to Disrupt Democracies,” *Nikkei Asian Review* (27 Dec. 2018).

2. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military’s Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 81.

3. Twitter Safety, “Information Operations Directed at Hong Kong,” *Twitter* (19 Aug. 2019), [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/information\\_operations\\_directed\\_at\\_Hong\\_Kong.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html); “Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from China,” *Facebook* (19 Aug. 2019), <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/08/removing-cib-china/>.

4. John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia And How Democracies Can Push Back,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Mar. 2018).

INTRODUCTION

Because of their large diasporas (relative to their population) out of which “a considerable numbers [are] recent immigrants with relatives and close ties to China”<sup>5</sup>; because they are located in what Beijing sees as its sphere of influence, because their economies are highly dependent on China, because they attract a high number of Chinese students and, finally, because of their relative lack of regulations on financing political party (up until recently).<sup>6</sup> According to former diplomat Chen Yonglin, who defected in 2005, Australia was identified very early on as the “weak link in the Western camp,” and it became the place where the Party-State was able to “test its infiltration and subversion methods” given its openness, its demographics, its proportion of Chinese immigrants and its multiculturalism.<sup>7</sup>

CONCEPTS

**The second step of this expansion focused on the rest of the world, particularly – but not only – on Europe and North America.<sup>8</sup>**

Australia<sup>9</sup> and the United States<sup>10</sup> have led to a sizable scholarly literature. In Europe, the United Kingdom,<sup>11</sup> the Czech Republic,<sup>12</sup> and, to a lesser extent, Germany<sup>13</sup> have also been studied. All these countries – that we also visited to prepare this report – are mentioned in the previous sections and included in our many examples. Yet, **for our in-depth case studies, we decided to focus on other places: Taiwan, Singapore, Sweden, Canada, but also the operations that targeted Hong Kong protestors in 2019, and framed the Covid-19 as an American virus in 2020.**

ACTORS

ACTIONS

CASE

CONCLUSION

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5. Charles Parton, *China-UK Relations: Where to Draw the Border Between Influence and Interference?* Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI), Occasional Paper, (Feb. 2019), 12.

6. In New Zealand, the Parliament Justice Select Committee carried out a one-year investigation on foreign interference between 2018 and 2019, following which a new law on campaign financing was passed; it then announced a new investigation, this time on local political interference. The Australian reaction is described further down (→ p. 544).

7. Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books, 2018), 3.

8. Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (Richmond: Hardie Grant Books, 2020).

9. See Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*; See also, the excellent work by the ASPI, which is one of the most knowledgeable institutions on Chinese influence in the world, and in Australia in particular.

10. See, for example, *Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Report of the Working Group on Chinese Influence Activities in the United States, co-chaired by Larry Diamond and Orville Schell (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2018).

11. See for example Parton, *China-UK Relations*.

12. See the excellent work published by the Sinopsis think tank: <https://sinopsis.cz/en/>.

13. See for example Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Mapping China-in-Germany,” *Sinopsis* (2 Oct. 2019).

## Chapter 1

# TAIWAN

Chinese influence operations had already targeted Taiwan, its institutions, political parties, civil society before, even when Kuomintang (KMT) – which is favorable to mainland China (One China policy) – ruled the country, for example during Ma Ying-jeou’s presidency (2008-2016). Truth be told, the United Front has always been very active in Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> But these maneuvers intensified after **the Sunflower Student Movement** that saw students occupy the legislative Yuan, the Taiwanese parliament, in March and April 2014: at that point, Beijing certainly came to the conclusion that Ma did not have enough control over the situation to implement a pro-Chinese agenda. Their concerns were confirmed two years later when, in 2016, **Tsai Ing-wen was elected president** and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which supports Taiwan independence, won a majority of the seats in parliament.

**Since 2016, cross-strait relations have deteriorated, and China’s “political warfare” in Taiwan has become harsher.** As J. Michael Cole explained, the Chinese strategy in Taiwan usually consists in combining incentives (to “win hearts and minds”) and coercive measures to constrain decision-makers while weakening democratic institutions. The DPP’s rise to power pushed Beijing to review the balance between these two poles.<sup>2</sup> **The hope of seducing Taiwanese people is now relatively faint,**<sup>3</sup> first because the feeling of belonging to the Chinese nation has deteriorated in recent years, so much so that only 2% of Taiwanese inhabitants define themselves as only Chinese compared to 62.6% as solely Taiwanese.<sup>4</sup> Then, Xi Jinping’s martial speech in January 2019, which mentioned a potentially forced reunification if necessary, and the Hong Kong crisis during the summer and the fall of that year acted as powerful repellents. **China now focuses on coercive measures.** They have become easier to implement because, during Ma Ying-jeou’s eight years in power, “cross-Strait ties were opened up [...] his administration made little effort to increase its counterintelligence capabilities in a manner commensurate with the new opportunities for penetration from China that resulted from the loosened restrictions. That created a number of new avenues for the CCP to penetrate, influence, and corrode Taiwanese institutions.”<sup>5</sup> **Taiwan perfectly illustrates the Chinese “Machiavellian moment,” i.e. the conviction that it is safer to be feared than to be loved (→ p. 619).**

1. 吳俊德 (Wu Jun-deh), “中國與俄羅斯資訊戰手法初探” (“A Preliminary Compared Study of Chinese and Russian Information War Methods”), 國防情勢月報 (*Defense Situation Monthly*), 國防安全研究院 (INDSR), 144 (27 Jun. 2019), 32-39.

2. J. Michael Cole, *Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term* (Ottawa: Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Jun. 2020), 10.

3. It is the “End of An Illusion” – the subtitle of J. Michael Cole’s book, *Cross-Strait Relations Since 2016: The End of the Illusion* (London: Routledge, 2020).

4. According to a survey from a Taiwan think tank, <https://fr.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/92859>.

5. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 11.



Overall, the **Taiwanese society is particularly vulnerable to Chinese operations for a plethora of reasons, and first because China claims sovereignty over this territory where the same language, or even languages, are spoken.** Mandarin (*Guoyu* in Taiwanese) is the official language but the mother tongue of less than 20% of the population; 70% of the population speaks Taiwanese, which is essentially derived from the Minnan dialect, 10 to 15% of the population speaks Hakka, and 2% an aboriginal language. Young Taiwanese born after 1990 are very attached to democratic and liberal values – but the risk is that they are not mobilized during elections, particularly among those working in Taipei who must go back to their district of origin to vote.

Another weakness is that **the Taiwanese society is polarized** around several issues. The polarization is first reflected in Taiwan’s relationship with China (pro-unification/pro-independence) even if this divide has lessened in the past few years. The population is also divided over societal questions such as gay marriage, pension reform, agriculture, and so on. **The media landscape is likewise polarized**, as it reflects the society and is also largely infiltrated by Beijing. The Online Media Fractionalization indicator developed by the Digital Society Project (DSP)<sup>6</sup> showed that “major online media outlets in Taiwan provide very different presentations of the same events. Since Taiwanese people consume online media quite extensively [...] the Chinese disinformation strategy and resulting online information fractionalization is likely to have a detrimental impact on Taiwan’s democracy.”<sup>7</sup>

Taiwanese media also suffer from a concentration of capital, from a race for clickbait (a “tabloidization” of outlets) and overwork (some journalists having to produce 4 to 8 articles a day).<sup>8</sup> As a result, journalists do not take enough time to cross-check their sources or to verify information. J. Michael Cole, who worked at the *Taipei Times* – owned by the biggest press holding on the island – for more than seven years, explained that this “very poor tradition of fact checking, or double-checking, or corroborating information [...] makes Taiwan ripe for the injection of disinformation in its bloodstream.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, the verticality of relationships inside a newsroom, which stifles young reporters, and the lack of incentive (or time) for investigative journalism are additional vulnerabilities.<sup>10</sup> Besides, Taiwan has the **second highest social network penetration in the world** (88%)<sup>11</sup>: 83% of the population gets its information online and 59% through social networks.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Taiwanese people are very “connected,” most of them have an account on one or several social media platforms, and they are incidentally particularly vulnerable to the disinformation that circulates on these networks. All these reasons explain why, according to several reports, **Taiwan is one of the countries most at risk of disinformation in the world.**<sup>13</sup>

6. The Digital Society Project (See Valeriya Mechkova, Daniel Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, and Steven Wilson, *Measuring Internet Politics: Introducing the Digital Society Project*, DSP, (May 2019)).

7. *Democracy Facing Global Challenges*, V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2019 (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, May 2019), 35.

8. J. Michael Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power and Taiwan,” Brookings Institution (11 Sept. 2018), 9.

9. Ibid.

10. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 22.

11. “Active Social Network Penetration in Selected Countries as of January 2020,” *Statistica* (14 Feb. 2020). The share of social network penetration measures the share of Internet users visiting social networking in selected countries or regions.

12. Nic Newman et al., Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020, 103.

13. Huang Tzu-ti, “Taiwan Most Vulnerable to Disinformation Attacks: Swedish Survey,” *Taiwan News* (28 Sept. 2019); Mechkova, Pemstein, Seim, and Wilson, *Measuring Internet Politics*, 18.

That being said, Rush Doshi insists that it is not only about disinformation and propaganda. In Taiwan more than anywhere else, **Beijing’s goal is to “control every step of the information supply chain.** Targets range from those that create content (journalists and researchers) to the institutions that publish and validate it (television stations and wire services) and, finally, to the platforms that often provide the final outreach to consumers (social media websites and digital TV infrastructure).”<sup>14</sup> We will see that **Beijing uses both the carrot and the stick, both positive measures (incentives, rewards) and negative actions (intimidations, threats, sanctions)** at each of these stages.

More broadly, in **applying the full repertoire of “political warfare” tactics, the CCP has two main goals in Taiwan: first, weaken its democratic institutions,** including elections, and the trust, morale, and resistance of the population. **Second, divide the society** by exacerbating its weaknesses: Chinese state media ostensibly want to “lebanize”<sup>15</sup> Taiwan: they strive to pit communities against each other, target the country’s cohesion, including its territorial cohesion by pitting regions against each other and paying particular attention to the islands. To reach that goal, the Party uses two types of resources: traditional Chinese media and local relays.

## I. From the outside: How traditional Chinese media penetrate Taiwan

Traditional media stands for the media that existed before the advent of the Internet and of new communication technologies, mainly in print (press and books), radio and television formats – even though they have also developed new digital platforms since then. Among the traditional Chinese media, we distinguish the traditional (or generalist) media which cover all sorts of topics and do not target one particular audience, for instance the newspapers *Global Times* and *People’s Daily* and media outlets specifically dedicated to Taiwan, such as the *Voice of the Straits* radio, the *China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation* and the Haifeng publishing company (→ p. 100).

### A. The use of conventional media

**Chinese conventional media are a powerful vector to spread the Party’s propaganda, but they only exert a limited influence on Taiwan** and on Taiwanese people. Apart from the radio, (that can be freely listened to if it is aired close enough to Taiwan) it is impossible for other channels (press, television) to open in Taiwan without the approval of Taiwanese authorities. This is the reason why radio has historically been the preferred mean of diffusion of the Party’s propaganda in Taiwan, being a rather inexpensive tool that is easy to set up.<sup>16</sup>

14. Rush Doshi, “China Steps Up its Information War in Taiwan,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Jan. 2020).

15. “官媒: 解放军可将台湾‘黎巴嫩化’ 逼其修改激进政策” (“Official Media: the PLA Wants to “Lebanize” Taiwan and Force it to Change its Radical Policies”), *Sina* (3 Apr. 2019), <https://archive.vn/miB8V>.

16. On the benefits of the radio, see 许丽华 (Xu Lihua), “海峡两岸广播媒体交流的优势与困境” (“Benefits and Dilemmas from Radio Media Cross-Strait Exchanges”), *新闻爱好者 (Xinwen Aihaozhe)*, 4 (2011), <http://archive.ph/BF1Rf>.

Nowadays, **Chinese television channels such as CCTV or CGTN seem to have a limited potential for influence** because they do not broadcast in Taiwan, and even though Taiwanese inhabitants can access their content online. But this latter option requires active engagement from viewers, unlikely to be taken given the current context of relative distrust toward Chinese narratives and the increased competition for the viewers' attention in the current media landscape.<sup>17</sup>

With the Internet, Chinese **newspapers** can offer web versions of print articles, making sharing or viewing content particularly easy online, regardless of where readers are. **While their content is easy to access, it is not the most attractive to Taiwanese audiences** who enjoy a large variety of national newspapers. Besides, Chinese newspapers are not always available in traditional characters. Taiwanese people can generally read simplified Chinese characters, but most prefer traditional characters, out of convenience or by choice, given the simplified characters' political connotations, as they are immediately linked to the language of the CCP. Hence, Chinese articles with a version in traditional Chinese characters are more likely to be read by Taiwanese audiences than articles solely written in simplified Chinese characters. **As a result, many newspapers have a web version in traditional characters**, for example the Xinhua press agency and the *PLA Daily*.<sup>18</sup> The *People's Daily*, the *China Daily* and the *Guangming Daily* do not appear to offer it. However, almost all offer an English version for their international audiences and some – such as Xinhua and the *People's Daily* – have an entire section dedicated to Taiwanese news.

Radio programs are now also available online. And, **very early on, the main Chinese networks, such as CNR and CRI, set up networks dedicated to Taiwanese audiences**. In 1954, as nationalist and communist forces were still fighting, the CNR had already opened two channels for Taiwanese audiences. The “Chinese Voice”, or CNR-5, now covers cross-strait and Taiwanese news in Mandarin. The “Shenzhou Voice”, or CNR-6, offers cultural programs in Mandarin, Hakka, and Minnan dialects.<sup>19</sup> The latter two dialects are the most widely used languages in Taiwan and in the Chinese province of Fujian, which faces the island from the other side of the strait. **Chinese media often claim that these programs are highly successful in Taiwan:** they recently reported approximately 2 million Taiwanese listeners.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, CRI, which was created in 1949, developed programs in various dialects, including Minnan and Hakka, for people of Chinese descent. Today, the radio station “Chinese Voice in the World” offers programs in these two dialects as well as in languages from Guangzhou, Chaozhou, and Wenzhou.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the two radio programs dedicated to Taiwan, the CNR set up a **web portal, HelloTaiwan** – or *Nihao Taiwan* in 2000 to **reach a younger audience**. The stated objective is to promote China-Taiwan relations and to allow people of Chinese

17. The current context is indeed characterized by an increase of negative opinions about the PRC and by an increasingly defined Taiwanese identity. See Voir Kat Devlin, Christine Huang, “In Taiwan, Views of Mainland China Mostly Negative,” Pew Research Center (12 May 2020); Chung Li-hua and Jake Chung, “Most Taiwanese Feel that China is Unfriendly: Poll,” *Taipei Times* (28 Mar. 2020); Keoni Everington, “Record 83% of People in Taiwan Identify as Taiwanese Amid Wuhan Virus Outbreak,” *Taiwan News* (24 Feb. 2020).

18. For Xinhua's edition in traditional characters, see <http://archive.vn/ymnbx>; for the *PLA Daily*, see <http://archive.vn/T1Fuc>.

19. For the CNR-6 program page, see CNR-6, “Shenzhou Voice,” see <http://archive.vn/e0nFN>; for CNR-5 program, “Chinese Voice,” see <http://archive.vn/99QBF>.

20. “中央电台对台广播推出中华之声神州之声 (‘Chinese State Radio Launches the ‘Chinese Voice’ and ‘Shenzhou Voice’ for Taiwan),” *Sina* (21 Jan. 2004), <http://archive.vn/tRIWs>.

21. “世界华声” (‘Chinese Voice in the World’), CRI, <http://archive.vn/1ecuC>.

descent to “better understand” China. Chinese sources say that the website is visited around 12 million times each day, which would make *HelloTaiwan* one of the main platforms for Chinese propaganda in Taiwan. **This platform is part of the nexus of informational operations within which we found units of the PLA’s Base 311, such as the China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC) and Voices of the Strait (VTS).**<sup>22</sup> In fact, Zhang Xida, a HelloTaiwan and CNR journalist, was found spreading false information on YouTube and Facebook through videos in which he pretended to be Taiwanese (→ p. 467).

Finally, **publications from major publishing companies in China** such as the ones tied to Beijing University (北京大学出版社), East China Normal University (华东师范大学出版社), the Red Flag University (红旗出版社) or the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences Press (社会科学文献出版社) **can be accessed from Taiwan**, at least on the main book vendors’ websites such as Bokelai (博客来).<sup>23</sup> Books do not allow reacting on breaking news as easily as newspapers, radio, and television can. But they can help shape the long-term intellectual landscape. Many Chinese initiatives thus **promote cross-strait relationships in the publishing sector**, which is considered as playing an important role in the pursuit of the “cultural fusion” between Taiwan and China.<sup>24</sup> The goal reflects **Beijing’s ambition to influence or even control narratives and ideas in the Taiwanese intellectual world**. An organization subordinate to the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO → p. 84), the Jiuzhou Center for Cultural Communication (九州文化传播中心), organized a cross-strait forum for the publishing industry in 2018, together with the Fujian Academy for Social Sciences, to celebrate thirty years of cooperation in the sector.<sup>25</sup>

In Taiwan, structures such as the Tonsan (唐山出版社) and Renjan (人間出版社) publishing companies, the *Observer* (觀察) and *Yuanwang* (遠望) journals, or *The Commercial Press Taiwan* (臺灣商務印書館) have already participated in this type of cross-strait forums; some of their leaders pleaded for a better diffusion of Chinese books in Taiwan during these events.<sup>26</sup> Some actions are even instigated by Taiwanese people, such as the forum organized by the dean of the private Nanhua University in Taiwan (南华大学),<sup>27</sup> which has convened every year since 2005 around themes such as the construction of China’s soft power, cultural fusion, or the impact of digitalization on the publishing sector.<sup>28</sup>

**While conventional media are not the most efficient in decisively influencing the Taiwanese audience nowadays, they still play an important role in relaying the official Chinese narrative.** Incidentally, the more a narrative is repeated, the more

22. These actors organised events together several times. See for example “中华文化之旅’活动 人员河南新郑拜谒黄帝” (“Participants to the ‘Chinese Cultural trip’ Went to Pay Homage to the Yellow Emperor in Xinzheng, Henan province”), 华夏经纬网 (*Huaxia jingwei*) (2 Jun. 2010), <http://archive.ph/HiaJu>.

23. <https://www.books.com.tw>.

24. “厦门举办两岸出版与人文智库论坛” (“The Cross-Strait Forum of Social Science Publishing Companies and Think Tanks was Held in Xiamen”), *Xinhua* (30 Oct. 2019), <http://archive.vn/98Xlc>.

25. “2018两岸出版论坛在厦门开幕” (“The 2018 Cross-Strait Forum Started in Xiamen”), *China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification* (2 Nov. 2018), <http://archive.vn/XgLck>.

26. “厦门举办两岸出版与人文智库论坛” (“Cross-Strait Forum”).

27. “The Origin and Development of the Forum,” 海峡两岸华文出版社与文化创意学术论坛 (*Academic Forum on Chinese Publishing and Cultural Creativity held by both sides of Taiwan and Mainland China*) (14 Jul. 2013), <https://archive.ph/mgybQ>.

28. “The Main Data of Each Forum,” 海峡两岸华文出版社与文化创意学术论坛 (*Academic Forum on Chinese Publishing and Cultural Creativity Held by Both Sides of Taiwan and Mainland China*) (5 Sept. 2014), <http://archive.vn/w98DR>.



familiar it becomes, and the more likely is it that its audience will adhere to it. **Chinese media thus regularly repeats narratives reinforcing the idea that “reunification” with Taiwan is unavoidable and legitimate,<sup>29</sup> criticizing official Taiwanese positions and the support Taiwan may receive from the United States,<sup>30</sup> and also narratives that are part of a “psychological warfare” aimed to discredit the Taiwanese armed forces’ ability to defend themselves against the PLA, hence fostering fear among the public.<sup>31</sup> The *Global Times*, for example, frequently contributes to psychological warfare operations by maintaining a constant military tension, as if a Chinese invasion was imminent, and by systematically exaggerating the reach of ongoing military exercises (→ p. 478).<sup>32</sup>**

Chinese media can also **relay manipulated information intended for Taiwanese audiences**. This was the case with an operation that tried to make people believe that President Tsai Ing-wen had lied about receiving her PhD from the London School of Economics (→ p. 464),<sup>33</sup> or another operation that pushed people to believe that some Taiwanese tourists that had been stuck in Japan during typhoon Jebi were evacuated with a Chinese embassy bus, but only after accepting to identify as Chinese<sup>34</sup> (→ p. 456).

To make up for the weaknesses of traditional “general” Chinese media and to increase their influence capabilities in Taiwan, China also put together **media outlets specifically dedicated to a Taiwanese audience**.

## B. The creation of dedicated outlets

In Part II, we briefly introduced three media dedicated to Taiwan, all of them Base 311 offshoots: VTS, CHBC, and Haifeng. In this case study of Taiwan, we will further study how they work and what practical actions they carry out against the island.

### 1. The Voice of the Strait (VTS)

**VTS is a front organization for a unit of the PLA Base 311 (→ p. 101)**. Before its creation, other radios from Shanghai, Huadong, or Fujian had developed programs in Mandarin, as well as in the Minnan and Hakka dialects, for Taiwanese audiences. Eleven Chinese radios focused on communication with Taiwan in 2011, VTS and CHBC included. In fact, **radio is seen as an essential tool in the United Front’s**

29. “Reunification Only Acceptable Option for Taiwan Question: Experts,” *Global Times* (21 Dec. 2019), <http://archive.vn/faBcH>.

30. Zhou Wenxing, “Stronger Ties with Washington Won’t Buy Time for Taiwan,” *Global Times* (20 July. 2020), <http://archive.vn/kT3ZA>.

31. Liu Xuanzun, “Taiwan’s Counter-Landing Drill with PLA in Mind a ‘Naïve, Meaningless Show,’” *Global Times* (16 Jul. 2020), <http://archive.vn/Pvvkf>.

32. “解放军空军放出一张图，台湾岛内炸锅” (“Air Forces Publish a Photo, Taiwan Panics”), *Huanqiu* (19 Dec. 2016), <http://archive.vn/eA06w>.

33. Li Ping and Fan Lingzhi, “British Universities Under Fire for Politicizing Honorary Degrees,” *Global Times* (7 Nov. 2019), <http://archive.vn/gHjJk>; 李名 (Li Ming), “疑点重重! 论文被发现缺页错字, 蔡英文博士学位再被爆造假” (“Suspicious! Missing Pages in Tsai Ing-wen’s Thesis, Her PhD under Scrutiny Again”), 环球网 (*Huanqiu*) (30 Aug. 2019), <http://archive.vn/CapFU>.

34. Keoni Everington, “Witnesses Refute Report Stranded Taiwanese in Japan Had to Identify Themselves as Chinese,” *Taiwan News*, (7 Sept. 2018).

strategy to ensure “Taiwan’s liberation<sup>35</sup>” because it has many advantages: contrary to newspapers and TV, it can be freely broadcast from China to Taiwan, requires little financial resources and staff and it can interact with listeners who can participate.<sup>36</sup> Besides, the human voice, as opposed to the neutrality that comes with a written piece, is seen as being more persuasive. Hence the value in **airing recorded messages of support such as “Strength to Wuhan!” or celebrating the solidarity between the two shores during the Covid-19 pandemic using people with a Taiwanese accent. These help persuade listeners that China was supported by the Taiwanese population.**<sup>37</sup>

Radio is a media that also draws its strength from its capacity to respond quickly to an event. Since **audiences are always more marked by the first version of events that they hear** than by subsequent versions – a cognitive psychology bias known as anchoring – VTS’ former director Liu Linlan (柳林岚) claimed that politically-aimed radios such as VTS are playing a crucial part in **quickly reacting to impose the adequate version of facts first**, particularly on topics pertaining to the cross-strait relationship.<sup>38</sup> In 2005, she wrote that VTS’ mission was to improve knowledge and understanding of reforms and modernization in China and various types of exchanges between the two sides of the strait, to contribute to reinforcing the feeling of fraternity between populations and the feeling of belonging to the Chinese Nation, but also to promote Chinese culture and values.<sup>39</sup>

*a. Using “voice carriers” to reach a wider audience*

It seems that VTS launched an offensive to penetrate the Taiwanese media landscape after its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations. Since the beginning of the 2010s, VTS has indeed sought to **build a network of collaborators in some Taiwanese media to use them as “voice carriers”** (借台唱).<sup>40</sup> By letting its stories be aired to already-established audiences, VTS is widening the reach of its messages in an increasingly competitive media landscape.<sup>41</sup> For example, VTS signed a cooperation agreement with Libra Radio (非凡音联播网) in 2008 that provided for shared programs, the transmission of Libra Radio’s audience measurements to VTS, and for the broadcasting of VTS’ news reports on Libra Radio for forty minutes every day.<sup>42</sup> Libra Radio broadcast on the Matsu Islands, north of Taiwan, as well as on the coastal cities of Fujian.<sup>43</sup> Hence, its audience is both Taiwanese and Chinese. **VTS also targets Chinese who maintain close ties with Taiwan** because, if they are convinced by the content of the shows, they can become efficient relays sharing these

35. 许丽华 (Xu Lihua), “海峡两岸广播媒体交流的优势与困境” (“Advantages and Dilemmas of Cross-Strait Radio Exchanges”), *新闻爱好者 (Xinwen Aihaozhe)*, 4 (2011), <http://archive.ph/BF1Rf>.

36. Ibid.

37. “666新闻特快” (“News”), 海峡之声广播电台 (*Voice of the Strait*) (21 Mar. 2020), 7am Show (Beijing time), 55 minutes.

38. 柳林岚 (Liu Linlan), 郭红斌 (Guo Hongbin), and 刘洪涛 (Liu Hongtao), “按照大众传媒规律办好对台广播” (“Communicate Well Toward Taiwan by Following Mass Communication Rules”), *军事记者 (Military Correspondent)*, 10 (2005), <http://archive.ph/rOgC6>.

39. Ibid.

40. 陈国团 (Chen Guotuan) and 程岚 (Cheng Lan), “关于如何做好对台文化节目的思考” (“Thoughts on the Best Way to Carry Out Cultural Programs in Taiwan”), *Voice of the Strait*, (21 Dec. 2011), <http://archive.ph/Di0tD>.

41. 钟志刚 (Zhong Zhigang), “通过媒体融合加强对台舆论引导” (“Reinforce the Orientation of Taiwanese Public Opinion by Media Integration”), *军事记者 (Military Correspondent)* (2014), <http://archive.ph/RKt9T>.

42. “海峡之声电台与台湾非凡音联播网签新闻合作协议” (“Voice of the Strait and Libra Radio Sign a Partnership Agreement”), 中央政府门户网站 (PRC Central Government) (27 Jun. 2008), <http://archive.ph/8BwQj>.

43. “电台介绍” (“Radio Presentation”), 非凡音广播电台 (*Libra Radio*), <http://archive.vn/727h9>.

ideas with Taiwanese people.<sup>44</sup> In addition to local radios, **VTS has also partnered with local newspapers.** According to its former director, Zhong Zhigang (钟志刚), VTS regularly cooperates with several Taiwanese publications such as *Want Daily*, (旺報), the *Taiwan Daobao* (臺灣導報), or the *Liberty Times* (自由時報) in the hopes of increasing its influence in Taiwan.<sup>45</sup>

*b. Using local dialects for a rapprochement*

**The Minnan and Hakka dialects are spoken on both sides of the strait and are used to bring the continent and the island closer together.** Taiwanese people speak mandarin – calling it *guoyu* (國語) rather than *putonghua* (普通话) as Chinese do – but more than 70% of the population speaks Minnan and around 15% belong to the Hakka ethnic group. **As such, collaborating with Taiwanese radio broadcasting in Minnan or Hakka was identified as an efficient tool to penetrate the Taiwanese society.**<sup>46</sup> In 2009, VTS partnered with six Taiwanese radios broadcasting in Hakka to create a group of channels operating in Taiwan's region.<sup>47</sup> According to former VTS director Zhang Zhigang, this action is considered to have marked the actual entry of continental China into the Taiwanese radio environment.<sup>48</sup> VTS aired its first show, co-hosted with a Taiwanese radio station, Formosa Hakka Radio Station (寶島客家廣播電台), in May 2009.<sup>49</sup> VTS joined the Hakka Radio Cooperation network (客属电台协作网) created by the China Radio and Television Association (CRTA, 中国广播电视协会)<sup>50</sup> in 2012. Similarly, in the Minnan dialect, VTS joined the Broadcast Cooperative Network for the Minnan Dialect (闽南话广播协作网), also created by the CRTA, in 2010. The five remaining members of this network are the Taiwan Broadcasting Center of the China National Radio (中央人民广播电台对台湾广播中心), the Southeast Broadcasting Corporation (东南广播公司), the Minnan Voice Broadcasting of the Xiamen Media Group station (厦门广播电视集团闽南之声广播), the Citong Voice Broadcasting of the Quanzhou Radio station (泉州人民广播电台刺桐之声广播) and the Zhangzhou Radio Station (漳州人民广播电台).<sup>51</sup>

*c. Diversifying communication supports*

Originally, VTS was a traditional organ of propaganda, but after more than 60 years, the old radio station had to evolve to keep pace with new technologies and to adapt to the needs of the new generations to maintain an influence. One of the major components of this strategy was to **diversify its supports of communication.** In 2000, VTS set up a **website** at about the same time HelloTaiwan was created (你好台灣), and both hoped to target younger audiences. The website allowed VTS to adopt different sup-

44. 柳林岚 (Liu Linlan), 郭红斌 (Guo Hongbin), and 刘洪涛 (Liu Hongtao), “按照大众传媒规律办好对台广播” (“Communicate Well Toward Taiwan by Following Mass Communication Rules”).

45. Zhigang, “Reinforce orientation.”

46. “闽南话广播协作网成立” (“Creation of a Cooperation Network of Radios Offering Programs in Minnan”), 中央人民广播电台 (China National Radio) (19 Sept. 2010), <http://archive.ph/vjQnv>.

47. Name of the Network in Chinese: 海峡之声广播电台台湾地区调频联播网.

48. Zhigang, “Renforcer l'orientation.”

49. 陈国团 (Chen Guotuan) and 程岚 (Cheng Lan), “关于如何做好对台文化节目的思考” (“Thoughts on the Best Way to Carry Out Cultural Programs in Taiwan”), *Voice of the Strait* (21 Dec. 2011), <http://archive.ph/Di0tD>.

50. “客属电台协作网” (“Hakka Radio Cooperation Network”), 你好台湾 (Hello Taiwan), <http://archive.ph/BETke>.

51. Gai Shuqin, “Taiwan Radio Stations to Promote Minnan Dialect Broadcasting,” *China Daily*, 6 November 2012, <http://archive.ph/ZQV2Z>.

ports: **articles, podcasts, and videos** of variable length, in order to target and adapt its content to different audiences. In August 2013, VTS even published **the first online video streaming channel aimed at Taiwan**: the Huaxia Jingdian (華夏經典網絡電台).<sup>52</sup> In 2015, two years after former VTS director Liu Linlan published an article on the important opportunities offered by **WeChat**<sup>53</sup> as a powerful application for messaging, information sharing and services, VTS created an account on the platform.<sup>54</sup> The **“New Media”** (新媒体) – WeChat, Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Plurk,<sup>55</sup> attracted a lot of attention, as evidenced by the high number of articles from VTS affiliates and others on the topic. They are a significant challenge because they intensify competition for the public’s attention but also an opportunity because they **are additional tools to penetrate and manipulate the Taiwanese “public opinion environment.”**<sup>56</sup> In his 2013 speech at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work (全國宣傳思想工作會議), Xi Jinping claimed that the Internet had become the main fighting ground of the war on public opinions and that victory there was crucial.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, in line with the secretary general of the Party, VTS has been striving to win the war on public opinions.

#### *d. Turning VTS into a mass media*

If the diversification of the means of communication was necessary, so was the evolution of the content of the messages. Mid-2000s, executives thought that VTS was too specialized and that it needed to become a **mainstream or “mass” media**.<sup>58</sup> This was considered to be the most efficient way to spread propaganda in Taiwan. Answering the question: “how to lower [the target audience’s] mistrust and hostility?” former director Lui Linlan wrote in 2005 that “there is only one way to do that. Communication toward Taiwan has to be conducted through mass media. Propaganda needs to be integrated in a real radio [programming]. **Circulating propaganda must be implemented in a subtle fashion, without leaving traces. Only then will [the target audience] let its guard down, forget you are United Front, be willing to listen to your programs, and they will ultimately trust the broadcast content.**”<sup>59</sup> In other words, by becoming a mass media, VTS aims to drown its propaganda in a flow of information, sneaking it to the audience.

52. “大陆首家对台网络电台开播 传承中华文化” (“The First Video Streaming Channel from China to Taiwan is Now Online”) *Sina* (26 Aug. 2013), <http://archive.vn/lh8kH>. The list of aired programs in 2016 is available here: “华夏经典网络电台节目时间表” (“Schedule of Shows on the Huaxia Jingdian Channels”), *Voice of the Strait*, <http://archive.vn/gtme8>.

53. 柳林嵐 (Liu Linlan), “微信, 一个强大的传播新平台” (“WeChat, a Powerful Dissemination Platform WeChat”), *声屏世界 (Voice and Screen World)*, 10 (2013), <http://archive.ph/i17dq>.

54. “海峡之声广播电台官方微博正式上线了” (“Voice of the Strait Officially Opens a WeChat Account”), *Voice of the Strait* (6 Mar. 2015), <http://archive.ph/Pnt5z>.

55. Zhigang, “Reinforce the Orientation.” 钟志刚 (Zhong Zhigang) and 姜红星 (Jiang Hongxing), “运用新媒体拓展对台广播舆论引导空间初探” (“Preliminary Study of the Use of New Medias to Widen the Space to Direct the Public Opinion of Media Communicating Toward Taiwan”), *中国广播 (China Broadcasts)*, 10 (2014), <http://archive.ph/7krUU>.

56. Zhong, “Reinforce orientation.”

57. “互联网已经成为舆论斗争的主战场”, in “网传习近平8•19讲话全文: 言论方面要敢抓敢管敢于亮剑” (“Xi Jinping’s Full Speech, 19 August”) *China Digital Times* (4 Nov. 2013), <http://archive.ph/cjZU1>.

58. 柳林嵐 (Liu Linlan), 郭红斌 (Guo Hongbin), and 刘洪涛 (Liu Hongtao), “按照大众传媒规律办好对台广播” (“Well Communicate Toward Taiwan by Following the Rules of Mass Communication”), *军事记者 (Military Correspondent)*, 10 (2005), <http://archive.ph/rOgC6>.

59. *Ibid.*



*e. Adapting its message to the target audience*

Likewise, VTS executives were aware of the need to use the target audience's language in order to fulfill their goals. This meant adapting the content to local specificities, for example by speaking the audience's specific dialect, but also adapting the message to different age groups, with a style that "spoke" to young people. On the matter of military-related propaganda toward Taiwan (对台军事宣传), its former director Zhong Zhigang explained that a **communication strategy tailored to each identified audience had to be adopted**. He highlighted three such categories: **ordinary Taiwanese soldiers, pro-independence forces, and the Taiwanese population**. According to Zhong, a Taiwanese soldier's only concern was "not knowing for whom he is fighting" (不知为谁作战) and, for that reason, he described them as having only "vague" patriotic aspirations (国家民族精神模糊). As a result, the PLA's communication strategy needed to guide them positively, and to lead them toward the "truth." However, he noted that a harsher tone needed to be used against pro-independence Taiwanese forces. The PLA's commitment and willingness to fight had to be made blatant and dissuasive narratives chosen. Finally, the civil population had to be told in a reassuring and educational tone that the PLA's mission was only to protect its fellow citizens.<sup>60</sup> Here, Zhong relied on basic principles of psychological warfare, and made them more prominent in public opinion warfare.

*f. Quickly reacting*

Former VTS directors Liu Linlan and Zhong Zhigang have insisted on the importance of **reacting quickly and efficiently** to impose a specific version of events and frame the debate, and for the "PLA's good image to penetrate the head of the population in Taiwan."<sup>61</sup> Given that VTS gives a lot of importance to military and defense-related issues – several of its programs are actually dedicated to them<sup>62</sup> – Zhong pointed to a few examples of news that needed to be followed and well-covered, such as the PLA's peacekeeping operations abroad, the protection of China's sovereignty in the South China Sea, joint Sino-Russian military exercises, and news on flagship technologies such as the J-20 fighter aircraft or the Liaoning aircraft carrier. However, this did not only apply to military issues. When a columnist for the *Taiwan Daobao* published an op-ed titled "[the] Chinese dream and the Taiwanese dream of independence are both just dreams,"<sup>63</sup> VTS responded in the same breath with articles such as "[the] Chinese dream is the highest common denominator between both sides of the Strait – a discussion with M. Mo Shangsang"<sup>64</sup> and "[how] could one compare the Taiwanese dream of independence with the Chinese dream"<sup>65</sup>; both were published on its own website and on *Taiwan Daobao*.<sup>66</sup> We were unable to find the columnists' publication, but VTS op-eds were still online years later.

60. 钟志刚 (Zhong Zhigang), "强军目标下对台军事宣传的新探索" ("Military Affairs Propaganda Toward Taiwan as Part of Building a Strong Army"), 军事记者 (*Military Correspondent*), 11 (2013), <http://archive.ph/F6mW8>. 61. In Chinese: "让我军良好形象深入台湾民众心中."

62. Zhong says that six VTS programs are dedicated to military matters. Zhigang, "Military Propaganda."

63. The article by 陌上桑 (Mo Shangsang), "中国梦 台独梦 都是梦" ("Both the Chinese Dream and the Taiwanese Independence Dreams are Just Dreams"), does not seem to be on *Taiwan Daobao*. It apparently keep none of Mo's articles from before 2017: <https://Taiwanreports.com/?s=%E9%99%8C%E4%B8%8A%E6%A1%91>.

64. "中国梦是海峡两岸最大公约数——与陌上桑先生商榷" ("The Chinese Dream is the Highest Common Denominator between Both Sides of the Strait – Discussion with M. Mo Shangsang"), *Voice of the Strait* (25 Jun. 2013), <http://archive.ph/UV0v1>.

65. "“台独梦”如何能与” 中国梦 “相提并论” ("How Could One Compare the Taiwanese Independence Dream with the Chinese Dream"), *Voice of the Strait* (25 Jun. 2013), <http://archive.ph/5FlHj>.

66. Zhigang, "Reinforce orientation."

## 2. The China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (CHBC)

CHBC is a front organization for a unit of the PLA Base 311 (→ p. 103) and it is particularly active in the organization of events promoting the Chinese culture and cross-strait relations (more prominently than on VTS).

### a. *The organization of events promoting the Chinese culture*

CHBC partnered with VTS and the Chinese National Radio (CNR) in 2009 to celebrate the **Beijing–Hangzhou Grand Canal** (京杭大运河), which was described as a precious legacy from centuries of imperial dynasties, and as still contributing to the economic development of the regions it connects.<sup>67</sup> In 2013, CHBC partnered with the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (中国航天科技集团公司), the Fujian Provincial Development and Reform Commission (福建省发改委) and the Fujian Association for Science and Technology (福建省科协) to organize a series of **events on the “space dream”- (航天梦)**; according to that narrative, the “dream” could only be achieved if it was taken up by Chinese people on both sides of the Strait.<sup>68</sup> In a very different field, CHBC has organized **cultural competitions**, such as the ocean-themed new songs contest for students on both sides of the strait, which took place in Fuzhou in 2013.<sup>69</sup>

CHBC also **sponsors events that contribute to the promotion of China**, even if it does not directly organize them. In 2019, CHBC was among the seven sponsors of the third edition of the Chinese classical poetry recitation competition organized by Aiyinsitan FM Radio (爱音斯坦FM) on both sides of the strait, Hong Kong, and Macao (海峡两岸暨香港澳门地区中华经典诗文诵读大赛).<sup>70</sup> In 2012, CHBC sent about forty of its journalists to interview a hundred China-based Taiwanese entrepreneurs to collect their stories as part of an initiative of the China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture (中华文化发展促进会). Testimonies were gathered during a five-month fieldwork and presented during the closing ceremony in Wenzhou. Wang Shu, CHBC’s director at the time, and a member of the military and Base 311 commander, said this action, called “Chinese Cultural Development Strategies – Four Cultural Salons Across the Taiwan Strait” (大陆台商财富故事), was an opportunity to show the contribution of Taiwanese people to the economic development of the cities they settled in and to reveal the “real” family links between them and the local population.<sup>71</sup>

The flagship event to which CHBC takes part is the **Forum for the Development of the Chinese Culture** (中华文化发展论坛). This forum aims to strengthen ties between China and Taiwan and to promote the Chinese culture, in other words to increase China’s soft power. This forum, which was called “Strategy for the Development

67. 王宗磊 (Wang Zonglei), 杨胜云 (Yang Shengyun), and 宋印伟 (Song Yinwei), “海峡之声广播电台” 大运河千里行 “媒体活动解读” (“Presentation of the Media Initiative ‘Travel Along the Big Canal,’ the Voice of the Strait”), *People’s Daily* (16 Jan. 2010), <http://archive.vn/eNERq>.

68. “航天科技文化海峡两岸系列交流活动正式启动” (“Official Launch of Cross-Strait Exchanges for Culture and Social Sciences”), *Taiwan.cn* (19 Jun. 2013), <http://archive.vn/4TxBL>.

69. “美丽海洋我的家”两岸(大学生)原创歌曲大赛启动” (“Launch of the Contest of New Songs for Students on Both Sides of the Strait”), 中国新闻网 (*China News*) (6 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.vn/iWw06>.

70. “第三届海峡两岸暨香港、澳门地区 中华经典诗文诵读大赛’年度总决赛选手招募” (“List of Finalists in the Third Edition of the Classical Poetry Contest for Both Sides of the Strait Hong Kong and Macao”), 大风号 (*Feng Media*) (7 Nov. 2019), <http://archive.vn/2ebmU>.

71. “大陆台商财富故事’历时5月温州收官” (“Closing Ceremony in Wenzhou for the ‘Success Stories for Taiwanese Entrepreneurs in Mainland China’”), 台海网 (*Taihainet*) (22 Dec. 2012), <http://archive.vn/2ebmU>.

of Chinese Culture – Cultural Salon for Both Sides of the Strait” (中华文化发展方略—两岸四地文化沙龙) during its first three editions, was launched by the China Academy of Culture (中国文化院) – which is owned by the CEFC China Energy Co. Ltd. (→ p. 117) – and the CAPCC (→ p. 124).<sup>72</sup> CHBC participated in the organization of its second edition in 2014,<sup>73</sup> which allowed the forum to gain in depth and influence. The seventh edition took place in Beijing in August 2019 and gathered 180 experts, journalists, and young people from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, compared to only 30 people during the first edition.



Seventh edition of the Forum on the development of Chinese Culture, Digital Culture and Media Communication, China – Beijing, August 2019. Organizers: China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation, Internet Society of China (<http://www.chbcnet.com/web/remit/special/zhwhfzlt2019/index.shtml>).

Each edition has a specific theme. The 2019 edition, co-organized with the Internet Society of China, focused on “Internet culture and media communication” (网络文化与媒体传播). Executive Director Chen Guojun (陈国军), who is also a member of the military, spoke for CHBC at the event and called for the media to guide the population on both sides of the Strait in **recognizing China’s “real history” and rejecting independence movements**; he reminded his audience that modern dissemination channels created “historic opportunity” (历史机遇) to “[tell] China’s history correctly” and “to correctly recount the story of the relations between China and Taiwan” (讲好中国故事，讲好两岸故事).<sup>74</sup> The fifth edition, taking place in 2017 in Fuzhou, and named “One only Chinese family on both sides of the Strait” (两岸族韵·中华一家) set for itself to explore the cultural legacies of ethnic minorities in China and Taiwan in order to **intensify cultural exchanges between ethnic groups on both sides of the Strait** and create collaboration opportunities.<sup>75</sup> Zhu Xi (朱瓿), the secretary general of the Foundation for the Development of the Chinese Nation (中华民族发展基金会), claimed that the ruling DPP had launched an anti-Chinese campaign since he took power in 2016, and that it and was embracing indigenous population with the sole goal

72. “首届”中华文化发展方略——两岸四地文化沙龙“形成共识” (“First Edition of Chinese Cultural Development Strategies – Four Cultural Salons Across the Taiwan Strait”), 网易 (Wang yi) (7 Nov. 2013), <http://archive.vn/Pyg3X>.

73. “第二届”两岸四地文化沙龙“将于福州召开” (“Second Edition of the Cultural Exhibition of of Both Shore is Inaugurated in Fuzhou”), *Tai bainet* (13 Oct. 2014), <http://archive.vn/cLMUt>.

74. “聚焦‘网络文化和媒体传播’第七届中华文化发展论坛在京举办” (“The Seventh Forum on the Development of Chinese Culture was Held in Beijing”), 观察 (*Guan cha*) (23 Aug. 2019), <http://archive.fo/PVUDK>.

75. “第五届‘中华文化发展论坛’研讨两岸少数民族文化渊源与传承” (“The Fifth Edition of the Forum for the Development of Chinese Culture Discusses the Origins and Cultural Heritage of Ethnic Minority on Both Shores”), *Xinbuanet* (29 Dec. 2017), <http://archive.vn/oR0xO>.

of winning over their votes and advancing their pro-independence cause.<sup>76</sup> This forum thus contributed to **reinforcing ties between all ethnic groups and the “big Chinese family”** and to press for the big “Chinese dream” according to Zhao Yixian (赵一先), deputy director of the KMT’s Working Commission on Ethnic Minorities (中国国民党少数民族工作委员会).<sup>77</sup>

The fourth and sixth editions of the forum were held in Xiamen and focused on “the legacy of the Chinese culture and the responsibility of the contemporary youth” (中华文化遗产与当代青年担当) and on “Cultural innovation and the responsibility of the youth” (文化创新与青年担当) respectively.

*b. The youth: A key target group*

**The youth is a key target group because it embodies the future of cross-strait relations.** Some of CHBC’s shows are incidentally explicitly conceived for young audiences, as with “Liang’an qingnianhui” (两岸青年汇). CHBC president Qui Yu, otherwise known as General-Major Yue Lei, pointed out in a 2017 speech that the youth on both sides of the Strait had a role to play in the “protection of Chinese culture.”<sup>78</sup> CHBC regularly organizes actions specifically dedicated to young Taiwanese people, with the goal of making them like Chinese culture, to instill a sense of pride in them as part of the same Chinese nation, and ultimately to strengthen a sense of belonging.

In 2018, for example, and together with the Taiwan Affairs Office of the PRC’s State Council, CHBC organized an **exchange program for 50 Taiwanese students and 10 Chinese students to show them opportunities in the academic and business sectors** in several Chinese mainland towns.<sup>79</sup> CHBC had previously co-organized an **Exchange Forum for Taiwanese students wishing to study or work in China** (台生大陆求学就业交流汇) in 2015.<sup>80</sup> According to its president, Qiu Yu, this forum aimed to inform young Taiwanese people about opportunities in China, to offer them support and to create a communication platform between the two sides of the Strait. Similarly, CHBC invited around twenty Taiwanese students to discover Qinghai in July 2016, in the hopes of fostering exchanges between that province and Taiwan. An executive from the Qinghai–Tibet railway company (青藏铁路公司) told them about the company’s history and its weight on the socio-economic development of these two huge provinces located in Western China.<sup>81</sup> These actions targeting the youth show that **Chinese are betting on the long-term: to shape the youth’s opinions** in such a way that it favors Taiwan’s reunification with China, which would win back the island without using military might.

76. “中评现场: 第五届中华文化发展论坛在榕开幕” (“The Fifth Edition of the Forum for the Development of Chinese Culture Has Been Launched”), *China Review News Agency* (29 Dec. 2017), <http://archive.vn/dkQV8>.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Video published on CHBC’s website by *Miaopai* (秒拍) (30 Dec. 2017), <http://n.miaopai.com/media/bBnT7KgmDqrgy23PZ5n0FW1CvBfxLzdV>.

79. 王乾宏 (Wang Ganhong), “‘华广青年汇·双创趴趴走’ 两岸青年交流周圆满收官” (“Closure of the Week for Cross-Strait Exchanges for the Youth”), *中华时报 (Chuang Hua Times)* (20 Aug. 2018), <http://archive.md/BbKYV>.

80. “海峡两岸大学生重走青藏铁路活动在青海启动” (“Launch of the Initiative ‘Students from both Shores Travel the Qinghai-Tibet Railway’”), *中国台湾网 (Taiwan.cn)* (4 Jul. 2016), <http://archive.vn/fPe4J>.

81. “海峡两岸大学生重走青藏铁路活动在青海启动” (“Launch of the initiative ‘Students from both Shores Travel the Qinghai-Tibet Railway’”).



*c. One galaxy*

The **partners of the events organized by CHBC usually belong to the same galaxy**: without surprise, there are VTS and the Haifeng publishing company, the other two organizations directly affiliated to Base 311, but also the media partners such as the *Want Daily*, the Chinese National Radio, the China Review News Agency or the *HelloTaiwan* web platform. **Most of these events are held under the aegis of the Taiwan Affairs Office** or of **civilian organizations** promoting cross-strait relations, including the China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture (CAPCC, 中华文化发展促进会), the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots (中华全国台湾同胞联谊会) or also the Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations (两岸关系和平发展协同创新中心). **The CAPCC was created in 2001 and it is now seen as the PLA's main platform for informal exchanges with Taiwan.** It is probably run by the former General Political Department's Liaison Office of the CMC. In fact, two general officers in that bureau held senior positions in the CAPCC (→ p. 124).<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots was created in 1981 and acts as a “bridge and link” between Taiwanese people, the CCP, and the Chinese government.<sup>83</sup> The Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations is another organization: created at the initiative of Xiamen University in 2013, the center brings together the University of Fudan, Fujian Normal University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to work toward a peaceful reunification with Taiwan.<sup>84</sup>



*d. A Collaboration with local media*

Not unlike VTS, CHBC has tried to **penetrate the Taiwanese media landscape by cooperating with local media**. One of its most successful collaborations was set up with Happy Radio (快樂聯播網). In October 2010, they partnered for the diffusion of a show

82. Mark Stokes and Russel Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” Project 2049 Institute (2013), 21. The CAPCC website was still accessible in July 2019 [http://www.chinaapc.org/index\\_utf8.php](http://www.chinaapc.org/index_utf8.php). It should not be mistaken with the Chinese Cultural Promotion Society (中华文化促进会).

83. “全国台联简介” (“Federation Presentation”), 中华全国台湾同胞联谊会 (All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots) (1 Jan. 2018), <http://archive.vn/GHG3L>.

84. “中心简介” (“Center’s Presentation”), Collaborative Innovation Center for Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relations, <http://archive.vn/qvQGQ>. “两岸关系和平发展协同创新中心在厦门揭牌” (“Center for Collaboration and Innovation for the Peaceful Development of Cross-Strait Relationships in Xiamen”), 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 (Central government of People’s Republic of China) (25 Mar. 2013), <http://archive.vn/lixDn>.

co-hosted by a Chinese CHBC anchor and a Taiwanese Happy Radio anchor. The show was called Huaguang Kuaile Easy Go (华广快乐EZGO) – Huaguang referring to CBHC and Kuaile to Happy Radio. The hour was divided between a serious part dedicated to exchanging views on issues affecting both sides of the Strait, and a lighter part dealing with Chinese culture, travel stories, or food. Exchanging views in such manner was meant to **show that, although there are disagreements between the two sides of the Strait, it was still possible to understand each other and to share a common history and culture.**<sup>85</sup> CHBC also wanted to be able to share the Chinese narrative to the audience of its Taiwanese collaborator. Happy Radio is indeed the second largest radio network in Taiwan, after UFO Radio (飛碟聯播網). The show was first aired on three of Happy Radio's stations before being extended to the seven channels, covering the whole Taiwanese territory.<sup>86</sup> This partnership was the result of a rapprochement initiated by CBHC before 2010: CHBC had invited Happy Radio's executive director to events in China, later to visit CHBC's headquarters and to collaborate on some occasional projects. CHBC now seeks to increase its visibility in Taiwan, but also to increase China's visibility (增进对大陆的理解认知) and reduce anti-China opposition (消除对大陆的对抗) there.<sup>87</sup>

### 3. Haifeng

**Haifeng is the publishing company of the PLA Base 311** (→ p. 106). According to the description of its activities on the Tianyancha trade database, Haifeng publishes **propaganda writing and illustrated books for Taiwan.**<sup>88</sup> The topics vary: politics, economy, history, law, culture, literature, arts. For instance, in 2011, the Haifeng publishing house won the second edition of the publishing award the Chinese government awards every three years (第二届中国出版政府奖), for its book *Presentation of the cities in China* (中国城市巡礼).<sup>89</sup> Published in 2009, for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC, the book praised the successes and developments of modern Chinese cities since the economic reform. It was commended for including Taipei, Hong Kong, and Macao, thus taking a “true family photo” of Chinese cities.

Several of Haifeng's books promote national reunification, such as *A Call from the Two Shores: Peaceful Reunification of the Motherland* (海峡两岸的呼唤:和平统一祖国) published in 1999 by Xu Haoran (徐浩然), a former aid to Chiang Ching-kuo and member of the Kuomintang's revolutionary committee in the Jiangxi province.<sup>90</sup> That same year, Lee Teng-hui's *Commentary on the “Two States” Theory* (评李登辉及其“两国论”)<sup>91</sup> was released. In it,

85. 赵志刚 (Zhao Zhigang), 柳林岚 (Liu Linlan), and 周均 (Zhou Jun), “话语结构的交叉与重组——《华广快乐EZGO》节目形态探析” (“Huaguang Kuaile EZGO’ Programme Analysis”), 中国广播 (*China Broadcasts*), 7 (2015), <http://archive.vn/igy0q>.

86. “關於我們” (“About Us”), 快樂聯播網 (*Happy Radio*), <https://archive.vn/p00lg>.

87. 赵志刚 (Zhao Zhigang), 柳林岚 (Liu Linlan), and 周均 (Zhou Jun), “话语结构的交叉与重组——《华广快乐EZGO》节目形态探析” (“Huaguang Kuaile EZGO’ Program Analysis”), 中国广播 (*China Broadcasts*), 7 (2015), <http://archive.vn/igy0q>.

88. “编辑出版对台宣传的社科图书, 以及画册, 挂历类出版物” (“Profile of the Haifeng Publishing House on *Tianyancha*, updated on 20 December 2019”), <https://www.tianyancha.com/company/270887829>. Information also here: “海风出版社” (“Haifeng Publishing House”), 利酷搜黄页网 (*Likuso*), <http://archive.vn/htNnj>.

89. 辛旗 (Xin Qi), 中国城市巡礼 (*Presentation of the Cities in China*), Haifeng Publishing House (2009), <http://archive.ph/BgKZY>.

90. The Kuomintang's revolutionary committee is one of the eight democratic parties recognised by the PRC and supervised by the United Front Work Department. 徐浩然 (Xu Haoran), 海峡两岸的呼唤: 和平统一祖国 (*The Call from the Two Shores: Peaceful Reunification of the Motherland*), Haifeng Publishing House (1999), <http://archive.vn/XGII2>.

91. 评李登辉及其“两国论” (*Commentary on the “Two States” Theory by Lee Teng-hui*), Haifeng Publishing House (1999), <http://archive.vn/KHVuB>.

Lee Teng-hui, the now-former Taiwanese president, rejected the idea of One China and defended the implementation of inter-state relations between Beijing and Taipei. Two years earlier, in 1997, Haifeng had published *Hong Kong's Retrocession and the Reunification of the Motherland* (香港回归与祖国统一).<sup>92</sup> There is no doubt that there is an **interest in Taiwanese public affairs**: a researcher at the CCP's Central School published a book with Haifeng in 2006 untitled *All Aspects of the Policies of the Democratic Porgressist Party, in Power for Four Years, toward Mainland China* (民进党当局执政四年大陆政策面面观).<sup>93</sup> A *Taiwanese Affairs Handbook* (涉台事务知识手册)<sup>94</sup> was published the following year, followed by *Policies and Rules toward Taiwan* (对台政策法规)<sup>95</sup> two years later.

Until then, former Haifeng directors had mostly published books on culture or art. For instance, Jiao Honghui wrote several books on Chinese calligraphers,<sup>96</sup> on folk culture on both sides of the Strait,<sup>97</sup> and on traditional Chinese celebrations.<sup>98</sup> His successor Lu Fengtang edited a poetry collection in Hakka,<sup>99</sup> as well as travel photography book adapted from the "Photographers of the Two Shores" outings (see on the following page), such as *Fifteen Years of Shadows and Light* (光影十五年).<sup>100</sup>

Previous **Base 311 commanders also published books** with the company. Its first commander, Deng Changyu, published a book on autonomous regions in 2010.<sup>101</sup> The following year, his successor Wang Shu, published a book on the 1911 Chinese Revolution under a pseudonym, for the revolution's centennial.<sup>102</sup> **VTS also penned books** published by Haifeng, including one in 1997 on the links between the nation and the army.<sup>103</sup> More recently, in 2013, the VTS former editor-in-chief Lu Wenxing (卢文兴) published a book on propaganda toward Taiwan.<sup>104</sup> Finally, in 2014, the VTS former director Zhong Zhigang authored a book on the Chinese dream.<sup>105</sup>

**Major General Xin Qi, former director of the former General Political Department's Liaison Office, and a well-known figure in China,**<sup>106</sup> published a book with Haifeng on pho-

92. 香港回归与祖国统一 (*Hong Kong's Return and the Reunification of the Motherland*), Haifeng Publishing House, (1997), <http://archive.vn/TtWda>.

93. 何仲山 (He Zhongshan), 民进党当局执政四年大陆政策面面观 (*All Aspects of the Policies of the Democratic Porgressist Party, in Power for Four Years, Toward Mainland China*), Haifeng Publishing House (2006), <http://archive.vn/honIB>.

94. 余友文 (Yu Youwen), 涉台事务知识手册 (*Taiwanese Affairs Handbook*), Haifeng Publishing House (2006), <http://archive.vn/sVbMq>.

95. 徐学 (Xu Xue), 对台政策法规 (*Policies and Rules Toward Taiwan*), Haifeng Publishing House (2008), <http://archive.vn/UFIVG>.

96. 焦红辉 (Jiao Honghui), 当代书法名家—李章庸 (*Master of Calligraphy Li Zhangyong*), Haifeng Publishing House (2008), <http://archive.fo/hH64w>.

97. 焦红辉 (Jiao Honghui), 源与缘: 闽台民间风俗比照 (*Origin and Destiny: Comparison of Popular Customs in Fujian and Taiwan*), Haifeng Publishing House, 2008, <http://archive.fo/Y4GFF>.

98. 焦红辉 (Jiao Honghui), 中华传统节日 (*Traditional Chinese Celebrations*), Haifeng Publishing House (2012), <http://archive.fo/HMEIR>.

99. 吕凤堂 (Lü Fengtang), 桐花客韵: 海峡两岸客家诗选 (*Paulownia in Hakka Rymes: Poem Selection from Both Shores in Hakka*), Haifeng Publishing House (2016), <http://archive.vn/p3qP5>.

100. 吕凤堂 (Lü Fengtang), 光影十五年 (*Fifteen Years of Shadow and Light*), Haifeng Publishing House (2016), <http://archive.vn/qNmMq>.

101. 邓长宇 (Deng Changyu), 跨越 改革开放中的中国少数民族自治区 (*Crossing Autonomous Regions in China During the Economic Reforms*), Haifeng Publishing House (2010), <http://archive.md/HEaye>.

102. 汪澍 (Wang Shu), 百年复兴忆辛亥 (*Hundred Years of Renaissance and Memories of the 1911 Revolution*), Haifeng Publishing House (2011), <http://archive.md/deJXo>.

103. Voice of the Strait, 军人与祖国 (*Militaries and the Motherland*), Haifeng Publishing House (1997), <http://archive.fo/e1kUq>.

104. 卢文兴 (Lu Wenxing), 传播问效 对台宣传探索文集 (*Anthology of Studies on the Dissemination of Propaganda for Taiwan*), Haifeng Publishing House (2013), <http://archive.vn/g9iPR>.

105. 钟志刚 (Zhong Zhigang), 共叙中国梦 (*Narrating our Chinese Dream Together*), Haifeng Publishing House (2014), <http://archive.fo/H5nqd>.

106. Stokes and Hsiao, "The People's Liberation Army," 21-23.



tos of Lijiang in 2004.<sup>107</sup> Incidentally, he edited the book prized by the Chinese government in 2011.<sup>108</sup> Xin Qi is currently vice-president of the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), which is, as previously explained, a political warfare platform affiliated with the PLA. Finally, another former vice-president for the CAIFC, Yi Xian, published a *Taiwanese Population Stories Series* (台湾百姓故事丛书), a trilogy, in 2015.

Finally, it should be noted that **Haifeng also published several books on psychological warfare**, including *A selection of Psychological Wars Carried out by Foreign Armies* (外国军队心理战战例选评)<sup>109</sup> and *Psychological Warfare Leaflets* (心理战传单), written by three authors in 2009, including a professor at the National Defense University.<sup>110</sup>

**Taiwanese people theoretically have access to books published by Haifeng** insofar as they can be found on the websites of Taiwanese book vendors.<sup>111</sup> **However, the actual appeal of these books is doubtful**, given that they are displayed on these websites without any picture or description, and they are relatively expensive. In addition, **Haifeng books are published in simplified characters**, whereas Taiwanese people are used to traditional characters. Here, the **lack of efforts undertaken to market and promote them is surprising**. Haifeng does not even have a website dedicated to its products, a catalogue or at least a system to present its new books to readers who might be interested in them. The publishing company did create a **WeChat account** in which it regularly publishes some short texts, but WeChat is not the preferred social network in Taiwan. With book that are not easily discoverable on the Taiwanese market and that do not necessarily correspond to the target audience's tastes and expectations, **we can question Haifeng Publishing's actual ability to conduct "propaganda toward Taiwan"** (对台宣传).

#### a. *The events it organizes involve the same galaxy*

However, **Haifeng's actions go beyond publishing books**: it also regularly takes part in events promoting Chinese culture and cross-strait relations. **CHBC, VTS, and Haifeng often co-organize events together**, such as a 2015 ceremony commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Japanese War, which was attended by Jiao Honghui et Ai Songru, otherwise known as Ai Ke,<sup>112</sup> or a cultural event organized in 2013 under the aegis of the CAPCC by CHBC, VTS, CNR and Haifeng.<sup>113</sup>

Haifeng's flagship project seems to be the **"Photographers of the Two Shores," an initiative** it has organized yearly since 2002 with the Photographic Society of Taipei (台北摄影学会, founded in 1956). It puts together a trip with a group of Chinese and Taiwanese photographers to visit several cities and territories displaying Chinese wealth,

107. 辛旗 (Xin Qi), 丽江印象 (*Impressions from the Lijiang*), Haifeng Publishing House (2004), <http://archive.md/ogOc2>.

108. 乙先 (Yi Xian), 台湾百姓故事丛书 (*History of the Taiwanese Population*), Haifeng Publishing House, (2019), <http://archive.vn/BfF66>.

109. 尹西斌 (Yin Xibin), 外国军队心理战战例选评 (*A Selection of Psychological Wars Carried out by Foreign Armies*, Haifeng Publishing House (2002), <http://archive.vn/txSJs>.

110. 刘凤健 (Liu Fengjian), 李绍新 (Li Shaoxin), and 欧立寿 (Ou Lishou), 心理战传单 (*Psychological War Tracts*), Haifeng Publishing House (2009), <http://archive.vn/6BQ8Y>.

111. For example, <https://www.sanmin.com.tw/Product/index/005897106>; [https://www.books.com.tw/web/sys\\_puballb/china/?pubid=0000000419&sloc=main](https://www.books.com.tw/web/sys_puballb/china/?pubid=0000000419&sloc=main).

112. “两岸抗战老兵的故事”征文活动颁奖仪式在福州举行 (“Stories on Former Combattants from Both Shores During the War Against Japan: Writing Contest Award Ceremony Took Place in Fuzhou”), *Voice of the Strait* (17 Nov. 2015), <http://archive.md/OgoCW>.

113. We note that the photographer of the event was Ai Ran (艾然), a CHBC and base 311 Unit-61070 affiliate (→ p. 113). “台湾文化人在大陆”报道活动圆满落幕 发行同名图书 (“Closing of the Event and Book Publication”), China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (2 Dec. 2013), <http://archive.md/0Ww8B>.



INTRODUCTION

culture, and its successes to teach Taiwanese people about China and build friendships between both sides of the Strait. This project rests on the so-called “two Huis”: Haifeng executive Jiao Honghui, and Cai Denghui (蔡登辉) of the Photographic Society of Taipei. Since leaving their respective positions, Jiao Honghui has continued to take part to the trips as co-president of the Fujian Photographers’ Association and Cai Denghui as a member of the Taiwan Cross-Strait Peace, Culture and Arts Alliance (台湾两岸 和平文化艺术联盟). Other local photographers’ associations have been invited to participate in the project: associations from the Chinese province of Yunnan and the city of Wuhan and from the Taiwanese city of Tainan, and the counties of Nantou and Hsinchu in 2016 for instance. Among the participants we also found several media. In 2016, it included the *China News Service*, the Chinese daily *Sanmin* (三民日报), and the Taiwanese magazines *Dujia Baodao* (獨家報導) and *Lianyi Sheying* (聯藝攝影). The academic field was also included that year, with the participation of Cai Denglong, professor at the National Taiwan University of Sport and National Chung Cheng University in Chiayi (蔡登龍), and a teacher from the Chiayi Industrial Vocational High School. Finally, these Haifeng initiatives have often been carried out with the full support and occasional participation of the CAPCC.<sup>114</sup>

CONCEPTS

## II. From the inside: local intermediaries

ACTORS

**Beijing goes around the Taiwanese central government by coopting a high number of local intermediaries:** political parties, media, PR agencies, business persons, civil society organizations, or cultural institutions working on both sides of the strait, as well as diehard “blue” military communities, brought up with the myth of an unavoidable reunification. These local intermediaries are crucially important, first because they act as interpreters allowing cultural mediation; and second because they are already established and thus benefit from an immediately available credibility and audience. **By using them, not only does Beijing cover its tracks** (particularly because local intermediaries do not make linguistic mistakes that might give away their foreign origins), **it also increases its chances of having an impact** because the Taiwanese population will be reached out by people that it knows, in its language, with its own cultural references. “China just has to pay for these local groups to do the work for them,” a member of government summed up.<sup>115</sup>

ACTIONS

### A. Taiwanese media

CASE

**The party is involved in an overt “media war on Taiwan,”** the strategic goals of which were laid out in 2004 by President Hu Jintao, at the fiftieth anniversary of the first broadcast of the Chinese National Radio in Taiwan: **“Entering the Island, Entering the Household, and Entering the Mind (of the people)”** (“入島、入戶、入心”).<sup>116</sup> In the early 2000s, China was mostly using outside media, from Hong Kong especially, to try and influence the Taiwanese public opinion. Beijing then took on **Lenin’s idea: “the**

CONCLUSION

114. “两岸摄影家·两岸行风采录，看看有没有你” (“Photographs from the Two Shores”), 美篇 (*Meipian*) (30 Oct. 2016), <https://archive.vn/8uJXl>.

115. Interview between the authors and a minister in Taipei (Apr. 2019).

116. Huang Jaw-nian, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media,” *China Perspectives*, 3 (2017), 30.

**easiest way to capture a fortress is from within.**<sup>117</sup> Going through local intermediaries is all the more necessary since, contrary to Hong Kong, Taiwan forbids entities or individuals from mainland China from buying Taiwanese media without governmental approval. Similarly, Taiwanese media cannot publish advertisements from the Chinese state. Beijing thus needs to rely on local intermediaries.

**This strategy of capture from within made headways during the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou (KMT, 2008-2016) as he promoted a deeper economic integration between Taiwan and mainland China.** It facilitated the penetration of Taiwanese media by Beijing and, incidentally, self-censorship. This was confirmed by subsequent reports on global media freedom: Taiwan's score has sharply deteriorated since 2008-2009<sup>118</sup> – even though it remains #1 in Asia. RSF's choice of setting up its East Asian office in Taipei was telling: Hong Kong had been an option until the Umbrella Revolution, after which Reporters without Borders reconsidered its decision given Chinese interference.<sup>119</sup>

Huang Jaw-nian came up with a **theoretical model to explain China's influence on Taiwanese media**,<sup>120</sup> combining the “commercialization of censorship” model developed by Kurlantzick and Link<sup>121</sup> and Wu Jieh-min (吳介民)'s “China Factor” model.<sup>122</sup> According to the first, the CCP has not only used traditional methods, but also outsourced censorship to private media companies by threatening them when they refused to comply, which increased the tendency of Chinese media to censor themselves. According to the latter model, economic dependence is Beijing's main tool of political influence on other countries. Combining both, Huang Jaw-nian focuses on **mechanisms through which the Chinese government exports its censorship, including by outsourcing it to foreign private media companies.** He subsequently distinguished three steps: **first, make the target country economically dependent; then co-opt private media**, either providing services to them (financial and advertising resources, capitalization, access to the Chinese market) or through threats to close them down; **finally, implement and normalize self-censorship** within the media landscape of these countries to shape the narrative in favor of China. The author predicted that “a media company outside China will exercise self-censorship on Chinese-sensitive topics when it becomes commercially tied with the Chinese market”<sup>123</sup> – an hypothesis that Huang confirmed by looking at Taiwan. Here, four specific levers can be distinguished.

## 1. Access to the Chinese market

**Taiwan became economically tied to China during the 2000s**, and after the 2010 free trade agreement was signed. But the process had begun earlier: China has been Taiwan's **main trade partner** since 2005, replacing the U.S. and Japan, its **first export market** since 2004 and the **first investment market** for Taiwanese businesses in 2002. Simultaneously there has been an exponential growth in the number of organizations, associations, inter-strait forums in the economic and cultural fields. **This environment has**

117. Hsu Chien-jung, “China's Influence on Taiwan's Media,” *Asian Survey*, 54:3 (2014), 516.

118. See the archives from Reporters without Borders and Freedom House.

119. Interview of the authors with RSF in Taipei (Apr. 2019).

120. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan's Media,” 27-36.

121. Joshua Kurlantzick and Perry Link, “China: Resilient, Sophisticated Authoritarianism,” in Christopher Walker, ed., *Undermining Democracy: 21st Century Authoritarians* (Washington DC: Freedom House, 2009), 13-28.

122. Wu Jieh-min, “The China Factor in Taiwan: Impact and Response,” in Gunter Schubert, ed., *Handbook of Modern Taiwan Politics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 425-445.

123. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan's Media,” 29.

facilitated the co-optation of Taiwanese media: most of them are attracted by the enormous Chinese market whose access is conditioned to self-censorship. The Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) slowly gave access to some Chinese media such as the *United Daily News* (UDN) which received an authorization to print and distribute its paper in the city of Dongguan, and the *China Times* (→ p. 144). Huan Jaw-nian noted that “despite these privileges, the circulation of both Taiwanese newspapers in China has still been restricted to certain regions, organizations, and people, such as Taiwanese enterprises, foreign businesses, five-star hotels, and academic institutions for Taiwan studies.”<sup>124</sup> Conditionality is always in order: Beijing only authorized the Taiwanese television channel TTV to set up its offices in several Chinese cities, including Beijing, after it stopped broadcasting a show on Falun Gong. This request immediately propelled self-censorship because, from that moment on, “most Taiwanese media planning to enter the Chinese market became reluctant to produce news reports and TV programs about Falun Gong.”<sup>125</sup>

This was not a matter of ideological convergence: even “green” media, that are pro-independence or, at least, in favor of a strengthened national identity, play along for commercial reasons. This is illustrated by the **SET television channel**, which was initially pro-DPP and anti-CCP but **began to censor itself after Ma’s election in 2008 because the network’s president wished to expand its business in mainland China**. A quantitative analysis confirmed that the number of stories on Tian’anmen, for example, has continuously decreased since 2010.<sup>126</sup> Besides, SET mainly airs Taiwanese TV shows – the “Taiwanese drama,” a genre in its own right. But, to please Beijing, the network, which produces a majority of them in Mandarin, renamed them “Chinese drama” in December 2011. This was not enough: **Beijing demanded the cancellation of the very popular but particularly anti-CCP show Big Talk News** (大話新聞), broadcast on SET. This happened gradually: first, the show was barred from speaking about topics that irritated Beijing (such as the Tian’anmen massacre, the Dalai-lama or Uyghur activist Rebiya Kadeer), from inviting guests seen as subversive (such as Amnesty International Taiwan’s president, a pro-Tibet activist) or simply from criticizing China. In the end, the network cancelled Big Talk News in May 2012, showing that the “China factor” could lead to self-censorship and even to the elimination of a popular TV show.<sup>127</sup>

Among pro-Chinese media, **Master Chain** (大師鏈) is interesting. The online media was created in 2018 and based in Taipei: it was the **first Taiwanese media accredited by the Chinese government**, authorized to set up an office and broadcast in mainland China. The firm quickly expanded, going from 15 to 50 employees and recruiting with higher salaries than the average in the sector thanks to a 100-million-dollar subvention from Hasdaq, a company registered in the United States but headquartered in Hong Kong.<sup>128</sup> **Among the new recruits, were former Taiwanese military and intelligence officers**, including good “catches” such as the former managing director of the National Safety Bureau Yang Kuo-chiang (楊國強) – now a consultant for Master Chain – and the former director of the Military Intelligence

124. Ibid., 32

125. Ibid.

126. Hung Yao-nan, Yang Hsiu-Jing, and Chen Chun-Wei, *How Did China Factor Influence Taiwanese Media? Taipei: Graduate Institute of National Development* (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 2014), 19-23, cited in Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media,” 35.

127. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 527-529.

128. Sophia Yang, “Taiwan Media Outlet Master Chain Criticized for Being China Lackey,” *Taiwan News* (4 Dec. 2019).

Bureau Chang Kan-ping (張勘平),<sup>129</sup> now the group's vice-president. Master Chain decided to abandon its activity in Taiwan on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, after the anti-infiltration law precisely aimed at countering Chinese interference on the island came into force.

## 2. Advertising

**More or less covert advertising is another tool to shape Taiwanese narratives on China.** Since the late 2000s, the TAO and some provincial authorities in mainland China have produced advertisings (to encourage doing business, or visiting China) for Taiwanese media. UDN and the *China Times* have frequently published them, for instance, and the We Want group even created an agency in Beijing (Want Want China Times Cultural Media Agency) to serve as an intermediary for the Chinese government and place ads in other Taiwanese media.<sup>130</sup>

## 3. Money

**Participating in the capital of a company, and then taking control of it, by buying up shares is the third tool:** in the late 2000s, TAO “prepared a huge amount of capital, at least US\$300 million, with the clearly identified purpose of purchasing stock in Taiwanese media companies such as Television Broadcasts Satellite (TVBS) channels and the UDN Group’s affiliated institutions.”<sup>131</sup> United Front agents apparently pressured Chinese companies into buying Taiwanese media companies, in exchange of a two-year tax exemption. **The United Front then places agents in the outlets so as to take control of their editorial line.**<sup>132</sup>

## 4. Buyouts by Taiwanese tycoons

Finally, **a fourth lever is to encourage pro-Chinese tycoons – or tycoons who have ties to the Chinese market – to buy Taiwanese media. This is what happened with Want Want.** Want Want Holdings Limited is a Taiwanese food company founded in 1962 by Tsai A-shi (蔡阿賜). In 1987, the group went to his son Tsai Eng-meng (蔡衍明), who massively invested in China after the martial law was lifted at the beginning of the 1990s. The company created a Chinese branch in Shanghai, Want Want China Holdings, which is now the most important branch of the group, and the biggest Chinese manufacturer of rice crackers and flavored milk – and a global leader in the market. The group makes about 90% of its profits in the Chinese market,<sup>133</sup> which is where the group’s president built his fortune. Tsai Eng-meng, worth \$6.6 billion nowadays, is the third richest man in Taiwan despite mainly residing in Shanghai.<sup>134</sup> His group reportedly received at least \$586.7 million in Chinese investment between 2004 and 2019.<sup>135</sup> And Tsai Eng-meng returns the favor

129. 羅添斌 (Lo Tien-pin), “台灣這家媒體竟能插旗北京 明邀連戰、吳斯懷見證” (“This Taiwanese Media Company Can Plant a Flag in Beijing and Invite Lien Chan and Wu Si-wei to Watch”), 台北報導 (*Taipei Baodao*) (12 Mar. 2019).

130. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media.”

131. *Ibid.*, 33

132. Interview of one of the authors with a Taiwanese diplomat in Canada (Apr. 2019).

133. Andrew Higgins, “Tycoon Prods Taiwan Closer to China,” *The Washington Post* (21 Jan. 2012).

134. “#308 Tsai Eng-meng,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/tsai-eng-meng/?sh=6769d9fb59f4>.

135. Kenji Kawase, “Chinese Subsidies for Foxconn and Want Want Spark Outcry in Taiwan,” *Nikkei Asian Review* (30 Apr. 2019).



INTRODUCTION

by regularly making pro-China public statements. In 2012, he said to *The Washington Post*: “[whether] you like it or not, unification is going to happen sooner or later. I really hope I can see that,” while denying the Tian’anmen massacre.<sup>136</sup>

CONCEPTS

The group, which had initially been specialized in the food industry, decided to diversify its activities by investing in the media. **In 2006, it bought the Taiwanese television channel CTV, and then the China Times Group in 2008.** The China Times Group is the island’s fourth biggest media conglomerate with its three dailies, including the *China Times*, which was founded in 1950 and has the fourth largest circulation in the country, three magazines, three TV channels – including CTi TV – and 8 news websites. It was subsequently renamed Want Want China Times Group and is now led by one of Tsai Eng-meng’s sons, Tsai Shao-chung (蔡紹中, president) and by KMT vice-president and former mayor of Taichung Jason Hu (胡志強, vice-president). Want Want also created two platforms: another journal, *Want Daily* (旺報) in 2009, and an English news website called the WantChinaTimes.com in 2010, which takes up so many articles from the Chinese press agency Xinhua that the website was nicknamed the “representative of the Xinhua news agency in Taiwan.”<sup>137</sup>

ACTION

“Since then, **China Times has morphed from a mainstream publication into what critics call a mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist party**”<sup>138</sup> – or a so-called ‘Red’ media, i.e., one that covers Beijing’s narratives, attacks the DPP’s government and largely censors itself. Hsu noted that even if self-censorship started before the newspaper was taken over (the initially hostile *China Times* has gradually shifted in its attitude toward Beijing since the mid-1990s),<sup>139</sup> several elements showed that it has intensified since the buyup. First, the newspaper’s archives were purged of any mention of the Tian’anmen massacre.<sup>140</sup> **The editorial line then changed:** a comparison between articles published before and after the purchase showed its impact, with a drastic decrease in human rights-related news on China (two thirds fewer than before the purchase).<sup>141</sup> Among the four biggest Taiwanese newspapers, comparing the ones that accept advertising from Chinese authorities (*China Times* and UDN) and the other two (*Apple Daily* and *Liberty Times*), we see that the former groups has “a tendency to have a more positive and detailed coverage of information on Chinese leaders and their official visits to Taiwan.” In the same vein, 100% and 77.78% of articles published by the *China Times* and UDN on Xinjiang were based on official Chinese sources only, and 100% and 83.33% of them blamed the conflict solely on protesters rather than on the Chinese regime.<sup>142</sup>

ACTION

Besides, the editorial team’s obedience to Beijing is clear, highlighted by the following elements. First, the **CCP’s Central Propaganda department was involved in Tsai’s purchase of the China Times Group**, through the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), which is said to have intervened through a KMT leader to convince Tsai Eng-meng to buy the group. At the time, the CCP feared that the group might be bought by the anti-communist Next Media.<sup>143</sup> Only two weeks after the purchase, Tsai instructed the China Times Group

CASE

136. Higgins, “Tycoon Prods Taiwan Closer to China.”

137. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 522.

138. Kathrin Hille, “Taiwan Primaries Highlight Fears over China’s Political Influence,” *Financial Times* (16 Jul. 2019).

139. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 519.

140. 陳政偉, “中國時報下架六四相關報導 對外沒有回應” (“The China Times Withdraws Articles from June 4, No Reaction Abroad”), 中央社 (CAN) (13 Jun. 2019).

141. 李嘉艾 (Li Chia-ai), 台灣媒體生產政治中的中國因素與獨裁者邏輯: 以C集團為例, MA Thesis in Sociology, Tsinghua University, cited in Reporters Without Borders, *China’s Pursuit of a New Global Order* (2019), 40.

142. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media,” 35.

143. *Ibid.*, 34.

managers to “strongly support the [KMT, pro-Beijing] Ma Ying-jeou administration, to improve cross-strait relations, and to avoid discussing unification and independence in the Group’s media.”<sup>144</sup> Two weeks later, Tsai met with Wang Yi, director of the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office (now minister for Foreign Affairs) to “report” on the purchase and his plans for the media group.<sup>145</sup> Besides, within less than two years, the team covering the cross-strait relationship was moved from the political division to the group’s headquarters in mainland China, for the coverage of this sensitive topic to be directly controlled by the new executive team, in other words by Beijing.<sup>146</sup>

Quickly, **the journal parted ways with the authors of articles that had upset Beijing** – and incidentally upset Tsai. In one instance, a journalist who was writing an article on China was also asked by his editor to first run it by the TAO.<sup>147</sup> In March 2012, the *China Times* dedicated its cover to the promotion of the Fujian governor’s visit to Taiwan. It was later revealed that the journal was following a document called “Propaganda plan for the Fujian governor’s tour in Taiwan in 2012” (福建省長訪台宣傳計畫) that the province’s authorities had handed out in advance and that went so far as to plan the number of words needed for each article that the newspaper had to publish on the event.<sup>148</sup> For this propaganda work, the group was paid through its intermediary in Beijing (Want Want China Times Cultural Media).<sup>149</sup> But it ultimately cost more to the group because the coverage sparked outrage and an investigation from the Mainland Affairs Council (the agency in charge of relations with mainland China). The journal was fined 1.8 million Taiwanese dollars (€53,200).<sup>150</sup> It was criticized for **disguising advertising texts paid by Beijing (advertorials, infomercials) as news** and for working as an intermediary for Beijing to purchase spots in other newspapers – which is also illegal in Taiwan.<sup>151</sup> In 2019, it was revealed that **the editorial managers of the *China Times* and CTi TV were getting their instructions from the TAO in Beijing**: “[they] call every day,” said one *China Times* reporter. “They do not meddle in everything, mainly topics related to cross-strait relations and to China. They have a say in the angle of the story, and whether it goes on the front page.”<sup>152</sup>

The Want Want group is also involved in the **dissemination of fake news**. For example, in July 2012, when hundreds of students protested against Want Want’s project of purchasing parts of Next Media, which would have further increased Beijing’s hold over Taiwanese media, Want Want accused researcher Huand Kuo-chang of paying the students to protest, but it admitted a month later that this claim was not supported by any proof.<sup>153</sup> Anti-Want Want protests intensified (thousands of people took to the streets on September 1), and the international protest campaign became international, thus prompting Tsai to give up.

Furthermore, the group also organizes meetings and cross-strait cultural forums with Chinese organizations, associations and think tanks suspected of being **tied to the United Front Work Department (UFWD) or to the PLA’s political warfare units**.<sup>154</sup>

144. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 520-521.

145. *Ibid.*, 521.

146. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media,” 34.

147. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 521-523.

148. 福建置入中時 陸官員：發票來了 錢就匯過去” (“Fujian Invests in China Times. Lu Guanyuan: The Bill Arrives, the Money is Sent”), *New Talk* (30 Mar. 2012).

149. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan’s Media,” 33.

150. One Country, One Censor: How China Undermines Media Freedom in Hong Kong and Taiwan, A Special Report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (Dec. 2019), 24.

151. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 532.

152. Cited in Hille, “Taiwan Primaries.”

153. Hsu, “China’s Influence on Taiwan’s Media,” 535.

154. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 21.

Finally, the group's media outlets give **maximal coverage to pro-Chinese candidates** during electoral campaigns. CTV and CTi TV ensured an uninterrupted coverage of pro-Beijing candidate Han Kuo-yu – for the Kaohsiung mayoral election (2018), for the KMT primaries (2019), and for the presidency (2020) – contributing to the creation of a “Han Wave” (→ p. 460). CTi TV was actually fined one million Taiwanese dollars (€29,500) by the National Communications Commission (NCC), the public authority regulating the media, because it found that CTi TV had given too much airtime to Han, violating principles of fairness and equal speaking time.<sup>155</sup>

In 2017 and 2020, CTi News itself was the subject of 30% of all complaints to the NCC, which decided not to renew its broadcasting license in November 2020 after observing **many cases of “disinformation” and traces of “external interference.”** The NCC had never taken such a decision since its creation in 2006.<sup>156</sup> The Taiwan Supreme Administrative Court rejected the network's appeal and CTi News ceased to broadcast on Taiwanese cable television (Channel 52) on December 11, 2020. It remains available online however.

Want Want's example has been emulated: knowing how beneficial *China Times*' purchase was to Tsai, because Beijing granted him favors. **Other Taiwanese tycoons have become involved in the media, with the sole goal of pleasing Beijing and using that relationship to make profits for their companies in other sectors.** Taiwanese smartphone-maker HTC thus took control of the TVBS Media group, which runs four national and one international TV channels. It did so by buying a high number of shares in 2011 and then by becoming majority shareholder in 2015. Furthermore, the Taiwanese group Ting Hsin, specialized in food production (biggest producer of instant noodles in China) also bought one of the biggest companies of cable TV, China Network System (CNS), in 2014. At the time, CNS ran eleven channels.<sup>157</sup>

## 5. Other levers

**The other available levers of influence include clandestine funding** (some Taiwanese groups have been paid to occasionally publish some articles that fit Beijing's interests: for instance, the TAO presumably paid RMB30,000 (€3,800) for two articles)<sup>158</sup>; **appointments to key positions** (a CTi TV journalist explained that the way a number of Taiwanese media cover China was “organized” by representatives of the Chinese state who appointed China-based correspondents to editorial positions);<sup>159</sup> and **the organization of bilateral forums** such as the Cross-Strait Media People Summit (兩岸媒體人峰會/兩岸媒體人北京峰會) created in 2015. During its fourth edition in Beijing, in 2019, more than 70 representatives of Taiwanese media were told that it was their “duty” to promote Chinese culture and the reunification with China.<sup>160</sup>

155. Hille, “Taiwan Primaries.”

156. Matthew Strong, “Taiwan TV Station to Move Online After Court Rejects Final Appeal,” *Taiwan News* (11 Dec. 2020).

157. Huang, “The China Factor in Taiwan's Media,” 34.

158. Yimou Lee and I-hwa Cheng, “Paid ‘News’: China Using Taiwan Media to Win Hearts and Minds on Island,” Reuters (9 Aug. 2019).

159. Cité dans Hille, “Taiwan Primaries.”

160. J. Michael Cole, “More than 70 Participants from Taiwanese Media Industry Attend 4<sup>th</sup> Cross-Strait Media Summit in Beijing,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (1 May 2019).

## B. Private cyber-armies

Cyber-armies are groups of individuals that can be **recruited to conduct campaigns for or against an entity or a person**. This “post-helpers” (貼文小幫手) business, which consists in creating fake accounts and fake articles, has grown a lot in Taiwan during the past decade. It is also accessible to all budgets (“[you] could hire an Internet army for NTD 10,000 [\$330] a month”).<sup>161</sup> Initially used by companies to promote their products,<sup>162</sup> this process can be used for political purposes. **Some agencies are specialized in political campaigning**, like AutoPolitical, which has worked all over Asia. Its slogan is “win an election with artificial intelligence.” There is also a black market for social media accounts, sold to the highest bidders, where the most followed and oldest accounts are the most expensive (→ p. 376), PTT accounts for instance.<sup>163</sup> Because they act through local agencies, it is not always easy to trace them back to foreign contractors and to prove an interference.

## C. Politics

### 1. Political parties

**The KMT has become less important to Beijing** since it lost power: “more and more you will hear voices in the CCP who also claim that the KMT is no longer the counterpart that they were banking on for unification with Taiwan.”<sup>164</sup> For that reason, **Beijing tries to diversify its channels of influence. In this instance, three small pro-unification political parties are used as local intermediaries by Beijing:**

- **The New Party (NP – 新黨)**, created in 1993. Its spokesperson Wang Ping-chung (王炳忠), his father, and two executives of the Party’s Youth were **found guilty of espionage on behalf of China** in June 2018 due to their implication in an operation led by the Chinese citizen Zhou Hongxu (周泓旭) – also charged with espionage in September 2017. The small group, which called itself the “secret Star Fire unit,” created a website (Fire News) to **recruit Taiwanese people**, including civil servants. They tried to **obtain classified documents through members of the Taiwanese military**, mostly on armament programs. Investigations discovered evidence of money transfers from mainland China and a document on which Wang Ping-chung wrote “I work under the guidance and assistance of the CCP to help the forces working to achieve unification across the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>165</sup> This indictment clearly did not deter the NP from building a closer relationship with Beijing, as the party announced its intention to open a liaison office in mainland China right after the conviction.<sup>166</sup>
- **The Chinese Unification Promotion Party (CUPP – 中華統一促進黨)** created in 2005. It was created by Chang An-le (張安樂), a man with a sultry reputation who

161. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 19.

162. Samsung’s Taiwanese branch received a 10-million-dollar fine (€295,000) in 2013 for using these services to promote its phones and smear competing products.

163. Monaco, Smith and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 20.

164. Cole, “A Conversation About China’s Sharp Power,” 5.

165. Jason Pan, “New Party’s Wang, Others Charged with Espionage,” *Taipei Times* (14 Jun. 2018).

166. Cole, *Cross-Strait Relations since 2016*, 53.



INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTS

ACTORS

became famous for his ties to **organized crime**. Known as the “White Wolf,”<sup>167</sup> he was a leader of the Bamboo Connection (竹聯幫) gang, one of the largest Taiwanese triads, which also operates in the United States. Chang An-le was arrested there in 1985 under several charges including murder and drug trafficking. After serving a ten-year sentence in a U.S. prison, he came back to Taiwan where he quickly became involved in a case of corruption, which led him to flee to mainland China where he stayed for ten years. According to J. Michael Cole, that was when Chang An-le spent time with several “Red princes” including Hu Shiyong (胡石英), who is said to be part of Xi Jinping’s “close circle.”<sup>168</sup> He then founded the CUUP from China, and its Taiwanese branch in 2005. He came back in Taiwan in 2013 and was briefly arrested. He was arrested again in August 2019, charged with several offences including having received tens of thousands of dollars from China, which is illegal in Taiwan under the Political Donations Act.<sup>169</sup> **Some suspect that the CUPP, like other pro-Beijing political groups, receives money from Beijing through Chinese companies**, including those tied to the Taolue group (韜略集團) but also from criminal organizations (the Bamboo Connection and the Four Seas (四海幫)),<sup>170</sup> networks of Buddhist temples and various United Front organizations in the area and in the world.<sup>171</sup> The CUPP also created several cross-strait groups such as the Tainan Cross-Strait Exchange Promotion Association (台南市兩岸交流協會) and the Cross-Strait Taiwan Guangdong Exchange Association (台粵交流協會), whose final goal is to **circumvent the Taiwanese government**.<sup>172</sup> The CUPP is presumably also used as an intermediary for Taiwanese companies that wish to settle in China and ensure that “ideological conditions” will be met by incoming companies.<sup>173</sup>

ACTIONS

• **The Home Party (HP – 紅黨)**<sup>174</sup> created in 2017, which aims, among other things, to “uniting the majority of Taiwanese farmers and fishermen” (統合廣大農漁工)<sup>175</sup> – key populations in the Taiwanese political landscape (and historically swayed by the KMT), who are regularly targeted by disinformation campaigns that, for example, discredit the agricultural policies of the DPP (→ p. 465). The HP was involved in at least two cases that showed its role in Chinese influence operations on the island. The first was a **recruitment campaign**, active since at least 2017, for the Taiwan Elite Class of the Communist Party School of the Fujian Province (中共黨校福建省委黨校台灣社會菁英班).<sup>176</sup> **The school “serves as an incubator of the central government,”** and its teachers come from Beijing-based think tanks affiliated with the CCP. Student were expected to identify as Chinese and to support the One China policy. The second case occurred in April 2019, when the HP co-organized an event in Taichung called “2019

CASE

167. Yimou Lee and Faith Hung, “Special Report: How China’s Shadowy Agency is Working to Absorb Taiwan,” Reuters (27 Nov. 2014).

168. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 47-48.

169. “Pro-China Party Founder Indicted for Illegal Political Donations,” *Focus Taiwan* (13 Aug. 2019).

170. Cole explained that, under Ma’s presidency, the CPP often recruited from local gangs to “hire muscle” for its security service during official CCP visits (*Democracy under Fire*, 14.)

171. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 13.

172. Ibid.

173. Yimou Lee and James Pomfret, “Pro-China Groups Step Up Offensive to Win Over Taiwan,” Reuters (26 Jun. 2019).

174. Sometimes translated as the “Taiwan Red Party” in English, which is the literal translation from Chinese.

175. J. Michael Cole, “Organizers of Aborted Pro-Unification Rally Recruiting Taiwanese for Communist Party School,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (13 Apr. 2019).

176. It appears to have been created in 2014, see “福建省委黨校輪訓官員也培訓台商 搭建兩岸企業合作新平台” (“The Executives from the Party School in Fujian Province Are Also Training Taiwanese Businessmen to set up a New Platform for Trade Cooperation Between the Two Sides of The Strait”), 人民網 (16 Sept. 2015).

Peaceful Integration and Development Forum” (2019和平統一融合發展論壇), with two organizations from the United Front (the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification (CPPRC, 中國和平統一促進會 (台灣)) and the China Peace Development Association (中華和平發展促進會)). The slogan of this event, which was eventually cancelled, was: “Proclaim the 1992 consensus, support peace and unification” (宣揚九二共識、支持和平、支持統一).<sup>177</sup>

## 2. Individuals

**In addition to investing in political parties, Beijing also invests in individuals – politicians noticed for their potential or existing pro-Chinese inclinations and for their more-or-less strategic positions in the Taiwanese political landscape.** Members of parliament, mayors, and advisors of various political backgrounds are invited on **all-expense-paid, usually luxurious trips to mainland China** where they meet CCP executives for instance. They are then expected to implement policies in favor of Beijing at their respective levels.

**Granting access to a special economic zone is one of the methods used to capture the political elite and/or their family members,** thus offering preferential conditions to foreign companies. Cole reported that Beijing used this technique to “capture” Lin Kuo-ching (林國慶), a former DPP politician who became independent and stood out in October 2019 when he said that “no one likes Taiwan more than Xi Jinping.” This declaration was surprising but probably explained by the fact that his son Lin Chih-yuan (林智遠) owns a company operating in the Pingtan free-trade zone. He is also the assistant general manager of the Pingtan Free Trade Zone Cross-Strait Development Co. (平潭自貿區兩岸發展公司) and has been active within the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.<sup>178</sup>

## D. Influencers and other intermediaries

### 1. Groups and prominent figures on the cultural and artistic scenes

Beijing has, at the very least, two different tools in this area. First, **using Chinese artists or cultural events as relays: Chinese artists that tour Taiwan can be used as vectors of “political warfare,” through the propaganda that they can spread or the contacts they can make.** J. Michael Cole explained that the events themselves are usually not problematic, but they are used as a cover or opportunity to carry out other operations: “when they organize Chinese singing competitions, or concerts at National Taiwan University, it’s not the songs that they’re singing that are a threat to Taiwanese society, it’s the individuals who are organizing the event [...] coming to Taiwan and using their time off to interact with other individuals and hopefully recruit some Taiwanese, or co-opt them.”<sup>179</sup>

Taipei is aware of that risk and has already barred some individuals from visiting – such as Liu Qi (刘奇), who introduced himself as the leader of an art group planning to per-

177. Ibid.

178. 吴晟炜 (Wu Shengwei), “台湾人士列席福建政协会议: ‘十四五’ 会有更多发展的机会” (“Taiwanese People Take Part in the Fujian CPPCC Meeting: the 14<sup>th</sup> Quinquennial Plan, There Will be Even More Opportunities for Development”), 中国新闻网 (*China News Service*) (24 Jan. 2021).

179. Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power,” 5.

form in Taiwan in November 2019. Liu was also the director of the Cultural Department of a United Front organization, the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC, 中华全国归国华侨联合会).<sup>180</sup> Cole also mentioned the Shanghai-Taipei “Sing! China” music festival, which was planned at National Taiwan University (NTU) in September 2017 and co-organized by the city of Taipei and several cultural organizations in Shanghai. The event was actually devised to promote “the peaceful unification of the motherland,” as one Shanghai organization described on its website.<sup>181</sup> The Chinese counterpart even made a request, which was eventually granted: they wanted the “National Taiwan University” renamed as “Taipei City Taiwan University” in promotional material.<sup>182</sup> The event was eventually cancelled following student protests, but similar events had taken place on other campuses in the preceding weeks and years.

**Second, Beijing can also use the Chinese market as a lever to control Taiwanese artists.** There, as often, both the carrot and the stick are used. The carrot: Beijing identifies Taiwanese celebrities on TV, invites them to China and explains that, over there, their salary can be between 5 and 10 times higher. The stick: **members of the Taiwanese cultural industry identified as hostile to the CCP are denounced and often targeted by naming and shaming campaigns** on social networks, which push them to apologize and publicly recognize that they identify as Chinese, or else they risk seeing their contracts, tours and shows cancelled. Access to the huge Chinese market being important, even vital, for much of the cultural industry, Beijing thus succeeds in whipping them back in line, and in some cases in **turning Taiwanese actors, singers and models into real ambassadors for the CCP.**<sup>183</sup>

## 2. Civic organizations

Besides, Beijing uses “civic organizations” such as the Concentric Patriotism Association (中華愛國同心會) – which, along with its secretary general Chang Hsiu-yeh (張秀葉), openly advocates for reunification<sup>184</sup> – that **defend the CCP’s interests down to the streets of Taiwan, sometimes violently attacking targets** such as Falun Gong members and pro-democracy and pro-independence activists.<sup>185</sup> These organizations are also used to mobilize people for protests, even paying them (**between 800 and 900 Taiwanese dollars (€23-26) per person to wave a PRC flag during various events in Taipei**, according to J. Michael Cole).<sup>186</sup>

## 3. Networks of Buddhist and Taoist temples

Some temples are suspected of contributing to the United Front’s activities. An article published in *Mirror Media* on October 2, 2019 revealed that **yearly pilgrimages**, including one dedicated to the goddess Mazu, **are reportedly used as a cover for agents to organize meetings, transfer Chinese funds for United Front activities and to pressure**

180. “Chinese Artists Must Not Engage in ‘Propaganda’ in Taiwan: MAC,” *Focus Taiwan* (30 Oct. 2019).

181. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 15.

182. Ibid. 16

183. Ibid. 18

184. 林育立 (Lin Yuli), “德電視報導台灣大選 聚焦愛國同心黨支持統一” (“German TV’s Coverage Highlights the Patriotic Party’s Support for Reunification”), 中央社(CNA) (8 Jan. 2020).

185. Lynn Lee, “Taiwan: Spies, Lies and Cross-Strait Ties,” *Aljazeera* (6 Sept. 2018).

186. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 16.

**uncooperative temples.**<sup>187</sup> About thirty temples, mostly in the south of the island, are presumably involved. The article explained that these temples had been infiltrated by members of the Chinese Unification Promotion Party, led by Chang An-le. However, according to a study by Luo Cheng-tsung,<sup>188</sup> a professor at the Southern Taiwan University for Science and Technology, the 30 mentioned temples are only minor temples with little influence. According to him, attention should be paid to the main temples on the island, which are also under the influence of the CCP.

In June-July 2017, a campaign accused President Tsai and her government of “persecuting religion” and rapidly grew in intensity. The rumor specifically targeted the network of Buddhist and Taoist temples, with false announcements, such as a fake news announcing that the government would prohibit incense.<sup>189</sup>

#### 4. The business community

**The Taishang (臺商) – businesspersons working in mainland China – are important intermediaries for Beijing,** not solely because of their sheer number, but also because of their economic and political weight. Some of them, members of local CCP branches or of United Front organizations, participate in Chinese influence operations.

#### 5. Members of the military

**Senior officers and retired generals, especially freshly-retired generals, are a prime target for Beijing,** because they are knowledgeable on Taiwanese defense capacities and the organization of its armed forces, and because they have a high-level network of still-active promotion comrades who have reached the highest levels of the hierarchy. **These young retirees are thus invited to China** to participate in ceremonies, where they embody the One China policy (in November 2016, the presence of 32 former Taiwanese officers singing the Chinese anthem at a memorial ceremony in China stirred a controversy), or to various events, during which **sports or culture are useful opportunities** to organize meetings.

Between the summers of 2009 and 2011, at least twelve such events took place in China. For example, from June 1 to June 6, 2011, Chinese and Taiwanese retired military officers attended a golf tournament in Sichuan, visited the area hit by the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and held a seminar on cross-strait relations in Beijing.<sup>190</sup> **Other meetings do not even pretend to be cultural or sports events and get straight to the point: in April 2010, retired general Hsu Li-Nung (許歷農), the former director of the department of political warfare of the Taiwanese army led a delegation of twenty former officers through a trip in Beijing and Shanghai** where they met, among others, “State Council Taiwan Affairs Office Director Wang Yi, Politburo Standing Committee Member Jia Qinglin (賈慶林) and CMC Vice-Chairman General Xu Caihou (徐才厚).”<sup>191</sup> **More**

187. 林俊宏 (Lin Chun-hung) and 黃揚明 (Huang Yang-Ming) “[白狼染紅宮廟] 吸收北港朝天宮董事 統促黨滲透全台30宮廟”, (“[White Wolves Stained the Wolves] Recruiting the Administrator of the Chaotian Temple in Beigang, the UCP infiltrated 30 Temples in Taiwan”), *Mirror Media* (22 Oct. 2019).

188. 羅承宗 (Luo Cheng-tsung), “宗教組織無法管，中國吃定了台灣” (“Taiwan Cannot Control its Temples Anymore, China Exploits this Weakness”), 思想坦克 (5 Nov. 2019).

189. J. Michael Cole, “Fake News at Work: President Tsai ‘Persecutes Religion’ in Taiwan,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (20 Jul. 2017).

190. John Dotson, “Retired Taiwan Officer Exchanges Offer Insight into a Modern ‘United Front,’” *China Brief*, 11:19, Jamestown Foundation (14 Oct. 2011).

191. *Ibid.*



rarely, these meetings take place in Taiwan (in May 2010, about fifty former officers from Taiwan and around sixty former PLA officers met up in Taipei for a “cross-Strait friendship conference”<sup>192</sup>). **The also target intelligence services:** in December 2010, “Lieutenant General Hsu Ping-chiang of the National Security Bureau (NSB) and Major General Huang Chi-mei of the Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) – led a delegation of 17 retired MIB officials on a trip to China.”<sup>193</sup>

These ties between both straits are often maintained by the Whampoa Military Academy Alumni Association (黃埔軍校) – founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1924; the military academy has trained generals from both the nationalist and the communist sides of the Strait.<sup>194</sup> Yet, this alumni association is actually a United Front organization operated by the UFWD. Hence, meetings between Chinese and Taiwanese officers are anything but spontaneous: they are simply one of the United Front’s many programs.

**Beijing uses these meetings to create a network and solidify its influence, even inside the Taiwanese armed forces and intelligence services. It also sometimes uses them to destabilize the Taiwanese public opinion.** It was thus revealed that, at a mundane event in Beijing, Hsia Ying-chou (夏瀛洲), a retired general from the Taiwanese armed forces, and former NDU President, reportedly said that “[from] now on, we should no longer separate the ROC Army (ROC meaning Taiwan) and the PLA. We are all China’s army.”<sup>195</sup> Hsia Ying-chou denied saying this. Regardless, Beijing achieved its goal by convincing Taiwan, where a controversy erupted, that such outbursts were at least possible. Following the story, President Ma asked the Ministry of Defense to prepare a **code of conduct for retired generals visiting China.**<sup>196</sup>



Retired Chinese and Taiwanese military officers at a cross-strait golf tournament organized by the UFWD (source: Dotson, “Retired Taiwan officer exchanges”).

192. Ibid.

193. Ibid.

194. 許劍虹 (Samuel Hui), “轉化許歷農、吳斯懷成為「甯共毋獨」的統戰組織——黃埔同學會” (“Transformation of Hsu Li-Nung and Wu Sz-huai into a Whampoa Fellowship: A United Front Organization Promoting “Prefer Communism to Independence”), *The News Lens* (27 Feb. 2020).

195. “Ma Orders MND to Draft Code of Conduct for Retired Generals Visiting the Mainland,” Official Website of the Kuomintang (10 Jun. 2011).

196. Mo Yan-chih and Su Yung-yao, “Ma Calls for ‘Code of Conduct’ for Retired Generals,” *Taipei Times* (10 Jun. 2011).

New legislative dispositions were adopted in 2019 to avoid compromising situations like these: retired generals and highlevel officials, such as vice-ministers, who participate in political events in China, can now lose their pension (or fined up to 10 million Taiwanese dollars – €295,500 – if their pensions were paid in one installment when they retired).

## 6. YouTubers

Everywhere in the world, **YouTubers have become a main channel for information for young audiences. Cognizant of this, Beijing tries to control their impact on Chinese public opinion, and to use them to attack Taiwan.** During the last presidential campaign, for instance, after YouTuber Potter King (波特王) filmed a show with President Tsai, his Chinese partner Papitube asked him to delete it, criticizing him for calling Tsai “President” (a forbidden label in China, which uses “Taiwan leader” to avoid implying that Taiwan is a sovereign state). Potter King refused, thus ending the contract that allowed him to broadcast in China. Papitube said it “strongly rebukes any action which undermines the nation’s (China) dignity.”<sup>197</sup> After the incident, the YouTuber was also unable to access his Weibo account, where he had a million fans.<sup>198</sup>

**Beijing also tries to recruit Taiwanese people to influence the Taiwanese public opinion while covering its tracks**, especially after the scandal around the Chinese YouTuber posing as a Taiwanese person (→ p. 467). **They are reportedly trained by the PLA** (both in terms of their technical skills and in terms of the content they will produce).<sup>199</sup>

## 7. Disgruntled individuals

Generally, Beijing targets those in Taiwan who can become spokespersons because they have influence, but it also looks for those who are motivated because they are **unhappy with the current political order**. For instance, and not unlike Canada or Australia, Aboriginals, or “First Nations,” are prime targets as they are regularly neglected by authorities. In Taiwan, **Beijing targets aboriginal media and young people aspiring to a better life, but also disappointed shop owners in distressed areas**, such as in the touristic sectors areas. To counter Beijing’s strategy of controlling the number of tourists to pressure the island, the government’s diversification strategy has been a success in recent years. It compensates the loss of Chinese tourists with a higher number of tourists from Japan and from Gulf countries especially, who also have a greater purchasing power. Tourism was doing well before being impacted by the pandemic, in ways similar to tourism all around the world. Nevertheless, because Chinese tourists visited specific areas not always toured by new tourists, some tour-operators, gift shops, restaurants and other local shops in these areas were upset by the development. Hence, they are prime targets for Chinese influence operations attacking the Taiwanese government. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that most of these areas are in the south, where local authorities are more sympathetic to China to begin with.

197. “Taiwan YouTuber Loses China Business Over Tsai Interview,” *France 24* (16 Dec. 2019); “YouTuber Potter King ‘Flirts’ Again with Taiwan President,” *Taiwan News* (20 Dec. 2019).

198. Ko Yu-hao and William Hetherington, “YouTuber Loses China Contract Over “President,”” *Taipei Times* (17 Dec. 2019).

199. Interview with the authors, in Taipei (Jan. 2020).

## 8. Overseas Taiwanese people

Reaching inside Taiwan also means reaching outside of the island; **Beijing targets the Taiwanese diaspora all over the world, starting with Taiwanese people living in China** (presumably over 1 million people). They were mostly left alone under Hu Jintao. But, under Xi Jinping, they are increasingly relied upon and mobilized against Taiwan.<sup>200</sup>

## 9. Chinese people living in Taiwan

**Conversely, Beijing also look at Chinese citizens in Taiwan, or at people of Chinese origin on the island, as potential relays.** The business community is the most obvious interlocutor. Wives are among the less obvious (and less scrutinized) relays: 70% of Chinese people who become Taiwanese citizens are women. This can be explained by the relative low competitiveness of middle-class Taiwanese men on the Taiwanese marriage market, which means that these men sometimes go to China or Vietnam to find spouses. Hence, women can become relays, but they must be accounted for individually, as they do not form an organized group and they cannot trigger mass movements of their own.

## III. Information manipulation

In its outward appearances, the Chinese strategy of information manipulation in Taiwan roughly follows the same pattern: fake or biased information “first appearing in Chinese state- or party-controlled media is then spread via Chinese social media. The disinformation is subsequently injected into the Taiwan media environment via social media – PTT board (a Taiwanese bulletin board system), Facebook fan pages, and closed groups – and is finally picked up and legitimized by traditional media.”<sup>201</sup> **Facebook is the most widely used social network** (nearly 79.6% of Taiwanese people, a world record which explains why Facebook “**has been a very important playground for disinformation in Taiwan**”<sup>202</sup>). Facebook is ahead of YouTube (72.6%) and LINE, which is the most prominently used instant messaging application (98.5%), way ahead of Facebook Messenger (48.2%).<sup>203</sup> **2,400 disinformation attacks are carried out daily on Facebook solely, “all of them originating from China,” and aiming to undermine Taiwanese democracy and its institutions.**<sup>204</sup> They are all meticulously planned, with spikes of disinformation occurring between 7 and 9 a.m., when Taiwanese people are in public transports using their phones.

During a parliamentary hearing in May 2019, lieutenant general Vincent Chen (陳文凡), deputy director of the National Security Bureau, confirmed that a few Taiwanese media had adopted Beijing’s editorial line (he described them as “complying media” (同路媒體)), and operated on a number of platforms (print or online press, social media) to spread disinformation in Taiwan. The NSB said these operations were part of cognitive warfare (認知作戰) in that they aim to shape a narrative that fits with Beijing’s interests.<sup>205</sup> Chen did

200. Interview with the authors in Taiwan (Jan. 2020).

201. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 21.

202. Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power,” 3.

203. IORG, Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan (19 Jun. 2020), 13, <https://iorg.tw/>.

204. Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power,” 3.

205. 游凱翔 (You Kaixiang), “國安局: 中共對台灣同路媒體放消息帶風向” (“National Security Bureau: the Chinese Communist Party is Spreading News in Taiwanese Media”), 中央通訊社 (*Central News Agency*) (2 May 2019).

not reveal the names of these media, a decision that was criticized, including by KMT representative Lu Yui-ling (呂玉玲), but it could be interpreted as a warning shot sent to these media companies.<sup>206</sup> He however insisted on **problems stemming from the purchase of Facebook fan pages and social influencers by Beijing** and confirmed that some Taiwanese media were asking Beijing for approval before publishing opinion pieces.<sup>207</sup>

The credibility of people spreading disinformation is at stake. **How to earn the trust of the targets? One of the main methods is to pretend to be a direct witness, someone speaking from experience** (at Kansai airport, for example, in the case of typhoon Jebi → p. 456). **Another method is to institutionalize fake information, by making it seem like it comes from government officials, sometimes counterfeiting documents to legitimate the information.**<sup>208</sup> By the time the information is verified, and the government issues a denial, the damage has already been done.

**In terms of substance, these stories mainly revolve around four topics. First, the (DPP) government is painted as unable to work efficiently**, not providing for the needs of its population, its protection... Some *ad hominem* attacks also target the president and members of the ruling majority. **Second, they discuss Taiwan's relationship to China (its independence)**, which is the key question defining the Taiwanese identity. Here, we obtained contradictory information from our interviews: for some, Chinese operations nurture both sides of the debate, pro-unification and pro-independence alike, because they aim to divide the society rather than to impose a narrative, mirroring what the Russians did in the United States and in Europe (→ p. 620).<sup>209</sup> For others, Beijing differs from Moscow as it only supports unification and always discredits independence and the DPP. **Third, they focus on divisive societal topics** that include agriculture (spreading rumors on falling prices), labor (a government allegedly pushing people to work more and earn less), LGBT rights and gay marriage (society is divided along generational lines here, with young people being more favorable, older and more religious people opposed to it), nuclear power, economic problems (particularly low wages; unemployment is not an issue in itself), pensions, etc. Immigration is among other controversial topics that could be used in the future, but it has been relatively left aside for now. **Fourth, the stories emphasize diplomatic relations** and Taiwan's uncertain position on the international stage (→ p. 476).

Of course, the narratives are adapted to different targets: the government's economic failure and the lack of a future in Taiwan for young people (Taiwan is presented as a ghost island, see box below); the agricultural crisis, insecurity, health issues... to old people (harder to reach because they are less connected).

206. 葉郁甫 (Light Yeh) and 宋弘麟 (Stalin Song), “刊出前會先讓北京過目! 國安局首爆中國在台「同路媒體」手法” (“Beijing will See it Before it Goes to Press! NSB Reveals the Chinese Methods for “Complying Media”), 民視新聞 (2 May 2019).

207. Russell Hsiao, “Taiwan's Intelligence Agency Confirms Some Local Media Co-opted by PRC,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, 4:9 (8 May 2019).

208. IORG, *Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan*, 49.

209. Garrett M. Graff, “Russian trolls are Still Playing Both Sides – Even with the Mueller Probe,” *Wired* (19 Oct. 2018); Venuri Siriwardane, “How Russian Trolls are Adapting Cold War Propaganda Techniques,” Brookings Institution (15 May 2020).

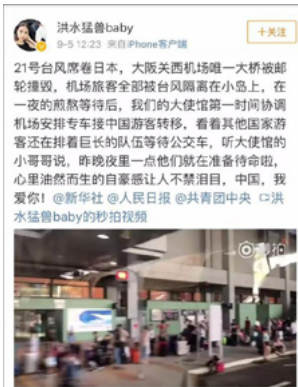


### The ghost island narrative

One of the most common narratives used by Beijing to weaken and divide the Taiwanese society is the ghost island narrative (鬼島): Taiwan is portrayed as having nothing to offer to its youth (low salaries, no professional opportunities).<sup>210</sup> Beijing nourishes that story, not only by spreading messages on social media (there is even a namesake Facebook group,<sup>211</sup> and forums on which young Chinese people discuss the topic). They also organize a brain drain: the China's State Council Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) disclosed in early March 2018 "31 incentives" (对台31项措施) to attract companies and Taiwanese individuals to come live in mainland China, by pushing for the distribution of Taiwanese cultural products (movies, television programs, books) in China, for example, or by having authors receive training in China or become members of Chinese professional organizations.<sup>212</sup> In November 2019, 26 new measures were added to the list, 13 for companies and 13 for individuals.

There has been an increased awareness of Taiwan's vulnerability to misinformation since two distinct events in 2018: the aftermath of typhoon Jebi in Japan and, two months later, the November 2018 municipal elections.

## A. The Typhoon Jebi Affair: when disinformation kills



This is a rare example of information manipulation that indirectly led to someone's death; **the incident "was a turning point in the understanding of information manipulation in Taiwan and their capacity to inflict damages."**<sup>213</sup>

Category 5 typhoon Jebi was the most violent typhoon to hit Japan since 1993. It hit the Kansai region on September 4, 2018. Consequently, Kansai International Airport, not far from Osaka, was severely flooded, grounding more than 3,000 persons, including 750 Chinese and 500 Taiwanese citizens. On day later, at 12:23pm, a Weibo account named "Baby flooding beast" (洪水猛兽baby) posted a message stating that the Chinese embassy was "sending chartered buses to evacuate Chinese travelers" and ending with "I spontaneously feel pride and cannot help to have tears in my eyes. China, I love you!" while tagging the Xinhua press agency, the *People's Daily* (人民日报) and the Communist Youth League to attract their attention. Three hours later, the Chinese website Guancha (观察者网) published an article untitled "750 Chinese citizens blocked at a Japanese airport, the powerful motherland comes to rescue them" which stated that the general consulate in Osaka had sent 15 buses to evacuate Chinese travelers. The article cited the aforementioned message from "Baby flooding beast" as well as Weibo account users claiming to have been among the Chinese people evacuated from the airport. According to those messages, Taiwanese people who wanted to get on the bus were told that they could

210. See for example: "台湾薪资水平为何这么低? 台专家: 真是个 '鬼岛'" ("Why is Taiwanese Media's Salary So Low? A Taiwanese Expert: it really is a Ghost Island"), *Sobu.com* (21 Mar. 2018).

211. Cole, "A Conversation about China's Sharp Power," 16.

212. Lawrence Chung, "Taipei Faces Brain Drain as Beijing Dangles 'Equal Status' Offers," *South China Morning Post* (6 Mar. 2018).

213. IORG, *Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan*, 2.

benefit from this service from the “motherland” if they felt Chinese (觉得自己是中国人就能上车).<sup>214</sup> Official Chinese media picked up the story.<sup>215</sup>

The story reached Taiwanese social media the following morning, first via Professional Technology Temple (PTT), the most popular online forum in Taiwan. An account named “czqs2000” posted a message titled “Does anyone have information on Chinese passengers getting preferential access to buses in Kansai international airport?” Other users shared articles from Guancha and the *Global Times*. Following this, the daily tabloid *Taiwan Apple Daily* (蘋果日報) published a message initially titled “The Chinese embassy sent buses to pick up Chinese passengers at the Kansai airport and asked Taiwanese people to declare themselves as Chinese to get on the bus.”<sup>216</sup> Two hours later, a PTT account user under the name “GuRuGuRu” claimed to be a Taiwanese traveler stuck at the airport the previous day, and said she was able to get on a bus sent by China without having to identify as Chinese. She added that she had contacted the Taiwan Representative Office in Osaka but did not receive any help. Her message was extensively shared and discussed on Taiwanese social media. On September 14, **Su Chii-cherng, (蘇啟誠), a Taiwanese diplomat** and managing director of the Osaka branch of Taipei’s Economic and Cultural Bureau **committed suicide**, hanging himself at his home in Japan. He left a letter in which he said he **could not bear the humiliation and public criticism** that accused his bureau of not doing enough for his fellow citizens blocked at the airport.

The following day, TFC published an investigation showing that all these stories were based on a false premise: in reality, and as was confirmed by a spokesperson of the Kansai airport, **the Chinese consulate never sent buses to pick up Chinese citizens.**<sup>217</sup> The buses were chartered by Japanese authorities for all passengers, without distinction. The Chinese consulate had indeed asked to send its own buses, but its request was rejected by the Japanese authorities.<sup>218</sup> Airport authorities moved the passengers to a transit terminal in a mall in the city of Izumisano, 11.6 km away from the airport. And it is there that the Chinese consulate sent its buses, which picked up Chinese citizens, but no Taiwanese citizen (not the 1044 “Chinese” people, including 32 Taiwanese, claimed by the Chinese consulate).<sup>219</sup> During the airport’s evacuation, staff members from the China Southern Airline company gathered Chinese citizens in one of the buses, but it had not been sent by the consulate.

**Hence, a controversy was allowed to grow for a dozen days, leading to one death, as none of the Taiwanese media involved in the scandal bothered to check the initial information:** they simply took anonymous online testimonies for granted, without being suspicious. Political figures such as KMT’s Arthur Chen (陳宜民) were also instrumental in spreading the Chinese narrative. On September 17, the Taiwanese media watchdog (National Communications Commission, NCC) intervened and sent a warning to several television channels and online media who had not verified information in this story. In reality, **the case showed that “the Taiwanese society in 2018 was generally**

214. “750名中国人滞留日本机场 强大的祖国来接人了” (“750 Chinese Citizens Blocked at a Japanese Airport, the Motherland Came to Rescue Them”), 观察者网 (*L’Observateur*) (5 Sept. 2018).

215. “1,044 Chinese Tourists Evacuated from Typhoon-Hit Japan,” *People’s Daily Online* (6 Sept. 2018).

216. The title was later changed (IORG, Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan, 17).

217. <https://tfc-Taiwan.org.tw/articles/150>.

218. Interview with the authors in Tokyo (Mar. 2019).

219. Tai-Li Wang, “Does Fake News Matter to Election Outcomes? The Case Study of Taiwan’s 2018 Local Election,” *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research*, 8:2 (2020), 94.

not aware of the [risk posed by] disinformation operations.”<sup>220</sup> This incident made the population and social platforms more aware of disinformation as both serious and potentially lethal. It was evident for PTT, which stopped registering new accounts for some time afterward.

In December 2019, Taiwanese influencer Slow Yang (楊蕙如), who built her wealth in the credit card business, and Tsai Fu-ming (蔡福明), were charged for having organized online harassment against Su Chii-cherng by paying several Internet users to insult him.<sup>221</sup>

**While Taiwanese media bear a huge responsibility in this story, its origin remains suspicious.** A rather common incident was transformed into an issue tied to the Taiwanese identity by an article from Guancha, which spread the (false) news that Taiwanese people had to identify as Chinese to get on buses reportedly chartered by the Chinese authorities. But Guancha “operates under Beijing’s Central Network Security and Information Committee Office.”<sup>222</sup> The “czqs2000” account then spread the rumor on Taiwanese networks by posting it on PTT. This is not irrefutable evidence, but its IP address (221.219.231.115) is based in Beijing and is apparently owned by a Chinese press photographer.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, there was a “grouped publication” phenomenon on Facebook, found in many other disinformation cases, including during electoral campaigns, which consists in groups of fan pages publishing at about the same time or within very similar time frames.<sup>224</sup> This highlights a possibly coordinated campaign, further signaling its potential state origin. To sum up, **this fake story, designed to become viral in Taiwan, was presumably fabricated in China, spread by Chinese relays, introduced in Taiwan by a Chinese Internet user and then circulated on Taiwanese social networks, including on Facebook, in a coordinated fashion. For all these reasons, this could be a Chinese disinformation operation in which Taiwanese media, because of their incompetence, were objectively Chinese allies.**

## B. Electoral interference

Not only does Beijing continue to rely on the permanent networks described in this chapter, it also intensifies its efforts during key moments of the Taiwanese democratic life, particularly during electoral campaigns. Electoral interference mainly takes two shapes. First, **covert financial support for selected candidates:** “[such] funds are believed to be made available through Hong Kong, through ‘dual use’ Chinese companies, via Taiwanese companies with a presence in China, and in the form of hard cash brought by couriers (e.g., businesspeople on visits across the Taiwan Strait).”<sup>225</sup> Second, it is evident in the **numerous information manipulations.**

220. IORG, *Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan*, 48.

221. Keoni Everington, “Slow Yang Charged with Spurring Suicide of Taiwanese Diplomat in Japan with Fake News”, *Taiwan News* (2 Dec. 2019).

222. Tai-Li Wang, “Does Fake News Matter to Election Outcomes? The Case Study of Taiwan’s 2018 Local Election”, *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research*, 8:2 (2020), 79.

223. IORG, *Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan*, 20.

224. *Ibid.*, 49.

225. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 18.

## 1. The November 2018 municipal elections

There was a **peak in information manipulations** during the municipal elections organized on November 24, 2018, and which were largely won by the KMT. It was highlighted by a study of more than 5,000 messages reported to the Cofacts platform as being potentially false during the four months preceding the elections, and one month after.<sup>226</sup> Taiwan has always been the target of influence and disinformation operations emanating from mainland China, but they were particularly intense in this instance: “Taiwan’s 2018 election was **the first time for this island to be massively attacked** by fake news or disinformation.”<sup>227</sup>

There are probably a few reasons explaining this intensity: President Tsai’s election two years earlier put an end to the KMT’s political dominance and redefined Taiwan’s relation to China. This election, which was largely perceived as a referendum on the president, questioned the national identity. Finally, the President was unpopular (her approval rate had fallen from 70% to 30%), mostly because of reforms on divisive issues – gay marriage, labor rights, pensions, etc. – some of which were at the center of a multiple-choice referendum on the day of the election. These controversial topics were logically instrumentalized during the electoral campaign. Minister Lo Ping-chen (羅秉成), who was in charge of the fight against disinformation, said that “on the gay marriage issue – this policy was distorted to such an extent that [it claimed] there will be no more moms and dads after such a referendum was passed.”<sup>228</sup>

Two months before the election, the Ministry of Justice’s Investigation Bureau (法務部調查局) released a communiqué claiming to have “**unequivocal evidence**” of the **Chinese government’s interference in the campaign through content farms producing divisive fake news to divide the Taiwanese society.**<sup>229</sup> It also investigated **33 cases of suspected Chinese financial contributions to Taiwanese candidates.**<sup>230</sup> The National Security Bureau (NSB) speaks of “media and psychological warfare” against the island, which it compared to the Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections. It detected “many content farms, many bots and purchases of ‘likes’ coming from China and supporting pro-Chinese candidates only, through private companies.”<sup>231</sup> “It costs 5,000 Taiwanese dollars to buy 1,000 logins, and the price rises during election campaigns. Some accounts change their IP addresses every day,” a member of government explained, adding that “the most common *modus operandi* was the spreading of fake news on social media, on Facebook and on LINE, before they got picked up by conventional media. We also saw usurped IP addresses, fake accounts, and attempts to provoke or accentuate divisions between people who were pro and anti-China.”<sup>232</sup> It also seems that **illegal bets** played a role too: “the likelihood of high returns if a certain candidate is elected could encourage bettors to call upon their friends and families to vote for the candidate in question.”<sup>233</sup>

226. 王宏恩 (Wang Hong'en), 選舉前的假新聞比較多嗎? —以LINE為例 (“Are There Numerous Fake News Preceding the Elections? LINE’s Example”), 思想坦克 (*Voice Tank*) (5 Sept. 2019), <https://www.voicetank.org/single-post/2019/09/05/090501>.

227. Wang, “Does Fake News Matter to Election Outcomes?” 74.

228. Cited in Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 16, note 25.

229. Chien Li-chung, Chung Li-hua, and Jonathan Chin, “China Using Fake News to Divide Taiwan,” *Taipei Times* (16 Sept. 2018).

230. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 18.

231. Interview with one of the authors and a NSB executive, in Taipei (Apr. 2019).

232. Authors interview with a member of the government in Taipei.

233. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 19



Many irregularities were found in the campaign for the country's second biggest city, **Kaohsiung** (2.8 million inhabitants). For two decades, the city was controlled by the DPP, which won the previous elections with 68% of the votes. The incumbent mayor, Chen Chu (陳菊) held the record of political longevity in the country after 1945 (2006-2018). This time, she was facing a KMT candidate, pro-Beijing **Han Kuo-yu**, whose populist style, such as the slogan "Make Kaohsiung Rich and Great" won him the nickname of the **Taiwanese Trump**, save for the fact that, unlike Trump he had largely been unknown months before the vote. **His meteoric rise, which led him to be elected mayor, may have been greatly helped by Beijing.** At first, there were a few suspicious signs. His social media accounts had a level of "community engagements" (an aggregate of likes, comments, and shares across the Internet) many times higher than all of the other KMT candidates combined.<sup>234</sup> His **Facebook** account in particular prompted suspicions. **His official page's popularity growth was spectacular**, it gained 225,882 "likes" and 235,038 followers in less than a month, three times more than his DPP opponent and higher than the national average (around 12,000 "likes" and followers).<sup>235</sup> The page had about half a million followers at the end of the campaign – twice as many as his DPP opponent, Chen, whose page was filled with insults and hateful comments.

**A Facebook group supporting him** named "Han Kuo-yu Fans for Victory! Holding up a Blue Sky!" (韓國瑜粉絲後援團 必勝! 撐起一片藍天), created just one day after Han declared his candidacy, **played an important role in the campaign.** With around 61,000 members at the time of the election, it became a hub offering many resources (talking points, memes, fake news discrediting the DPP opponent, etc.) to Han supporters. Yet, it was later established that **this group had not been created by actual fans of the candidates, but rather "created, managed, and nurtured by what looks very much like a professional cybergroup from China."**<sup>236</sup> **Three of its admins, involved from the beginning, were suspicious accounts** which turned completely inactive a day after the election. The LinkedIn profiles linked to these accounts exhibited stereotypical patterns and **displayed the exact same characteristics as 249 other accounts:** same description in simplified Chinese characters, similar mugshot-style photos that could have been cropped from decades-old graduation pictures, all claiming to be Tencent employees and Peking University graduates.<sup>237</sup> Some even used the **same photo under different names**, thus confirming the fraud. Paul Huang, who uncovered the operation, added that **"LinkedIn is known to be one of Beijing's favorite playgrounds for conducting espionage and influence operations."**<sup>238</sup> Numerous cases revealed in the United States,<sup>239</sup> in Germany,<sup>240</sup> or in France,<sup>241</sup> showed **Beijing to be capable and used to creating hundreds or thousands of accounts to scout, approach – and potentially recruit – targets**, which is easier on LinkedIn, where people are usually looking for professional opportunities. Besides, LinkedIn is the only major American social media allowed in China.<sup>242</sup>

234. Paul Huang, "Chinese Cyber-Operatives Boosted Taiwan's Insurgent Candidate," *Foreign Policy* (26 Jun. 2019).

235. Between October 17, and November 14, 2018, according to Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 17.

236. Huang, "Chinese Cyber-Operatives."

237. Ibid.

238. Ibid.

239. Jeff Stone, "LinkedIn is Becoming China's Go-To Platform for Recruiting Foreign Spies," *Cyberscoop* (26 Mar. 2019).

240. "German Spy Agency Warns of Chinese LinkedIn Espionage," BBC (Dec. 2017).

241. Christophe Cornevin and Jean Chichizola, "Figaro's Revelations on a Chinese Spying Program Targeting France," *Le Figaro* (22 Oct. 2018).

242. Edward Wong, "How China Uses LinkedIn to Recruit Spies Abroad," *The New York Times* (28 Aug. 2019).

Another element pointing to Chinese interference came after the fact, with the defection of **Wang Liqiang** (王立强), who claims he had been an intelligence officer and asked Australia for political asylum in November 2019. His confession should be taken with a pinch of salt, but he **claimed to have participated in influence operations** against Taiwan during the 2018 elections by **creating 200,000 fake accounts on social media and offering no less than 1.5 billion yuan (€188.5 million) to Taiwanese media** to promote Han Kuo-yu's campaign against President Tsai.<sup>243</sup> Based on the data released by Wang, two people he named were arrested in Taiwan for being Chinese agents.

Finally, regarding the extent to which fake news spread during this campaign actually reached their goals – whether or not they really influenced the electors' opinions – a survey carried out immediately after the vote, on a sample of 1,068 voters, highlighted the two most influential fake news: that President Tsai did not leave her armored vehicle and “hid” behind armed soldiers as she visited a region that had suffered from heavy floods in 2018; and the typhoon Jebi affair (→ p. 456). The study also showed that the voters who were the most influenced were politically independent. That year, a majority of them voted for the KMT.<sup>244</sup>

Largely perceived as a referendum on the government and as a general repetition for the January 2020 general elections, the **2018 municipal elections were also an eye opener, and increased awareness of the risks posed by electoral interference**. They also highlighted the leading role played by content farms (→ p. 367) since it is now accepted that, during the 2018 campaign, **a large part of the published content was produced in content farms coordinated by the PLA**.<sup>245</sup>

## 2. The presidential and legislative elections of January 2020

On January 11, 2020 Taiwan organized its 15<sup>th</sup> presidential election and 10<sup>th</sup> legislative election. Democratic Progressive Party Incumbent Tsai Ing-wen was re-elected with 57.1% of the votes, against the Kuomintang candidate Han Kuo-Yu (38.61%) and the People First Party candidate James Soong (4.26%). Turnout stood at 75% (compared to 66% in 2016) – the highest in twenty years. According to Liberty Times Net, the number of voters that registered abroad doubled compared to 2016.<sup>246</sup> The DPP also maintained its majority in the Legislative Yuan, while losing a few seats (from 68 to 61). The KMT gained three seats (now 38). The Taiwan People's Party (TPP), led by the mayor of Taipei, won 5 seats but only 1.5 million votes, compared to 4.8 million and 4.7 million for the DPP and KMT respectively. The remaining 9 seats went to other parties. This election also contributed to feminizing the parliament: women won 45.6% of the seats, which is comparable to Scandinavian countries.

**During this election, and not unlike the preceding one, “we observed Chinese state-affiliated activities stealthily targeting every segment of the influence operations lifecycle, from production and amplification to dissemination.”**<sup>247</sup> Beijing started by **covertly funding some candidates**. In December 2019, the Justice Ministry

243. Renée Diresta et al., *Telling China's Story: The Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Shape Global Narratives*, Stanford Internet Cyber Policy Center (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution, Jul. 2020), 26.

244. Wang, “Does Fake News Matter to Election Outcomes?” 67-104.

245. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 28.

246. “Taiwan Election: Disinformation as a Partisan Issue”, Stanford Internet Observatory (21 Jan. 2020).

247. Insikt Group, “Chinese Influence Operations Evolve in Campaigns Targeting Taiwanese Elections, Hong Kong Protests,” *Recorded Future* (29 Apr. 2020), 1.

revealed it had identified 66 cases since July, involving 279 people, six of whom had been arrested, in connection to amounts paid from accounts located in China as well as in Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Vietnam, reaching 100 billion Taiwanese dollars (€2.95 billion).<sup>248</sup> Authorities also found and closed 1,700 clandestine casinos, seized more than 50 million Taiwanese dollars (€1.48 million).<sup>249</sup>

**Information manipulation was however less prominent than expected, for several reasons. First, precisely because the government and civil society were better prepared** following the 2018 fiasco.<sup>250</sup> **Second, because Chinese efforts had been concentrated on the Hong Kong crisis**, particularly between September and November 2019, leading to more sloppy and less subtle operations against Taiwan that were easier to spot for these reasons. These operations were also carried out in vain, since **the Hong Kong crisis was a strong repellent**: it confirmed Beijing’s anti-democratic ambitions and the failure of a “One Country, Two Systems” policy. This clearly made things more difficult for pro-unification candidates, particularly for Han Kuo-yu (KMT), the incumbent president’s main opponent. It became quite clear during the summer, or at the beginning of the fall of 2019, that he would not win the presidency. From that moment on, **there was no point for Beijing in investing too much in an unwinnable election**. What could be impacted, though, were the legislative elections, which was taking place simultaneously, with the objective of making as many pro-unification candidates win as possible. Finally, **digital platforms were proactive. Facebook, especially**, recruited a staff to specifically oversee the electoral campaign, set up an “election war room,” deleted 51 accounts, 118 pages as well as 99 groups linked to them for “unauthentic behavior.” Suppressions of this kind are actually frequent but they were noticed this time around, because one of the groups, supporting Han Kuo-yu’s candidacy, had more than 150,000 followers. Facebook had to justify itself. Apparently, the manipulations were not coordinated, and their origin was not established. From Facebook’s point of view, **elements hinting to China (such as the use of simplified characters or the time when people were active)** were not necessarily problematic, Chinese web-users having the right to express support for a Taiwanese candidate. We should also note that the page belonging to the third candidate, James Soong (founder and president of the pro-unification and anti-independence People’s First Party) gained 500,000 “likes” (+359%) and almost 500,000 followers (+356%) between the December 12 and 16, 2019, compared to only about 12,000 (both likes and followers) in the following weeks – a gain “unlikely to be organic,”<sup>251</sup> that points at the **use of bots and fake accounts to artificially inflate a community**.

According to the Taiwan FactCheck Center, the first fact-checking organization in Taiwan, **the disinformation campaign accelerated in October**: before, most of their activities revolved around debunking false news about science, health, food safety, environment, trafficking, and so on. But in October, political topics became prevalent. **And most of the false news were published in simplified Chinese, thus presumably produced in mainland China.**<sup>252</sup> A significant proportion focused on procedural elements, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) mostly, with rumors about the ink that was being

248. 顧荃, “蘇貞昌: 境外勢力干擾選舉必痛加打擊” (“Su Tseng-chang: Foreign Forces Interfering in Elections are Hard to Combat”), 中央社 (CNA) (12 Dec. 2019).

249. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 19.

250. Iain Robertson, *Chinese Messaging Across the Strait: China-friendly Narratives and the 2020 Taiwan Presidential Election*, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (Dec. 2020), 5.

251. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 53.

252. An interview with one of the authors at the Taiwan FactCheck Center in Taipei (Jan. 2020).

used (said to invalidate votes for Han Kuo-yu), ballot delivery, counting, etc. These tactics hoped to **cast doubt on the election's integrity, thus lowering trust in the results. This is a tactic used by people who know they will lose: if an election cannot be won, at least try to weaken the winner.** Other more topic-based operations targeted international tourism (accusing the government of paying tourists), gay marriage, or the idea that President Tsai “was profiting off AIDS” because she invested in biotechnologies.



In order to spread the idea that even the administration had lost trust in the government, opponents published a **fake news targeting the Presidential Office Secretary-General Chen Chu (陳菊)**, a leading DPP figure, saying that an investigation from the Ministry of Justice established that she was corrupt and had stolen 50 billion Taiwanese dollars (€1.48 billion) when she was Mayor of Kaohsiung. This rumor was initiated in April 2019 by the Chinese Phoenix press agency. The Ministry of Justice Investigative Bureau did deny it in a November press release, but it was not enough, and the fake news was intensely shared during the campaign's final

month, in December 2019. And it completely stopped the day after the election, which confirmed that its goal was indeed to influence the results.<sup>253</sup>

**Media-based disinformation was present during the campaign. On Facebook, DFRLab gave the example of a CCP-aligned page that spread disinformation on the president:** “Headlines across the Strait” (@taiwanheadlines 兩岸頭), was still active in March 2021, with more than 766,000 followers. Created in 2015, DFRLab noted that it underwent a series of name changes – one indicator of inauthentic behavior. In October 2018 (ahead of the 2016 president election), its first name was “2016 Taiwan Presidential Election” (台灣大選). Following Tsai Ing-wen’s victory in January 2016, the page became “Advice to Tsai Ing-wen” (向蔡英文建言) and was later renamed several times, adapting it to the local political context. The owner of this page is the Chinese company VTV Internet Technology Jiangsu Limited Co. (微視網絡科技江蘇有限公司). The main shareholder of the company is the Elion group, whose chairman of the board, Wang Wenbiao, is a businessman “who also holds [an] important position in the CCP’s Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, the ‘highest-ranking entity overseeing the United Front system.’”<sup>254</sup>

253. IORG, *Event Studies of Chinese Information Operations Against Taiwan*, 27.

254. Robertson, *Chinese Messaging Across the Strait*, 12.





Aside from Facebook, **Twitter, LINE, and YouTube, other platforms such as PTT, Dcard, and Weibo, were also used to spread disinformation during the 2020 presidential election campaign.**<sup>255</sup> YouTube can be used to recycle debunked printed fake news into videos, and it was used much more than before.<sup>256</sup> Several videos, for example, questioned the **authenticity of Tsai Ing-wen’s PhD** (see screenshot below) – a persisting rumor, already prevalent on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, so much so that the prestigious London School of Economics (LSE) had to publish a press release in October 2019 to attest that Tsai Ing-wen did indeed receive a PhD in law in 1984.<sup>257</sup> This campaign lasted until after the election, as the **idea that her PhD was fake gave legitimacy to the notion that the election was fake as well.** Thus, on February 21, 2020, a petition appeared on the White House website<sup>258</sup> “We the People,” titled: “Luc 8:17: we want the truth on the Taiwanese president’s fraudulent PhD.”<sup>259</sup> This petition was shared profusely on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) in Taiwan as well as in the Chinese-speaking press in the United States,<sup>260</sup> as part of articles or advertisements that called on the Chinese diaspora to sign the petition.<sup>261</sup> But, with only 42,347 people signatures in 30 days, the petition did not reach the 100,000-signature threshold required to be considered by the U.S. government. However, as soon as the petition closed, another petition was created by the same Internet user (L.H.) which claimed that the reason why the petition did not meet the required threshold is that it was “hacked” by “Tsai’s hackers,” including her minister of digital affairs Audrey Tang. This second petition asked the White House to conduct an investigation – without much success either, it only collected 3,647 signatures in 30 days.<sup>262</sup>

255. Ibid., 17.

256. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 50.

257. “LSE Statement on PhD of Dr Tsai Ing-wen,” The London School of Economics and Political Science (8 Oct. 2019).

258. A system implemented under Obama to bring the government’s attention to causes that can gather more than 100,000 signatures in 30 days: <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/about>.

259. The petition could be found on: <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/luke-817-we-want-truth-taiwanese-presidents-fraudulent-phd-degree> but it has been deleted since then. The title refers to the Bible’s passage: “for there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed.”

260. Including *Chinese of Chicago*, *St. Louis Chinese Journal*, *Chinesejournalus.net*, *Sing Tao Daily* and *Southern Daily*.

261. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital*, 56-59.

262. The petition could be found on: <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/possible-security-breach-and-tempering-white-house-petition-zhi-yi-bai-gong-wang-zhan-bei-hai-ke-ru-qin-yi-ji-bai-gong-de-qing> but it has since then been deleted.



At the top: the since-deleted petitions on the website of the White House. At the bottom: video published by the 政經關不了 news channel (*True Voice of Taiwan*) on August 31, 2019. This show, hosted by Peng Wenzheng (彭文正), pretended to demonstrate to what extent Tsai falsified her PhD.<sup>263</sup>

## C. Agriculture as a key battleground for disinformation

Farmers are a **significant voter base** in Taiwan and, with the Taiwanese working-class, one of the two groups most supportive of the current government. **They are thus regularly targeted with disinformation** in the hope of turning them against the DPP – operations in which content farms (→ p. 367) usually play an important role.<sup>264</sup>

Banana prices fell in May 2018 due to a rising production, quickly reaching a five-year low before the Agricultural Council intervened. But many articles written by content farms sustained and exaggerated the farmer’s “panic.” One article on *Mission* titled “Pineapple prices are bad, bananas also go below the dollar, and seasonal fruits are not good either: farmers are now panicking,” was largely shared on May 29, 2018 on the Facebook pages “Kaobei DPP, Recall the DPP” (罷免民進黨) and “Kaobei Current Events” (靠北時事). Two days later, the website *China Review*, which belongs to the China Review News Agency, created in Hong Kong in 2005 (a part of the China Review Group (中国评论集团) created in 1998), published an article on its website in Taiwan quoting a farmer who presumably said that “if the Tsai government does not act quickly, we will see if farmers do not rebel.” This article was picked up by the content farm Nooho which merged it with another article and added a new title: “if the DPP does not fall, farmers will be good-for-nothings.”

The following day, on June 2, an unknown writer on *Mission* copied and modified an article initially published in the *Apple Daily Taiwan* (蘋果日報), changing its title to “Helen Chang [a DPP politician]: it’s China’s fault if we have an oversupply of fruits, it’s a matter of national security” and spread it on forums and on Facebook. At the same time, Xinhua and the Chinese content farm Meiri Toutiao (每日頭條) wrote that “the Taiwanese public opinion believes that the DPP authorities’ refusal to recognize the 1992 consensus effectively froze inter-strait relations and severely impacted tourism industries, agricultural industries and fishing in Taiwan. The continental market is essential in solving unmarketable price declines in Taiwan.”

263. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyEd-VVUxsg&app=desktop>.

264. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyEd-VVUxsg&app=desktop>.



Picture with misleading captions also circulated on social media. On one of them, presumably taken in June 2018, a truck is seen dumping bananas in a ditch in Kaohsiung. On LINE, this photo came with comments such as “the media does not dare report that the bananas from Qishan and Meinong in Kaohsiung are massively thrown away, everything has been silenced” (高雄旗山美濃的香蕉棄置現場新聞不敢報，一切都新聞封鎖), or that a kilo of bananas was now sold for one dollar (台香蕉一公斤一元). But the Taiwanese journalist Li Huiyi (李慧宜) took the picture in 2007 for the 我們的島 TV show on public television. And to prove that the “recent” photo was a fake, she went back to the exact same spot on June 6, 2018.<sup>265</sup>

Similarly, a picture showing thousands of pineapples rotting in a pond spread on social media in 2018, particularly on LINE, with the same narrative (DPP policies are responsible for declining prices, pushing farmers to throw their production away). In fact, this photo had been taken in Xuwen District, in the Zhanjiang city jurisdiction of Guangdong, in mainland China.<sup>266</sup>



A year later, the same scenario was repeated: **articles initially published on Mission and then shared on Facebook fan pages divided the Taiwanese society** (this time about a story on pesticides and bananas) and Chinese content farms like Meiri Toutiao kept painting China in a positive light, claiming it bought Taiwanese goods to help the island’s farmers, who were incidentally grateful for that.

For example, on March 8, 2019, in the middle of an election campaign – in a move visibly aimed at weakening the DPP – the pro-KMT CTi television channel aired an interview in which a grapefruit producer said that farmers had poured 200 million tons of grapefruits in the Zengwen reservoir (曾文水库) the previous year.<sup>267</sup> The interview was immediately picked up by KMT member Hsieh Lung-chieh (謝龍介) who, standing behind the presenter, corrected the number because it was too high: he admitted it was probably closer to 120 million tons – which remains huge and unconvincing. Later in

265. 李慧宜 (Li Hui-yi), “記者還原真相! 旗山美濃香蕉「沒有棄置現場」請別流傳傷害農民” (“A Journalist Re-Establishes the Truth! No Abandoned Banana in Qishan, Please, Do Not Spread Rumors that Could Hurt Farmers”), 上下游 (*News and Market*) (6 Jun. 2018).

266. “[假照片]台南鳳梨丟棄電視不敢報導? 來自中國的照片和影片” (“[Fake photo] Television Does Not Dare to Report on the [Case of] Waste in Tainan? [True] Photos and Videos from China”), *MyGoPen* (24 May 2018).

267. Available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llAn6pTUa6w>.



the interview, the farmer Chen stopped mentioning the Zengwen Dam and instead talked about the Zengwen River (曾文溪). Nevertheless, CTi captioned its video: “200 million tons of grapefruit are thrown in the reservoir” (see screenshot below).



#### D. A Chinese journalist posed as a Taiwanese YouTuber (2019)

In August 2019, an Internet user showed what he considered to be evidence that President Tsai Ing-wen and the DPP were “selling” Taiwan to Japan and the United States in a video shared on YouTube and Facebook.<sup>268</sup> **He spoke Mandarin with a Taiwanese accent and used traditional characters in his video’s subtitles. He even perfectly mastered the Taiwanese dialect, so much so that he really seemed to be a native of Taiwan.** However, the Investigative Bureau of the Ministry of Justice revealed that **he was a Chinese agent spreading fake news.**<sup>269</sup> A body of corroborating evidence did indeed show that he was a journalist and radio presenter serving the PRC.

In his video, the Internet user contended that DPP members were the descendants of Japanese colonizers who took money away from Taiwanese taxpayers to enrich Japan. He said that, according to official numbers from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, more than a third of the trade surplus from business with the PRC was given to Japan. It was meant as an irrefutable proof that DPP members, including Tsai and the Taiwanese representative in Japan Frank Hsieh (謝長廷), were “sold” to Japan: they were described as inciting Taiwanese people to accept imported “radioactive” food from the Fukushima region, that Japan struggled to sell abroad. The video’s author also criticized Tsai’s government for squandering Taiwanese taxpayer’s money by buying military equipment that “is not even working” – a hint at the F-16V bought from the United States. He ended the video by calling his viewers to make the right choice during the 2020 presidential election.

This was the first video posted on **his YouTube channel and Facebook page “At the Foot of Mount Jade” (玉山腳下)**, a name referring to the Yu Shan mountain at the center of Taiwan. In two months, the video was liked over a thousand times on each platform, shared more than 1,700 times on Facebook, watched more than 15,800 times on YouTube

268. Facebook Video: “蔡英文賣台證據，實錘！還不抓嗎？” *Facebook* (22 Aug. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=381426715789427>; YouTube Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3CwIVfd3H8&t=33s>.

269. “「蔡英文賣台」影片竟是統戰手法 調查局：轉傳恐觸法” (The Video “Tsai Ing-wen’s Treason” is In Fact a United Front Tactic: Investigation: Its Diffusion May Violate the Law”), *Apple Daily* (21 Oct. 2019), <https://tw.news.appledaily.com/local/realtime/20191021/1651955/>.



and 127,000 times on Facebook. The YouTube channel has since been made private, but the videos remain accessible on his Facebook page. In other videos, he fueled controversy over Tsai's PhD,<sup>270</sup> accused the United States of interference in Taiwanese elections through their support for Tsai,<sup>271</sup> or called on Taiwanese media to be more disciplined, verifying facts rather than spreading rumors.<sup>272</sup>

This person, who introduced himself as Xida (希達), seemed to be **Zhang Xida (张希达), a PRC journalist and radio presenter**. His employee profile is easy to find on HelloTaiwan (nihaotw.com),<sup>273</sup> a media platform for Taiwanese audiences owned by the China National Radio (中央人民广播电台).<sup>274</sup> The latter belongs to the China Media Group (中央广播电视总台), or Voice of China (中国之声), a subordinate to the State Council of the PRC.



Zhang Xida is a journalist, author of many articles on issues related to relations between China and Taiwan.<sup>275</sup> He also followed Han Kuo-yu for a few months and portrayed him in a very favorable light in a video published on Weibo on March 27, 2019 by the Cross-straits Internet Exchange Committee of the Internet Society of China (中国互联网协会海峡两岸互联网交流委员会).<sup>276</sup> It effectively introduced Zhan Xida as a CNR journalist (“央广记者”).<sup>277</sup> The post was then picked up by the account of a show on the Shenzhou Easy Radio station, otherwise known as CNR 6 (中央人民广播电台神州之声),<sup>278</sup> with the comment “here are the words of our dashing corre-

270. 玉山腳下 (Yushanjiaoxia), “蔡英文假學歷，民進黨真斂財，陳明文300萬就煞寥寥?” *Facebook* (9 Sept. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/lovetw3000times/videos/1125459457842023>; “一篇論文搞定2個博士學位，蔡英文的神論文昨天公佈，不能說的秘密太多”, *Facebook* (24 Sept. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/lovetw3000times/videos/505554506905112>.

271. 玉山腳下 (Yushanjiaoxia), “美國赤裸干涉台灣選舉，台北法案做賊喊捉賊，蔡英文夜夜做夢都會笑” *Facebook* (28 Sept. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/lovetw3000times/videos/1104141263113969>.

272. 玉山腳下 (Yushanjiaoxia), “大陸人每天只能買2公斤豬肉，台灣媒體還有新聞素養嗎?” *Facebook* (2 Sept. 2019), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=502012260573239>.

273. His HelloTaiwan profile: [http://nihaotw.com/gb/zbfc/20161116/t20161116\\_523271611.html](http://nihaotw.com/gb/zbfc/20161116/t20161116_523271611.html). Archived here: <http://archive.md/929IO>. HelloTaiwan Presentation: [http://www.hellotw.com/gb/stzn/20191023/t20191023\\_524829085.html](http://www.hellotw.com/gb/stzn/20191023/t20191023_524829085.html).

274. HelloTaiwan <http://www.nihaotw.com/> – 中央人民廣播電臺對台灣廣播中心版權所有.

275. For example, an article on an event fostering cross-strait relationships for young musicians and published on October 23, 2019, on the CNR website: [http://news.cnr.cn/dj/20191023/t20191023\\_524829362.shtml](http://news.cnr.cn/dj/20191023/t20191023_524829362.shtml).

276. Zhang Xida on Han Kuo-yu: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=028VzA9FL-c>.

277. Weibo Account “融融来了” [https://www.weibo.com/345998109?is\\_hot=1](https://www.weibo.com/345998109?is_hot=1); Chinese website: <http://www.siec.Taiwan.cn/>.

278. Weibo account “CNR祖地乡音” [https://www.weibo.com/u/1980070714?refer\\_flag=1001030103\\_&is\\_hot=1](https://www.weibo.com/u/1980070714?refer_flag=1001030103_&is_hot=1); CNR 6 is a radio station for Taiwanese audiences, in regional dialects and in Mandarin.

spondent Zhang Xida.”<sup>279</sup> He is indeed tied to CNR 6, given that he participated in the conception of one of its daily shows, broadcast since 2012 from the first Chinese boat that connected the city of Quanzhou to the Kinmen (Quemoy) Island, the *Pengjiang* (蓬江輪).<sup>280</sup>

**Other details revealed his Chinese identity:** he used the term “dangju” (当局) to talk about Taiwanese authorities, which is not used by Taiwanese people because it implies that the authorities in power are not legitimate.<sup>281</sup> It is used by the Chinese however. In addition to that, in another video, the wrong transcription in simplified characters of the word “gan” in the expression “dried mangos” (芒果干) was noticed. The traditional character is usually written “乾” (pronounced in the first tone) but the author used “幹,” which is homophonous (pronounced in the fourth tone). However, both characters were simplified in the PRC as “干.” Hence the mistake made by Zhang Xida, who involuntarily revealed that he was from the continent, and not from Taiwan.<sup>282</sup>



“Awful! China’s methods to spread fake information are more and more sophisticated!  
Zhang Xida, from Xiamen:

1. No Chinese accent, knows Taiwanese dialect.
2. Knows Taiwanese people TV habits.
3. Has penetrated Taiwanese radio.
4. Chinese pro-Han Kuo-yu journalist.”<sup>283</sup>

At this point, Zhang Xida’s action could have been an independent initiative. But this case shows that **language is not sufficient as a barrier to protect Taiwan from disinformation coming from China.** But, while Zhang Xida’s case indicates that the Chinese

279. <http://archive.md/9SayI>.

280. His HelloTaiwan profile announced that he participated in at least four other shows <http://archive.md/929IO>. On the boat, see [http://www.hellotw.com/mnkj/xmbjb/201212/t20121202\\_797683.htm](http://www.hellotw.com/mnkj/xmbjb/201212/t20121202_797683.htm). End of service in 2018: <http://archive.md/QQyC8>.

281. Full formulation: “台湾当局经济主管部门官方网站”.

282. See <https://www.ftvnews.com.tw/news/detail/2019A27W0011>.

283. <http://archive.ph/Zrv1Z>.

can to launch believable disinformation campaigns, it also reveals that their **initiatives lack sophistication**. It was way too easy to find Zhang Xida’s real identity: he could have taken the time to construct a robust backstory and to delete any trace of his activity in China.

## E. The Li Jie Case (2019)

On June 18, 2019, an Internet user called Li Jie (李杰, also transcribed as “Li Chieh”) circulated a text on several Facebook groups stating that the Tsai administration had given 1 billion Taiwanese dollars (€29.5 million) to support the “violent” protests in Hong Kong, but that it had refused to give anything for the prevention and the fight against dengue fever in Kaohsiung (see screenshots below).

His posts gathered between 600 and 800 “likes” on the groups, and they were shared between 300 and 800 times, all within less than 24 hours. The Taiwanese authorities refuted the claim as early as the next day, opened an investigation, and revealed that the IP address belonged to an Internet user who had already been reported for a similar initiative the year before.<sup>284</sup> Li Jie’s profile was thus suspended, and his posts were deleted. From screenshots captured before he was suspended, we learned that Li Jie had signed up to Facebook in July 2018 and presented himself as an inhabitant of Kaohsiung.



On the left: “The violent protests in Hong Kong received an aid of one billion [Taiwanese dollars] from Tsai’s government [but] Kaohsiung did not receive anything to prevent and fight the dengue fever.”

On the right: “Open your eyes wide, one billion!!! It was one billion!!! We have enough money for others to spend it, but not one cent to save our own population! Tsai’s government sent one billion [Taiwanese dollars] to support the protests against the amendment to the Extradition Law by the Hong Kong government, and receives severe warnings from mainland China.”

Source: *Liberty Times Net*.

The cases of dengue fever in Kaohsiung had already sparked controversy between KMT supporters who, out of sheer political calculation, criticized the DPP for not allocating enough money to dengue prevention in Kaohsiung; on their part, DPP supporters criticized how Han Kuo-yu dealt with the crisis.<sup>285</sup>

At least three of the **Facebook groups on which Li Jie spread the fake news were identified as overtly anti-DPP or pro-KMT**. A first group was created in February and

284. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiZel8VP6oM>.

285. “高雄”绿委“用登革热”黑韩”遭台网友狠批”, Taihainet.com. <http://www.taihainet.com/news/twnews/twdnsz/2019-06-18/2275003.html>.



had more than 23,500 members.<sup>286</sup> It was fully aligned with the positions adopted by CTi TV host Joyce Huang (黃智賢), known for her pro-unification stances.

#### DESCRIPTION

黃智賢小姐的評論理性中肯，言必有證(物)，值的為其按讚，可與我新儒家評論網相互支援，共同破解假台灣人真日本人建構的邪說謬論。

Screenshot from the description of the pro-Joyce Huang group:

“[the] analysis of Ms. Joyce Huang is rational and pertinent, always grounded in evidence and it deserves to be praised.

Together with our new website of Confucian commentaries [Rujiaawang], she can support us and unmask the absurdities and lies of the so-called Taiwanese who are actually Japanese.”

With more than 32,000 members,<sup>287</sup> another group was created in March 2018 to support Hou Yu-ih (侯友宜), the KMT mayor of New Taipei, in his campaign for the 2018 provincial elections. Thanks to its page's current cover picture, we can see that the group also supported Han Kuo-yu's 2020 presidential bid.



Screenshot of the Facebook page that endorsed Hou Yu-ih.

The third group,<sup>288</sup> with a community of 54,000 members, was created in April 2014 to support the KMT politician Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱). The group changed its name in August 2019, signaling its direct support for Han Kuo-yu, seen below with Hung. The group's earlier description called for everyone to come together against “pro-independence people and fascists.”



Screenshot of the Facebook page supporting Han Kuo-yu and Hung Hsiu-chu.

286. See Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/436685729870298/>.

287. See the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2034858436836458/>.

288. See the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/706676622729838/>.

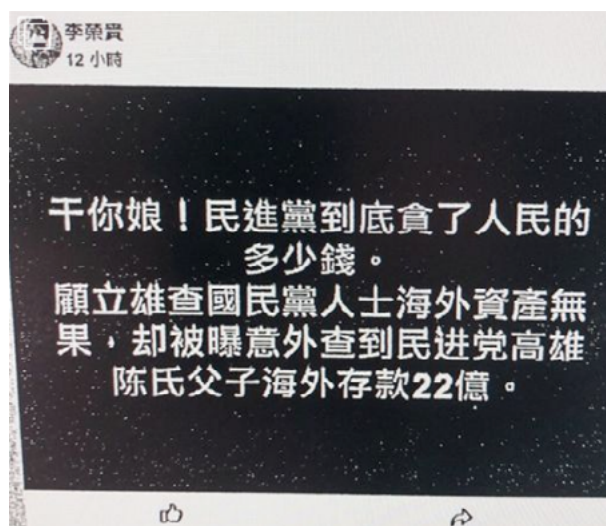


Hence, it is hardly surprising that Li Jie's posts were well-received in these groups, in which several members expressed their opposition to the protests in Hong Kong.

We know little on "Li Jie," whose Facebook profile is no longer available, except that his name was written in simplified, non-traditional characters. This detail fed speculations that Li Jie, a common name in Chinese, was a PRC agent masquerading as Taiwanese and claiming to be from Kaohsiung, or at least as living there.



Moreover, the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB) revealed that **Li Jie's IP address was the same as Li Ronggui's (李榮貴, also transcribed as "Li Jung-kuei"), and located in Singapore.**<sup>289</sup> According to the CIB, it likely to be the same person. Li Ronggui's profile spread a number of false news targeting Chen Chi-mai (陳其邁), a DPP candidate at the provincial elections for the city of Kaohsiung in 2018; for example, it claimed that he and his father owned foreign assets worth 2.2 billion Taiwanese dollars (€65 million).<sup>290</sup> Han Kuo-yu won the election, but it is impossible to assess whether these manipulations played a role in the KMT candidate's victory.



"How much money did this fucking DPP embezzled from the people! Wellington Koo inspected the foreign assets of KMT leaders without finding anything abnormal, but he found surprises on the DPP side, the Chens, father and son, from Kaohsiung, hid 2.2 billion abroad."

## F. The Covid-19 pandemic (2020)

This lost opportunity, for China, was quickly followed by a new opportunity for **disinformation: the Covid-19 pandemic. It was all the more important that, in Taiwan, information manipulation had focused on health issues more than on politics in recent years**, as Audrey Tang explained: "most viral rumors are not political, they are

289. "Taiwan Denies Donating NT\$1 Billion in Support of Hong Kong Protest," *Focus Taiwan* (20 Jun. 2019).

290. <http://archive.fo/cNjFm>.

about food safety, they are about health [...] That is dominant.”<sup>291</sup> In other words, the Taiwanese society was particularly vulnerable to the Covid-19 “Infodemic.”

In late February and early March 2020, “Chinese users organized a coordinated disinformation campaign to smear the Taiwanese government on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Rumors spread included that the government was covering up domestic cases of the coronavirus, the DPP was profiting off of the disease, and bodies were being burned en masse or buried secretly in construction sites. Chinese Weibo users openly bragged about spreading these rumors on Facebook.”<sup>292</sup> On Twitter, the hashtag #台湾肺炎 (Taiwan pneumonia) was used to make people believe that the virus was Taiwanese. Chinese media also defended the idea that Taiwanese authorities used the health crisis to pursue political independence (以疫谋独) but that this “shameful ploy” would end in bitter failure.<sup>293</sup> The announcement of a Taiwan-United States partnership to combine their efforts in the fight the pandemic (台美防疫伙伴关系) and Taiwan’s subsequent donation of 10,000 masks a week to the United States triggered a surge of criticisms from China. In an op-ed widely shared across Chinese networks, Xinhua described the decision as a political maneuver by Taiwan to get closer to the U.S. at the expense of its population’s well-being, an act depicted as treason. How could the DPP give so many masks to the United States when the Taiwanese population had trouble finding any? Xinhua condemned Taiwan’s policy of being “distrustful toward China but not the United States or Europe” (只防大陆, 不防欧美). This policy, which they described as “hating China and flattering the United States,” was “even more harmful than the virus” (仇中媚美 比病毒更毒) according to the media.<sup>294</sup>



This campaign also contained interesting cases of image and identity theft. On several occasions the accounts spreading these rumors portrayed themselves as established media: for example, @APChinese\_ (an account since suspended by Twitter) used the logo of the Associated Press as a profile picture. In a tweet posted February 28 (see image), this account, which posed as a Chinese branch of the Associated Press, accused the government of hiding Covid-19 deaths and illustrated its point with a hijacked picture of corpses (captured in 2006 and showing the victims of an Indonesian earthquake).

In the second half of March 2020, the Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Justice organized a press conference to announce that 196 (72%) of the 271 cases of disinformation on the pandemic for which an investigation had been opened had originated in China: “Chinese users prepare messages aimed at the Taiwanese public, they co-ordinate the manner in which these messages are spread, then they use fake accounts to spread the messages on Taiwanese Facebook groups.”<sup>295</sup>

291. Quoted by Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 63.

292. Ibid.

293. “国台办：民进党当局趁火打劫，”以疫谋独“，注定遭到可耻失败” (“The Bureau of Consular Affairs: DPP Authorities Use the Pandemic to Advance Their Agenda of Political Independence, but this Shameful Ploy Will End in Humiliating Defeat”), Xinhua (14 Feb. 2020), <http://archive.vn/10Myn>.

294. “仇中媚美“比病毒更毒！——戳穿吴钊燮们的表演” (“Hating China and Charming the United States is Even More Toxic than the Virus! Let Us Expose Wu Zhaoxun’s Spectacle for What It really is”), Xinhua (19 Mar. 2020), <http://archive.vn/YsMap>.

295. “70 Percent of Fake COVID-19 News from China: Investigation Bureau,” *Focus Taiwan*, CNA English News (8 Apr. 2020).

Among those cases were **false testimonies** which all followed a formulaic blueprint: “My father is a city councilor and another council member told him that Taiwan actually has more than 500 cases of Covid-19 and 200 related deaths” (elements of the formula like “my father” or “councilor” sometimes changed to give the impression of a variety of sources). One could also find doctored screenshots of Taiwanese TV channels and fake Taiwanese governmental press releases.<sup>296</sup>

One of the most persistent rumors in subsequent weeks was that of a **(fake) racist Taiwanese campaign against the director general of the WHO**. On April 8, Tedros Ghebreyesus, who is known to be close to the CCP (→ p. 213), declared during a press conference that he was the target of a racist campaign on social media that had been going on for months and he accused Taiwan of being its instigator.<sup>297</sup> President Tsai and the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately denied having anything to do with the campaign. Two days later, in the midst of numerous messages of apology posted by Taiwanese users on social media, the Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Justice declared that these accounts were in fact Chinese, and not Taiwanese. The investigators noted the existence of numerous identical messages to prove that this was a coordinated operation, as shown by the screenshots below. These messages frequently appeared on a false account modelled on that of Radio Free Asia in order to spread confusion.<sup>298</sup> The ASPI showed that **60% of the 65 accounts diffusing these messages of apology in traditional Chinese had previously tweeted in simplified Chinese, which seemed to indicate that their owners were Chinese from the mainland hoping to pose as Taiwanese**.<sup>299</sup> The whole campaign was apparently a **Chinese operation meant to weaken Taiwan’s position**. This seemed to be confirmed by the rapidity with which officials from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed support for the director general of the WHO, and by the mobilization of the patriotic rap group CD REV which published a video clip about the scandal on April 14. The song entitled “Mr. Virus is warning us!” took up the idea of a racist Taiwanese campaign against the head of the WHO.<sup>300</sup>



296. Ibid.

297. William Feuer, “WHO Chief Addresses Death Threats, Racist Insults: ‘I do not give a Damn,’” CNBC (8 Apr. 2020).

298. Hwang Chun-mei, “Taiwan Finds Fake Twitter Accounts Tweeting Apologies from ‘Taiwanese’ to WHO Chief,” Radio Free Asia (10 Apr. 2020).

299. ASPI International Cyber Policy Centre, *Covid-19 Disinformation and Social Media Manipulation Trends* (8-15 Apr. 2020), 3.

300. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oCweEA4zfo>.



Examples of identical messages (thus indicating a coordinated campaign). Translation: “I am Taiwanese and I am terribly ashamed of the Taiwanese who attacked Tedros in such a vicious way. On behalf of the Taiwanese people, I apologize to Tedros and ask him to forgive me.”

The campaign had probably a twofold objective. A long-term objective first: Beijing could not prevent the re-election of Tsai but it could try to discredit her and the DPP while undermining the confidence of the population in its government’s actions. And a short-term objective: to make people forget Taiwan’s excellent handling of the pandemic, which could be interpreted by some observers as a demonstration of the virtues of the model of liberal democracy, especially in terms of the circulation of information. Indeed, Taiwan was seldom affected by the pandemic (there were very few cases, no necessary nation-wide lockdown and citizens kept living normal lives even in crowded entertainment venues) and, even worse for the CCP, in 2020, Taiwan’s GDP growth (+2.98%) was greater than China’s (+2.3%) for the first time since 1991. Furthermore, Taiwan had never been more internationally visible and president Tsai’s popularity broke records – these factors merely exacerbated Beijing’s resentment.

The deteriorating health situation on the island in the spring of 2021 therefore provided the CCP with an opportunity. Numbers remained very low compared to other countries, but there was an epidemic outbreak in May 2021. This was accompanied by an “Infodemic” outbreak, a spike in informational attacks presumably created and/or amplified by mainland Chinese actors.<sup>301</sup>

301. Kathrin Hille, “Taiwan unity flags as China steps up flood of disinformation,” *Financial Times* (30 Jun. 2021), 6. See also: IORG, “Pandemic storm hit Taiwan, vaccines weaponized by CCP,” iorg.tw (10 Jun. 2021).



## G. Diplomatic Relations

Diplomatic relations, along with military affairs, are more often used in the **psychological warfare** (see the case of military exercises → p. 478), but they can also be at the center of the **dissemination of false information**. Here are four examples. First, in 2018, as Taiwan had just lost its diplomatic ties with Burkina Faso, a user of the Taiwanese social media platform PTT spread the rumor that the Foreign Affairs Minister of Honduras was currently in Beijing negotiating the conditions for **breaking its diplomatic relations** with Taiwan in the next 48 hours and that Haiti would follow suit. This created a wave of panic in Taiwanese diplomatic circles until the Honduran minister denied the rumor.<sup>302</sup> **Beijing's objective is to maintain a permanent insecurity and tension over Taiwan's diplomatic relations by wooing away its few diplomatic allies one by one and by manipulating information to heighten its anxieties.**

Second, in the course of the summer 2018 a rumor spread on social media, mostly on LINE, according to which Air Canada would no longer recognize **Taiwanese passports** after July 25 – the rumor picked up in intensity and forced the Minister of Foreign Affairs to publish a press release to deny it.<sup>303</sup> It is true, however, that more and more airline companies and airports are giving in to Beijing's pressure to categorize Taiwanese booking as Chinese and Taiwanese cities as destinations inside China. Nevertheless, a Taiwanese passport remains valid and gives visa-free access to far more countries (145) than a Chinese passport (75).<sup>304</sup> In fact, Taiwan announced in early September 2020 the removal of the appellation “Republic of China” (the official name of Taiwan, which can lead to confusion) from its new passports, to avoid any ambiguity and to resist Chinese pressure. This concession should be put into perspective, as the Chinese wording (中華民國) remains present and the one in English appears inside the passports.

Third, the Taiwanese Minister of Foreign Affairs was forced to intervene to put an end to an insistent rumor spread by the Chinese website xilu.com that Taiwan was planning **to lease the Taiping Island (Itu Aba) to the United States**. This is the largest of the Spratly Islands, a disputed archipelago in the South China Sea.<sup>305</sup> In the context of a Sino-American “Cold War,” **misinformation tied to the United States will certainly become more prevalent, to increase inter-strait tensions and ultimately provide a pretext for Beijing to intervene.**

Fourth, to kill two birds with one stone, turning the Taiwanese population against its own government and an allied state, Beijing also spreads fake news aimed not only at the United States but also at Japan. For example, in April 2021, a fake memo from the Office of the President stating that the Taiwanese government had agreed to receive contaminated (nuclear) water from Fukushima circulated on Facebook. The real origin of the memo was easy to discover as it contained simplified Chinese characters. The president's spokesperson immediately denounced the maneuver, calling it “cognitive warfare” and President Tsai also published a denial on Facebook:

302. Keoni Everington, “Honduras Denies Rumors of Talks with Beijing on Cutting Ties with Taiwan,” *Taiwan News* (28 May 2018).

303. J. Michael Cole, “Disinformation Targets Legitimacy of Taiwan's Passport,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (1 Aug. 2018).

304. Henley & Partners Passport Index, *Global ranking 2021*, <https://www.henleypassportindex.com/global-ranking>.

305. “Taiwan Rebutts China's Claim that it will Lease Taiping Island to U.S.,” *Taiwan News* (29 Jun. 2018).



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/photos/a.390960786064/10157418818956065/>.

### The ICAO's Twitter account

Late January 2020 several Twitter users found that their accounts had been blocked by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) after posting tweets on the agency's policy toward Taiwan.

The ICAO was then headed by Liu Fang, one of the Chinese nationals in charge of one of the 15 UN specialized agencies (→ p. 206). Since her arrival at the head of this agency, the ICAO has stopped inviting Taiwan to participate in its tri-annual assembly.<sup>306</sup> This exclusion has led to criticisms at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Several people expressed regrets on Twitter that Taiwan was not included in the exchanges with ICAO members, even though Taoyuan airport is a major hub for airport connections in the region, with more than 72 million passengers transiting every year toward more than 150 cities across the world.<sup>307</sup> The polemic grew with the reactions of Jessica Drun, a non-resident member of Project 2049, who posted the following tweet on January 22: “Want to drive the point home that two orgs, @WHO & @icao, refuse to share knowledge w/ Taiwan authorities. This means civil aviation authorities for one of busiest regional airports do not receive up-to-date info on any potential ICAO-WHO efforts.”<sup>308</sup>

A few days later, on January 25, she brought attention to the fact that she had been blocked by the ICAO's Twitter account even though she was not calling for recognition of Taiwan as a member of the ICAO, but only for Taiwan's inclusion in the talks.<sup>309</sup> Numerous other users – think-tank analysts, academics, journalists and other observers – also noticed that they had been blocked by the agency after criticizing Taiwan's exclusion.<sup>310</sup> Beyond the symbolism of this gesture, the effect was that these users could no longer consult the publications of the agency's account.

The ICAO went even further by blocking users who simply referred to the affair, such as Alex Dukalskis, associate professor at University College Dublin and China Fellow at the Wilson Center. Dukalskis revealed that, after writing to the ICAO, following its advice, he was asked to criticize himself to have a chance of having his Twitter account unblocked: “If you could therefore firstly reassure me that you recognize you were mistaken in your earlier questions and posts, and secondly confirm that you were not aware that your activities were augmenting risks to the safety and security of our staff, we'd be willing to reconsider re-establishing your ability to post your personal opinions on our account.”<sup>311</sup>

The ICAO's immunity – originally conceived to protect international organizations from state interference – does not allow these decisions to be challenged in court. But this behavior

306. J. Michael Cole, “ICAO Refuses to Invite Taiwan to Assembly,” *The News Lens* (23 Sept. 2016); “Ally Backs Taiwan's ICAO participation,” *Taipei Times* (3 Oct. 2019).

307. J. Michael Cole, “ICAO Twittergate-Taiwan Scandal Highlights Deeper Problems at the UN: J. Michael Cole For Inside Policy,” *Macdonald-Laurier Institute* (6 Feb. 2020).

308. Jessica Drun (22 Jan. 2020), <https://twitter.com/jessicadrunk/status/1220013584564002822?lang=en>.

309. Jessica Drun (25 Jan. 2020), tweet, <https://twitter.com/jessicadrunk/status/1220984488303435777?lang=en>.

310. Tom Grundy, “Wuhan Coronavirus: UN Aviation Body Blocks Users Who Raise Issue of Taiwan's Inclusion on Twitter,” *Hong Kong Free Press* (28 Jan. 2020).

311. Alex Dukalskis, (20 Feb. 2020), <https://twitter.com/AlexDukalskis/status/1230467827485806593>.

contradicts the fundamental mission of these agencies, which are supposed to facilitate information sharing, and it brings into question the impartiality of ICAO authorities. In this instance, **the ICAO's Twitter account was managed by a Chinese national** named Guang Qining, who seemed to have suspended her LinkedIn profile as the affair was publicized.<sup>312</sup> Before being recruited by the ICAO, Guan worked for the Civil Aviation Administration of China, as did Secretary General Liu Fang, and for the Pan-Chinese Journalist Association which, as J. Michael Cole explained, is an organization that oversees, among other tasks, the broadcasting of Party propaganda on foreign media.<sup>313</sup> Guang Qining was not, however, in charge of the agency's PR but this modus operandi seemed to have been fully approved by the head of communication, Anthony Philbin, according to whom the ICAO is obliged to block people who intentionally and publicly damage the agency's image, forcing the ICAO to protect the integrity of its broadcast information and the discussions arising from it.<sup>314</sup> **The ICAO has in fact characterized Taiwan as a Chinese province.**<sup>315</sup> Besides, this agency also behaved similarly in March 2019 by blocking voices critical of its environmental policy.<sup>316</sup>

## IV. Armed Force

**Beijing has always used military exercises – for the impact they have in their own right and for the ease with which they can be exaggerated in the media – as a means of psychological warfare against Taiwan – particularly (but not solely) during elections, as a way to influence, or at least to send a message to the winners.** For instance, between July 1995 and June 1996, with the presidential election scheduled for March 23, 1996, China organized no fewer than six military exercises aimed at the island, firing missiles into the sea a few dozen kilometers away from the Taiwanese coast. Not long before, in 1994, while a novel anticipating a Chinese invasion of Taiwan one year later became one of the island's best-sellers,<sup>317</sup> Beijing was conducting its biggest military exercises in years.

**Military pressure has intensified since Tsai Ing-wen's election in 2016, an admission that the Chinese soft power failed to win the hearts and minds of Taiwan's population. The PLA regularly simulates an invasion of the island.** For example, in August 2020, in response to what Beijing saw as an American provocation (the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services visited Taiwan), the PLA conducted amphibious landing exercises. The PLA actually has a full-scale replica of a part of downtown Taipei on the military base of Zhurihe, which includes the Taiwanese presidential palace and has been used to simulate assaults.<sup>318</sup> **Intrusions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) have multiplied in recent years.** And 2020 was saw a record 380 incursions by

312. David Spencer, "Will ICAO Twitter block hasten Taiwan's admittance to international bodies?" *Taiwan News* (1 Feb. 2020).

313. Cole, "ICAO Twittergate-Taiwan Scandal."

314. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "UN Aviation Agency Blocks Critics of Taiwan Policy on Twitter," *Axios* (27 Jan. 2020).

315. "Economic Impact Estimates Due to COVID-19 Travel Bans," *ICAO* (13 Feb. 2020).

316. Megan Darby, "Fake News: UN Aviation Body Blocks Online Climate Critics," *Climate Home News* (27 Mar. 2019).

317. 鄭浪平 (Zheng Langpin), 閏八月震盪 (*August fluctuations*) (Taipei: Business Weekly Publisher, 1994).

318. Joseph Trevithick, "China's Largest Base has Replicas of Taiwan's Presidential Building, Eiffel Tower", *The War Zone, The Drive* (27 May 2020).

Chinese aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ.<sup>319</sup> Beijing stepped up its activities immediately after President Tsai's re-election, as if to send a signal. The first quarter of 2021 confirmed that the pressure is still mounting, with two large Chinese air sorties on March 26 and April 12, the latter involving 25 aircrafts simultaneously.<sup>320</sup> These violations usually grow more intense during particular events over which Beijing wishes to exert its influence, such as the Taiwanese national holiday (October 10), diplomatic visits (as in September 2020, with the visit of the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment), or during the inauguration of the new U.S. president. Between January 23 and 25, for instance, a few days into Joe Biden's presidency, Beijing tested the president's resolve by sending 13 aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ the first day, 15 on the second, and 15 on the third, a record number since September 2020.<sup>321</sup> On September 23, 2021, and while it expressed disapproval of Taiwan's accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Party-State sent 24 aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ. These massive sorties are becoming more and more frequent, and intimidating, with a clear acceleration since October 1, 2021 (the PRC's National Day): **145 Chinese planes entered Taiwan's ADIZ in 4 days** (38 on October 1, which was already an absolute record, then 39 on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 16 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 52 on the 4<sup>th</sup>).<sup>322</sup>

As J. Michael Cole explained, this **"latest militarization of Beijing's posture** comprises two main vectors – increased PLA activity and preparedness in the vicinity of Taiwan, combined with a sustained campaign of psychological warfare against the Taiwanese government and public."<sup>323</sup> **Indeed, these exercises are generally accompanied by a bellicose rhetoric from Chinese media, which exaggerate their scale and significance.** In April 2018, relatively minor scheduled exercises were taking place off the coast of Quanzhou in the province of Fujian, but the Chinese press turned them into "live fire drills to check 'Taiwan Independence,'" as the *Global Times* headlined.<sup>324</sup> J. Michael Cole also noted that these exercises "were ostensibly timed to coincide with a visit to Swaziland by President Tsai Ing-wen."<sup>325</sup> In August 2020, the *Global Times* described military exercises **"not [as a] warning but [as a] rehearsal for [a] Taiwan takeover"** by the PLA, which was **deemed inevitable.**<sup>326</sup> Confirming the crushing superiority of the PLA and its capacity to attack the island from all sides, the unabashed objective of these exercises is to "deter Taiwan secessionists."<sup>327</sup> **Hence, military exercises targeting Taiwan are increasingly frequent and the propaganda that accompanies them is growing more aggressive.**

The purpose of these daily intrusions and this constant pressure is not only meant to create a **permanent threat** in the Taiwanese minds, or even a **sense of inevitability** for a Chinese invasion, but **to create the conditions for an incident** which would likely end badly. Pierre Haski explained that "[the] risk is not, at least not yet, a deliberate trigger of

319. AFP, "Taiwan Says Chinese Jets Made Record 380 Incursions in 2020," *France 24* (5 Jan. 2021).

320. Greg Waldron, "Beijing Air Power Turns up the Heat on Taiwan," *Flight Global* (16 Apr. 2021).

321. J. Michael Cole, "2021: The Year China and Taiwan clash?" *The National Interest* (25 Jan. 2021); Nathalie Guibert, "Taiwan: 'Unprecedented Chinese Aerial Incursions,'" *Le Monde* (25 Jan. 2021).

322. According to the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense's Twitter account, which provides daily numbers, models and routes of Chinese aircrafts entering the ADIZ.

323. J. Michael Cole, "Propaganda Drives 'Massive' PLA Exercises in the Taiwan Strait," *Global Taiwan Brief* (26 Aug. 2020).

324. Shan Jie, "Live-fire Drills to Check 'Taiwan Independence,'" *Global Times* (13 Apr. 2018).

325. Cole, "Propaganda Drives 'Massive' PLA Exercises."

326. "PLA Friday Drills Not Warning, but Rehearsal for Taiwan Takeover: Global Times Editorial," *Global Times* (18 Sept. 2020).

327. Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Holds Concentrated Military Drills to Deter Taiwan Secessionists, US," *Global Times* (23 Aug. 2020).



war, but rather an incident that can trigger a series of events which would be difficult to stop.”<sup>328</sup> The Taiwanese are aware of this and remain calm: they know they are targeted by operations of psychological warfare and that **the mistake, the excuse Beijing is waiting for, would be to offer an overreaction paving the way for an escalation.**<sup>329</sup>

One case is particularly instructive. On December 16, 2016, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF)’s Weibo account published a picture of an airborne (nuclear-capable) H-6 bomber, registered under the number 20019 (which indicated it belonged to the 10<sup>th</sup> Bomber Division based in Anqing<sup>330</sup>). On the picture one could see two mountains in the distance peaking above a sea of clouds (Figure 1).<sup>331</sup>

Chinese Internet users quickly put forward a first hypothesis: the two peaks in the background could be part of the Jade Mountain, also called Yushan (玉山), which culminates at 3,952 meters and is located on the island of Taiwan, in Nantou County. Hence, by analyzing the orientation of the two peaks, some Internet users believed that the bomber was coming from the north and heading south and that therefore the picture was taken by the PLAAF during a drill around Taiwan on November 25.<sup>332</sup> Others suggested that it was more likely the long-distance surveillance exercise of December 10.<sup>333</sup>



Figure 1. Source : [http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/187972608.html?weibo\\_id=4053418358272402](http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/187972608.html?weibo_id=4053418358272402).

Figure 2. Source : [http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/189226955.html?weibo\\_id=4052894808581395](http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/189226955.html?weibo_id=4052894808581395).

328. Pierre Haski, “Taiwan against China: The Risks of a Poorly Controlled Escalation,” *France Inter* (23 Sept. 2020).

329. J. Michael Cole, “China’s Live-Fire Drill in the Taiwan Strait: A Case Study in Psychological Warfare,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (18 Apr. 2018).

330. Kenneth W. Allen and Cristina L. Garafola, *70 Years of the PLA Force*, China Aerospace Studies Institute, US Air University (2021), 139.

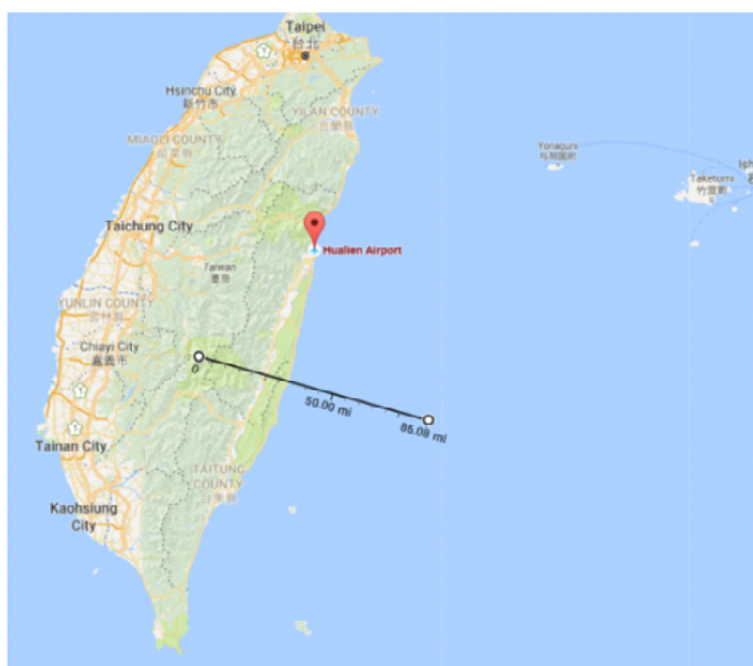
331. In Chinese, “周末，分享一幅很有意义的照片!”。 “我空军绕台飞行，轰-6K与台湾玉山合影” (“Our Air Force Conducts a Flight Around Taiwan, the H-6K Bomber Poses with Taiwanese Mount Yushan”), 个人图书馆 (*360doc*) (17 Dec. 2016), <https://archive.vn/vuXbQ>.

332. “Our Air Force Conducts a Flight Around Taiwan,” *360doc*.

333. “台媒：轰6K绕台照”造假“在海峡西测” (“According to Taiwanese Media: the “Faked” Picture of the H-6K Circling Taiwan Was Actually Taken from the Eastern Side of the Strait”), 搜狐 (*Sohu*) (27 Dec. 2016), <https://archive.vn/EHizL>.

When users linked this photo to others published by the same PLAAF Weibo account two days earlier, which showed the plane in the same position but from a different angle, it revealed not two but three peaks in the background (Figure 2). And a second hypothesis was then laid out – about another Taiwanese mountain, Mount Beidawushan (北大武山), which culminates at 3,902 meters, and is located on the southern tip of the island in Pingtung County.<sup>334</sup>

On December 17, 2016, the Taiwanese Ministry of Defense denied that the picture showed Mount Yushan.<sup>335</sup> In fact, as Mount Yushan is 50 km away from the sea and around 200 km inside the ADIZ, the proportions of the aircraft in relation to the mountain suggested that if it were Mount Yushan, the picture had to have been taken from inside the Taiwanese ADIZ.<sup>336</sup> One Internet user suggested that the picture was taken at a distance of 100-150 km from the Mount (Figure 3).<sup>337</sup> But two complementary counter-arguments were advanced by Taiwan: if this was indeed the silhouette of Mount Yushan then the proportions in the picture had to have been doctored, or it could simply have been a different mountain, such as Beidawushan, which is closer to the sea.<sup>338</sup> The reluctance of the Taiwanese authorities to recognize that the PLAAF's picture was taken from the eastern coast of Taiwan was understandable since it reinforced the idea that the PLA was capable of attacking the island from all sides.<sup>339</sup>



从图片中看，拍摄地点距离玉山约100-150公里，拍摄地点可能如图所示

Figure 3: A Chinese user estimated that the photo had to have been taken at a distance of 100 to 150 km from Mount Yushan. Source: <https://archive.vn/vuXbQ>.

334. “解放军空军发布疑似轰-6K与台湾中央山脉高峰合影” (“The APL Air Force Posts a Picture of What Seems to be an H-6K Next to the Highest Taiwanese Peak”), 观察 (*Guancha*) (17 Dec. 2016), <https://archive.vn/Q4KU5>.

335. Matthew Strong, “Military Denies Yushan in China Bomber Picture,” *Taiwan News* (17 Dec. 2016).

336. “According to Taiwanese media: the ‘faked’ photo”; 黄丽蓉 (Huang Lirong), “解放军轰6-K飞行背后山影可能是屏东大武山” (“The Mountain Behind the PLA’s H-6K is Probably Beidawushan”), *China Times* (17 Dec. 2016), <https://archive.vn/f793D>.

337. “Our Air Force conducts a flight around Taiwan,” *360doc*.

338. This is for example the argument put forward by the chief editor of a Taiwanese military magazine, *Junshi lianxian* (军事連線). Lirong, “The Mountain behind the APL’s H-6K is Probably Beidawushan.”

339. “According to Taiwanese media: the ‘faked’ photo.”

In April 2018, the PLAAF's Weibo account posted a 4-minute promotional video in which a scene had clearly been taken from the preceding photos (Figure 4). This was not an isolated case: **the Chinese Air Force frequently posts photos and videos of its fighters around Taiwan, to keep the pressure up.** This is a typical illustration of psychological warfare. Whether the picture had been taken from Mount Yushan or not, **the harm was done as doubt was sowed in the Taiwanese public opinion. The goal was to undermine the Taiwanese people's trust in their armed forces' ability to track PLA movements, to react quickly, defend the territorial sovereignty of the island and protect the people from a PRC attack.** "The photos send a message [...] to Taiwan's citizens, to highlight the inability of their government to stop such flights. [...]. When two H-6Ks entered Taiwan's ADIZ during the July 20th flight, the Chinese pilots said they and the Taiwanese were the "same people," an illustration of Chinese claims to Taiwan."<sup>340</sup>



Figure 4: Video posted on April 19, 2018 on the Chinese Air Force's Weibo account.  
Source: <https://archive.vn/df7MT>.<sup>341</sup>

**Another way for Beijing to exert military pressure on Taiwan is to spread false or biased news that would constitute a *casus belli* if they were proven accurate.** For instance, a rumor suggested that American military planes were using Taiwanese bases: in August 2020 Internet users claimed that a U.S. Navy Lockheed EP-3 electronic warfare and reconnaissance aircraft had landed in Taiwan and taken off several times.<sup>342</sup> The news was spread on social media, most notably by the South China Sea Probing Initiative (SCSPI).<sup>343</sup> It was then taken up by the *Global Times*, which quoted the SCSPI and, as usual, issued threats as to the consequences for Taiwan if this was proven true: it would amount to "crossing a red line" and Beijing could "destroy the relevant airport on the island and the US military aircraft that land there – a war in the Taiwan Straits [would] thus begin." The newspaper demanded to the Taiwanese and U.S. authorities to avoid "[playing] with fire," and it went further, recommending that "Beijing officially declare the 'airspace' over the Taiwan Island

340. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Derek Grossman, and Logan Ma, "Chinese Bomber Flights Around Taiwan: For What Purpose?" *War on the Rocks* (13 Sept. 2017).

341. [http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/187972608.html?weibo\\_id=4053418358272402](http://weibointl.api.weibo.com/share/187972608.html?weibo_id=4053418358272402).

342. Keoni Everington, "Aircraft Spotters Allege US Spy Plane Landed in Taipei," *Taiwan News* (19 Aug. 2020).

343. [https://twitter.com/SCS\\_PI/status/129409196630559493](https://twitter.com/SCS_PI/status/129409196630559493).

as a patrol area of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA's reconnaissance aircraft and fighter jets will perform missions over Taiwan Island [to] check whether there are US military planes landing at Taiwan's airports or US warships docking at the island's ports. If the island's military dares to fire the first shot at the PLA's aircraft, it will mean provocation of a war, and the PLA should immediately **destroy Taiwan's military forces and achieve reunification through military means.**"<sup>344</sup>

The initial information on the presence of U.S. military planes on the island had no factual basis and it was denied by the Taiwanese authorities. As Cole **noted, the SCSPI on which the *Global Times* based its threats is not a neutral actor, despite the fact that it presents itself as such: the group has ties to the University of Beijing.** The director of the SCSPI, Hu Bo (胡波), is also the director for the Center of Maritime Strategic Studies at the University of Beijing. One of the members of the SCSPI's board of director is the president of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies (NISCSS, 中国南海研究院). The SCSPI and the NISCSS are regularly used as "platforms to support Beijing's territorial claims."<sup>345</sup>

**What is certain is that the method is well established: false or biased information emerges on social media or on various forums, preferably with no visible link to the CCP and is taken up and amplified by Chinese media, generally the *Global Times*, which issues threats. This method may vary from full-fledged operations built from scratch, for example when Chinese intelligence plants the initial information, to sheer opportunism when the media identifies any piece of information that could be damaging to Taiwan, irrespective of its origin.**

## V. Conclusion

**The Chinese political warfare against Taiwan has won a few tactical victories to the extent that it has contributed to polarizing the Taiwanese society** and, thus, convinced a section of the public opinion that "Taiwan's real enemy was the opposite camp (the DPP) rather than the authoritarian regime across the Taiwan Strait."<sup>346</sup> **Additionally, it "may have helped a few politicians to get elected."**<sup>347</sup> **Some seduction methods, notably through the business community, can work** but others appear to be ineffective. This is notably the case in the Taiwanese academic world which is well educated about the Chinese threat and its methods: those who have been targeted by state-sponsored influence peddling (luxurious trips to continental China, indoctrination sessions supervised by CCP executives), returned without being converted by Chinese efforts and, if anything, rather sarcastic about them, according to Cole: "I've had several interviews with the Taiwanese academics who went on these trips to China, they come back and they tell me: 'we had great food, the hotel was nice [...]. But did they succeed in brainwashing me or convincing me that I'm something that I'm not? Absolutely not'. And they normally laugh it off saying that **the Chinese are spending a lot of money on these activities, and that the actual dividends are quite minimal.**"<sup>348</sup> **The Chinese probably know that these measures are**

344. "Tsai Authorities Deserve a Stern Warning from Beijing: Global Times Editorial," *Global Times* (31 Aug. 2020).

345. J. Michael Cole, "Beijing's Anti-Taiwan Propaganda Goes into Overdrive," *Global Taiwan Brief* (23 Sept. 2020).

346. Cole, *Democracy under Fire*, 33.

347. *Ibid.*, 32.

348. Cole, "A Conversation about China's Sharp Power," 4.



not efficient; their justification is found only in the mechanisms of the Party-State apparatus: certain operations are in fact the product of an administrative logic as civil servants hope to show their hierarchy that they are doing something.

**Strategically, this is a failure. In fact, the Chinese political warfare that targets Taiwan has been counterproductive:** incentives and punitive measures under Xi Jinping have not produced the expected results; the majority of the Taiwanese population still approves of the president and the DPP and is even more distrustful of China than before. Beijing has even lost the KMT, which was once a useful CCP relay and is now distancing itself from China and vice versa (Beijing said it “will no longer rely on the KMT”).<sup>349</sup> Besides, the 2020 presidential campaign confirmed the KMT’s loss of influence and the need for Beijing to rely on other channels, usually not political parties, to reach out to the population, and especially to the younger generations (China has lost its attractiveness among them because of the China-US trade war and of the Hong Kong crisis). Moreover, the **nationalist sentiment is rising:** the number of people identifying as “only Taiwanese” has never been higher (67%).<sup>350</sup> **The Hong Kong crisis has much to do with this since it played a role as a powerful turnoff. Taiwan’s government subsequently adopted a series of measures to combat interference** – especially Chinese interference – which should make influence peddling more difficult in the future. This also reinforced the Taiwanese government’s determination **to reduce its dependence on China and to diversify its economy** – in particular in the sectors used by Beijing (i.e. tourism) to exert pressure.

Overall, **Beijing’s mounting aggressiveness in recent years, against Taiwan and globally, has considerably increased the island’s attractiveness.** Without gaining any formal diplomatic allies, **Taiwan has seen its relations with the US strengthened** with the visit of the US Secretary of Health in August 2020 (the highest ranking US official to visit the island since 1979), of an Under Secretary of State in September, and with the creation of a U.S. F-16 maintenance center, the only one in East Asia. The visit of an impressive Czech delegation in late August 2020 also brought international attention to the island while incurring Beijing’s wrath. In a word, **Chinese efforts to weaken and isolate Taiwan have had the opposite effect of what they intended.**

349. Yang Sheng, “Beijing Won’t Rely on KMT for Realizing Reunification with Taiwan Following ‘Mayor’ Recall Drama: Analysts,” *Global Times* (7 Jun. 2020).

350. Since the first poll in 1992: Huang Tzu-ti, “67% of People in Taiwan Self-Identity as Taiwanese,” *Taiwan News* (4 Jul. 2020).

### From Taiwan to Hong Kong and Back

What has been the link between Taiwan and Hong Kong since the beginning of the Hong Kong crisis? Are the Chinese using the same methods and content in Taiwan as they have in Hong Kong, or vice-versa? Both probably. There seems to be an adaptive recycling of methods and content. On the one hand, the Hong Kong crisis contributed to shaping the narratives used against Taiwan, such as the rumor according to which “the Taiwanese government is interfering in the Hong-Kong crisis – by offering financial support” (a Facebook post asserted that President Tsai Ing-wen spent a billion Taiwanese dollars (€29.5 million) to finance the protests in Hong Kong, all the while refusing to finance the fight against a dengue outbreak that afflicted the south of Taiwan), or tactical support (the pro-Beijing press in Hong Kong, picking up in Taiwan, claimed that Taiwanese agents were spotted advising the protesters on the best way to face off against the police).<sup>351</sup> More generally the Hong Kong crisis has not really had an impact on the frequency and the intensity of the informational attacks against Taiwan: Beijing has the resources to operate on both fronts. However, the crisis has had an impact on the narratives as they now focus less on unification (a delicate subject during the Hong Kong crisis) and more on Taiwan’s internal issues (social problems).

On the other hand, among the 13.8 million tweets identified by Twitter in August and September 2019 as part of a pro-Beijing operation against Hong Kong, Taiwan was an issue. There were attempts to promote Taiwanese pro-unification leaders such as the journalist Joyce Huang (黃智賢) or the politician Wang Ping-chung (王炳忠), both known to have worked with Chinese intelligence, something confirmed by several criminal investigations.<sup>352</sup> Also, **China seemingly used its Taiwanese allies to intervene in Hong Kong**, because they could use traditional Chinese characters. They were less susceptible to make mistakes than Chinese individuals from the PRC, thus making them harder to detect.

351. K. G. Chan, “Taiwan Hits Back at Claim It’s Funding HK Rallies,” *Asia Times* (29 Jul. 2019).

352. Monaco, Smith, and Studdart, *Detecting Digital Fingerprints*, 32.



## Chapter 2

# INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGAINST HONG KONG PROTESTERS IN 2019

Hong Kong was retroceded to China in 1997 after an agreement between the United Kingdom and the PRC that preserved the existing political system in Hong Kong for 50 more years (in conformity with the Basic Law, Hong Kong’s “constitution”). This arrangement is commonly known as the “One Country, Two Systems,” and the island became a “Special Administrative Region” (特别行政区–SAR) with its own judicial and political system. The PRC’s authority is represented by the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Hong Kong SAR (中央人民政府驻香港特别行政区联络办公), aka the Liaison Office.

Throughout the winter of 2019 a bill on extraditions to China angered the population, which began to protest against it. The movement intensified as the police repressed them. The June 16 protests gathered a record two million people according to the organizers, but confrontations with the police became more violent. **And tensions culminated during the summer and fall of 2019. In this context, Beijing conducted a number of influence and disinformation operations against protesters** using three narrative lines: support for the police and the Hong Kong government, attacks against the reputation of protesters, and accusations of foreign interference.<sup>1-2</sup>

## I. Beijing’s difficulties in imposing its narratives on the protests

On the ground, the Chinese regime proved unable to anticipate the size of an opposition or to understand the movement’s evolution and the meteoric decline of executive head Carrie Lam’s standing in the public opinion. The failure of the Liaison Office’s representative was also obvious. In this regard, images of protesters surrounding the Liaison Office and trampling the PRC’s flag **were seen as a clear affront to the CCP**. Surprised by the scale of the protests and the inability of Lam’s government to restore order, the CCP was forced to react quickly. The Party’s margin for maneuver was slim however since Hong Kong remains largely autonomous and a direct coercive action would only have come at a high political price, detrimental to the CCP’s public image – and completely demonetizing

1. This chapter focuses on the events of 2019. For a general analysis of United Front activities in Hong Kong, see Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, Steven Chung-Fun Hung, and Jeff Hai-Chi Loo, eds., *China’s New United Front Work in Hong Kong: Penetrative Politics and Its Implications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

2. Iain Robertson, *Targeting the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement: China’s Hong Kong Messaging Proliferates on Social Media*, Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab (Dec. 2020), 10.



INTRODUCTION

the rhetoric of the “One country, Two systems” in the eyes of the people of Hong Kong but also in Taiwan.

Faced with this humiliation that rapidly tested the Chinese regime’s capacity to restore its authority – in China strictly speaking as much as in Hong Kong or within its population – Beijing’s response **turned to the informational sphere.**

CONCEPTS

Beijing’s counter-attack faced three challenges. Its discourse had to address three target audiences simultaneously: (1) **mainland public opinion**, which was the easiest to channel, as information is tightly controlled behind “the Great Chinese Firewall” with the Propaganda Department setting the tone and Chinese media falling behind; (2) **Hong Kong’s public opinion**, and more generally the Chinese diaspora, especially in North America and Europe; and (3) the **non-Chinese-speaking international public opinion.**

ACTORS

The challenge for China was to **retain a minimum of its capital for sympathy**: the protests indeed attracted the attention of foreign media to the situation in Hong Kong and naturally to the management of the crisis by the Party. However, the Chinese government was facing a complex international environment, under growing criticisms and hostility with the “trade war” it faces with the U.S. administration, the backlash against its colonization policy in Xinjiang and its increasingly brazen constraints on public liberties for instance. Beijing’s real margin for maneuver was slimmer than appeared at first glance.

**The regime’s objective was to spread counter-narratives that could be heard and accepted by all three audiences.** The channels and languages used to diffuse these narratives were numerous. On the one hand, in the Chinese-speaking world, Beijing essentially used sealed-off ecosystems like WeChat, Weibo and Douyin (the continental version of TikTok), in which only content that conform to the mainland’s laws and rules can circulate (→ p. 196). These platforms are widely used by overseas Chinese and constitute an efficient way to influence the diasporas. On the other hand, to shape international public opinion Beijing mostly used U.S. platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, banned in China, and the Chinese TikTok. Social media occupied an important role in the Chinese communication strategy regarding Hong Kong but traditional media were not neglected either.

ACTIONS

## II. The Chinese media’s narrative

The Chinese government’s spokespeople often complain about the foreign media coverage of the PRC. This coverage is often considered to be too negative and too ignorant of the successes of the Communist Party to focus on “smear” campaigns instead. This tactic or **posture as a victim**, which consists in criticizing the coverage of China in western media, is the main – and most commonly used – method to influence a public opinion. The target audience is just as much that of China as that of the diaspora and sometimes even certain fringes of the international public opinion (the far left and the far right in European liberal democracies for example).

**On the continent the Party can rely on its well-oiled propaganda apparatus** and its network of censors to steer the public’s attitude to the protests. David Bandurski from the *China Media Project* analyzed the methods and narratives used to achieve this goal on the continent.<sup>3</sup> Along with big official daily newspapers, he noted the importance of numerous WeChat accounts massively posting “low quality” articles or *junk propaganda*. These articles

3. David Bandurski, “Hong Kong through China’s Distorted Lens,” *ChinaMediaProject* (24 Jul. 2019).

serve to inflame public opinions through carefully selected and powerfully divisive content (desacralized flag, imputing acts of violence to protesters or even “proof” of foreign interference— most notably from the CIA). This content, largely spread on the web, can be likened to **political “spam” aiming to drown a public opinion in manipulated content.**



Examples of articles posted around October 8, 2020 on WeChat after an Internet search for “the bandits of Hong Kong” (香港暴徒).<sup>4</sup>

**In Hong Kong, however,** the Chinese government could not directly censor or influence the protesters’ media narrative. The Liaison Office did have relays in public opinion inasmuch as it had acquired publishing houses or formed close links with a number of daily newspapers and tabloids beforehand,<sup>5</sup> but **the CCP could not control flows of information on social media as it did on mainland platforms.** Besides, Beijing announced its decisions, at least officially, to let the Hong Kong government handle the protests. All the declarations from the Liaison Office, or from the general secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping, displayed the “CCP’s confidence in the Hong Kong government.” **The Party-State’s actions kept a low profile** and strived to unite the “loyalist” forces with a dual strategy: **forcing the hand of Hong Kong’s institutions** (firms like Cathay Pacific, the Mass Transit Railway or the Ministry of Justice for instance) but also playing the long-term game of **letting the opposition movement wither away**, collapse or be discredited because of the protesters’ violence and radicalization.

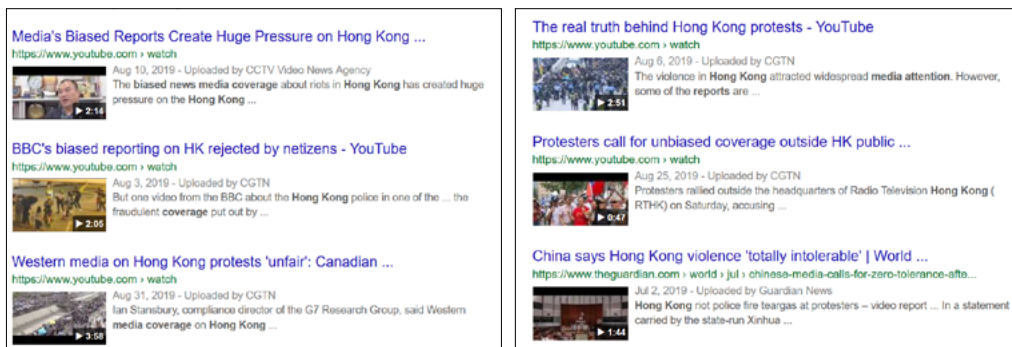
The channels used to get this type of messages through varied. Aside from the declarations of official representatives and organized protests against certain TV channels (illustrated by the 41-page letter sent in late August 2019 to prominent international newspapers and press agencies),<sup>6</sup> **the task of amplifying the message was mostly assigned to official Chinese media.**<sup>7</sup> For instance, a Google search for “Hong Kong media coverage biased” returned several videos posted mainly in August 2019 by CGTN, CCTV or even *China News*.

4. This is only a sample among hundreds of proposed search results. In his article, David Bandurski and his team have listed more than 200 published in July. See “暴徒以镭射笔照射军营\_驻港部队首次‘警告’” (“Rioters Shine Laser Pens Toward the barracks, Troops in Hong-Kong Give a First Warning”) (10 Jul. 2019).

5. “中聯辦掌控聯合出版集團擁三大書局兼壟斷發行 議員指涉違《基本法》” (“The Liaison Bureau Takes Control of a Publishing House and Owns Three Big Libraries, this is a Monopoly Problem. The Members of Legco Point Out a Violation of Basic Law”) (9 Apr. 2015).

6. “Hong Kong Government Supporters’ Protest Targets ‘Biased’ Journalists at Public Broadcaster RTHK’s headquarters,” *South China Morning Post* (24 Aug. 2019).

7. “China Sends 41-page Letter to Tell Foreign Media to Stop Biased Reporting,” *Mothership*, (23 Aug. 2019).



Google search September 26, 2019.<sup>8</sup>

Another example of this type of content designed to spread Beijing’s narrative was analyzed by David Bandurski.<sup>9</sup> On August 1, 2019, the PLA broadcast a video from a training of its Hong Kong garrison on Chinese public television. This video, which showed PLA soldiers training to disperse protesters by force, was widely taken up by the “pro-Beijing” opinion as a guarantee that the “motherland” would not abandon the “loyalists,” but also by the protesters themselves to illustrate the threat China represented. The video was shared by several official accounts (PLA, *China Daily*) in English and Chinese, totaling tens of thousands of views. It is still available today. In fact, **the threat of an armed intervention** was used recurrently as part of a Chinese strategy of **gradually imposing more pressure** on protesters, as testified by the announcements made on August 12,<sup>10</sup> 18,<sup>11</sup> and 28.<sup>12</sup>

The state media’s strategy seemingly **avored shocking content that could catch the attention, spark a debate** and generate views. For example, **a TV clip compared Hong Kong protesters with jihadist terrorists** for the way they presumably instrumentalized children (see the screenshot below).<sup>13</sup> Posted on Facebook in mid-September, this video was later broadcast by the main Chinese media channels (*Global Times*, *China Daily*, etc.).



8. The first contradictory search results arrived in sixth position but the majority are on the second page. The search results for “Hong Kong Protest” were more varied and included little or no content emanating from state television. Moreover, YouTube signaled channels funded by a state with a banner as in the examples quoted here.

9. David Bandurski, “War Games in Hong Kong,” *China Media Project* (1 Aug. 2019).

10. “Chinese Armed Police Truck Convoy Rolls into Shenzhen as Hong Kong Enters Another Week of Protests,” *South China Morning Post* (12 Aug. 2019).

11. “Chinese Armed Police Stage Another Riot Drill Across Hong Kong Border as Protests Enter 11th Week,” *South China Morning Post* (18 Aug. 2019).

12. Austin Ramzy, “Chinese Military Sends New Troops into Hong Kong,” *The New York Times* (28 Aug. 2019).

13. See <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2495151990809474> (last accessed 08/10/2019).

### III. The Example of Guancha

The official social media accounts of certain Chinese media outlets played a central role in spreading anti-protest narratives and similar iconographies.<sup>14</sup> “RealGuancha” in particular played a prominent role. Guancha (观察) is a popular Chinese news website in the style of Jimian (界面), Sina (新浪) or *Global Times* (环球时报). If *Global Times* was already well-known on Western social media (particularly Twitter) for its nationalist remarks and clear-cut stances, the Guancha platform had not been noticed outside of China at that point. But its Twitter account, created in March 2019, turned out to be **very active and virulent in its coverage of the protests.**



The Twitter account @realGuancha mostly shared content in Chinese but not only. Posts from October 7 (see above) showed the destructions of shops and boutiques belonging to mainland franchises and brands. These undeniable acts of violence were depicted as a **generalized pillaging and even as “pogroms”** (targeting mainland Chinese residents). On the screenshot on the left, the sentence “[if] you commit a crime, is an apology enough?” was a reference to the initiatives of moderate protesters who wanted to apologize for the violence.

Hence, **the @realGuancha account** published content intended to divide, like the content circulated on WeChat or Weibo. Even if it remained a small account (more than 32,000

14. See <https://twitter.com/realGuancha>.



subscribers on March 21, 2021), its growth during this period was significant: it went from 2,000 subscribers on October 6, 2019 to 3,543 on the 19<sup>th</sup> – a 77% increase in two weeks. **Extremely active**, it posted no fewer than 750 messages during the same period (from 1,800 tweets on October 6 to 2,550 on the 19<sup>th</sup>) for an average of 57.7 messages a day. According to the Accountanalysis application, a peak of activity was registered on October 1, 2019, during the national holiday of the PRC, with 633 messages.

Guancha was present not only on Twitter: it was **just as active on YouTube**, with at least a hundred videos uploaded between October 3 and 6 on its YouTube channel.<sup>15</sup> All these videos showed **images of violent protesters** and highlighted their acts of violence. Quality and length varied but they all seemed to originate from different sources, having been filmed by Hong Kong locals and mainland Chinese citizens in Hong Kong. Very few of these videos seemed to have been the object of a journalistic approach, or even edited, and on the whole they resembled a compilation of amateur videos rather than a careful montage.

These posts were frequently posted, almost akin to a **saturation attack**, and it led people to believe that **the objective was not to inform**. Guancha aimed to **flood** platforms with a counter-discourse favorable to the “loyalists.”

### Jimmy Sham's “self-mutilation”

On October 16, the activist Jimmy Sham, who had organized numerous peaceful protests that rallied several hundred thousand Hongkongers, was targeted and beaten by a group of men armed with hammers and iron bars. On October 19, Guancha posted a video entitled “Jimmy Sham's self-mutilation” (岑子杰的苦肉计 – “*keurouji*” which means “to wound oneself to gain the enemy's trust”).<sup>16</sup> The video shows the blood-stained scene of the attack with Jimmy Sham lying on the ground. Then Sham was shown at the hospital the day after the attack, smiling. The innuendo was clear: if he had been as gravely wounded as he claimed how could he only have had a little plaster on his forehead and be seen smiling, as if he had never felt better?



岑子杰的苦肉计

15. Guancha News 观察者网, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJncdiH3BQUBgCroBmhsUhQ/video>

16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1kd88RgYMk>.

The case of Jimmy Sham’s “self-mutilation” is only one example among dozens of videos uploaded on October 19 **at an industrial pace – by midday ten videos had been posted in two hours.** They covered news related to the movement while, of course, offering an “alternative” point of view. For example, on **“the list of the cockroaches’ crimes”** (甲由罪行錄CASE 01),<sup>17</sup> we found videos showing the “truth” behind the case of a young 15-year-old girl whose lifeless body was found in the port. These videos insinuated that it had just been a suicide and that other explanations were mere rumors to defame and humiliate the police.<sup>18</sup> Despite these suspicious messages, Guancha was not one of the 210 accounts suspended by YouTube.<sup>19</sup> According to YouTube, **the accounts affiliated to Guancha used VPNs to post videos on its platform.** Even if the firm announced that this discovery “was consistent with recent observations and actions related to China announced by Facebook and Twitter,” it was not able to establish a clear link between these activities and the PRC, unlike for the two other platforms.



Screenshot of a video from the “cockroach crimes” series (甲由罪行錄CASE 01). The video only garnered 70 views and 8 “likes” with no comments, which is about average for videos like this one.

## IV. The use of social networks with an international audience

### A. TikTok

As we explained in part three (→ p. 200), **TikTok is censored and instrumentalized by Chinese authorities.** For instance, *The Washington Post* observed that a search for “#hongkong” on the application gave no result tied to the protests.<sup>20</sup> And “violence in Hong Kong” (香港暴力) mainly returned videos from official media which unanimously condemned the protesters’ “terrorism.”

17. “甲由罪行錄CASE 01” (“Cockroach crime CASE 01”) (19 Oct. 2019), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY\\_6vnGgjsY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY_6vnGgjsY).

18. “视香港15岁少女陈彦霖母亲：女儿是自杀，望停止造谣” (“See the Mother of Chen Yanlin, the Young 15-Year-Old Girl from Hong Kong: She Committed Suicide, Hoped of Stopping the Rumors, I Hope that the Disinformation Will Cease”) (Oct. 2019); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxXE5u-WIn4>; “暴徒炒作「少女自殺案」污衊警方，其母發聲：放過我們一家人” (“The Mob Defames the Police with ‘a Case of Adolescent Suicide;’ the Mother Speaks Out: Leave Our Family Alone”) (18 Oct. 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rNza7FZN5Y>.

19. “Maintaining the Integrity of Our Platforms,” Google (22 Aug. 2019), <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/maintaining-integrity-our-platforms/>.

20. Drew Harwell and Tony Room, “TikTok’s Beijing Roots Fuel Censorship Suspicion as it Builds a Huge U.S. Audience,” *The Washington Post* (15 Sept. 2019); see also Alex Hern, “Revealed: How TikTok Censors Videos that do Not Please Beijing,” *The Guardian* (25 Sept. 2019).



## B. Facebook

On August 19, 2019, Facebook deleted seven pages, three groups and five accounts that showed “coordinated inauthentic behavior” from a network that “originated in China and focused on Hong Kong.”<sup>21</sup> These pages **compared the protesters to cockroaches and terrorists**, among other posts. They also posted photo montages showing armed protesters, or police officers being attacked.

If the content was certainly shocking, it was removed for another reason: Facebook, in accordance with its rules, **suspended these pages, groups and accounts because of their inauthentic and coordinated (i.e. manipulative) behavior** and not because of the content they were disseminating.



An example of content removed by Facebook: “the cockroach soldiers.”

21. “Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from China,” *Facebook* (19 Aug. 2019), <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/08/removing-cib-china/>.



An example of content removed by Facebook: “Protesters, ISIS combatants, what’s the difference?”



An example of content removed by Facebook.

## C. Twitter

The massive disinformation campaign organized by China is most visible on **Twitter**. On August 19, 2019, the same day as Facebook (which had been tipped off by Twitter), the platform made public a “significant state-backed information operation”: the company explained that it had deleted around **200,000 fake accounts** implicated in a campaign meant to “[undermine] the legitimacy and political positions of the [Hong Kong] protest movement” and it published the archives of the 936 most active of these accounts, all “**originating from within the PRC.**”<sup>22</sup> A month later, on September 20, Twitter published the archives of another batch of 4,301 accounts, which were also among the most active in this operation.<sup>23</sup>

Several research teams have analyzed the data published by Twitter. In this summary we used **the analysis of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)** and those of two independent data scientists, one known only under his pseudonym “AirMovingDevice,” the other, Chua

22. “Information Operations Directed at Hong Kong,” *Twitter* (19 Aug. 2019), [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/information\\_operations\\_directed\\_at\\_Hong\\_Kong.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html).

23. “Disclosing New Data to Our Archive of Information Operations,” *Twitter* (20 Sept. 2019), [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/info-ops-disclosure-data-september-2019.html).



China Hong, based in Singapore. Particularly quick to respond, the ASPI published its report, *Tweeting through the Great Firewall*, on September 3, only two weeks after the data was published by Twitter.<sup>24</sup> The report dwells on the means used by Beijing to build its disinformation campaign as well as its targets, but does not confine itself to Hong Kong since it gives examples of older campaigns targeting political opponents such as Guo Wengui and Gui Minhai.

## 1. A Typology of the accounts involved in the disinformation campaign

First preliminary observation: **this campaign was conducted in haste.** The ASPI noted that the operators behind the surge did not take the time to build credible digital identities, unlike the Russian operators who had attacked the presidential campaign in 2016. Of course the difference is that the calendar for the U.S. election was pre-established, allowing the attackers to prepare their operations several years in advance and to patiently build an “infrastructure of influence,” whereas the Hong Kong crisis was unexpected and evolved quickly. The modus operandi of the disinformation campaign had to be adapted at the last moment, taking “shortcuts” to buy time, such as purchasing existing accounts for instance, which made the operation quite easy to detect.<sup>25</sup>

**Two types of Twitter accounts used against Hong Kong protesters need to be analyzed separately: on the one hand, there were “mercenaries,”** which previously used different languages (English, Indonesian, Korean, Japanese, Russian) to post content ranging from English football to pornographic messages (sex dating websites, escort services), or even information about Korean boy bands. Having been bought, these accounts changed their language and cause overnight, thereafter defending Beijing and going after Hong Kong protesters. Selling accounts is a common practice already mentioned in part three (→ p. 375). **On the other hand, there were also “dormant” accounts:** among the data published by Twitter, ASPI identified 233 accounts where there were intervals of at least a year between two tweets. Among them, the oldest had been created in December 2007.

Their interest in Hong Kong intensified in May (one day before Carrie Lam suspended the extradition bill) and June 2019 (with the “capture” of the Legislative Council by the protesters).<sup>26</sup> Even if the tweets referencing Hong Kong were only a small part of the sampled data, the ASPI identified **three main narratives: a rejection of the protesters** and the condemnation of their positions, **support for the Hong Kong police** and the “rule of law,” and **finally conspiracy theories suggesting “Westerners” were involved in the protests.**

Hastily organized and lacking technical means, the ASPI describes a **“blunt” influence operation.** The method was similar to those used in mainland China, where censors often use spams to flood public opinion with certain types of content, and to armies of Weibo accounts paid to plaster official messages under certain types of posts globally.<sup>27</sup>

**Chua Chin Hong**, a Singapore-based specialist on Chinese media proposed a more granulated analysis of the second batch of data published by Twitter (ten million tweets) that refines our understanding of the campaign. These tweets, posted between May and July 2019, **represented a “campaign surge” which “could ironically be one of the key reasons why the network set off alarm bells at Twitter and got taken down.”** During this surge,

24. Tom Uren, Elise Thomas, and Jacob Wallis, *Tweeting through the Great Firewall: Preliminary Analysis of PRC-linked Information Operations against the Hong Kong Protests*, ASPI, Report No. 25 (2019).

25. *Ibid.*, 8.

26. Chua Chin Hon, “Failed Surge: Analyzing Beijing’s Disinformation Campaign Surge on Twitter,” *Toward Data Science* (24 Sept. 2019).

27. Chen Na, “Guns for Hire: China’s Social Media Militia Engage on Command,” *Sixth Tone* (12 Mar. 2018).

the accounts disseminated 87,000 tweets and retweets (but only 27,000 original tweets). **The overwhelming majority of these messages were in Chinese** with only 6% in English.<sup>28</sup>

One indication of the artificial nature of these accounts was **their lack of experience using Twitter**, which is banned in China. For instance, Chua highlighted that many of the accounts unknowingly posted the welcome message on Twitter (“Just setting up my twitter #myfirstTweet”), before they started to successively retweet the “lead” accounts. For the Singaporean analyst, **one of the main clues to the “massive and coordinated” nature of the disinformation campaign could be found in the accounts’ dates of creation**. Indeed, as the ASPI study showed, the accounts removed in August were rather old. In the September archive, the accounts were far more recent: out of the 4,301 accounts listed **more than half (54%) were created during the previous three months**. The largest spike in creation was on June 14 – **one day before** the extradition bill was suspended – but the analyst remained prudent and, in the absence of proof of any coordination, spoke only of a coincidence.

## 2. Spam and dormant accounts

Another analyst, “AirMovingDevice,” underlines several other characteristics.<sup>29</sup> First, **the tweets were synchronized with Beijing’s time zone**: the time slots during which the majority of the tweets were published did not correspond to the local time zone (that is to say with the geographical zones advertised by Internet users) but to Beijing’s. Moreover, **like the ASPI, AirMovingDevice highlighted long periods of dormancy or non-activity in many accounts** (nearly 41%). He described the following model: the accounts were created before 2018, posted in different languages, and then remained inactive for more or less long periods of time. They were reactivated around 2018-2019 and started posting in Chinese.

The analyst gave the example of 披荆斩棘 (#saydullos1d), a female user presumably based in Colorado.<sup>30</sup> This account, created in 2013, posted mainly in English on topics linked to hunting and fishing, without ever being retweeted or “liked.” She then progressively disappeared from the radars before reappearing in 2018. During these five years, she had “learned Chinese” and “developed a passion for butterflies,” for a few weeks at least. But this passion mysteriously evaporated to make room for Chinese tabloids. AirMovingDevice then showed that she spread content found on Weibo, even going as far as posting 1,000 messages in 2018. Then, in June 2019, she suddenly started to retweet numerous messages condemning Hong Kong protesters.

“Qujianming” was another example analyzed by Chua Chin Hong. Immediately suspect, Qujianming boasted 28,000 subscribers for 24,000 subscriptions, but, as Chua explained, it is rare for accounts to have that many subscriptions. Qujianming mainly tweeted in Chinese and called for “severe punishment for the violent protesters, systematically described as rioters (暴徒 – hooligans, thugs)” – who were accused of following their own interests only (and not those of Hong Kong).

## 3. Case Study

In a complementary approach to the essentially quantitative studies published by the ASPI in 2019, and in order to better understand the methods used by Beijing to influence and manipulate online discourse, we conducted **a qualitative investigation on Twitter and Facebook**.

28. Hon, “Failed Surge.”

29. AirMovingDevice on Twitter 22/08 (<https://twitter.com/AirMovingDevice/status/1175689332704759810>).

30. Ibid.

*a. Methodology*

We chose to **start with hashtags, that are a signature for the digital narratives and the narrative communities that conveyed them**, to further investigate some emblematic Twitter accounts. This approach has several advantages: first, a hashtag is often used and shared by large groups of users at the same time, but it nonetheless remains defined and intelligible. In the case of the Hong Kong protests, each “side” defended its representations through clearly differentiated and divisive hashtags. Sometimes the two sides fought over the same hashtags (#HongKongPolice for instance), with one side defending the actions of the Hong Kong riot police, and the other condemning their violent actions. In other words, hashtags were a point of convergence for the different sides and a structuring force for their discourses – a shared signature of some sort. As markers, **they helped identify a group of relatively homogeneous users**. This also **allowed us to study the users’ discourse**, which involved various channels (tweets, images, memes, allusions, wordplays, etc.). Finally, the hashtag is also **a time marker**, since it allows us to date its first use (and sometimes its decline). For all these reasons, our study analyzes **of a set of hashtags used in September and October 2019**.

Starting with these hashtags (listed below), we chose representative accounts based on **three criteria that questioned their authenticity: anonymous user IDs** (a Twitter user ID made of a word, or part of a word, with many numbers); **a linguistic dissonance** (IDs using a “Western-sounding name” but tweeting only in Chinese); and **their non-linearity or non-regularity** (accounts that boasted more than 5,000 subscribers or subscriptions a few months after their creation, or accounts that had been inactive for a long time but suddenly starting to tweet in Chinese).

These suspicious accounts were then analyzed in more details with the help of open-source research tools (OSINT) such as “tinfoleaks” or “accountanalysis,” which gave us the precise date of an account’s creation, the date of the first tweet, the hashtags used, and so on. This method was relatively efficient: half the accounts quoted in our investigation have since been suspended (between the last weeks of September and mid-October 2019).

The research on these accounts focused on **the period that started on September 20 and ended on October 20, 2019**. The advanced research tools provided by Twitter made it possible to target certain phrases, enabling us to concentrate on the events that shaped this period: the protests of September 28 and October 1, and those that followed the adoption of the law outlawing masks during demonstrations. The choice of this one-month period allows us to propose an analysis that takes into account the evolution of the methods and narratives used during this period, but also to propose an original qualitative study that goes beyond a mere observation of the virality of the messages. We formulate hypotheses regarding the intentions and strategies that could have underlain their publication, thus complementing already existing studies. The analysis hopes to show the technical levers used with Twitter accounts and, therefore, their non-authentic or “unnatural” character (inherent to their irregular uses).

b. *Reactivated dormant accounts*

• **@loverealface2** (active until October 9, the day it was suspended) was registered in the United States. Created in December 2017, it boasted 5,100 subscribers (5,800 subscriptions) and only posted 56 tweets after its creation. The long period of inactivity between August 2018 and September 17, 2019 made it suspicious.

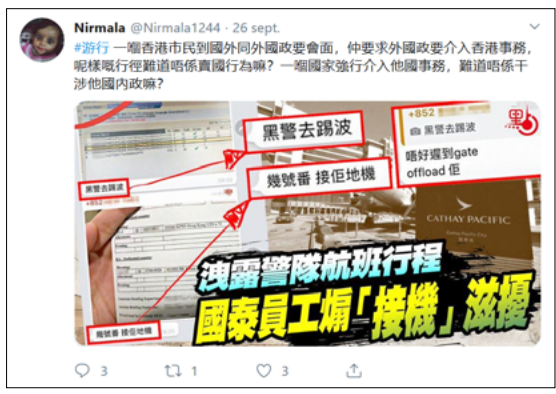
It last tweeted in English in August 2018. And, from September 2019 on, it tweeted in Cantonese when covering Hong Kong and, more rarely, in Mandarin when dealing with “personal messages” (for example a message about a trip to Yunnan).



We give two examples of tweets posted by **@loverealface2** here: the first (see below, left) accused Joshua Wong, Jimmy Lai, Anson Chan, and Martin Lee of having “collaborated” with the “exterior anti-Chinese forces” (境外反華勢力) to organize a color revolution (顏色革命) in Hong Kong. The photo showed a “calm, clean” Hong Kong that contrasted with the mass of umbrellas. The message meant “let Hong Kong recover her past glow (glory).” The second picture (see below, right), exploited the theme of the collaboration with “exterior anti-Chinese forces.” Joshua Wong was accused of wanting to destroy the social order and to break the “One country, Two systems” compromise. The photo was supposed to represent a U.S. diplomat having dinner with several pro-democracy figures.

• **@Nirmala1244** (last consulted on October 3, and suspended around October 9) was created in March 2019. For someone who tweeted very little (only 21 tweets), the account boasted 5,000 subscribers and 5,400 subscriptions. This account posted in Mandarin and Cantonese and wrote “personal” tweets (which had very little to do with the Hong Kong protests). Furthermore, between April 8 and July 24, the account was barely active, with only three visible messages. The peak of its activity occurred between September 21 and October 1 – not unlike **@loverealface2** – which could mean there was a rapid campaign in the lead up to October 1. The content of the tweets was similar to that of **@loverealface2**: patriotic images and others meant to tarnish the protesters.

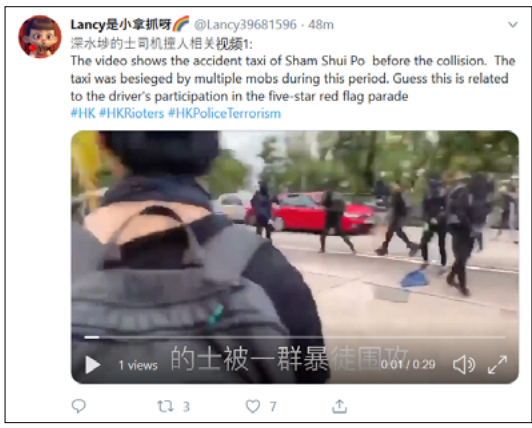
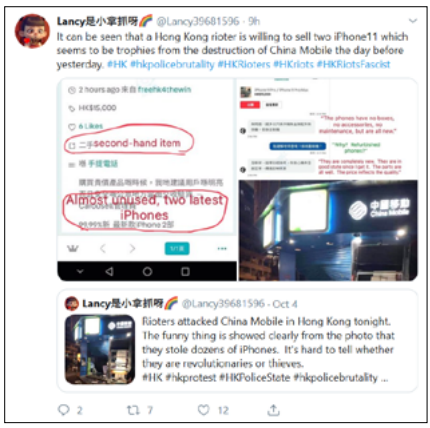




Above are two tweets that @Nirmala1244 posted. The first (on the left) questioned foreign influence: in this case one person presumably met with a foreign diplomat to discuss the protests. The message mentioned “meetings” between foreign agents and protests leaders. The second tweet (on the right) criticized the fact that protesters allegedly “used” children to conduct their violent acts.

- **@FunnybonesBob** (consulted on October 2, suspended on October 10) had 5,400 accounts and collected 5,100 subscribers. Created in November 2017, it did not tweet between March 2018 and September 2019 and had only published 37 tweets in total. Most of the tweets were old and they discussed an application that supposedly “cleans” Twitter profiles and subscriptions in particular.<sup>31</sup> This account only became active in September 2019 and more precisely on September 30, with only a few tweets that took up the iconography linking protesters to the Ku Klux Klan; another tweet drew an analogy between protesters and saboteurs.

- **@Lancy39681596** was also very active. Its number of subscribers grew sharply: from 1,720 on October 10 to more than 2,000 on October 19. In addition, it published more than 12,000 tweets after its creation, five months earlier, in May 2019. Even more troubling was the frequency with which this account sent messages. On Sunday, October 6, as major protests took place in Hong Kong in reaction to the law banning the wearing of masks, @Lancy39681596 sent nearly 1,400 tweets between 7am and 10pm. In comparison, on Saturday October 5, the account sent “only” 387 tweets.



31. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mhmdalmz.example.unfollowjet&hl=en>. It is possible that this is the application but the tweets have since been removed and we have no way of confirming this hypothesis.

On Sunday, October 6, @Lancy39681596 was particularly moved by the violence perpetrated by protestors (in particular against a cab driver, stores, and individuals). It also presented cases of looting of Chinese stores or simply of “ordinary citizens” by Hong Kong protesters. The tweets were often bilingual (the screenshots above were taken on October 5).

- **@anyaafairy**, another suspicious account, was consulted on October 14 and 18, and suspended around October 20. This account was **typical of the “improvements” made to more basic accounts**. @anyaafairy claimed to be a roleplay “NSFW” account (*not safe for work*, i.e. erotic or sexual), and its profile picture was stolen from a real Thai model.<sup>32</sup> The account had over 12,000 followers and fewer than 130 subscriptions. In other words, **it was at first glance an “authentic” account**. However, in its three years of existence, it tweeted only 234 times. Only a dozen tweets were visible at the time the account was consulted in October 2019, with the oldest dating back to October 7. On average, two out of three (visible) tweets were about Hong Kong and published in Mandarin.



The user deplored that, since June, more than 4,200 meters of railing, close to 400 lamp posts and traffic lights, 2,600 square meters of asphalt and 1,700 items of city property had been destroyed by rioters.

- **@TXT\_Tathyunnn** (last accessed on October 18, suspended on October 30) was a fan-made account about Kang Tae Hyun, one of the singers of the Korean K-pop group “TXT Tomorrow-X-Together.” It was not the official account of the boys band. Created in August 2015, it posted 8,800 tweets, with 19,000 followers and barely 50 subscriptions. At its creation and until April 2019, it behaved “normally”: retweets of the band’s official account (in Korean), pictures of the singers, etc. Then, between April and October 7, 2019, the account was completely inactive. In early October, the account posted a series of photographs of members of the band but without text. Then, on October 9, the account tweeted in traditional Mandarin to criticize the Hong Kong protesters, following a model similar to the tweets mentioned above (infographics/photos, videos and comments). The account kept tweeting about the members of the Korean K-pop group but tweets became less frequent and interspersed with other tweets about Hong Kong. TXT also tweeted in Cantonese and English, and seemingly focused on looting and violence.

32. Thanyarat Charoenpornkittada who can be found on <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002074497537>, Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/fearythanyarat/?hl=en>, and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT5aACooyOYKmetQsERH0Qw>.



• Our last examples show **the reactivity of these accounts’ operators**, in this instance their ability to quickly activate fallback accounts. The account @CrealDilmhg, consulted on October 14, but since suspended, was a particularly active account with almost 1,100 tweets and 1,300 subscribers in its three months of existence.<sup>33</sup> On October 17, however, another account @DilmhgCreal, created in July 2019 with the same profile picture, and around 1,300 subscribers, resumed its activities.<sup>34</sup> The content was very similar to what was already presented: highlighting the protesters’ violence was its leitmotiv. They were often compared to terrorists. Each misdeed was scrutinized (or made up) and the messages recycled the specificities we have observed on WeChat: shocking images and titles that sought to prompt indignation, etc.

c. “Relay accounts”

In this study we also noted **numerous accounts with a marginal audience**, i.e. only a few subscribers and subscriptions. These accounts **seemed to simply retweet and share the content disseminated** by the more important accounts presented above. We named these **“relay accounts.”**

There are many such fake accounts, but we could also find many “micro users” among them who try to go undetected by Twitter moderators. For example, “Wurufan” (务如凡 @kWz331F6nCU9Z7E – last accessed on October 19) **was one account whose user-**

33. See the archive we made: <https://archive.fo/ozJfK>.  
 34. The account has since been suspended, see the archive we made: <https://archive.fo/62muw>.

name seemed to have been randomly generated by computer. Not very active (123 tweets between its creation in July 2019 and October 10), the account had only five subscriptions and only one subscriber. Its first message dated from September 10 and they all followed the same principle. The account retweeted and commented on messages coming from bigger accounts (such as those quoted previously). The first tweets sent on September 10 actually relayed messages from accounts which are now suspended.



Many accounts like this one took turns to generate content online. The account **@BeverleyMclare3**, active on October 9, was suspended the next day; a similar account, **@RuthannGant9**, created in September 2019 (accessed on October 9 – 2 subscriptions, 2 followers, 28 tweets), used the same codes; it subscribed to two other fake accounts **@anntaranti** and **@MaThao91**, both created in September 2019, with one or no subscriber. If they had been created in September, they apparently did not start tweeting until early October, which would indicate that **they were back-up or secondary accounts**. Both accounts were accessed on October 9 and suspended the next day. It is likely that these accounts are regularly suspended and then reprogrammed. A new example is provided by **@UshaBoardman** (account accessed on October 14, suspended on the 16<sup>th</sup>) created on September 23 and almost inactive until October 14.

Another peculiarity is that most of these “new” accounts used **Western names**. For instance, **@GillianMonteith** and **@MarineMcgregor5** were two accounts that tweeted only in Mandarin about Hong Kong-related topics. These accounts were not the most influential because their audience was after all inexistent, but they revealed the Chinese strategy described in the ASPI reports or in other studies.

#### *d. Anti-protester hashtags, narratives and iconographies*

The following texts were collected from hashtags used both in English and in Chinese. Generally, the tweets did not contain more than three or four keywords, among which we always found “Hong Kong” / “香港.” Here is an overview of the main hashtags:



Hashtags in Chinese	English Translation	Commentary
#香港廢青	Hong Kong wasted youth	“waste” (廢 – fei has several meanings: “abandoned,” “thrown away” (for waste). This was one of the hashtags the protestors used the most.
#香港暴乱	Hong Kong riots	One of the most common hashtags.
#(香港)暴徒	Hong Kong thugs	Another of the most frequent hashtags. “暴徒” ( <i>baotu</i> ), which means “bandit,” i.e. a violent individual without a “noble” cause.
#守護香港	Protect Hong Kong	A widely-used hashtag.
支持香港警察	Supporthkpolice	Probably one of the most widely used hashtags in both Chinese and English.
#我支持香港警察你们可以打我了	I support HK police you can hit me	This message appeared in late July and early August as clashes with the police became more frequent.
#14亿人撑香港	1,4 billion people support HK	One of Diba’s slogans.
#14亿护旗手	1,4 billion protect the [PRC] flag	Another of Diba’s slogans.
#饭圈女孩网络出征	The online campaign of the fan girls	One of the hashtags of Fanquan that allowed its members to recognize themselves.
#帝吧出征	Diba’s campaign	Same principle, one of Diba’s main slogans.
#中国一点也不能少	China can’t be a bit smaller	This slogan expresses the opposition to the “secession” of Hong Kong.
#香港是中国的香港	Hong Kong is China’s Hong Kong	Similar to the one above; absolute refusal to lose sovereignty over Hong Kong.
#全民撑警	The whole people support the police	A hashtag similar to the ones presented before, but sponsored by groups endorsing the Hong Kong (and Chinese) government, and relayed by Guancha. <sup>a</sup>

a. “今天，香港全民撑警日” (“Today, it’s Hong Kong Police’s day”), 观察者网 (*The Observer*) (10 Aug. 2019).

Variations on these hashtags did exist but it was neither pertinent nor possible to include all of them here. The few hashtags listed above were among the most recurrent but they were not the only ones.

These hashtags can be classified into **two groups: those displaying patriotism or nationalism** (particularly among Diba members) **and those which specifically covered protests in Hong Kong** (either by supporting the police or disparaging the protesters).

To get a better understanding of the anti-protester narratives disseminated on Twitter **one need to study the content of the tweets and images. The two main lines of attack were the alleged violence of protesters** (drawing an analogy with terrorists, highlighting the pillaging, accusations of rape, of lynching, etc.) **and the alleged manipulations of “foreign anti-Chinese forces.”** Hereafter we show several tweets and infographics, both in English and Chinese, which are representative of these topics.



1

On image #1, the first strip shows protesters as cockroaches yelling “five demands and not one less” (the protesters’ slogan), “I want to break stuff, hit people and stop them from going back to work or to school.” On the strip at the bottom, under the red title (“Once the law prohibiting the wearing of masks is enacted”), the “protester” on the right in the foreground says to his comrade: “Come on, you go first,” the other answers: “Errrrr ok, but I’m scared...” This image posted in late September 2019 was supposed to **illustrate the fact that protesters only dared follow through with their actions because they felt protected by the anonymity provided by masks.**

The main message was that **masked protesters were violent**, that they hid real weaponry (Image #2), and caused major damage (Image #3).



2



3

A particularly predominant leitmotiv advanced that protesters behaved more violently than the police. A number of posters and messages highlighted **the acts of violence presumably committed by protesters against the police** (Image #4). For example, Image #5, posted by Guancha, showed the following: “Neither peaceful nor reasonable,” followed by the caption “Peaceful? Reasonable? Certainly not!” Guancha was here trying to demonize the values exhibited by protesters (“we are peaceful and reasonable”) to better discredit them.



4



5

While certain images denounced the protesters’ violence against the police, others praised the attitude of the police in regard to the “thugs” (Images #6 and #7). This very cinematic style could also be found among both protesters and “counter-protesters.” Once again the role of Guancha in the dissemination of this content was noteworthy.



6

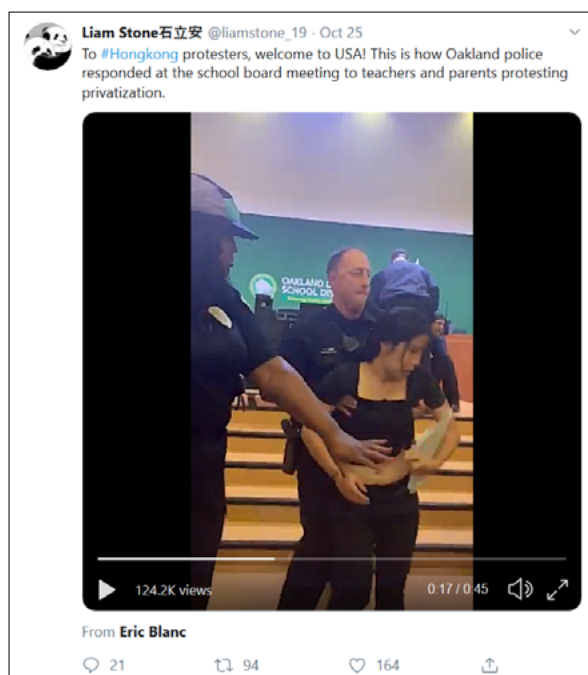


7

Another angle was the “whataboutism,” a form of sophistry which was about trying to create a diversion by invoking a different target. For example, in response to what was perceived as the biased Western coverage of the Hong Kong crisis, criticizing the violence of the police and Beijing’s support, many influential Chinese-speaking accounts turned these criticisms back against the West using comparisons – especially to the U.S. police, as we saw in part three (→ p. 385) and as illustrated by Images #8 and #9.



8



9

## D. The new corps of volunteers on Weibo

In mainland China, Weibo is the equivalent of Twitter, and its content is strictly regulated (→ p. 199), as with all the Chinese platforms. However, Weibo plays an essential role in the **“fans’ economy.”** Weibo is very lucrative for movie, reality TV, and music stars who have mastered mobilizing their communities.<sup>35</sup> The race for popularity on this network has pushed many users to organize themselves in militant communities in order to support their idols or pay **“water armies”** (水军)<sup>36</sup> to **artificially increase the popularity of a star (or product)** on the network. Weibo is thus a permanent battlefield between different communities of users defending their favorite celebrities.<sup>37</sup>

### 1. Diba

A well-known example among Chinese users is the group **“Li Yi Ba”** (李毅吧), which has morphed over time to become **“Diba”** (帝吧). **“Liyiba”** was originally a sub-section of an online forum named **“tieba,”** a community of users known for mocking a football player named Li Yi. It progressively became more organized and now **regularly leads “campaigns”** (出征 – as in **“military campaigns”**) **against targets “outside the Great Chinese firewall”** under the slogan **“[when] Diba launches a military expedition not a blade of grass is spared”** (帝吧出征，寸草不生). For instance, Diba **attacked the Facebook page of the newly-elected head of the Taiwanese government Tsai Ing-Wen**<sup>38</sup> and

35. Fan Shuhong, “Idol Hands: How China’s Super Fan Groups Make and Break Stars Via the Multi-Million Dollar ‘Fan Economy,’” *RADII* (7 Jan. 2019).

36. Na, “Guns for Hire.”

37. Owen Churchill, “Hit Show Accused of Shirking Payment for Fake Reviews,” *Sixth Tone* (24 Feb. 2017).

38. “帝吧出征表情包大战升级\_千万大陆网友翻墙占领脸书” (“Diba Gears Up to Trigger the War of Emojis. Ten Million Cyber-Citizens from the Mainland Seize Facebook by Crossing the Wall”), *Sobu* (20 Jan. 2019).



the international movement fighting for the rights of Uyghurs in early 2018. If Diba seems essentially active in China's peripheral environment (Taiwan and Hong Kong notably), its campaigns can also strike more distant targets: **they attacked the satirical Swedish show *Svenska Nyheter* in September 2018 (→ p. 532) and the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in January 2020, after the publication of a caricature representing the flag of the PRC with the characteristics of the coronavirus.**<sup>39</sup>



The caricature of a Chinese flag in which the stars have been replaced by coronaviruses, published by the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on January 28, 2020, triggered a campaign by pro-Chinese trolls which Diba partly led, against the paper and Denmark more generally.

**On Twitter**, the group Diba used the account @D8China. Thanks to Twint, we were able to collect all the published tweets before the account was deleted in late October or early November 2019. The first was posted in April 2019 and targeted activist groups defending the rights of the Muslim Uyghur minority (and not Hong Kong demonstrators). The account showed its successes through an article it shared.<sup>40</sup> @D8China did not participate in targeted campaigns but played the role of a propagandist, highlighting Diba's successes and relaying Beijing's watchwords: territorial unity, the fight against "biased Western media," etc.

**On Facebook**, Diba has several official groups (and pages). Foremost among these is "Diba's army group center" (帝吧中央集团军) created in 2015.<sup>41-42</sup> In October 2019, it had 83,000 members including 3,000 new members that subscribed during the previous 30 days. Diba also had several Facebook groups intended to organize its activities: "Diba's campaign to protect Hong Kong" (帝吧出征守护香港),<sup>43</sup> created in July 2019 with 8,000 members (October 2019), but also "Diba's base of operations," created in April 2016 and which had 22,000 members (October 2019).<sup>44</sup> To join some of these groups, administrators impose rules or submit users to questions which often consists in showing off one's patriotism.

Diba was supposed to launch a campaign (出征) **against Hong Kong protesters** on July 23, but it was brought forward to July 22 and the announcement was made on the

39. Diba's implication was confirmed during our interviews in Denmark.

40. "中国网军出征 维吾尔人权团体脸书遭洗版" ("The Army of Internet Users Goes After Uyghur Facebook Groups"), DW (11 Apr. 2019), <https://archive.vn/bxgdZ>; see also Zhang Han, "Patriotic Posts Flood East Turkestan Pages to Fight Untrue Reports on Xinjiang," *Global Times* (10 Apr. 2019).

41. <https://www.facebook.com/dibazhongyangjitanjunxiaozu/>; see also [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Antiindependence/community/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Antiindependence/community/?ref=page_internal).

42. 帝吧中央集团军— [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1101110389929793/?ref=group\\_header](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1101110389929793/?ref=group_header).

43. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1655995351222347/?ref=search>.

44. [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1721233154831031/?ref=pages\\_groups\\_card&source\\_id=832140356914881](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1721233154831031/?ref=pages_groups_card&source_id=832140356914881).

group's Weibo account.<sup>45-46</sup> **The pages of certain Hong Kong protesters' support groups were targeted** in a well-defined modus operandi: the attackers copied and pasted messages (often the same messages) one after another to saturate the spaces. However, this time **Diba was quickly detected and its main operators “doxxed”**: their names, addresses, telephone numbers and bank account details were made public and some of these were used for enrolment applications in the PLA. The main operation was apparently cancelled by the organizers for fear of reprisals.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Fanquan

Another operation was apparently conducted between August 14 and 17, 2019 and this time **by a set of groups called “饭圈女孩” (*fanquan nühai*).**<sup>48</sup> **Literally translated as the “girls of the fan circle,”** this was a group of young Internet users (most often high school girls) deeply involved in the “pursuit of stars” (追星—*zhuixing*).<sup>49</sup> There were in fact different groups of fans of pop idols who “joined together” to help and support “阿中” (*a-zhong*) or 阿中哥哥 (*a-zhong gege*) – or, in other words, China.<sup>50</sup> These fans developed a whole iconography based on “gifs” or memes (humoristic Internet images – *biaoqing bao* (表情包 in Chinese)). And they responded to hashtags on Weibo such as “守护全世界最好的阿中” (“Let us, in all corners of the world, protect the greatest China”).<sup>51</sup> A search with this hashtag on Weibo returned a frenzy of activities over the slightest subject that involved China, such as the NBA, Huawei, the military parade of October 1 and, of course, Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the “fan girls” also have a **Twitter account, @520CHINA666,**<sup>52</sup> created in June 2019 and suspended in late October. When we created our archive, around October 25, the account had published nearly 3,700 tweets (we were able to collect around 1,000). In October, the *fanquan* boasted 5,000 subscribers and 55 subscriptions. In comparison to Diba's account, this one was more aggressive insofar as it actually answered (often with insults) Internet users who favored democracy.<sup>53</sup>

## 3. Coordinated actions

The peak in activity of both Diba and Fanquan groups apparently occurred between August 14 and 20. Chinese websites spoke of the “814大团结” (“**the Grand Unity of August 14**”): **that day, different fan groups came together to lead a highly “disciplined” attack against China's enemies.** Diba and Fanquan groups apparently led the charge. This attack

45. “[逃犯條例] 內地網軍「帝吧」提前「出征” (“[Rules on Fleeing Offenders] The Continental Cyber Army ‘Diba’ ‘attacks’ in advance”), KHO1.com (22 Jul. 2019), <https://archive.vn/Yd3JY>.

46. <https://urlz.fr/ePsC>.

47. “中國網軍揚言到香港FB 踩場 反被起底「所有」個人私隱” (“Chinese Cyber Citizens Threaten to Trample Facebook in Hong-Kong but See Their “entire” Private Lives Exposed”), *Unwire HK* (Jul. 2019).

48. “中國網軍揚言到香港FB 踩場 反被起底「所有」個人私隱” (“Chinese Cyber Citizens Threaten to Trample Facebook in Hong-Kong but See Their “Entire” Private Lives Exposed”); “饭圈女孩” (“The Girls of the Fan Circle”), <https://jikipedia.com/definition/679265533/>.

49. In the West, the importance of media consumerism and the fascination generated by pop-stars and other idols is seldom understood. This economy is also a very proactive social movement (with extremely organized online groups) that does not hesitate to use its striking force to support their artists or, like in this case, conduct campaigns against their adversaries.

50. <https://jikipedia.com/definition/224758815>. The term “a-zhong/a-zhong gene” stems from the fascinations for Korean stars and “o-ba”(欧巴) culture in Korea. O-Ba is a word used by girls to talk about a boy.

51. To this end, see the results for the search on this hashtag on Twitter: <https://bit.ly/3oxEpyl>.

52. In the coded language of Chinese Internet users, “520” (wuerling) means “I love you” and “666” is a word play meaning “cool.”

53. See our archive: <https://archive.md/CNqwGa>.

was in fact a **meme war meant to control the comment section on the adversary's posts, to stop them from disseminating their version of events and even to block their page.** On August 15, *Guancha* (→ p. 491) wrote an article about this symbolic victory.<sup>54</sup>

Another wave of coordinated attacks reportedly took place on August 17.<sup>55</sup> More than an “offensive campaign,” this “operation” aimed to stimulate patriotism and was supported by the pro-Beijing Hong Kong representative Junius Ho.<sup>56</sup> The day before, Diba’s official Weibo account issued a mobilization order. This message, “虽千万人吾往矣” (“even in the face of ten million, I shall advance”), was a quote from the Confucian theorist Mencius. It accompanied instructions on how to “defend the right of the Hong Kong police to arrest protesters” (坚决支持香港警察依法拘捕暴徒). According to *Guancha*, who used screenshots as evidence, these groups were organized around **QQ groups and into “regiments” (团). For the occasion “reinforcement” groups from China (阿中后援团) were formed.**

In terms of content **the groups’ administrators provided the “ammunitions” (阿中后援):** images of violent protesters, phrases and messages previously prepared in Chinese and English.



It is worth noting that the members of these groups took up the codes of Hong Kong protesters only to turn them against them. For instance, echoing the “five demands” of the protesters,<sup>57</sup> they issued “five positive demands” (5大正能量诉求 – see picture on the left): an end to violence (止暴制乱), the restoration of order (恢复秩序), severe punishments for the rioters (严惩暴徒), attack on lawlessness (打击违法), fair coverage of the news (公正报道).

In parallel to this type of targeted content, Diba’s Twitter group asked its subscribers to spread messages of support on the Hong Police Facebook and Twitter groups.<sup>58</sup>

Of course these actions encountered difficulties: Facebook and Twitter are banned in China. **Diba and Fanquan “soldiers” had to “cross the wall” (翻墙 – a word used to mean “go around the great Chinese firewall”).** Diba’s Facebook page seemed to give instructions and technical advice on how to do it (see below).<sup>59</sup> **Included among the ammunition, were “instruction manuals on how to use foreign social media and methods to avoid the blocking attempts (spam accounts) of foreign social platforms” (针对各大大海外社交平台制作了扫盲教程、防封号教程).**<sup>60</sup> On Twitter (see below) one account advised “young patriots” (爱国青年) to use a VPN (theoretically banned by the Chinese

54. “守护全世界最好的阿中” 饭圈女孩出征”开撕” 香港示威者 (18 Aug. 2019), [http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019\\_08\\_15\\_513689.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019_08_15_513689.shtml).

55. [http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019\\_08\\_18\\_514016.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019_08_18_514016.shtml). The Diba account message, suspended since, was posted at this address: <https://twitter.com/D8China/status/1162365049303756801>.

56. Ibid.

57. The “five demands” of the Hong Kong protesters were the total withdrawal of the draft bill, the withdrawal of the word “rioters” used to describe the protests, the liberation of arrested protesters, the establishment of an independent commission to investigate the level of violence inflicted by police during the protest of 12<sup>th</sup> June, and finally Carrie Lam’s resignation and the implementation of universal suffrage for legislative elections and for the election of the head of the executive.

58. <https://twitter.com/D8China/status/1162705584702885893> (account suspended, last used on 24 Oct. 2019). This is the content of the tweet recovered from our archives: “现在转移新战场!!id: 香港警察Hong Kong Police!! 香港警察的FB主页, 大家进去所有帖子留言支持香港警察!! 没有fb账号的留战ins!! 点赞全部友军!!不要理fq!! 撑港警别骂人现在转移新战场!! 千万别骂人这是我们的人!”

59. 热血! 昨夜, 帝吧出征 (“Warm blood! Yesterday Evening, Diba Launched a Campaign”) (18 Aug. 2019), <https://new.qq.com/omn/20190818/20190818A03Q7C00.html>.

60. Ibid.

authorities) and an “accelerator” (加速器) called “Ant Accelerator” (蚂蚁加速器) to cross the wall and thus contribute to China’s defense. On Weibo, another account explained that **the government “tacitly blessed” these illegal practices** (see below).



**The scale of the “attacks” on August 14-18** was such that the Weibo account of the official TV network CCTV took up the information. Many articles, idols and popular Chinese social media accounts endorsed the initiative, calling on their members to spread images of support.<sup>61</sup> This wave of patriotism also included Chinese students abroad.<sup>62</sup> The organizers and articles dealing with this campaign asserted, while backing their claims with screenshots, that they were able **“to take control” of the comment sections of several Facebook and Instagram pages belonging to Hong Kong media outlets or protesters.**<sup>63</sup>

The Chinese also deployed their narratives through **pornographic accounts** on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The porn audiences of these accounts were no doubt easier targets for Beijing’s pre-fabricated narratives, but also **to skirt around the growing vigilance of traditional platforms in regard to Beijing’s activities.**<sup>64</sup> Rejected on certain platforms, Chinese intermediaries disseminating the Chinese narrative decided to use **PornHub**. This platform is not allowed in China, so Chinese agents acting from the mainland also had to use VPNs to “cross the wall.” One such account took the name “CCYL\_central,”<sup>65</sup> which seemed to be a reference to the Communist Youth League (→ p. 72), even if there was probably no link between the operators and the CYL. As on the traditional platforms, protesters were compared to hooligans, or cockroaches, and the idea of democracy itself was discredited with references to its alleged deficiencies and malfunctions.

## E. Conclusion

Analyzing China’s actions on its traditional media outlets and the content disseminated on different social networks, mainly Twitter, Facebook and TikTok, between July and October 2019, allowed us to identify several characteristics:

61. Ibid. – 《新闻联播》播发央视快评：乱港暴力已入穷途末路 (“Xinwen Lianbo (CCTV) Broadcasts a Commentary: The Violence in Hong Kong ‘Has Come to an End’”) (18 Aug. 2019), [https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2019-08\\_18/docihytcern1749313.shtml](https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2019-08_18/docihytcern1749313.shtml) excerpt from CCTV.

62. “留学生合唱团、帝吧网友、饭圈女孩……有的出手，有的出征” (“An Overseas Student Choir, Diba Users, Girls from the Fan Circle... Some Have Come Out, Some Have Gone on The Offensive!”), *Xinhuanet* (20 Aug. 2019), [http://www.xinhuanet.com/gangao/2019-08/20/c\\_1124895556.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/gangao/2019-08/20/c_1124895556.htm). See also [http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019\\_08\\_18\\_514016.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019_08_18_514016.shtml), which contains numerous photos of operations on Facebook or Instagram.

63. See their campaigns on Twitter with the hashtag “14亿人撑香港” (“1.4 Billion People Support Hong Kong”), <https://bit.ly/36rBL6U>.

64. Jane Li, “China’s Messaging Against the Hong Kong Protests Has Found a New Outlet: Pornhub,” *Quartz* (13 Nov. 2019).

65. Ibid.



- The accounts were differentiated according to the effect sought: **spam, dormant or relay accounts with a complementary roles** in disseminating anti-protester narratives.
- The approach focused on compiling very basic content but emphasizing their volume **to saturate the spaces of the target communities and play with their emotions.**
- **The modus operandi was relatively artisanal** because they did not have the time to mount a targeted operation and because events in Hong Kong accelerated, but this was **largely compensated by a multi-channel and pragmatic approach** that used Twitter and Facebook just as much as WeChat or TikTok.
- **They showed a real ability to adapt themselves to Twitter’ repeated decisions to delete waves of accounts,** by adopting other approaches and other relays, notably via communities that seemed apolitical at first sight, like the fans of celebrities. The campaign led by Diba was the most sophisticated example of this in terms of its degree of organization, its length, the aggressiveness of its members and its viral character.
- The Twittersphere and the “institutional relays” of official Chinese TV channels converged, and even aligned themselves semantically. This is another indicator of **a willingness to coordinate informational operations.**

## Chapter 3

# SINGAPORE

Singapore has an ambivalent relationship with China, which mixes proximity and distrust, and several characteristics of the country make it both vulnerable and uniquely resilient to Chinese influence.

### I. Vulnerabilities

**First, there are structural weaknesses such as its size.** Singapore is a city-state that can be toured in one day with a bicycle and this affects everything: “here **everything is strategic**: there is no distinction between the tactical and the strategic.”<sup>66</sup> This concentration, combined with the country’s **hyper-connectivity**, means that online fake news can reach the entire population within minutes. Besides, **the widespread use of both English and Chinese** makes the Singaporean society easy to penetrate for foreign actors. Its dependence on imports for all essential goods and **its tense relationship with Malaysia** (which is itself vulnerable to radical Islam and more or less aligned with Beijing) are other exploitable weaknesses. In fact, **Beijing can use intermediaries based in Malaysia**, for instance, to conduct disinformation operations against Singapore that would seem all the more credible as Singapore and Malaysia have a tense relationship and because a number of informational operations have already originated from Malaysia. Furthermore, there are precedents of known Chinese groups paid to produce content in Malaysia, to target Taiwan especially (→ p. 367).

Yet, the main vulnerability lies in the very nature of **Singapore’s multiethnic, cross-community society**. These attributes are both a source of great richness and a lever easily accessible to an ill-intentioned third-party actor. For now, cross-community tensions have been avoided, but this harmony is never guaranteed and it requires proactive policies (such as the constitutional revision that has allowed a Malaysian candidate to run for the presidency).<sup>67</sup> A terrorist attack could easily trigger such tensions. Indeed, among the improbable but high-impact scenarios that must not be overlooked is the possibility of a terrorist attack targeting the Chinese, which could subsequently serve as a pretext for Beijing to intervene.

**Second, there are particular vulnerabilities in regard to China**, primarily the proportion of the population that is of Chinese descent: according to official statistics, **3.01 of the 4.04 million inhabitants (74.5%) were Chinese** in June 2020, 550,000 were Malaysian

66. From an interview with one of the authors, in Singapore (Nov. 2019).

67. The constitutional amendment allows a presidential election to be reserved for candidates from a particular ethnic group if that group has not been represented in the presidency in the last five terms. This applies to all ethnic groups: if there were a series of five non-“Chinese” presidents, the next election would be reserved for “Chinese” candidates. See in particular Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s speech, “Race, multiracialism and Singapore’s place in the world” (23 Sept. 2017).

(13.6%), 360,000, Indian (8.9%) and 130,000 classified as “others” (3.2%).<sup>68</sup> This is why **Beijing’s main narrative describes Singapore as a “Chinese country”** part of the “Greater China” that owes its loyalty to China. For this precise reason, and to avoid being assimilated into China’s orbit, Singapore has always been wary in its dealings with China. For example, out of the five earliest ASEAN members, Singapore was the last to establish diplomatic relations with China. However, the former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew (1959-1990) contributed to the rapprochement by going to China frequently and by promoting, as early as 1979, the use of simplified characters in Singapore to align it with mainland China.

The Chinese community is very organized, in **clan associations** for instance, a system dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. More than 300 associations are officially registered in Singapore. These serve as key institutions for “preserving a sense of Chinese identity and kinship.”<sup>69</sup> They organize cultural events, trips to China, etc. Older generations, who generally have a stronger affinity with China, are more likely to be members of these associations.

**Immigration from China** keeps the proportion of the Chinese population in Singapore at around 75%: their exact number is classified but there are an estimated 20,000 Chinese naturalized in Singapore every year, and even more permanent residents. **This flow contributes to maintaining a Chinese majority** because the community has the lowest birth rate there (7.6 per 1000 in 2019, compared to 8.7 for Indians and 14 for Malaysians<sup>70</sup>). Chinese newcomers, who retain their networks in mainland China, are an additional vector of influence.

For younger Singaporeans, who are less interested in clan associations, Chinese influence is channeled mostly through its **economic attractiveness**. The youngest, born after the Tian’anmen generation, have a tendency to see China solely as an opportunity and not as a threat. **The two economies are highly integrated:** in the last two decades, Singapore has increased its exports to China while reducing the ones to the United States, Europe and Japan. Hence, **the most powerful vector of Chinese influence is neither clan-based nor cultural, but economic**, with professional organizations, notably the Chinese Singapore Chamber of Commerce and the Singapore Business Federation. “The PRC exerts leverage over Singapore businessmen by making it harder for them to get contracts, licenses, permits, loans, etc – especially in the real estate sector, where Singaporeans hold significant investments in China.”<sup>71</sup> Those doing business in China are in fact questioned by Chinese intelligence services, which extract negative information that could damage the Singaporean government. They also give businessmen key elements of speech that are printed on little cards and need to be disseminated by them.<sup>72</sup> The Chamber of Commerce and the Business Federation have also created the **Chinese Development Assistance Council**, which offers scholarships to study in China, among other actions. **The Confucius Institute** of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), inaugurated in 2005 – one of the first in the world (→ p. 300) – had only 200 students in 2006, but 7,000 in 2020.

Beijing can also count **on media and individual relays**. On the one hand, Xinhua has a local office, *China Daily* has a supplement in the weekend edition of *The Straits Times* and there are local Chinese-speaking media, such as *Lianbe Zaobao*, a daily newspaper created in 1983 that has become the largest Chinese-speaking media in the city-state. On the other hand, certain influential and notoriously pro-Chinese voices regularly intervene in the pub-

68. “Resident Population by Ethnic Group, Age Group and Sex Dashboard,” Department of Statistics, Singapore, <https://bit.ly/39G0CpP>.

69. Russell Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Singapore,” *China Brief*, 19:13 (16 Jul. 2019).

70. “Number of Babies Born in Singapore Rises Slightly After 8-year Low,” *Channel News Asia* (28 Jul. 2020).

71. Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey.”

72. Description given by one of our contacts in Singapore who had seen these cards.

lic debate, including **Kishore Mahbubani**. In July 2017, as dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore, he published an op-ed in *The Straits Times* calling for Singapore, “a small State” which he compares to Qatar, to be more cautious in its relations with Beijing.<sup>73</sup>

Another, often under-estimated, vulnerability of Singapore is **its approach to human rights**, since Beijing can prove a natural ally in the face of the hegemony of Western values that are presented as universal (i.e. the debate on Asian Values).

In this context, **Beijing’s objective “is to impose a Chinese identity on Singapore** so that it will align more closely with the PRC’s expanding interests.”<sup>74</sup> **In concrete terms Beijing wants Singapore to stop training its armed forces in Taiwan** (see the Terrex Affair below), **to stop speaking of the freedom of navigation, and to further develop its trade with China**. For example, Beijing wants a Chinese company to build the high-speed Singapore-Kuala Lumpur railway. Singapore refused, asking the Chinese to respond to the call for tenders like everyone else. Beijing responded by canceling a ministerial visit.

Consequently, the **main narratives conveyed in Chinese operations targeting Singapore** are the following: “Singapore is a country of Chinese culture if not altogether a Chinese country”; “it is a small country that can’t afford to be arrogant or make an enemy out of the Chinese juggernaut”; “It is a country that has not had a strong leadership since Lee Kuan Yew (unlike his father, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong underestimates the importance of the relationship with Beijing)”; “the country is too close to a declining United States, while China represents the future (it would be in Singapore’s interest to align itself with Beijing)”; and “Singapore shouldn’t meddle in the debate on the South China Sea.”

## II. The Terrex Affair: taking pledges

**Since 1975, and for lack of space at home, Singapore has trained its land army in southern Taiwan.** Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1990, Singapore has had a tacit agreement with Beijing which, while asking Singapore to use Hainan instead of Taiwan, never turned the issue into a problem because Singapore kept a low profile (notably by making their military wear Taiwanese uniforms when they are there<sup>75</sup>) and respected the One-China policy.<sup>76</sup> However, **on November 23, 2016, Hong Kong customs seized nine military Terrex armored vehicles belonging to Singapore** that were transiting in a commercial carrier to Singapore from Taiwan, where they had taken part in military exercises. The transit was routine: Singapore has been transiting its military vehicles, on the way back from exercises in Taiwan, through Hong Kong since the 1990s and it had never been a problem. Furthermore, this military equipment benefits from an immunity and cannot legally be confiscated or withheld by the authorities of another state.<sup>77</sup> This did not prevent Beijing, via Hong Kong, from doing so.

The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reminded Singapore that states which have diplomatic relations with China must abstain from “[having] any form of

73. Kishore Mahbubani, “Qatar: Big Lessons from a Small Country,” *The Straits Times* (1 Jul. 2017).

74. Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey.”

75. Eric Frécon, *L’Influence sécuritaire chinoise à Singapour* (The Chinese Security Influence in Singapore), IRSEM Report #85, August 2021, p. 48, n. 12.

76. Angela Poh and Chang Jun Yan, “The Terrex Fallacies,” *The Straits Times* (6 Dec. 2016).

77. Sébastien Roblin, “Singapore’s YouTubers Took on China Over Seized Armored Vehicles,” *medium.com* (26 Jan. 2017).



official exchanges with Taiwan, including military exchanges and cooperation.”<sup>78</sup> Chinese media, particularly the *Global Times*, took over after the ministry. They **exhorted Singapore to abandon its military training in Taiwan** – unless it wanted to see its relationship with China deteriorate. The affair generated tensions between China and Singapore until the eventual restitution of the vehicles on January 30, 2017. In this interval, **a disinformation campaign hit Singapore using dormant accounts** (inactive for a long time before they were suddenly awakened), according to a Singaporean social media analyst.<sup>79</sup>

Truly, **this was not an isolated case or a random occurrence**: Hong Kong customs officers seized the containers carrying the Terrex vehicles at a moment when **Beijing was ostensibly looking for a way to heighten the pressure on Singapore**. The relationship had been deteriorating for almost a year.<sup>80</sup> In December 2015, a strengthened cooperation defense agreement between the U.S. and Singapore, which notably involved the deployment of US Navy P-8A Poseidon military airplanes in Singapore, was not well-received by Beijing. In June 2016, the absence of the Singaporean Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan at a joint ASEAN-China press conference in Kunming was also noted. In September, the *Global Times* accused Singapore of having tried to raise the issue of freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and The Hague’s verdict on the matter at a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Venezuela. The attempt, according to the Party’s newspaper, was immediately blocked by many countries.<sup>81</sup> The Singaporean ambassador to China, Stanley Loh, protested against this “fabricated” information. Responding to the ambassador, Hu Xijin, the editor-in-chief of the *Global Times*, attacked Singapore for siding with the Philippines and Vietnam on the conflictual South China Sea, and accused the country of hosting U.S. warplanes “aimed at China.”<sup>82</sup> On October 1, General Jin Yanan (金一南) of the PLA National Defense University went further, declaring on Chinese national radio (CNR) that Singapore had been meddling for years in affairs which are none of its concerns (the South China Sea) and advising Washington on the subject. He believed that “[**it was inevitable for China to strike back at Singapore**, and not just on the public opinion front... Since Singapore has gone thus far, we have got to do something, be it retaliation or sanction.”<sup>83</sup>

**The Terrex affair thus crowned a series of incidents in a tense bilateral relation.** This sequence itself was not coincidental: its climax, the Terrex affair, came exactly one year before Singapore’s chairmanship of the ASEAN (November 2017), and **coincided with Singapore’s coordination of the ASEAN-China Dialogue** (2015-2018). From Beijing’s point of view it was necessary to remind the city-state about “who was in charge,” particularly on the topic of freedom of navigation, and especially after Singapore had called for the implementation of The Hague’s decision rendered in July 2016. **During this period Singaporeans were bombarded with YouTube videos in Mandarin and clan associations subjected to particularly intense pressure, always with the same narrative: Singapore “must stay in its place” as a “Chinese country” which must not rely on the United States;** besides, the ASEAN was presented as worthless without China.<sup>84</sup>

78. Han Fook Kwang, “What’s Behind Singapore’s Latest Run-Ins with Beijing,” *The Straits Times* (14 Dec. 2016).

79. From an interview conducted by one of the authors in Singapore (Aug. 2019).

80. William Choong, “Shining the Spotlight on Starlight,” *The Straits Times* (30 Nov. 2016).

81. Leng Shumei, “FM Calls on Singapore to Respect China’s Sea Stance,” *Global Times* (28 Sept. 2016).

82. “Singapore Accuses Chinese Paper of Fabricating South China Sea Story,” Reuters (27 Sept. 2016).

83. Minnie Chan, “Chinese Defense Adviser Turns Up Heat on Singapore Over South China Sea Row,” *South China Morning Post* (1 Oct. 2016). This article has been archived and is behind a pay-wall.

84. From an interview conducted in Singapore by one of the authors (Aug. 2019). The same information had evidently been conveyed to RAND researchers in an on-site interview a few months earlier: Scott W. Harold, Nathan

Singapore has since scaled down its Taiwanese training exercises from 15,000 to 6,000 men (which is also explained by a downsized military service) and is planning to move them to Australia, where training facilities should be available in 2022. **The episode contributed to the authorities’ and the public’s growing awareness of the city-state’s vulnerability to Chinese influence, or even interference.** Since then, this question has been discussed with growing frequency in public.



The nine Terrex vehicles seized in Hong Kong.<sup>85</sup>

### III. The cases of Huang Jing and Jun Wei “Dickson” Yeo

In the past few years, **two cases of Chinese espionage in Singaporean academic circles have received media attention.** The first concerns **Huang Jing** (黄靖). Born in China in 1956, educated in both China (masters at Fudan University) and the United States (PhD at Harvard), he is an American citizen who lived and worked for twenty years in the United States, occupying different positions in universities and research centers, including Stanford and the Brookings Institution, before joining the prestigious Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, serving as director for the Center on Asia and Globalization as well as the Lee Foundation Professor on US-China Relations. In parallel, Huang was an analyst for the Chinese press agency Xinhua. In August 2017, he was accused by the Singaporean Ministry of the Interior of being “an agent of influence for a foreign state” that was not identified; he and his wife were expelled from the country (with their residency permits revoked). They went to China where, since 2019, Huang Jing has been the dean of the Institute for International and Regional Studies at the Beijing Language and Culture University.

The second case is less ambiguous: it was tried in U.S. courts.<sup>86</sup> It involved **Jun Wei “Dickson” Yeo** (杨俊伟), born in Singapore in 1981. He may also have been linked to the previous case as he was one of Huang’s PhD students at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. This link led Bilahari Kausikan, an ex-diplomat and a major figure in the Singaporean foreign policy debate, to declare that it was Huang Jing who had Yeo recruited by Chinese intelligence services, something Huang denied.<sup>87</sup> **Yeo was recruited by Chinese intelli-**

Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media*, RAND Corporation, 2021, p. 82. For the authors, the fact that these videos were published exclusively in Chinese (simplified and traditional) suggests that they were specifically targeted at Singaporean clan associations.

85. [https://www.straitstimes.com/sites/default/articles/2016/11/29/40657903\\_-\\_24\\_11\\_2016\\_-\\_jcaroured25.jpg](https://www.straitstimes.com/sites/default/articles/2016/11/29/40657903_-_24_11_2016_-_jcaroured25.jpg)

86. United States of America vs June Wei Yeo, also known as Dickson Yeo, defendant. Us District Court for the District of Columbia (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/press-release/file/1297451/download>).

87. Rei Kurochi, “Ex-diplomat Bilahari Kausikan Rebutts Huang Jing’s Denial that he Recruited Singaporean Dickson Yeo as Spy,” *The Straits Times* (29 Jul. 2020).

gence in 2015 through Chinese think tanks which invited and paid Yeo to write reports. He quickly came to understand that these “scholars” were in fact intelligence officers. He was debriefed during frequent trips to China and online via WeChat. Initially used to transmit information about South-East Asia, he was reoriented toward the United States, where he had previously studied, he subsequently lived in DC for several months in 2019. **His mission was to collect information and to recruit U.S. sources**, which he did through LinkedIn and by creating a fake consultancy agency that put out job offers in order to collect CVs.

In this way he came into contact with U.S. military member and officials with access to confidential information. He would ask them to write reports in exchange for money.<sup>88</sup> A U.S. Army officer working at the Pentagon was hence hired to write a report, allegedly for private Asian clients, on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and its consequences for China. This work was paid \$2,000, which was wired to the officer’s wife’s account to avoid raising suspicion. An agent from the State Department also became entrapped by writing a report about a member of the U.S. Cabinet. Yeo’s Chinese handlers asked him to go further by trying to recruit the U.S. officer so that he could transmit different, more confidential, information this time. But Yeo was arrested when he landed in the U.S. in November 2019, precisely to do that. He pleaded guilty of espionage during his trial and was sentenced to 14 months in jail. After serving his sentence, he went back to Singapore, where he was arrested by the Internal Security Department on the day of his arrival (December 30, 2020).<sup>89</sup>

## IV. Resilience

Chinese influence is not a new problem for Singapore, which had defended itself from it during the 1950s and 1960s “when People’s Republic of China (PRC) leaders sought to export communist revolution to Southeast Asia.”<sup>90</sup> Singapore has always been able to offer a nimble resistance. **Its defense rests on the development of a counter-narrative where a unique national identity, one that is multicultural and multi-racial**, “is closely managed as an existential issue by Singapore’s ruling elites.”<sup>91</sup> It defends the singular identity of Chinese Singaporeans compared to other Chinese identities in the world and, of course, to the way Beijing views this identity. For instance, to counter – or at least to compensate for – the creation in 2012 of the Chinese Cultural Center, the Singaporean government created its own “Singapore” Chinese cultural center in 2017. It promotes the idea of “a vibrant Singapore Chinese culture, rooted in a cohesive, multi-racial society,” and during his speech at the center’s inauguration Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long emphasized that “Chinese in Singapore are very different from the Chinese in China, in terms of both history and identity.”<sup>92</sup>

**If three quarters of the population are theoretically “Chinese,” the vast majority of them feel Singaporean**, speak English (many only speak very imperfect Mandarin), have a largely Western, Asian and non-Chinese culture (Taiwanese and Korean singers are far more popular in Singapore than Chinese singers). In spite of Beijing’s **efforts there is very little cultural penetration**. Chinese influence on Chinese-speaking media is rela-

88. Michael Yong, “How a Singaporean Man Went from NUS PhD Student to Working for Chinese Intelligence in the US,” *Channel News Asia* (25 Jul. 2020).

89. Cara Wong, “Singaporean Dickson Yeo, Who Spied for China in the US, Arrested by ISD Upon His Return,” *The Straits Time* (31 Dec. 2020).

90. Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey.”

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*

tively limited because of the already tight control Singapore exerts on all outlets. Ultimately **money** and business ties **remain the main vulnerabilities**.

Moreover, in recent years, **people have grown cognizant to the risks posed by Chinese influence in Singapore**, in the course of several episodes: the Terrex Affair in 2016, the Huang Jing Affair in 2017, the departure the same year of Mahbubani, whose op-ed on the “small state” generated controversy, and also the hack on the Ministry of Health (between June 27 and July 4, 2018). 1.5 million patients’ medical files were stolen, among which were that of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong who was “specifically and repeatedly targeted.”<sup>93</sup> The attack was never attributed but, according to some sources, the incident may have been a response to the Huang espionage affair to find compromising information on the Prime Minister and blackmail him, or simply to undermine him. The attackers found nothing however.

Meanwhile, **Bilahari Kausikan**, a former ambassador and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published several articles in *The Straits Times* in June and July 2018. In these, he called on Singaporeans to “be aware” when Beijing is trying to manipulate them and not to “trust oversimplified narratives.”<sup>94</sup> He wrote that **“China uses a range of tactics – from legitimate diplomacy to more covert and often illegal deployment of agents of influence and operations – to sway decision makers or public opinion leaders.”**<sup>95</sup> He believes that these operations against Singapore were intended **“not just to direct behavior, but to condition behavior. China does not just want you to comply with its wishes, it wants you to... do what it wants without being told.”**<sup>96</sup> He also noted that “[o]ur identity, based in the idea of multiculturalism and meritocracy, is under pressure. There are centrifugal forces trying to pull us apart”, and went on to cite China’s attempts to “assert the Chinese identity on multiracial Singapore.”<sup>97</sup> These interventions inspired others afterward.<sup>98</sup>

A year later **Russell Hsiao** published an often-mentioned report on Chinese influence operations in Singapore.<sup>99</sup> China reacted through its embassy, dismissing the claims as “absurd.” But the report was beneficial as it liberated the discussion on the subject in Singapore: the topic remains touchy but it is well-documented and, with the accumulation of scandals since 2016, which are frequently analyzed in more and more details, the subject has become unavoidable and easier to talk about.

Finally, **the Singaporean government is acutely aware of its vulnerabilities**, particularly in regard to national unity, and regularly takes measures against what a 2013 report called “corrosive speech.”<sup>100</sup> Unlike hate speech, it targets certain communities, and can easily be instrumentalized, possibly by a third state, to create inter-community tensions. For example, the Internet website *TheRealSingapore.com* was shut down in May 2015 by the Media Regulation Authority (MDA) because some articles threatened public order and

93. Kevin Kwang, “Singapore Health System Hit by Most ‘Serious Breach of Personal Data’ in Cyberattack; PM Lee’s Data Targeted,” *Channel News Asia* (20 Jul. 2018).

94. Charissa Yong, “S’poreans Should be Aware of China’s Influence Ops: Bilahari,” *The Straits Times* (28 Jun. 2018).

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Yasmine Yahya, “Staying Aware of Foreign Influence Best Form of Defense for Singapore: Bilahari,” *The Straits Times* (20 Jul. 2018).

98. Including Simon Tay, “Inoculating Singapore Against Foreign Influences,” *The Straits Times* (26 Jul. 2018).

99. Hsiao, “A Preliminary Survey.”

100. Carol Soon at Tan Tarn How, *Corrosive Speech: What Can Be Done*, a Report from the Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (2013).



national harmony. The MDA accused the website of “inciting hostile sentiment toward foreigners in Singapore.”

**In combating information manipulation, Singapore is one of the most advanced and well-informed states in the world.** Its officials travel a lot, and are willing to learn from the experience of their foreign counterparts, in Europe, North America and Australia in particular. The Center of Excellence for National Security (CENS) of the RSIS also organizes an annual international symposium on these questions which has become one of the largest meeting of that kind globally, particularly because it brings together experts from different geographical areas (Euro-Atlantic and Asian regions). For all these reasons, **Singapore, along with Sweden, can be considered among the best prepared states** in the fight against information manipulation, and even against hybrid threats in general.

## Chapter 4

# SWEDEN

**Why is China interested in Sweden?** Generally, China takes **an interest in all Nordic countries**, that is to say Denmark (with the Faeroe Islands and Greenland), Finland, Norway, Iceland and Sweden, to which China has been proposing for several years, in vain for now, to meet in a “5+1” format modeled on the “17+1” group with states from Central and Eastern Europe (→ p. 310). China considers **these countries to be a double entryway, toward the Arctic first** (Sweden has hosted a Chinese satellite station in its far northern reaches since 2006 – this is China’s first fully-owned station<sup>1</sup>), **and then toward the EU**, because it has a longstanding relationship with these countries (Sweden, Denmark and Finland, in that order, were among the first Western countries to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1950) and because they “are politically stable, pro-free trade and, importantly, described as less suspicious toward China than many other ‘Western’ countries.”<sup>2</sup>



Inauguration of the Chinese satellite station in Kiruna on December 15, 2016.<sup>3</sup>

They have the advantage of offering both **a regulatory environment that is not very restrictive, even permissive, for foreign investment, and leading technology sectors**, with some of the world’s most innovative companies. And this combination is valuable. As Heather Conley and James Lewis showed, **“China remains dependent on the West for advanced technology, and it uses four techniques to acquire it: (1) forced technology transfers as a prerequisite to conducting business in China; (2) placement of students and workers in universities and companies in the West; (3)**

1. The “China Remote Sensing Satellite North Polar Ground Station” is located in Kiruna. All the other Chinese satellite stations in the world, notably in Africa and North America, are joint-ventures: Stephen Chen, “China Launches its First Fully Owned Overseas Satellite Ground Station Near North Pole,” *South China Morning Post* (16 Dec. 2016).

2. Jerker Hallström, *China’s Political Priorities in the Nordic Countries: from Technology to Core Interests*, Policy brief, 12 (2016), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (2016), 2.

3. Keegan Elmer, “Swedish Defense Agency Warns Satellite Station Could be Serving Chinese Military,” *South China Morning Post* (14 Jan. 2019).

INTRODUCTION

cyber espionage; and (4) the acquisition of foreign firms.”<sup>4</sup> In Nordic countries China mostly uses economic espionage, as it does elsewhere – except in local universities (China lacks the critical number of Chinese students it has in Australia or Canada for example), but also the acquisition of local businesses, as a privileged way of accessing technologies.

CONCEPTS

If “the primary motive for Chinese investment in the Nordics is commercial,” strategic interests are never far behind: it can be illustrated by investments in “semiconductors and munitions-related technology as well as emerging technology such as FinTech, GreenTech, BioTech and MaritimeTech.”<sup>5</sup> The acquisitions of Awilco in Norway (2008), which produces drilling equipment among other things, of Volvo Cars in Sweden (2010) and of Elkem, dealing with the production of silicon, silicone and carbon materials, in Norway (2011). They still rank among China’s most important purchases in Europe.

ACTORS

In this region, **Sweden has generated the greatest Chinese interest** because it is particularly innovative and has a strong start-up culture. **“Sweden is China’s Nordic Hub”** and it attracted the highest levels of Chinese investment in Europe (\$3.6 billion) in 2018, far ahead of other countries (\$1.6 billion in the United Kingdom, 1.5 in Germany and 1.4 in France).<sup>7</sup> When the Chinese Geely purchased Volvo Cars in 2010 and Volvo AB (which makes trucks and buses) in 2018 – one of the most important Chinese acquisitions in Europe and North America – it made an impression in Sweden and internationally. **A peak in acquisitions was reached in 2017** (51 majority and 40 minority holdings). In 2018, China had a majority stake in 114 companies.<sup>8</sup> And, in November 2019, more than 1,000 companies declared that they were, in effect, owned by a Chinese or Hong Kong citizen – and yet, the real scope of these acquisitions is certainly greater than what can actually be measured.<sup>9</sup>

ACTIONS

**Beijing has taken a notable interest in firms that develop dual-use technologies**, i.e. for both civilian and military uses. For instance, Chinese companies have purchased three Swedish semiconductor businesses, including Silex Microsystems (by a company with ties to the Chinese defense sector), and Chematur, a spin-off of the ammunition manufacturer Nobel which stands at “the center of Sweden’s defense industrial base”<sup>10</sup> (by the Wanhua group). The government’s China strategy, presented in September 2019, confirms that **CCP intelligence activities in Sweden are not only significant but also focused on acquiring military technologies**, in addition to intelligence on Swedish military capabilities. It also mentioned that the Chinese satellite station in northern Sweden could also be used for military intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

CASE

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4. Heather A. Conley and James A. Lewis, *Chinese Technology Acquisitions in the Nordic Region*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), 20.

5. Ibid., 1.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 3.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Oscar Almén, Johan Englund, and Jerker Hellström, *Survey of Chinese Corporate Acquisitions in Sweden*, Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), November 2019, especially its conclusions (in Swedish: <https://www.foi.se/en/foi/reports/reportsummary.html?reportNO=FOI+Memo+6903>).

10. Conley and Lewis, *Chinese Technology Acquisitions*, 7-8

11. Elmer, “Swedish Defense Agency Warns.”

## I. A typical case of a “Machiavellian moment”

For a long time, China invested a good deal in its relationship with Sweden and the Swedish public opinion was rather favorable, since China meant new jobs. **But then the Party entered in a “Machiavellian moment” with the appointment of a new ambassador in August 2017:** Gui Congyou (桂从友), apparently tasked with dominating the public debate. He quickly showed himself to be aggressive (some observers acknowledged **a turning point in early 2018**), attacking the media, journalists, the government, political parties, scholars, and denying visas with the aim of enticing fear and self-censorship.

The ambassador’s profile is revealing: Gui Gonyou admitted that he did not know anything about Sweden when he was appointed, that he had never visited the country, and that he had never had a Swedish friend.<sup>12</sup> He even declared in February 2020 that “he did not know why he had been sent to Sweden.”<sup>13</sup> However, he speaks very good Russian and he is **an expert on Russia:** the earlier part of his career alternated between Moscow, where he was posted twice and he remained for about 10 years, and Beijing, where he kept a close eye on Russian affairs for the ministry, often accompanying Xi Jinping during his diplomatic visits to countries in the former USSR. He was one of the main instigators of the Xi-Putin summits and he attended at all high-level meetings between Chinese and Russian leaders.

In Stockholm, **the ambassador multiplied attacks and threatening statements, especially against the media.** He even talked of “the tyranny of the media.”<sup>14</sup> On television he likened Swedish media criticizing China to a “48-kilogram lightweight boxer who starts a fight with an 86-kilogram heavyweight boxer, who out of kindness and goodwill urges the (smaller) boxer to take care of himself.” This provoked a reaction from the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, who interpreted the ambassador’s words as an “unacceptable threat” and an attempt to intimidate, and incidentally to muzzle, the press.<sup>15</sup> The embassy also publishes a lot on its own site: during 2019, it published at least 74 negative comments on Swedish media, most of them in reaction to publications perceived to express criticism of China.<sup>16</sup> **Gui Congyou maintains constant pressure** on the media, inviting some journalists to lunch to comment on how they cover China, sending protest emails himself when he doesn’t like an article.

These practices were documented and analyzed by journalist Patrik Oksanen, head of the Center for Influence and Disinformation Analysis at the think tank Frivärld, in a September 2020 study titled *China’s attacks to silence critics*.<sup>17</sup> When conducted a follow-up analysis a year later, he found that the embassy’s tactics had changed. In an August 2021 report entitled *The Dragon’s Changing Tactics*, he noted that the frequency of public statements on the embassy’s website appeared to have decreased, with the emphasis shifting **to direct, intimidating and even threatening letters to journalists, experts and MPs**.<sup>18</sup> Already, in a survey made public in January 2020, at least four of Sweden’s largest media groups (Svenska Dagbladet, Expressen, Sveriges Radio and Sveriges Television) said they had been

12. “今日头条：桂从友大使接受瑞典三家华文媒体集体采访” (“Today’s Headline: Ambassador Gui Congyou Gives a Group Interview to Three Chinese Media Outlets in Sweden”), Chineseonline.se, (12 Oct. 2017).

13. Birgitta Forsberg, “Ambassadören: ‘Sverige inte viktigt nog att hota,’” *Svenska Dagbladet* (30 Jan. 2020).

14. Statement from the Embassy of China in Sweden (22 Jun. 2018).

15. Jari Tanner, “Sweden Summons Chinese Envoy Over ‘Lightweight Boxer’ Remark,” Associated Press (18 Jan. 2020).

16. “China’s large-scale media push: Attempts to influence Swedish media,” *SVT Nyheter* (19 Jan. 2020).

17. Patrik Oksanen, *Kinas Attacker För Att Tysta Kritiker*, Frivärld (Sept. 2020).

18. Patrik Oksanen and Jesper Lehto, *Draken Som Bytte Taktik*, Frivärld (Aug. 2021).



contacted and criticized repeatedly by the Chinese embassy – some of the language used, in letters and emails, was threatening.<sup>19</sup> And, in April 2021, Jojje Olsson, a Swedish journalist based in Taiwan who has long been a target of the Chinese authorities, received yet another email from the Chinese embassy, clearly threatening him: “we ask you to stop your wrongful actions immediately, otherwise you will end up facing the consequences of your actions.”<sup>20</sup> In order to denounce and counter this practice, the think tank Frivärld launched a campaign on social networks, calling on the recipients of these messages to testify using the hashtag #Kinabrev.

This behavior is not exclusive to the embassy: Swedish journalists we met said that they were victims of **intimidation tactics** from Chinese diplomats but also from various Chinese associations, including student associations, which demanded that the journalists stop writing about specific topics. Some journalists were even followed by car to their homes.<sup>21</sup>

This pressure goes far beyond the media: for instance, the embassy convinced the Sheraton Stockholm hotel to cancel the celebration of the Taiwanese national holiday in October 2019, even though it had hosted the event for more than a decade. The celebration was finally hosted by the Swedish History Museum, which resisted the embassy’s pressure.<sup>22</sup>

**China’s aggressive turn in Sweden has been consequential since 2018: the Sino-Swedish relationship has considerably deteriorated.** The Chinese ambassador has been summoned by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs nearly forty times since he was appointed. In late 2019, several MPs demanded his expulsion. Then again in 2021 after the journalist Jojje Olsson was threatened by the Chinese embassy: several Swedish politicians then again called for **the expulsion of the ambassador**.<sup>23</sup> Sweden was also the first European country to **close all its Confucius Institutes** (the last in December 2019 and the last Classroom in April 2020).<sup>24</sup> Sweden eventually **rewrote its “China strategy,”** which was presented to the national parliament in September 2019, and it created a center for China Studies (along with another privately-funded institution) to better anticipate challenges posed by China’s growing influence. Even the city of Gothenburg, the second largest in the country, home to Volvo, and where China is omnipresent (to the extent that restaurant and service personnel are trained to speak Chinese), has **cancelled its twin city program** with Shanghai in April 2020 – a 34-year-old partnership. In October 2020, the Swedish Post and Telecommunications Authority (PTS) **banned equipment from Chinese companies** (Huawei, ZTE) in its ongoing call for tenders on the 5G infrastructure (a decision confirmed in January 2021 by the Administrative Court in Stockholm, which rejected Huawei’s appeal). The government is increasingly distrustful of China, once seen only as an economic boon, but now perceived as **a national security threat**. China’s public approval plummeted with 49% of unfavorable opinion in 2017, 52% in 2018, 70% in 2019, 85% in 2020, and 80% in 2021. Nowadays, out of the 34 countries surveyed, only the Japanese hold more negative opinions on China than the Swedes (→ p. 191).<sup>25</sup> From a regional perspective, far from being tempted by the Chinese proposition of a “5+1” for-

19. “China’s large-scale media push.”

20. *Journalistförbundet*, “Vi fördömer Kina-angrepp mot Jojje Olsson” (13 Apr. 2021).

21. From an interview in Stockholm conducted by one of the authors (Feb. 2020).

22. Birgitta Forsberg, “Kina Pressade Sheraton att nobba Taiwanese,” *Svenska Dagbladet* (3 Oct. 2019).

23. Hannah Somerville, “China’s Embassy in Sweden under Fire over ‘Threats’ to Journalists,” *Euronews* (12 Apr. 2021).

24. Oliver Moody, “Swedes Axe China-backed Confucius School Scheme as Relations Sour,” *The Times* (21 Apr. 2020).

25. Pew Research Center, *Global Indicators Database*, Opinion of China (2019). Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “Large Majorities Say China Does Not Respect the Personal Freedoms of Its People,” Pew Research Center (30 Jun. 2021).

mat, the Nordics are considering organizing themselves against Chinese influence in a “5 against 1” format.

In September 2021, the Chinese embassy in Stockholm finally announced **the departure of Ambassador Gui Congyou**, who was recalled to Beijing. This announcement was welcomed in Sweden with a certain relief (expressed on social networks by journalists, researchers and political leaders<sup>26</sup>), but without naivety as to his successor who could follow in his footsteps if Beijing wishes. His record is objectively **disastrous**. Since the end of 2017, he has unpicked the relationship his predecessors had built. “By launching a combative campaign ill-adapted to local conditions, China appears to have shot itself in the foot.”<sup>27</sup> **How can it be explained?** First, as Jerdén and Bohman showed, **his priority was not to seduce the Swedes but the CCP**: “[his] actions may [have been] motivated by a desire to impress superiors in Beijing. By vocally propagating China’s narrative abroad, he [put] his embassy in the spotlight and positioned it as a front runner in Xi Jinping’s mission to increase China’s global influence over media and ‘tell China’s story well.’”<sup>28</sup> This is an overall feature of the phenomenon of **“wolf warrior” diplomats** – which we presented in the third part (→ p. 222). Gui Gonyou was one of its precursors. Then, the ambassador’s **lack of understanding of liberal democracies** – his experience abroad being exclusively Russian – very likely contributed to his haphazardous crisis management and in underestimating the negative consequences of an overly aggressive behavior in Sweden for China. The embassy should have foreseen that Sweden, being one of the most hostile countries toward the CCP and toward authoritarianism in general, was also likely to resist this pressure.

Beyond the personality of the ambassador, Sweden is debating whether the country was chosen as **a testing ground for a more aggressive strategy that China could ultimately generalize globally. Why Sweden?** There are several reasons:

- Sweden is **the right size**: small enough not to be a threat, with no diaspora-related issues (there were only 31,700 people of Chinese origin in Sweden in 2017, 10,000 more than in 2009, and 2,671 students),<sup>29</sup> but large enough to be significant, in any case for Europe.
- Sweden is **a world champion of democratic and liberal values**, one of the leaders in terms of “soft power diplomacy.”<sup>30</sup> The country always tops rankings (thus the cultural shock experienced by the Chinese ambassador when he arrived in a country systematically in the top five of RSF’s Freedom of the Press rankings, whereas China is in the bottom five or three out of 180 countries). **Sweden is then a symbol, a model to be broken** (with the idea that if China achieves this, the foundations of all democracies can be shaken at their core).
- Linked to this, this is also a state that is among the most vehement critics of human rights violations in China. From this point of view, going after Sweden was an opportunity to **demonstrate that criticizing China comes at a cost**. This is a message for the world and especially for Europeans.

26. Anne-Françoise Hivert, “En Suède, l’ambassadeur chinois s’en va dans un climat de tensions” (“In Sweden, the Chinese ambassador leaves in a climate of tension”), *Le Monde* (27 Sept. 2021), 6.

27. Björn Jerdén and Viking Bohman, *China’s Propaganda Campaign in Sweden, 2018-2019*, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 4 (2019), 11.

28. *Ibid.*, 8.

29. Interview of one of the authors with the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), in Stockholm (Feb. 2020).

30. Elise Carlson-Rainer, “Sweden is a World Leader in Peace, Security, and Human Rights,” *World Affairs*, 180:4 (2017), 79-85.

• Sweden is **one of China's main rivals in certain key industrial sectors**, including 5G infrastructures, batteries and trucks.

• There were **already several irritating issues in their bilateral relations**: the most infamous being the Gui Minhai (桂敏海) affair, involving a Swedish citizen detained in China since 2015 (see box below). But also Peter Dhalin, a Swedish human rights activist, who was kidnapped and incarcerated for 23 days in China in 2016, and was forced to confess on television.<sup>31</sup> The “hostage diplomacy” practiced by China has left traces in Sweden. There was also the Qiao Jianjun (乔建军) affair, which involved a former civil servant who became one of China's most wanted fugitives, allegedly for corruption (he was accused of misappropriating millions of dollars). He was arrested in Sweden at Beijing's request in August 2018, but Stockholm refused to extradite him (the Swedish Supreme Court held that this would be a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, since he would risk death, torture and/or other inhuman or degrading treatment). He was freed in June 2019 and re-arrested five days later at the request of the United States, which was also looking for Qiao. He was extradited to the United States in late May 2020.

• Finally, Sweden – which hosted the Dalai Lama in September 2018 – **has granted asylum to Uyghur, Tibetan and Falun Gong refugees**, i.e. Beijing's main targets. This was confirmed by a **series of spying cases** in these communities: in 2010, a Uyghur refugee was condemned to 16 months in prison on charges of spying for China (he had infiltrated the Uyghur World Congress and provided information to a Chinese intelligence officer posing as a diplomat)<sup>32</sup>; in 2018 a Tibetan refugee was also condemned to 22 months in jail on charges of espionage in the service of China (he had infiltrated the Swedish Tibetan community and was transmitting information to a Chinese intelligence officer in Poland).<sup>33</sup>

For Beijing the objective is to make Sweden submit by limiting its freedom of expression, notably on the “five poisons” while **sending a warning shot at other countries, especially in Europe**. But this has completely failed: instead of giving in, Sweden has resisted and the consequence has simply been the deterioration of bilateral relations and of China's image in Sweden.

In any case, **the Swedish case is both an opportunistic test and a symptom of a worldwide evolution in the behavior of China**: the same happened in Canada (→ p. 537), Australia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Among them, there are differences of intensity but not of nature. The Swedish case is particularly spectacular because of preexisting tensions in the bilateral relations, but this announces a larger turning point and was interpreted as such, even in 2018.<sup>34</sup> **We call this turning point the Chinese “Machiavellian moment”** (→ p. 619).

31. Tom Phillips, “A Human Rights Activist, a Secret Prison and a Tale from Xi Jinping's New China,” *The Guardian* (3 Jan. 2017).

32. “Uyghur Spy' for China Jailed in Sweden,” BBC (8 Mar. 2010).

33. “Swedish Court Convicts Man of Spying on Tibetans for China,” Reuters (15 Jun. 2018).

34. Jojje Olsson, “Chinese Embassies are Becoming Increasingly Assertive: The Case of Sweden,” *Taiwan Sentinel* (7 Sept. 2018).

### The Gui Minhai Affair

Gui Minhai is a writer, editor and librarian who, born in China, arrived in Sweden in 1988 to begin a Ph.D and who stayed there, acquiring the Swedish citizenship while renouncing his Chinese citizenship. He then settled in Hong Kong, creating several publishing houses from 2006 on. Under a pseudonym (Ah Hai), he published a number of works on China's political life that were banned in mainland China. Knowing himself to be watched and under threat, he avoided going back to China, missing his father's last days of life and funeral as a result.

In October 2015, he was **abducted by Chinese intelligence officers during his holiday in Thailand** and disappeared. Four of his colleagues also subsequently disappeared. Confirmation of his incarceration came in January 2016 **in a quintessential Soviet-style televised confession – a practice that has made a comeback in China in recent years**<sup>35</sup> (in July 2020, Britain's Ofcom estimated that CGTN had violated the broadcasting rules of the United Kingdom by showing the forced confession of a British citizen).<sup>36</sup> In a CCTV broadcast, Gui, in tears, “confessed” to having killed a young woman in a car accident in 2003 and explained that, full of remorse, he had surrendered to the Chinese authorities. He added: “I do not want any individual or organization, including Sweden, to involve themselves in, or interfere with, my return to China. Although I have Swedish citizenship, I truly feel that I am still Chinese – my roots are in China. So I hope Sweden can respect my personal choice, respect my rights and the privacy of my personal choice.”<sup>37</sup>

In October 2017, Chinese authorities informed Sweden of Gui Minhai's release. He, however, had not provided any news, which left the exact situation unclear. What we do know is that in January 2018, **while in the company of two Swedish diplomats on a train headed for Beijing for medical examinations, Gui was once again abducted** by ten men dressed as civilians. He reappeared in another televised confession, in which he admitted to having been pressured by the Swedish authorities into trying to leave China, using a medical appointment at the Swedish embassy as a pretext.

In November 2019, he received the Tucholsky Prize for Freedom of Expression from the Swedish section of PEN, which angered the Chinese embassy. In February 2020 he was finally **sentenced to ten years in prison on charges of espionage** – a new accusation that came as a surprise as it had never been raised before. On this occasion, it was revealed that in 2018 Gui Minhai had “demanded” to recover his Chinese citizenship (which was largely seen as a maneuver to deprive him of his consular visitation rights). However, Sweden still considers Gui as one of its citizens since, as far as Sweden is concerned, there has been no proper and formal renunciation of Swedish citizenship.



Gui Minhai's televised confession on CCTC in January 2016.

35. Tania Branigan, “Televised Confessions on State-Run TV Consolidate China's Social Control,” *The Guardian* (11 August 2014); Magnus Fiskesjö, “The Return of the Show Trial: China's Televised ‘Confessions,’” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 15:13:1 (1 Jul. 2017).

36. “Chinese TV Channel Breached Rules With ‘Forced Confession,’” *BBC News* (6 Jul. 2020).

37. Michael Forsythe, “Missing Man Back in China, Confessing to Fatal Crime,” *The New York Times* (17 Jan. 2016).



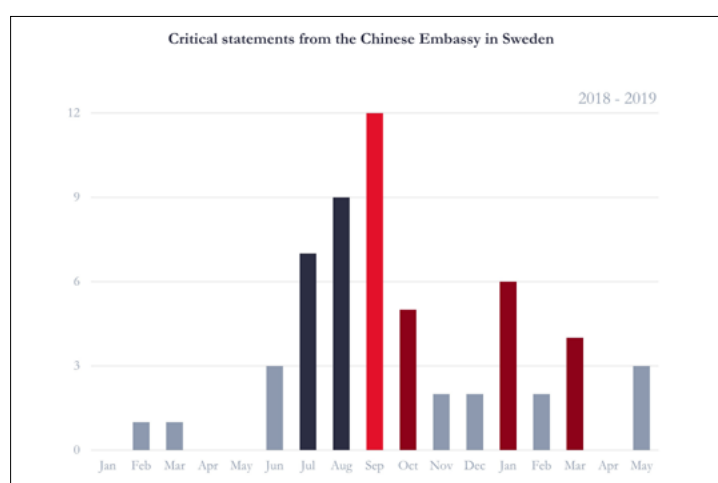
## II. The case of the Chinese tourists and the reactions to satire (2018)

This affair took place in September 2018, in two stages. First some Chinese tourists claimed they had been abused by the Swedish police, the embassy became involved and the affair was largely covered by Chinese media. Second, a Swedish satirical program mentioned the events and its take on them generated a violent reaction. Before examining these two phases in detail, we should note that the timing of the affair was suspicious, because very opportune, coming at a moment when the Chinese embassy in Sweden was on the defensive.

### A. Prologue

This affair took place **in a context of tensions that had been escalating after early June 2018**, following the simultaneous publication, in 38 Swedish newspapers, of a call for the release of Gui Minhai signed by 45 intellectuals and public figures.<sup>38</sup> The embassy immediately reacted by sending emails, letters and texts, and by calling the signatories; more than two thirds of them confirmed that they received a lengthy file from Chinese authorities incriminating Gui Minhai. Jojje Olsson and other Swedish journalists subsequently demonstrated that these files were fabricated.<sup>39</sup> The very aggressive embassy multiplied its often ad hominem attacks against the signatories and the media which published the call to release Gui Minhai. This offensive was counter-productive insofar as it drew negative attention and “raised interest and awareness not only about the Gui Minhai case, but Chinese influence on Swedish society in general.”<sup>40</sup> In late June protests took place in front of the embassy. In late August, Gui Minhai was formally invited to the Gothenburg Book Fair: the invitation was published in the press and sent to the Chinese embassy.

Björn Jerdén and Viking Bohmans’ quantitative study, which counted the number of critical statements released by the Chinese embassy,<sup>41</sup> confirmed their marked increase since early June 2018. The authors also showed that most of the embassy’s statements pertained either to Gui Minhai or to human rights in China (notably Xinjiang or organ trafficking).

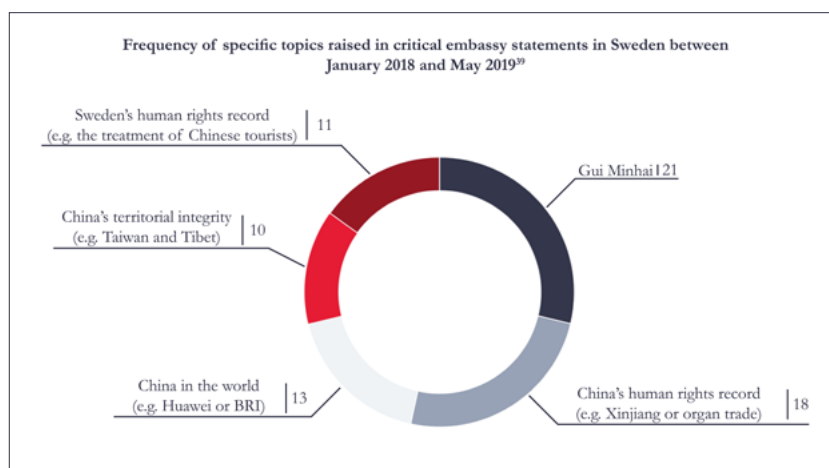


38. <https://www.journalisten.se/debatt/frige-gui-minhai>.

39. Olsson, “Chinese Embassies are Becoming Increasingly Assertive.”

40. Ibid.

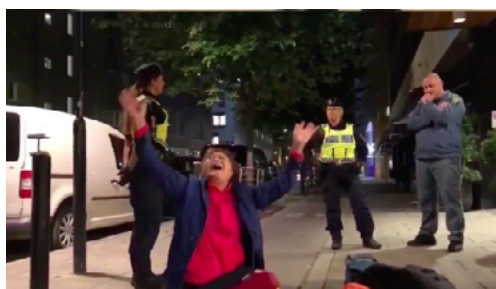
41. Björn Jerdén and Viking Bohman, *China’s propaganda campaign in Sweden, 2018-2019*, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Brief 4 (2019), 4.



This timeline shows that **the affair that occurred in September 2018, which we present in the following pages, occurred precisely when the embassy was on the back foot** and it constituted a riposte to criticism of human rights violations in China. In other words, **it allowed Chinese authorities to create a diversion and turn the accusation around in a piece of hypocritical sophistry (*tu quoque*) that let Beijing attack Sweden for violating the rights of Chinese tourists on its own soil. This coincidence corroborates our hypothesis that this affair was, at the very least, a blatant instance of Chinese instrumentalization of an incident, and it may even have been an entirely fabricated incident designed to manipulate public opinion.**

## B. Chinese tourists allegedly abused by the Swedish police

On September 1, shortly before midnight, the Zengs (曾), a family of three, arrived at the Generator Hostel in Stockholm nearly fifteen hours in advance, their reservation having been booked for the afternoon of the following day. They demanded to sleep in the hall which the hotel refused.<sup>42</sup> The family settled down on the sofas and refused to leave.



Hours later, judging their behavior as threatening, the staff called the police, which removed the family. Whereupon **a theatrical scene** ensued, with several cameras rolling: the father, suddenly unable to walk had to be carried out of the hotel by the police while the son screamed in English: “This is killing! This is killing!” The mother, seated on the ground, began crying and screaming in Chinese: “Save our lives.”

To add to this comedy, without anyone having touched him, the son hurled himself on the ground crying, as if he had been pushed.<sup>43</sup>

Three videos were apparently shot by the son and a fourth by a bystander, who later gave an interview in which he said that the police was in no way violent. According to the son, in

42. According to another version, the hotel agreed to let the Zeng family stay after the son had explained that his parents were old and in poor health. The son then left claiming to go in search of a room in another hotel, but returned accompanied by a woman. The hotel refused to let them all sleep in the hall and asked that they leave the premises. When they refused the establishment called the police (<https://m.rrrrttyy.com/news/148118.html>).

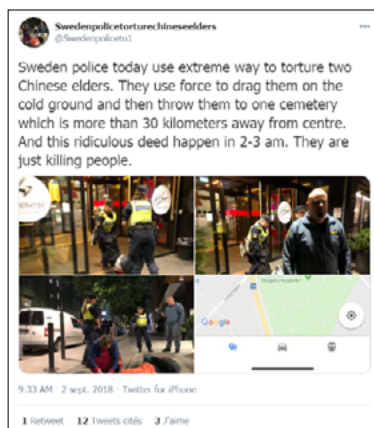
43. Jojje Olsson, “All the Details you Need on the Chinese Tourists who were ‘Brutally’ Handled by Swedish Police,” *In Beijing* (17 Sept. 2018).

comments published two weeks later by the CCP's daily newspaper *Global Times*, the police allegedly forced the family into a vehicle.



They were then driven around for an hour while the parents were allegedly beaten and, finally, all were thrown into a cemetery out of town, surrounded by woods and exposed to the cold. Actually, **there was no indication that the family suffered any physical violence**; they were dropped off by the police not in a cemetery but at a metro station bearing the name Skogskyrkogården (“wooded cemetery”), a reference to a site on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The station was located not outside but inside the city, less than six kilometers and a 10-minute metro ride away from the hotel. This was standard procedure and in conformity with the law, according to the prosecutor in charge of the case, who could not find anything to reproach to the police.

One of the videos and several photos were released by **the anonymous Twitter account @Swedenpoliceto1** (Swedenpolicetorturechineseelders), which only ever posted on the day of the event, September 2, 2018. It posted 58 tweets in four hours (between 8:33 am and 12:43 pm), from an iPhone,<sup>44</sup> to attract attention to the incident and stoke up indignation; it has never been used since.



According to the ambassador, the embassy was alerted by the family on September 2 at 6am and received a detailed written report, along with photos, on the morning of September 5.<sup>45</sup> The family reportedly left the country on September 2, with this comment: “I could not imagine this happening in any modern country, especially Sweden, the homeland of the Nobel Prize. It is so ironic that they talk about human rights all the time.”<sup>46</sup> The Chinese embassy waited two

44. According to data collected by accountanalysis.app.

45. Chinese Embassy in Sweden, “Ambassador Gui Congyou Gives an Exclusive Interview with *Expressen* on the Brutal Treatment of Chinese Tourists by Swedish Police” (18 Sept. 2018), <https://archive.vn/t02qK>.

46. “Chinese Embassy in Sweden Issues Safety Alert in Following Tourists’ ‘Nightmare’ Incident by Local Police,” *Global Times* (15 Sept. 2018).

weeks before publicly reacting on its internet website. On September 14, it released a warning in Chinese to all nationals visiting the country and informing them that Chinese people in Sweden had recently been “harshly treated by the Swedish authorities.”<sup>47</sup> The next day, the embassy posted a message of indignation “strongly condemning the behavior of the Swedish police,” announcing that official protests had been sent to the Swedish government in Stockholm and its embassy in Beijing, and demanding a public apology, that the police officers involved be punished, and for a financial compensation for the family of tourists.<sup>48</sup> Two days later, the embassy posted an interview in English and Chinese.<sup>49</sup> In it the ambassador repeated the family’s version of events, according to which they had arrived only “a few hours” early (in reality, fifteen hours early), been “treated brutally” (there is no proof of this and even a testimony to the contrary), and thrown “into a cemetery” (this was in fact the name of a subway station), etc. Most notably, **he used the incident to address the larger security situation in Sweden** and how he, before arriving, had thought of Sweden as a safe place where it wasn’t even necessary to lock one’s door, and how one year in the country had destroyed this illusion. He finally stated that, on average, two Chinese tourists in Sweden had their wallets or passports stolen every day, highlighting that the embassy had issued no fewer than three warnings to Chinese nationals in the last month.

On September 23, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in turn published a warning on Sweden but without specifically mentioning the Zeng incident. The statement focused on the allegedly rising number of cases of theft and aggression suffered by Chinese tourists.<sup>50</sup> **This seemingly confirmed that the Chinese authorities’ communication strategy was reaching beyond the Zeng affair and using it to develop a thorough narrative about the Swedish society (which in this case was portrayed as dangerous).**



On September 15, in parallel to the embassies’ statement, the *Global Times* devoted an article to the affair using pictures posted 13 days earlier on Twitter by @Swedenpoliceto1 and described in the article as having been “provided by Zeng”; in the article, Zeng was introduced as the son of the victimized family.<sup>51</sup> This corroborates the idea that the account was Zeng’s doing. However, the Chinese version of the article (on Huanqiu.com) used a supplementary photo not featured in the English version and which had not been posted by @Swedenpoliceto1. It allegedly showed the father’s back with the following caption: “Zeng father’s bruises after the attack (the marks of blood congestion – i.e. bruising – have not disappeared even three days later).”<sup>52</sup>

**For days, the pictures and the affair were widely covered by Chinese media**, after the *Global Times* (CGTN, Caixin, news.cina.cn, sohu.com, french.china.org.cn, etc.), and **on Weibo** where the hashtag **#ChineseTouristsMistreatedByTheSwedishPolice** (#中国游客遭瑞典警察粗暴对待) **was used 100 million times.**<sup>53</sup> Chinese-speaking Weibo

47. Embassy of China in Sweden, “中国驻瑞典使馆再次提醒在瑞中国公民务必提高安全意识、加强安全防范” (“The Embassy of China in Sweden Once Again Asked Chinese Citizens to Pay Attention to their Safety and to the Precautionary measures”) (14 Sept. 2018), <https://archive.vn/ybGtw>.

48. Chinese Embassy in Sweden, “The Chinese Embassy Spokesperson’s Remarks on the Brutal Abuse of Chinese Tourists by Swedish Police” (15 Sept. 2015), <https://archive.vn/aDF5y>.

49. Chinese embassy in Sweden, “Ambassador Gui Congyou Gives an Exclusive Interview with *Aftonbladet* on the Brutal Treatment of Chinese Tourists by Swedish Police” (17 Sept. 2018), <https://archive.vn/pxFjC>.

50. Jerdén and Bohman, *China’s Propaganda Campaign in Sweden*, 5.

51. “Chinese Embassy in Sweden,” *Global Times*.

52. “中国游客遭瑞典警方粗暴对待，一家三口被扔坟场，外交部严正交涉！” (“Chinese Tourists Brutally Treated By Swedish Police, a Family of Three Thrown Into a Cemetery, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Being Firm”), *Huanqiu* (15 Sept. 2018), <https://archive.vn/Br9je>.

53. <https://archive.vn/WB6Bs>.



INTRODUCTION

users also hypothesized about the identity of the son, Zeng Yi. The most popular thesis was that Zeng Yi was the general manager (总经理) of the pharmaceutical company Tasly in Nigeria (天士力尼日利亚分公司), and the creator of the Twitter account @Swedenpoliceto1.<sup>54</sup> The testimony of a former colleague described someone who used to travel so often that it had become suspicious; he had previously told a story about how his parents made a scene at an airport to take advantage of a situation.

CONCEPTS

However, the prevailing interpretation that the @Swedenpoliceto1 Twitter account is that of the son Zeng is questionable. While this account only ever posted on the day of the event, about 50 tweets related to the event, it was created earlier and liked about 15 messages between August 25 and September 2, mainly about Swedish nationalists, published by Russian media including RT and Ruptly – a behavior that seems to have no connection with the supposed interests of a Chinese tourist. These two very distinct lives of the @Swedenpoliceto1 account could lend credence to the idea that it is **a mercenary account**, used first to amplify, albeit briefly, Russian media and Swedish far-right themes, and then for a single Chinese operation. This means that, if the operator of the account in its second period was indeed the son Zeng, he was not an ordinary tourist; and this supports **the hypothesis of a manipulation**.

ACTORS

**Whether the hotel scene was built from scratch or an incident that involved more or less unstable individuals, the embassy took advantage of the opportune timing of the affair. Not only did it allow them to turn accusations of human rights violations against critics of the country, while the Gui Minhai affair was in full swing, but it occurred a couple of days before Sweden’s legislative elections on September 9, 2018. Two days after the elections, the Chinese embassy released a statement vigorously contradicting “rumors” accusing China of meddling with the election,<sup>55</sup> which came as a surprise since no one had made such an accusation. The events also preceded the visit of the Dalai Lama to Sweden (he arrived in Malmö on September 11).**

ACTIONS

**Besides, the embassy apparently tried to use Chinese tourists as leverage, as it had previously done elsewhere in the world (→ p. 405). In December 2018 the ambassador explained that the September incident had “damaged the image of Sweden in China, hurting tourism cooperation between China and Sweden. Now, the number of Chinese tourists in Sweden has dropped sharply. We hope the Swedish side will take effective measures to repair Sweden’s image in China. We once again urge Swedish police to sincerely apologize to the three Chinese tourists and restore Chinese tourists’ confidence in Sweden.”<sup>56</sup> The message was clear: if Stockholm wanted to see Chinese tourists return (along with their purchasing power), the Swedish police had to apologize.**

### C. The reactions to satire

CASE

**The satirical TV show *Svenska Nyheter* (Swedish News), broadcast on SVT1, covered the Chinese tourists’ affair weeks later, on September 22, in a ten-minute passage dedicated to Swedish anti-Chinese bias. The intention was laudable: as they saw it, the program makers were not mocking the Chinese but rather the Swedish and their oftenracist prejudices as well as, on occasion, their “complete lack of knowledge about China,” as the presenter Jesper Rönndahl**

54. Originally written by users @本無思維 and @鎗銓 and relayed by Sansanjiang (三三醬) for instance, (<https://weibo/ttarticle/p/show?id=23096342861300710271017>), before being taken up by several outlets.

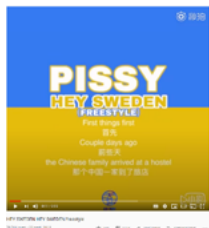
55. <https://archive.vn/62IIo> and <https://archive.vn/uAI6m>.

56. <https://archive.vn/1XTsy>.

said. However, toward the end of the program, they took it a step further: the presenter **introduced a short satirical film** addressed to the Chinese “so that they feel welcome” in Sweden; the film was also **translated into Mandarin and posted on Youku**, the Chinese “YouTube.” This one-minute-and-twenty-second clip offered “a few tips to avoid cultural shock,” such as not defecating outside historical buildings (a reference to the fact that outside the Louvre, a Mandarin-only sign asks visitors not to defecate on the floor),<sup>57</sup> to not consider dogs as food, to eat with cutlery, etc. On several occasions, an icon showed a Chinese silhouette clearly recognizable by its pointed peasant hat and bowl with chopsticks. **Even if it was meant to denounce Swedish racism toward the Chinese, the program used images that were particularly insulting to them:** this subtle irony was evidently missed by Chinese authorities.

The show’s producer, whom we met, recognized with hindsight that the program was “offensive and stupid.”<sup>58</sup> He especially regretted having failed to anticipate the Chinese reaction. Thomas Hall, who manages SVT1’s programs, publicly recognized that it was a mistake to have uploaded the film on Youku.<sup>59</sup>

The clip was quickly removed from Youku but it did remain online for several days. The embassy protested in a communiqué, demanding an apology; a formal complaint was lodged with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But this was not all: **in the wake of the official response came a veritable counter-attack, mounted in a matter of days. SVT1 suffered numerous cyberattacks (DDoSes). The show’s Instagram and Facebook accounts, the channel’s and the host’s, were attacked by trolls who saturated them** by posting thousands of hateful messages in Chinese, English and (poor) Swedish. The number was so high that the accounts had to be temporarily suspended.



Furthermore, it took only a couple of hours to the Chinese **“patriotic rapper”** Li Yijie (aka “Pissy”), leader of CD Rev (close to the CYL), and already discussed in part two (→ p. 75), to knock out **a song about the affair** that was posted on YouTube on September 23, the day after the program was broadcast. It was an impressive but not unusually quick response for the band.<sup>60</sup> The song opened on the Zeng affair:

*First things first/ Couple days ago / the Chinese family arrived at a hostel / in Stockholm / Your capital city / About 2 a.m. / they got nowhere to go / They just wanna stay in the lobby / Cuz the reservation was for the next night / tired and anxious prolly / They were like down and down in a valley, in panic / Then the police removed them from it / What da heck was going on with this? / Is it culture difference? / you just do not give a shieeet.*

All of this led to the proverbial “pot calling the kettle black” with a verse on the hypocrisy of liberal democracies who ignore their own principles (QED):

*Western nations / Sweetie Sweden / always talk about human rights / pay attention / How could you be so rude without a reason? [...] / different races / different standards / Western nations always on the rank list / Democracy hypocrisy.*

After a “You ‘bout to feel the power of Chinese nation,” and “you are just like virus,” came the threat of economic sanctions, boycotts of Swedish brands and embargos on tourism:

57. “Mauvaise réputation – La Chine prend des mesures pour corriger ses touristes ‘malpolis’” (“Bad Reputation – China Adopts Measures to Correct ‘Rude’ Tourists”), *Le Monde* (20 Aug. 2013).

58. Interview with one of the authors and the producer of the Svenska Nyheter show (Stockholm, Feb. 2020).

59. “SVT-chefen efter Kinasatiren: Helheten av vart budskap gick förlorad.”

60. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaXCXxQKVfQ>.

*We got a lotta free choice / EF that's a good idea / Ericsson, Terra Pak / And IKEA / We can choose to refuse the Swedish brands / And never on a trip to your Sweden again.*

And, as a finishing touch, a passage on territorial integrity:

*Yeab Last but not the least / Here I wanna say / You know what / The map of China on your TV Show / You should just, you know / fix it / You know what / Tibet and Taiwan belong to China, bitch / You better watch out next time.*

**In addition to this online propaganda, human excrement was mailed** to the TV station, as well as to the home addresses of the show's host and of the actress who starred in the clip. One of the station's executives said he feared for his physical safety after seeing **people watching over his home in the morning and evening.**

In an attempt to calm things down, the channel organized a meeting in its offices between the producer of the program, several of the channel's executives and three representatives of various Chinese organizations in Sweden, who demanded a public apology and that the video be withdrawn. For them the most insulting element of the caricature seems to have been the peasant hat, a symbol of China's under-development. They obliged the producer to make his apology on video – in what he felt was a **“forced confession.”** As he regretted recording the video almost immediately, he asked them not to release it, explaining that this would make it more difficult to obtain a public apology.<sup>61</sup> The video was published on Chinese media in Chinese, but not in Sweden, and thus did not receive international attention.

In the following week's show, on September 30, 2018, the show's host decided to respond with humor to the hate campaign he was subjected to, explaining that he received “tens of thousands of reactions, and by reactions I mean images of me eating feces.” He also broadcast a part of the rapper Pissy's song. Taking a more serious tone, he apologized for the clip that aired at the end of the earlier program and that was uploaded on Youku, acknowledging that he had gone too far: “[to] all the people in China and in Sweden – not the government – who were offended by this film, this was not our intention, and we should have anticipated that our clip would be perceived as racist. This was irresponsible and culturally insensitive on our part. We are sorry. However, **this is not an apology addressed to the Chinese regime, which does not respect liberty of expression.**” He then criticized China, with very sensible mentions of the Chinese strategy in Sweden, its aggressive diplomacy, pressure against the media, etc. He also spoke about Gui Minhai's abduction and detention, as well as the rapper Pissy, adding that “if he [gave] the impression of rapping the Chinese government's press releases,” it was because he worked for the government, which financed his rap band CD Rev. This was precisely the case, as we saw (→ p. 75).

Finally, on October 3, five Chinese associations of the diaspora in Sweden co-signed an open letter, in Swedish and in Chinese, denouncing the program.<sup>62</sup>

61. Interview with the producer of the Svenska Nyheter show, conducted by one of the authors in Stockholm, February 2020.

62. “今日头条：瑞典华人社团发联合声明强烈抗议瑞典电视台SVT辱华言行要求立即停止类似对中国和中国人民们恶意伤害的娱乐节目” (“Today's Headline: The Sino-Swedish Community Publishes a Declaration Strongly Protesting the Insulting Actions and Remarks of the Swedish Television Channel SVT, Demanding an Immediate End to All Entertainment Programs Insulting China and the Chinese People”), Greenpost.se (10 May 2018), <https://archive.vn/LpM45>.

### III. The Anna Lindstedt affair

This affair, which was described as **“the biggest Swedish diplomatic scandal in modern times,”**<sup>63</sup> started when **Anna Lindstedt, the Swedish ambassador to China, invited the daughter of Gui Minhai** (→ p. 527), **Angela Gui** – with whom she had been in regular contact – **to Stockholm**. Angela had been fighting relentlessly for her father’s release. The ambassador asked her to travel to Stockholm on January 24, 2019, to try a “new approach” and meet with businessmen who could help her. To reassure Angela, she said that these were people she “trusted” and that she would be present at the meeting. When Angela arrived at the rendezvous, a hotel in central Stockholm, she was joined by the ambassador and **two Chinese businessmen**, who invited her into their car and took her to another hotel, **to a lounge accessible only with a member’s card. She stayed for two days, during which she was questioned** about her personal life and her studies (she was a PhD student at Cambridge). She was constantly watched over and followed, even when she went to the bathroom. The two men invited many of their colleagues: “[t]here was a lot of wine, a lot of people, and a lot of increasingly strange questions. But because Ambassador Lindstedt was present and seemingly supportive of whatever it was that was going on, [Angela] kept assuming that this had been initiated by the Swedish Foreign Ministry.”

**One of the two men told her she had “potential” and proposed that she came with them to work in China.** He could arrange for a visa with the embassy in Stockholm and showed a photo of himself and his associate with Ambassador Gui Congyou. She refused the offer. The following day, the same man told her that he had “connections within the CCP” and assured her that **her father could soon be released if she said nothing about the matter**: “I was told I needed to be quiet. I wasn’t to tell anyone about this, or say anything publicly about the case. I was also to stop all media engagement with it. Ambassador Lindstedt, who was sat next to me, agreed to the plan. She said that if my father was released, she’d go on Swedish television and speak of the bright future of Sweden-China relations, as well as express regret over the Chinese tourist hotel incident in Stockholm [of September 2018], and the subsequent coverage of it on a Swedish comedy show [the case of *Svenska Nyheter* presented previously].” **The man raised his voice menacingly** – “you have to trust me, or you will never see your father again” – and asked her: “what is most important to you? **Your values or your father?**” He added that, if she kept speaking to the media, she would damage “Anna’s” career. The ambassador agreed, saying that China was “adopting a new diplomatic line,” where all forms of broadcast activism would force China to “punish Sweden.” Angela finally managed to extricate herself from this uncomfortable situation and left Stockholm.

The following week she called the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was told by staff that “they had not had the slightest idea this whole affair was taking place. They had not even been informed the ambassador was in the country.” Two weeks after the incident, Angela told the story in an online article, which she ended by stating: “I’m not going to be quiet in exchange for a visa and an **arbitrary promise that my father ‘might’ be released. Threats, verbal abuse, bribes, or flattery won’t change that.**”<sup>64</sup>

This is how the affair started. **Anna Lindstedt was immediately removed from office and recalled to Stockholm**, where she was accused of “arbitrariness in negotiations with a

63. Jojje Olsson, “Is Sweden Ready to Combat China’s Influence Operations?” *The Diplomat* (20 Jul. 2020).

64. This quote and all the preceding ones from: Angela Gui, “Damned If You Do, Damned If You Do not? I Won’t,” medium.com (13 Feb. 2019).



foreign power” relying on “a law that was crafted for times of war” which “had not been used since 1794.”<sup>65</sup>

The investigations later revealed that **one of the two businessmen was Kevin Liu**. Liu should not have been able to enter Sweden since **he was blacklisted in 2011**. He had since tried to enter the Schengen space using “different identities and forged passports,”<sup>66</sup> but had until then been detected and turned away. This time he had visibly succeeded in obtaining a visa through the Finnish general consulate in Hong Kong. **The court was unable to establish that the two businessmen represented the interests of a foreign state**, China, and this is one of the reasons **Anna Lindstedt was exonerated** in July 2020. **Experts on China know that the relative success of this grey zone operation – because plausible deniability was maintained, the operation was not state-backed according to the courts – has probably been interpreted by Beijing as an invitation to persist with its efforts.**

#### IV. Local relays of Chinese Influence

The different Chinese diaspora groups in Sweden, somewhat affiliated to the United Front network, are “hometown associations (同乡会, *tongxiang hui*): the Stockholm Overseas Chinese Service Center (斯德哥尔摩华助中心, *Sidege'eremo Hua Zhu Zhongxin*), which was founded in 2017 with an authorization from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, a united front organ; local branches of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association; professional organizations; media outlets and other networks.”<sup>67</sup> The most important actor, **the “central node,”** in this “Swedish United Front community” might be **the Swedish China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (瑞典中国和平统一促进会)**, created in 2005, which is the Swedish branch of the eponymous organization that acts around the world to promote the “annexation of Taiwan.”<sup>68</sup> There is also the National Swedish Chinese Association that the ambassador Gui described as the “backbone” of the Swedish branch of the Council for Reunification, and which received 812,000 Swedish crowns (€77,500) of public subsidies in Sweden between 2012 and 2017.<sup>69</sup>

**There are myriad associations** (five of which, for example, co-signed the open letter attacking the satirical program),<sup>70</sup> but they are often headed by the same people: for example, according to Pär Nyrén, the president of the Association for Reunification, Ye Pei-qun (Sometimes spelled Ye Peiquan in Sweden 叶沛群), is also the president of a Chinese language school in Stockholm, of the Committee of the Nordic Zhigong Association (北欧致公协会) and of the Swedish Chinese National Association (瑞典华人总会) – whereas his uncle, Ye Kexiong (叶克雄), heads the Swedish Qingtian Association. Another example is Zong Jinbo (宗金波), a PLA veteran, who is an honorary president of the Association for Reunification, and president of the Swedish Tianjin Association.<sup>71</sup>

Among other prominent local relays of Beijing are **the Sweden-China Bridge association** (directed by Xueifei Chen Axelsson, who writes for the news website Greenpost.se), **the China-Sweden Business Council (CSBC) and the Belt & Road Initiative**

65. Olsson, “Is Sweden Ready to Combat China’s Influence Operations.”

66. Ibid.

67. Pär Nyrén, “The CCP’s United Front Network in Sweden,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation (16 Sept. 2020), 29.

68. Ibid., 29.

69. Ibid., 30.

70. <https://archive.vn/LpM45>.

71. Pär Nyrén, “The CCP’s United Front Network in Sweden,” 29-30.

**Executive Group for Sweden (BRIX)**, which the ambassador Gui referred to as his “Swedish friends”<sup>72</sup> and whose objective is to promote the BRI in Sweden. It was revealed in 2019 that one of its executives, Lydia Liu (刘芳), also president of the Swedish Hubei and Hunan Association (瑞典两湖同乡会) and a member of the municipal council of Nacka in Stockholm’s suburbs, had **close links to the UFWD**. As a consequence, she was expelled from the Christian-Democrat party.<sup>73</sup> **BRIX founding members come principally from the Swedish branch of the Schiller Institute**. The president of BRIX, Ulf Sandmark, is also the president of the Swedish section of the Schiller Institute. Based in Germany with members from around 50 countries, the institute is one of the main organs of the LaRouche movement, named after the U.S. politician Lyndon Larouche: an international political network regularly condemned as neo-fascist, anti-Semitic and conspiratorial (→ p. 326). The small European Workers Party is a Swedish affiliate of this movement. Besides, the German activist Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Lyndon’s widow, president and founder of the Schiller Institute, has already been invited to a BRIX event. The Chinese Embassy, which works regularly with BRIX (the ambassador participated in many seminars), has funded at least one of their events. **That the embassy chose to publicly associate itself with the Schiller Institute came as a surprise in Sweden and was perceived as “self-sabotage, given the organization’s bad reputation.”**<sup>74</sup>

## V. The Swedish case as an example of the Russification of Chinese operations

Several features in the previous pages are symptomatic of a wider tendency highlighted in this report: **the Russification of Chinese influence operations**, which we will develop again and in more details in our conclusion (→ p. 620). **The first feature are the narratives used**. The ill treatment of Chinese tourists is a subject that bridges the gap between standard “positive” Chinese propaganda (about China) and “negative” propaganda (about the host country) with which Russia has been familiar for years (even decades in Sweden’s case). It still addresses the situation of Chinese nationals (and China) but chiefly in order to criticize the host and it ultimately develops a narrative according to which liberal democracies are decadent and violent. With Gui Minhai, **the boot is on the other foot now**: while Sweden accused China of violating human rights and the rule of law, arbitrary arrests and the bad treatment of prisoners (notably Gui Minhai), the Chinese tourist incident in Stockholm gave Beijing the opportunity to turn the accusation around and claim that it was Sweden that behaves abusively. **This strategy of focusing on incidents, criminality, immigration, Sweden’s alleged shortcomings, in order to deter tourism and portray Sweden as violent and unstable, is exactly what Russian media have been doing for years, just like the American alt-right** (see Trump’s “Last night in Sweden”).<sup>75</sup>

**Second, this convergence of views between Russian and Chinese authorities, and the American alt-right** – all pursuing the same objective of breaking the model of a perfect and happy Swedish liberal society – **is backed up by the links with extremist parties**

72. Ibid., 32.

73. Ibid., 33.

74. Ibid., 33.

75. Christian Christensen, “‘Last Night in Sweden’ was Figment of Trump’s Fox News-Inspired Imagination,” *The Guardian* (20 Feb. 2017).

**and movements.** In Stockholm, the embassy has close ties with the nationalist and populist far-right party Alternativ för Sverige (AfS representatives were present at the Chinese embassy on the anniversary of Tian'anmen) which regularly relays pro-Beijing positions. Then, of course, there is the Schiller Institute, as previously explained. **Both are familiar relations for Russia but relatively new ones for China, which confirms that China is following the Russian path.**

Finally, in light of all this, the diplomatic appointment of Gui Congyou to Sweden, where Russia is very active, is less surprising than it seems. Indeed, Gui speaks fluent Russian, is an expert on Russia, and is in fact pro-Russian (in 2014, he publicly supported the annexation of Crimea).<sup>76</sup> Besides, the ambassador admitted that his understanding of Sweden was limited to reading the Russian press (Chinese media in Sweden generally simply republish translated *RT* and *Sputnik* articles). **All this makes sense if we see the ambassador as having been sent to facilitate a local rapprochement with the Russians, to learn from them and perhaps even to work with them** on information operations in Sweden of the kind that Moscow has been conducting for a long time.

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76. <https://twitter.com/jichanglulu/status/1020787825619316736>.

## Chapter 5

# CANADA

**Why is China interested in Canada? Because of the Chinese diaspora first and foremost, and for the large number of assumed or presumed dissidents that lives in the country.** Jonathan Manthorpe explained that “Canada has become a hunting ground for the CCP’s agents [...] because the country has attracted so many immigrants from greater China intent on escaping the CCP.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, out of 1.8 million Canadians that identify as of Chinese origin – nearly 5% of the population<sup>2</sup> – there might be at least 500,000 Hongkongers, 100,000 Taiwanese, nearly 5,000 Tibetans (the largest Tibetan diaspora outside of Asia),<sup>3</sup> and 2,000 Uyghurs (with 300 relatives of people detained in Chinese camps).<sup>4</sup> Besides, Canada – which was the first country (in 1999) to publicly condemn the persecutions of Falun Gong members by Chinese authorities – is also a popular destination for the followers of this spiritual movement. In other words, because China has made the fight against the “five poisons” a priority, hence silencing advocates of Tibet, the Uyghurs, Taiwan’s independence, democracy in China, and the Falun Gong, part of this fight needs to be carried out in Canada.

**Furthermore, Canada is an interesting target for other reasons, including its multi-form proximity to the great U.S. rival, its membership in military (NATO) and intelligence (Five Eyes) alliances** that have raised Beijing’s concern; its position as an **Arctic nation**, a region of growing interest for China; **its image as an exemplary liberal democracy**, making Canada a symbolic target; and **its status as an average power**, which limits the potential fallout. Beijing also believes it is in a strong position due to Canada’s dependence on the Chinese market – and Canadian universities to Chinese students – especially in British Columbia. It is therefore understandable why Canada was described as a “second priority” for Chinese intelligence, after the United States, according to the defector Chen Yonglin. During a visit in Ottawa and Montreal in 2007, he stated that no less than “a thousand spies, whether official or unofficial and occasional informers,” were working in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

**For all these reasons, China is interested in Canada, and, as Charles Burton summarized it, it offered the following deal to the state: Beijing can help Canada dynam-**

1. Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019), 16.

2. Based on the 2016 census: Statistic Canada, “Ethnic and Cultural Origins of Canadians: Portrait of a Rich Heritage,” Census (25 Oct. 2017).

3. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 16-17.

4. Karine Azoulay and Brendan Naef, *What We heard: A Summary of Testimony on the Human Rights Situation of Uyghurs and Others Turkic Muslims*, Report prepared for the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Developments, Library of Parliament (19 Dec. 2018), executive summary, §4.

5. Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs. Enquête sur les activités d’espionnage au Canada* (Nest of Spies: The Starting Truth about Foreign Agents at Work within Canada’s Borders) (Montréal: Stanké, 2009), 219.



**ize and diversify its economy** (to make it less dependent on the United States) by giving Canadian companies a better access to the immense Chinese market and promising colossal Chinese investments in Canada, but **under certain conditions**. To that end, Ottawa needs to “1) remove Canadian restrictions on Chinese state acquisition of Canadian mineral and energy resources; 2) remove restrictions on export of high technology (including with military applications) to China; 3) allow the PRC to freely extradite Chinese nationals in Canada to face Chinese justice; and 4) cease all criticism of China’s domestic and international policies and shape public opinion to support better understanding of the critical importance to Canada of enhanced engagement with the PRC.”<sup>6</sup> This deal is basically meant to **incite Ottawa to do Beijing’s work in Canada**, so that the CCP “could be simply focused first on suppression of discourse damaging to China’s international image and prestige and second on neutralizing Chinese dissident voices in Canada.”<sup>7</sup>

**As Canada refused the deal**, particularly after the 2018 crisis strained bilateral relations (→ p. 544), **Beijing has become more offensive**. J. Michael Cole, a Taiwan-based former analyst at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), and one of the leading Canadian experts on Chinese influence, affirms that **Beijing uses its entire repertoire of actions in Canada**: China is not only engaged in traditional diplomacy but also uses “instruments of political warfare to divide Canadian society, manipulate decision-making in Ottawa, co-opt or use potential partners in government or parliament, sow confusion through disinformation and CCP-front organizations, interfere in electoral processes, and, where it feels it is necessary, to undertake more direct, punitive action, such as **lawfare against Beijing’s critics and by ‘weaponizing’ both Chinese students and trade**.”<sup>8</sup>

The diversity and reach of Chinese interference make the Canadian case comparable to Australia. And Canada and Australia are very often compared, for reasons that are as much historical (the British crown) as geographical (large size, low density, uneven distribution of the population over the territory), political (a federal system, a multicultural society, “First Nations” or Aboriginals) or economic (GDP, growth, important raw materials, especially ore, etc.). The two cases are also similar in terms of Chinese influence: Jonathan Manthorpe noted that “**the Australian experience of infiltration by the CCP is almost exactly the same as that of Canada**.”<sup>9</sup> This similarity is tied to the comparable trajectory of their Chinese diasporas which, in Canada like in Australia, were initially made up of former Hong Kong and Taiwan inhabitants, and Chinese dissidents (the post-Tian’anmen wave of immigrants), but the new generation, which is now more numerous, comes mainly from mainland China, migrated for essentially economic reasons, and is therefore more likely to be a target and vector of Chinese influence operations.

**The CSIS has long tried to draw the attention of the government, and even of the public, to this threat**, through publications (a joint report on the Sidewinder Operation with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in 1997, kept secret at first but eventually disclosed (see below)<sup>10</sup>; a 1998 report on the strategy of the United Front in Hong Kong<sup>11</sup>;

6. Charles Burton, “Recent PRC Influence Operations to Counter Public Demands for a More Effective Response to the Chinese Regime’s Political Interference in Canada,” *Sinopsis* (31 Jul. 2019), 1-2.

7. *Ibid.*, 2.

8. Cole, *Democracy on Fire*, 28.

9. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 7.

10. Available here: <https://www.primetimecrime.com/Articles/RobertRead/sidewinder.pdf>.

11. Holly Porteous, *Beijing’s United Front Strategy in Hong Kong*, CSIS Commentary No. 72 (1998), [https://www.academia.edu/43400353/Porteous\\_Holly\\_Beijings\\_United\\_Front\\_Strategy\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong\\_CSIS\\_Commentary\\_No\\_72](https://www.academia.edu/43400353/Porteous_Holly_Beijings_United_Front_Strategy_in_Hong_Kong_CSIS_Commentary_No_72).

a 2006 report on Confucius Institutes after the first one was inaugurated in Canada (at the British Columbia Institute of Technology)<sup>12</sup>; and, more recently, a 2018 report on *China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry*<sup>13</sup>) but also several public interventions by its successive directors (→ p. 543 and 549).

## I. An old story

**Chinese influence operations have deep roots in Canada.**<sup>14</sup> Surveillance, infiltration, and harassment on college campuses, among other things, which are much talked about today, were already used to monitor the fallout of Tian’anmen in 1989. “In Vancouver, for example, Chinese students at the University of British Columbia who had participated in protests complained publicly of being filmed, photographed, harassed, and blackmailed. Some have even received threatening phone calls. For others, it was their families back in China who were subjected to reprisals.”<sup>15</sup> The same thing happened to pro-Tibet activists, Falun Gong followers, and Taiwanese independentists – all have long been targeted.

**The 1984 announcement of the retrocession of Hong Kong to China,** in 1997, created a climate of insecurity in the population (reinforced by the Tian’anmen massacre in 1989), and provoked **a massive wave of emigration,** of which Canada was one of the main destinations. In 1997, a secret report of the Canadian Mounted Police and the CSIS, untitled *Sidewinder: Chinese intelligence services and Triads financial links in Canada*, highlighted some of its consequences on Chinese influence in Canada.

**By the end of the 1980s, Western intelligence services detected strengthening UFWD activities in Hong Kong, notably tasked with establishing connections with the Triads, which were already tied to business circles.**<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, more than 237,000 Hong Kong residents moved to Canada between January 1990 and March 1997, of which 70,000 were “entrepreneurs” and “investors.”<sup>17</sup> **In 1997, more than 500,000 Hongkongers presumably lived in Canada, approximately 22% of the immigrant population.** Between January 1990 and March 1997, most of the newly-arrived Hongkongers registered as “entrepreneurs” or “investors” settled in British Columbia (39.1%) – especially in the Fraser Valley, in the Vancouver region – but also in Ontario, in Toronto especially (28.5%), and, to a lesser extent, in Quebec (20.6%) and Alberta (7.3%).<sup>18</sup>

**However, some of these rich businessmen and investors, with ties to the Triads and Chinese intelligence services, immediately bought a Canadian company,** through a Canadian relative as intermediary when necessary – “so as to obtain a ‘local identity,’ legally and subtly concealing their foreign identity.”<sup>19</sup> Then, thanks to this first company, **they invested massively, or bought additional Canadian companies** in different fields, “but always under the Canadian banner.” Moreover, they also took care **to associate**

12. CSIS, *Ouverture d’Instituts Confucius* (“Opening Confucius Institutes”), BR (27 Jul. 2006), declassified secret report, quoted in Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 155.

13. The report is available here: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/csis-scrs/documents/publications/CSIS-Academic-Outreach-China-report-May-2018-en.pdf>.

14. See, for example, the chapters dealing with history in Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 2019.

15. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 189.

16. *Sidewinder: Chinese Intelligence Services and Triads Financial Links in Canada*, draft submitted to the RCMP-CSIS joint review committee, Secret (24 Jun. 1997), 2.

17. *Ibid.*, 1.

18. *Ibid.*, 4.

19. *Ibid.*, 4.

INTRODUCTION

themselves with influential Canadian politicians – “offering them positions on their boards of directors” – and to invest first in “soft” (non-sensitive) sectors such as real estate, transportations, energy and travel agencies – in order to avoid drawing scrutiny from Canadian intelligence. With time, they acquired companies in more sensitive sectors, such as in high-tech. **The CSIS noted that “over 200 Canadian companies [were] under Chinese control” in 1997.**<sup>20</sup>

CONCEPTS

This poses several problems, including the fact that **these companies have allowed Beijing to consolidate its influence in Canada by indirectly financing the two major political parties**, the Conservatives and the Liberals – a practice otherwise commonly used elsewhere in the world (especially in the United States, where more than 2,000 firms were suspected of having been used by China to illegally finance the Democratic Party). But the main problem, according to Canadian intelligence services, was that “some Chinese owners are now able to use the Canadian companies they have purchased and some of the political channels they have developed to obtain research assistance and even classified contracts. Once access is obtained, few things are in place to prevent them from repatriating the fruits of this research or classified information in China” because “most of this can be done legally.”<sup>21</sup> For instance, some of these Canadian companies controlled by Beijing are in the security sector, including IT and video surveillance, and are likely to pass contracts with the Canadian government. Furthermore, the report noted that “these triads now use their Canadian acquisitions to engage **in intelligence activities**, such as intimidating individuals, identifying potential sources of facilitating visit of Chinese delegations on behalf of China.”<sup>22</sup>

ACTION

**Drafted in 1997, this visionary report concluded that “China remains one of the greatest ongoing threats to Canada’s national security and Canadian industry” and that “the great difficulties in determining the threat is that it is diverse and multi-layered.** It diffuses itself through elaborated networks held by a cultural practice that still is not well understood by Western services.”<sup>23</sup>

ACTIONS

Chinese immigration to Canada has changed since 1997: Hongkongers are no longer a majority of migrants. For diverse reasons, including an increasing living standard in China (some Chinese settle in Canada to invest money), **“the majority of Chinese-Canadians in Canada are from mainland China”** nowadays.<sup>24</sup> Compared to previous generations of Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants, they are alienated from Canada’s democratic and liberal culture and are understandably more likely to support Beijing. In other words, **if only for demographic reasons, the risk of Chinese influence in Canada has increased over the past two decades.**

CASE

At the time, the *Sidewinder* report was coldshouldered by Canadian elected officials, who refused to admit that Beijing was a threat – so much so that, according to testimonies gathered by Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, “there was political interference at the highest level to torpedo the report and discredit its authors.”<sup>25</sup> As a result, it “was simply thrown away in 1997 before being replaced, in 1999, by a softer and more consensual version,” despite the fact that, in **May 1999, on the other side of the**

20. Ibid., 5.

21. Ibid., 13.

22. Ibid., 3.

23. Ibid., 14.

24. Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China & Amnesty International Canada, *Harassment & Intimidation of Individuals in Canada Working on China-related Human Rights Concerns* (update, Mar. 2020), 20.

25. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 195.

border, the “Cox Report”<sup>26</sup> came to the same conclusions on Chinese activities in the United States: “shell companies, pseudo-research and cooperation institutes, joint ventures between North American companies and China, use of student delegations, journalists, etc., to gather data, often from open sources, all tactics that are also used in Canada.”<sup>27</sup>

**In the 2000s, bilateral irritants accumulated.** Mei Ping, the Chinese ambassador in Ottawa between 1998 and 2005 had already displayed an aggressive behavior – especially when dealing with Falun Gong members. He regularly penned letters and contacted Canadian politicians to dissuade them from getting in touch with these “mentally damaged” “heretics.”<sup>28</sup> In 2001, the magazine *The Chinese Press*, based in Montreal’s Chinatown, circulated a series of anti-Falun Gong pamphlets accusing the followers of bestiality, vampirism and of being driven to suicide – despite a court order enjoining them to stop these attacks. The newspaper did it again in 2006 with a special edition of 100,000 copies. A Chinese “defector” previously tasked with persecuting Falun Gong followers noted that an operation of such magnitude was probably “financed by Beijing.”<sup>29</sup> Besides, the frequent visits of the Dalai-lama (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2012) – the third person in Canada’s history to receive the title of honorary citizen in June 2006, after Nelson Mandela and Raoul Wallenberg – and the absence of the Canadian Prime Minister at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008 did not help either.

**Likewise, China’s spying activities and influence operations intensified during the 2000s.** In April 2007, Jim Judd, then-director of the CSIS, admitted during a hearing of the Senate Permanent Committee on National Security that **Chinese operations took no less than half the Canadian counterespionage’s time.**<sup>30</sup> One symptom of this disproportionate spying activity is the growing number of employees working at the embassy: it suggests that many are “diplomats” in-name-only. In 2008, the Chinese embassy in Canada had 120 accredited diplomats, twice as much as the U.S. embassy, Canada’s main economic partner. This number went “beyond the traditional needs of an embassy”<sup>31</sup> and indicated that many of the employees were apparently intelligence officers working under a diplomatic cover.

**Despite recurring alerts from the CSIS and cases that regularly come out in the press, political resistance – i.e. the propensity of elected officials to see China as a partner more than as a threat – remains important in Canada,** for reasons that are both historical and cultural; this is more blatant than in Australia, where a consensus emerged in the political sphere circa 2017 on the importance of the Chinese threat (see the box below).

26. Report of the Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China, named after Rep. Christopher Cox, who reported it to the House of Representatives.

27. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 194-195.

28. *Ibid.*, 184.

29. *Ibid.*, 226.

30. *Ibid.*, 161.

31. *Ibid.*, 153.



## II. The 2018 Crisis and Its Aftermath

For several reasons, **Canadians have become more aware of the problem since 2018**. First, as pointed out by Charles Burton, the **situation in Australia created a precedent that rippled onto Canada**.<sup>32</sup> Because both countries are particularly similar, they watch each other, compare each other, and Australia's actions to counter Chinese influence in 2017-2018 (see the box below) sparked **a debate in Canada about whether to do the same**. Some, like the former Canadian ambassador to China David Mulrone, praised the Australian efforts and asserted that "much of what Australia has done could be applied in Canada."<sup>33</sup> Yet, **many proponents of appeasement have opposed such measures** and instead emphasized the particularities and, therefore, the non-replicability of the Australian case; the need to be reasonable and avoid anti-China hysteria demonstrated by both Australia and the United States; the fact that the Chinese-Canadian relationship should not be reduced to its sole security dimension; and the efficiency of the current counter-intelligence mechanism.<sup>34</sup> All arguments that can be found among those, especially in Europe, who still underestimate the threat posed by Chinese influence nowadays.

### The Australian Awakening

China was a decisive actor in the economic growth of Australia for the past three decades. As such, **Australia's awakening to the fact that China is not (only) an opportunity, but (also) a threat for the country has emerged gradually**. In 2015 first, when a controversy erupted over a 99-year lease granted by the government of the Northern Territory to a Chinese company over the **port of Darwin** (a strategic infrastructure). The United States, who keep a Marines contingent not far, protested, and a polemic ensued, with some voices calling for the renationalization of the port. Hence, Australians took notice of the importance of protecting **critical infrastructures**, and the government created a Critical Infrastructure Center in January 2007, among other measures.

The **Sam Dastyari affair, in 2016**, was another step. This Labor senator, who adopted certain pro-Beijing positions ("The South China Sea is China's own affair. On this issue, Australia should remain neutral and respect China's decision"), admitted that he had accepted financial contributions from Chinese companies.<sup>35</sup> It wasn't a lone case and several parties were blamed: **between 2014 and 2016, the Liberal and Labor parties presumably received \$5.5 million from individuals and companies tied to China**. "Chinese donors are by the far the first donors coming from outside of the country."<sup>36</sup>

In August 2016, the Prime Minister **Malcolm Turnbull commissioned a secret investigation on foreign interference**, the results of which "galvanized" the government and convinced it to adopt a targeted strategy. And the tempo accelerated in 2017. In May, Defense Secretary Dennis Richardson publicly declared that "it is no secret that China is very active in intelligence activities directed against us. [...] It is more than cyber. The Chinese government keeps a watchful eye inside Australian Chinese communities and effectively controls some Chinese language media in Australia."<sup>37</sup> **As his Canadian counterpart, the executive director of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), Duncan Lewis, noted**

32. Burton, "Recent PRC Influence Operations," 3.

33. David Mulrone, *Shining a Brighter Light on Foreign Influence in Canada*, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, Commentary (Oct. 2019), 3.

34. Burton, "Recent PRC Influence Operations," 3-5.

35. Caroline Taix, "Les liens des élus australiens avec la Chine font polémique" ("The Polemical Ties of Australian Elected Officials to China"), *Le Monde* (10 Sept. 2016).

36. Ibid.

37. Katharine Murphy, "'Chinese Are Spying on Us': Veteran Mandarin Dennis Richardson Bows Out," *The Guardian* (12 May 2017).

that foreign interference was an “existential threat,” “by far and away the most serious issue going forward,” even more than terrorism.<sup>38</sup>

More and more articles, investigations, and reports on Chinese influence have been released, including for the general public, such as a TV documentary on “the hard edge of China’s soft power” which was broadcast in June 2017. It revealed that ASIO had disclosed to the two main Australian political parties that two generous donors were tied to the CCP.<sup>39-40</sup> “One of them leveraged a \$400,000 donation in an attempt to soften the Labor Party line on the South China Sea.”<sup>41</sup>

In June 2018, Australia passed **two laws against espionage and foreign interferences,**<sup>42</sup> and it created a national coordinator to counter foreign interference. Australia also became the first country to **exclude Huawei** from its 5G network that same year.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 was another step forward, with Canberra questioning Beijing’s responsibility and demanding an independent investigation into the origin of the virus. In response, Beijing deployed a range of retaliatory measures, including trade sanctions (→ p. 246). In December 2020, the Australian parliament adopted a bill to endow the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with **the power to scrutinize international agreements signed by the federated states** (incidentally, the federal government announced the cancellation of the Victorian Labor government’s BRI agreement with China in April 2021), **but also by the municipalities and the universities** (which obviously targets Confucius Institutes → p. 299).<sup>43</sup>

In May 2018, and with that context in mind, **Canadian authorities decided to deny a visa to 200 Chinese citizens** planning to attend the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the World Guangdong Community Federation (第九届世界广东同乡联谊大会) in Vancouver. Jointly organized by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of China of Guangdong and the Guangdong Community Association of Canada, it was set in North America for the first time. The organizers expected 2,000 participants from around the world but 200 of them, including some 20 Chinese officials from Guangdong, were denied access to Canada, which displeased Beijing. **This unusual and daring decision, from a Canadian government that had long avoided offending China, was interpreted as a measure of reciprocity to the practice, common on the Chinese side, of denying visas to Canadian citizens.**<sup>44</sup> It could be also be interpreted as an attempt to **draw a limit on the activities of the United Front in Canada**, as this meeting was of a particular magnitude. That said, the event was still a success for the United Front, partly due to the participation of the province’s prime minister but also to the forceful images of **Vancouver policemen in uniform saluting the Chinese flag**. Moreover, **retired Canadian soldiers were seen carrying the PRC flag** (see pictures). The Canadian decision weighted on the bilateral relationship nevertheless.

38. Jade Macmillan, “Foreign Interference More of ‘An Existential Threat’ to Australia than Terrorism: ASIO chief,” *ABC News* (5 Sept. 2019).

39. “Power and Influence: The Hard Edge of China’s Soft Power,” *ABC News* (5 Jun. 2017).

40. Ibid.

41. John Garnaut, “How China Interferes in Australia And How Democracies Can Push Back,” *Foreign Affairs* (9 Mar. 2018).

42. The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act and the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference).

43. Australia’s Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act of 2020 (8 Dec. 2020).

44. Xiao Xu, “Two Hundred Chinese Citizens Denied Visas for Vancouver Conference,” *The Globe and Mail* (7 Jun. 2018).



During the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the World Guangdong Community Federation in Vancouver, the presence of Vancouver policemen in uniform on the stage, saluting the Chinese flag, did not go unnoticed.<sup>45</sup>



Retired Canadian soldiers carrying the PRC flag during the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the World Guangdong Community Federation in Vancouver, in May 2018.<sup>46</sup>

The turning point came six months later with **the Huawei affair, which remains the most serious crisis in the history of the Sino-Canadian bilateral relationship**. Meng Wanzhou (孟晚舟), the vice-chair of the board of directors and chief financial officer of Huawei, was arrested in Vancouver on December 1, 2018, following a U.S. arrest warrant. Beijing immediately **retaliated**, first by arresting two Canadians living in China nine days later, **the “two Michaels”** (Michael Kovrig, a former diplomat turned advisor to the International Crisis Group, and Michael Spavor, head of an organization promoting tours of North Korea) without justification. They were held in unacceptable conditions (no consular access, and at least one, M. Kovrig, in a cell with no access to daylight). They were formally charged with espionage on June 19, 2020, a few weeks after (so presumably in response to) Meng Wenzhou’s failed appeal to the Canadian courts. And they were released on September 25, 2021, the same day that Meng Wanzhou, who was under house arrest in Vancouver, was allowed to return to China – which confirms that Beijing has been exercising against Canada an **hostage diplomacy** it is familiar with (→ p. 411).

45. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1046047857088888832](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1046047857088888832).

46. “第九届‘世粤联会’在温哥华举行” (“The 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the World Guangdong Community Federation Took Place in Vancouver”), 中新网 (29 May 2018), <https://archive.vn/MlrU>.

### The Abduction of Canadian Citizens

There are precedents for the “two Michaels,” including **Sun Qian**, a Canadian citizen kidnapped during one of her trips to Beijing; another took place in a third country: **Huseyincan Celil**, a Uyghur imam who fled to Canada with his family in 2001 and obtained the Canadian citizenship. In 2006, as he visited the family of his spouse in Uzbekistan, he was **arrested by the Uzbek police and handed over to Chinese authorities**, who sentenced him to fifteen years in jail for terrorism. They branded him a member of the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, despite official protests from Canada.<sup>47</sup>

Beijing also adopted **trade sanctions**: they barred almost all Canadian exports of canola seeds, and seriously limited those of soy, peas, pork meat and beef. Finally, the aggravated situation of several Canadian citizens already detained by Beijing can also be interpreted as part of the Chinese response to the arrest of Meng: Robert Schellenberg, serving a fifteen-year sentence for drug trafficking, was suddenly **sentenced to death**, followed by Fan Wei, another Canadian, several months later.<sup>48</sup> Sun Qian, a Canadian member of Falun Gong who had been detained for three years, was subsequently sentenced to a particularly hefty eight years in prison.<sup>49</sup>

During this crisis, **the Chinese ambassador in Canada, Lu Shaye**, who became ambassador to France in July 2019, **showed notable aggressiveness**, on a par with his colleague in Stockholm (→ p. 523). Both were precursors of the so-called “wolf warrior” diplomacy described in part three (→ p. 222). For instance, in an op-ed published in January 2019 in the *Hill Times*, he attacked “Western egotism and white supremacy” and criticized what he called “double standards” because Canada was demanding the release of its two citizens detained in China as a retaliatory measure but refused to release Huawei’s CFO (who was in fact released on bail and whose rights were protected, unlike the two Canadian hostages in China).<sup>50</sup> He failed to convince however: public perception of China has dramatically worsened since the beginning of the crisis. A poll conducted between December 30 and January 5, 2019 showed that **more than 80% of Canadians viewed Chinese authorities negatively**.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, the publication of Jonathan Manthorpe’s book, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada*, in 2019, provoked a debate and contributed to a growing mistrust of Beijing among Canadian politicians and citizens. Overall, **revelations in recent years about espionage, influence operations, mass detention and even, according to some, a Uyghur genocide, along with the violent repression of pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong have, during this period, considerably damaged China’s image in Canada, as elsewhere in the world.**

As a consequence, Beijing hired a PR company to improve its image, as shown by **the Karen Woods case**. Karen Li Woods, a cofounder of the Canadian Chinese Political

47. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 29.

48. “China Sentences Second Canadian to Death,” *BBC News* (30 Apr. 2019).

49. Tom Blackwell, “Canadian Citizen Sentenced to Eight Years by China is Latest Victim of Huawei Feud, Beijing Lawyer Says,” *National Post* (30 Jun. 2020).

50. Lu Shaye, “China’s Ambassador: Why the Double Standard on Justice for Canadians, Chinese?” *The Hill Times* (9 Jan. 2019).

51. Robert Fife and Steven Chase, “Canadians Support Ottawa’s Decision to Arrest Huawei Executive, Poll Shows,” *The Globe and Mail* (8 Jan. 2019).



Affairs Committee (CCPAC), is a well-known commentator of Sino-Canadian relations, and she was all-the-more visible after Meng Wanzhou's arrest. She published a tribune in the *Toronto Star*, the most widely-read newspaper in the country, to explain that the Huawei case constituted "a dark cloud shrouding the psyche of many Chinese Canadians" and that people should be alert to the rise of "a new wave of Sino-Phobia."<sup>52</sup> But she failed to disclose that **her employer, the lobbying firm Solstice Public Affairs, listed the Chinese Consulate General in Toronto among its clients**, notably tasked with organizing meetings with Canadian congressmen to "promote various economic and cultural relations" between the two countries.<sup>53</sup> At the time, it was the sole known case of a foreign government hiring a private company in Canada to improve its image, something usually tasked to diplomats.<sup>54</sup> Following the ensuing polemic, the *Toronto Star* decided to add a "clarification" on her op-ed, disclosing the link tying the author to the Chinese General Consulate. Jonathan Manthorpe described the affair as "a good example of the vigilance needed not only by Chinese-Canadian communities, but [the] Canadian society in general to identify United Front operations, and the difficulties of being certain of the evidence."<sup>55</sup>

China's responsibility and behavior during **the Covid-19 pandemic continued to heighten tensions** in 2020. In April, the MP Erin O'Toole – who was elected leader of the Conservatives in August, thus the chief opponent to Justin Trudeau's government – said that **Canada was "on the brink of a new Cold War with China,"**<sup>56</sup> while Peter MacKay, another conservative, demanded that laws akin to the "Magnitsky Act" and others be used to target the Chinese responsible for the pandemic.<sup>57</sup>

That said, **these hardliners are opposed by supporters of appeasement with Beijing.** In June 2020, 19 eminent Canadians, including two former ministers of foreign affairs, Lloyd Axworthy and Lawrence Cannon, published an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau calling for the release of Meng Wanzhou – a unilateral end to the extradition process – to incite China to release the two Canadian hostages (the "two Michaels"). In fact, the letter insisted on the need to "**redefine the Canadian strategy toward China to avoid antagonizing it.**" Trudeau wasn't convinced and explained that "releasing Meng Wanzhou to resolve a short-term problem would endanger thousands of Canadians who travel to China and around the world by letting countries know that a government can have political influence over Canada by randomly arresting Canadians."<sup>58</sup> In other words, **yielding to the kidnappers' demands would encourage more kidnappings.** In another open letter published on September 18, 2020, a hundred anonymous former diplomats also called for the release of Meng in exchange for the "two Michaels."<sup>59</sup> In any case, the proponents of the transactional approach were successful, confirming the effectiveness of

52. Karen Woods, "Huawei Crisis Has Chinese Canadians Worried," *The Star* (18 Dec. 2018).

53. Anna Desmarais, "Lobby Wrap: Chinese Consulate Hires its First Lobbyist to Improve Relations," *iPOLITICS* (21 Aug. 2018).

54. Ian Young, "How China's Canadian Lobbyists Blurred the Lines of PR, Journalism and Political Activism," *South China Morning Post* (18 Apr. 2019).

55. Jonathan Manthorpe, "United Front Main 'Soft-Power' Tool for China's Governing Communist Party," *iPOLITICS* (21 Mar. 2019).

56. Erin O'Toole, "We are on the Brink of a New Cold War with China," *National Post* (23 Apr. 2020).

57. "Peter MacKay Suggests Magnitsky Act Should be Used Against China for COVID-19," *CTV News* (8 May 2020).

58. John Paul Tasker, "Trudeau Rejects Calls to Release Meng Wanzhou," *CBC News* (25 Jun. 2020).

59. Steven Chase and Robert Fife, "More than 100 ex-diplomats Urge Trudeau to Swap Meng for Kovrig and Spavor," *The Globe and Mail* (18 Sept. 2020).

the Chinese hostage diplomacy: the two Michaels were released on September 25, 2021 in exchange for the release of Meng Wanzhou (→ p. 411).

Separately, the **Uyghur question** has grown more prevalent in the Canadian public debate, with notable political consequences: on January 12, 2021, Canada, along with the United Kingdom, announced measures “to address human rights abuses in Xinjiang.”<sup>60</sup> Among the seven measures announced by the Canadian government are increased controls on exports to China and a ban on the import of forced labor goods. This move, while symbolic (unlike the British, the Canadians do not provide for financial sanctions against companies that do not comply with these rules), confirmed that the bilateral crisis, which is multi-faceted, is likely to last. David Vigneault, director of the CSIS, said as much on February 9, 2021, when he acknowledged that the Chinese government was “using all elements of state power to carry out activities that are a direct threat to our national security and sovereignty.” He mentioned the special **Chinese operation Fox Hunt** (猎狐专项行动), for instance, which, in the name of the fight against corruption, has been “used to target and quiet dissidents to the regime. [...] Those threatened often lack the resources to defend themselves or are unaware that they can report these activities to Canadian authorities, including us. Moreover, these activities are different from the norms of diplomatic activity because they cross the line by attempting to undermine our democratic processes or threaten our citizens in a covert and clandestine manner.”<sup>61</sup>

### III. The Efforts to Silent Dissenting Voices

**There are many well-documented cases of harassment and intimidation of Canadian citizens and residents that Beijing sees as dissidents or threats.** They mainly, but not exclusively, concern people closely tied to what the CCP considers as the five poisons (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong followers, pro-democracy and Taiwanese independentists).

In 2009, Fabrice de Pierrebourg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya already wrote that “for years, China’s main objective in Canada has been to control anything that is perceived as a dissent. Its intelligence services, along with its diplomats, spend time, energy and money discrediting or intimidating its opponents, conducting clandestine operations to infiltrate and manipulate pro-democracy, community and student groups.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, several affairs had previously underscored **the role of Chinese diplomats in the surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of a number of groups branded as dissidents**, especially Falun Gong members. In 2004, for example, the Chinese vice-Consul General in Toronto, Pan Xinchun, was convicted of defamation against a businessman tied to Falun Gong. Elsewhere, the police saw two members of the Chinese consulate in Calgary distributing “heinous literature,” during a conference at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton: two

60. Government of Canada, “Canada Announces New Measures to Address Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang, China,” press release (12 Jan. 2021); “UK Government Announces Business Measures Over Xinjiang Human Rights Abuses,” Gov.uk (12 Jan. 2021).

61. Remarks by Director David Vigneault to the Centre for International Governance Innovation, Ottawa (9 Feb. 2021), <https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/news/2021/02/remarks-by-director-david-vigneault-to-the-centre-for-international-governance-innovation.html>.

62. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 192.

pamphlets, including one with an explicit title (*Falun Gong is an evil cult*), “illustrated with bloody images of immolations, crimes and suicides.”<sup>63</sup>

In 2006, the visa of Wang Pengfei, Deputy Secretary to the Bureau of Education at the Chinese embassy in Ottawa, wasn’t renewed, and he was invited to leave Canada after it became known that he “was specifically tasked with documenting Falun Gong practitioners in Canada and making life difficult for them.”<sup>64</sup> Actually, he not-so-discretely relied on “the twenty or so Chinese student associations established in the country’s main universities,” as illustrated by an article published in 2004 by the *Chinese Scholar Abroad Magazine* in which he thanked the president of a UQAM student association for its “propaganda activities [...] and its brave and resourceful activities against Falun Gong.”<sup>65</sup>

In March 2017, the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China, to which Amnesty International belongs, released a report “to draw attention to **an organized and sustained campaign of intimidation and harassment aimed at activists working on China-related human rights issues in Canada, in circumstances suggesting the involvement or backing of Chinese government officials.**”<sup>66</sup> In an update released in March 2020, the same organizations concluded that, three years later, “**the situation is worsening, [...]: incidents of interference have become increasingly pervasive across different spheres of society, including a growing array of tactics and have expanded beyond traditional targets.**”<sup>67</sup>

## A. Systematic, Aggressive Counter-Demonstrations

The pro-democratic Hong Kong protests organized in Canada in 2019 nearly systematically led to **particularly aggressive pro-Beijing counter-demonstrations** that mobilized at least dozens (often hundreds) of protestors in cities (clashes occurred in Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa and Richmond, in British Columbia) and on campuses. But these demonstrations usually were not the “spontaneous actions of individuals.”<sup>68</sup> There was **evidence of “coordination and organization between [counter-] protesters and Chinese officials.**”<sup>69</sup> The counter-demonstrations usually begun **on WeChat**, with messages “suggesting that marchers should be followed, confronted and beaten up” – such as during the 2019 Montreal Pride. On that occasion, pro-Beijing demonstrators attacked LGBT marchers favorable to the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.<sup>70</sup>

Some pro-democracy demonstrators are sometimes intimidated, or even dissuaded, by an **invisible, more pernicious threat: photos of them could be shot** during demonstrations, then **identified**, in particular through **facial recognition** technologies and, once their identities are known to Beijing, there would be **consequences for them (risk of arrest if they travel to China) or for their relatives (pressure or intimidation of various kinds).**<sup>71</sup> Distance is no refuge here: even on the UBC campus, in Canada, pro-democracy

63. Ibid., 201.

64. Ibid., 199.

65. Ibid., 202.

66. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 2.

67. Ibid., 50.

68. Christopher Rea, quoted in Cheryl Chan, “‘Overseas Chinese’ Urged to be More Vocal in Support of Beijing, Says Chinese Cultural Historian,” *Vancouver Sun* (21 Aug. 2019).

69. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 3.

70. Ian Young, “Montreal Pride Expels Gay Hong Kong marchers, Blaming ‘Threats by pro-Communists’ to Sabotage Parade,” *South China Morning Post* (29 Aug. 2019).

71. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 27.

students wore masks to hide their identity when they demonstrated, like their counterparts in Hong Kong.<sup>72</sup>

## B. Targeted Campaigns of Harassment and Intimidation

The fate of actress **Sheng Xue** (her real name is Zang Xihong) is exemplary of such attacks. She fled China after Tian'anmen and settled in Canada in 1989 to study journalism. She subsequently remained there and became a writer and human rights activist. In 1996, she understood that Beijing had blacklisted her as she attempted to travel to China and was arrested, interrogated, and turned away at the airport.

In 2012, a month after receiving a medal from the Canadian government, she was elected president of the Federation for a Democratic China. From that moment on, she was targeted by **a systematic and very sophisticated slander campaign** that started the very day of her first conference as the president of the federation, in front of hundreds of persons that came from all over the world. As she was on stage, her colleagues received emails with – fake – naked pictures of her. More came later: **doctored images** of her naked were posted on Twitter and many stories on her purported unrestrained sexual life were relayed online by anonymous blogs. This organized campaign, which involved **fake accounts** on social networks pretending to be those of other pro-democracy activists, apparently sought **to create divisions within the movement**, and it succeeded: membership in the Federation for a Democratic China rapidly fell from 3000 to 100, as the group split into two organizations in 2017, and Sheng Xue resigned. When a Chinese-Canadian human rights lawyer, and friend of Sheng Xue, tried to gather evidence of this slander campaign in 2016, his computer was hacked and “all the documents disappeared.”<sup>73</sup>

There are many other, less publicized, examples that targeted leaders of the Hong Kong community in Canada, such as Cherie Wong, executive director of Alliance Canada HK. She claimed to have been targeted by “coordinated attacks on social networks,” including **rape and death threats**. Once more, **WeChat was used to incite hatred and to relay calls to harass the woman dubbed “Mrs. Hong Kong Independence”** by pro-Beijing activists. Cherie Wong received threatening calls, and explained that she had been followed and photographed while walking in Ottawa.<sup>74</sup> Gloria Fung, president of Canada-Hong Kong Link, was presumably victim of the same intimidation techniques.<sup>75</sup>

These techniques are neither recent nor limited to the events in Hong Kong. Phone calls, often in the middle of the night, are a common means of intimidation. These messages, often pre-recorded, include insults, sometimes death threats, or play nationalistic songs praising the Party.<sup>76</sup> In September 2010, Tao Wang, a NTDTV reporter who had settled in Canada three years earlier, disclosed to the press that he had received **phone calls from MSS agents uttering death threats**.<sup>77</sup> Owner of a company in China, he explained that his clients there had been visited by MSS agents telling them that he “was taking part to ille-

72. Marie-Danielle Smith, “In the Battle Over Hong Kong, the Surveillance State Knows no Boundaries,” *Maclean's* (3 Feb. 2020).

73. Catherine Porter, “Chinese Dissidents Feel Heat of Beijing’s Wrath. Even in Canada,” *The New York Times* (1 Apr. 2019).

74. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 30.

75. *Ibid.*, 30.

76. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 22.

77. Andrea Woo, “RCMP Probing Death Threat,” *Regina Leader-Post* (23 Sept. 2010).



INTRODUCTION

gal activities in Canada that were damaging to the national security of China, and they asked them to cease doing business with [his] company.” When he refused to sign a written statement barring him from taking part to political activities in Canada, Tao received another, more threatening, phone call: “they told me **‘do you seriously think that we can’t do anything to you because you are in Canada?’**” Or, “if you speak publicly, you’re playing with death.” That same day, his company’s bank accounts were frozen in China and his ten employees threatened with unemployment. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police investigated this case.

CONCEPTS

Similarly, in May 2016, the Toronto-based writer Xin Feng published on the Chinese-speaking website *sinophone51.ca* an article critical of the Chinese minister of foreign affairs, Wang Yi, during the latter’s visit to Canada. He was subsequently victim of a campaign of hatred. Among the many comments posted below his article, one could read: “**Be careful that your whole family does not get killed**, be careful when you walk outside!” or **‘Butcher this pig. He’s an animal, not a human.’**”<sup>78</sup>

### C. Family and Friends in China Used as Leverage

ACTORS

It is well known that **an effective way to get someone to give in is the indirect strategy of threatening to harm their loved ones**. And it is even easier when they live in China. The threats are varied: they risk losing their jobs, being arrested, assaulted, or even – in the case of the Uyghurs in particular – simply disappearing.

ACTIONS

Anastasia Lin’s case is well-known because she is a Chinese-born celebrity who immigrated to Canada at age 13, became a recognized actress and model, won the 2015 Miss World Canada pageant and now works as a human rights advocate. In a profile by *The Washington Post*, she explained how her father, the CEO of an important Chinese company, received threats and how, “no doubt fearing for his livelihood and business,” he asked her to cease being an activist.<sup>79</sup> **Chinese authorities wielded both the stick** (they confiscated her father’s passport, revoked her family’s visas to visit Hong Kong) **and the carrot** (they brought baskets of fruits and flowers to her grandparents hoping that they could convince her to keep quiet).<sup>80</sup>

CASE

**Coercing relatives is very commonly used against Uyghurs**. One night in 2004, Mehmet Tohti, the president of the Uyghur Canadian Association, received a phone call from his mother, who lived in Kargilik, in Xinjiang, and whom he had not seen since he fled China sixteen years earlier. His mother quickly passed him on to a man who identified himself as an officer from the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs. He enjoined him to stop defending the Uyghur cause in Canada and to avoid taking part to a conference planned in Germany with other groups of exiled Uyghurs. He added that he **held his brother and mother** in the police headquarters in Kasghar – from where they called – some 300 kilometers away from their home, and that **he could ultimately do “whatever [he] want[ed]” with them**.<sup>81</sup>

78. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 182.

79. Anastasia Lin, “I Won Miss World Canada. But my Work Puts my Father at Risk in China,” *The Washington Post* (6 Jun. 2015).

80. Tara Francis Chan, “China Uses Threats About Relatives at Home to Control and Silence Expats and Exiles Abroad,” *Business Insider France* (31 Jul. 2018).

81. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 29.

Elsewhere, a Uyghur refugee in Montreal told a journalist: “I received a Facebook message telling me that the Chinese government had arrested my mother, my brother, and my father. During their transfer to jail, my mother had a heart attack. My sister was incarcerated in a special prison where prisoners were tied up in a cell full of water. [Then,] I received another message telling me that my father had died. No one in my family was authorized to attend the funeral. Only six Chinese officials were there.”<sup>82</sup> The Uyghur community in France speaks of similar tactics: “We receive phone calls during which we are told that they know everything about our family and that, if we say bad things about the government, something bad will happen to them....”<sup>83</sup>

## D. Permanent Surveillance

The members of the tiny Uyghur community in Montreal have repeatedly explained that they feel under permanent surveillance. One of them added that they have all “received strange phone calls from the Chinese embassy. A prerecorded message tells them to go pick up a package at the Chinese embassy immediately. We never go because we know that there is not anything to pick up there. Once, I checked the phone number on Google and found that it was the number of the Chinese consulate in Texas, and not the one in Toronto as told in the message. Sometimes, they use fake numbers. I think **they want us to know that, even if we live abroad, they can control us and gather information on us.**”<sup>84</sup> Another said that his car was robbed, his official documents ostensibly stolen, that he was taken in tail from his home by “a Chinese person” and that, ultimately, that kind of things happens “very often.”<sup>85</sup> Even in France, Uyghurs feel under permanent surveillance: “when we protest, there is always someone filming to spy on us.”<sup>86</sup>

## E. Cyberattacks

Chinese has well-known cyber offensive capabilities. In 2018, at a seminar on cybersecurity, the text of CSIS Director Vigneault’s speech presented China as “one of the biggest threats facing our countries” in this area (“one of” was truncated in the transcript, meaning that China was presented as *the* greatest threat).<sup>87</sup> **On top of recurring attacks against state institutions and large companies – retaliation or espionage – Beijing knows how to use its cyber capabilities against identified dissidents.** In June 2013, for instance, Canadian Tibetan organizations received an email allegedly

82. “Les Ouïghours de Montréal sous pression” (“Uyghurs in Montreal Are Under Pressure”), *Radio Canada*, ICI Première, Désautels le dimanche (26 Jan. 2020).

83. Farida Nouar, “‘Les consommateurs ont du sang sur les mains:’ le travail forcé des Ouïghours derrière les articles ‘made in China’” (“‘Consumers Have Blood in their Hands:’ Forced Uyghur Labor behind ‘Made in China’ Goods”), *France Info* (3 Feb. 2021).

84. The Chinese consulate in Houston, which was closed down by American authorities on July 23, 2020, was known as a “nest of spies” tasked with intimidating dissidents, among others things. See U.S. Embassy in Georgia, “China’s Houston Consulate a Center of Malign Activity,” <https://ge.usembassy.gov/chinas-houston-consulate-a-center-of-malign-activity/>. Hence, it is not unconceivable that some of its activities were conducted throughout North America – including Canada – and not solely in the United States.

85. “Les Ouïghours de Montréal sous pression.”

86. Nouar, “Les consommateurs ont du sang sur les mains.”

87. Douglas Quan, “‘Significant and Clear’ Threat: What Canada’s Spy Chief Says about China behind Closed Doors,” *National Post* (13 Aug. 2019) (for all the quotes in this paragraph).

sent by a known member of the community, through a mailing list, with three Word documents (.doc) attached to it. Citizen Lab, a laboratory at the Munk School of Global Affairs of the University of Toronto, determined that these documents contained a malware of the “Surtr” family which had been used against the Tibetan community since at least November 2012. Once activated, this spying software is capable – among other things – to record keystrokes on a keyboard, explore the content of the infected computer, and execute commands at a distance. Analysts concluded that “**attackers actively monitor mailing lists and discussion groups used by the Tibetan community and repurpose the content for use in targeted malware attacks.**”<sup>88</sup>

This is not an exception: Citizen Lab presented similar cases in a report published the following year.<sup>89</sup> According to one of the Tibetan groups targeted by several of these attacks, at least a few of them are attributable to the infamous **APT1, known as PLA Unit 61398**.<sup>90</sup> On March 24, 2021, Facebook announced it had blocked another group of Chinese hackers, known as “**Earth Empusa,**” or “**Evil Eye,**” which – hidden behind fake identities (human rights activists, students, journalists, etc.) – used the social network to approach, and then infect, the computers of their targets, Uyghurs, by sending them **links to booby-trapped websites** (containing viruses or malwares) some of which looked like Uyghur media. Most of the targeted Uyghurs lived abroad, in Canada for instance (but also in Turkey, Kazakhstan, in the United States, Syria or Australia as well).<sup>91</sup>

## F. Identity Thefts

Attackers sent **insulting emails to MPs and government officers while impersonating Falun Gong members to discredit them.**<sup>92</sup> This is a common practice not limited to Canada, as explained by a member of the Canadian association of Falun Gong: “Government officials at all levels in numerous countries have been systematically and repeatedly targeted by fraudulent emails from persons claiming to be Falun Gong practitioners. The emails often portray the sender as obsessive, irrational, and rude, thus lending legitimacy to the Chinese regime’s claims that Falun Gong is a menace to society [...] Some of the emails have been traced to IP addresses originating in China.”<sup>93</sup> In Canada, such offensive – sometimes threatening – emails were sent by individuals introducing themselves as Falun Gong members to politicians, including to MPs Judy Sgro in December 2017 and Peter Julian in March 2019.<sup>94</sup>

88. Katie Kleemola and Seth Hardy, *Surtr: Malware Family Targeting the Tibetan Community*, The Citizen Lab (2 Aug. 2013).

89. *Communities @ Risk: Targeted Digital Threats against Civil Society*, Citizen Lab Report No. 48, University of Toronto (Nov. 2014).

90. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 18.

91. Mike Dvilyanski and Nathaniel Gleicher, “Taking Action against Hackers in China,” *Facebook* (24 Mar. 2021), <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/03/taking-action-against-hackers-in-china/>.

92. *Ibid.*, 21.

93. Limin Zhou, “Fake Letter Sent in Trudeau’s Name Not Isolated Case in China’s Disinformation Campaign,” *The Epoch Times* (7 May 2019).

94. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 46.

## G. Travel restrictions

Several Canadian activists were denied a Chinese visa, or were arrested, detained and intimidated in Chinese airports – and ultimately “forced to leave China despite entering the country legitimately.”<sup>95</sup> In 2019, Chinese-born Canadian politician Richard Lee revealed that, in 2015, when he was a MP and vice-president of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, he was detained by Chinese authorities after landing at Shanghai Airport. He was kept away from his wife for eight hours, his professional phone (property of the government of British Columbia) confiscated and hacked, and they called him a “threat to the national security” of China.<sup>96</sup> They eventually cancelled his visa and sent him back to Canada. His case shows that Beijing can turn its surveillance and counter-measures against any Canadian citizen or resident, whatever their status may be. Indeed, Lee was not an activist, but an elected official who did not hesitate to defend the democratic and liberal values of his country, Canada. He commemorates the Tian’anmen massacre every year for instance – something that may have angered Chinese authorities (the Chinese consul in Vancouver, Liu Fei, had told him as much, directly and through his Liberal Party). **The fact that even an MP, vice-president of a provincial legislative assembly, could be targeted really means, as he acknowledged it, that “it could happen to anyone.”**<sup>97</sup>

## H. Conclusion

To sum up, **“the attacks range from abusive midnight phone calls to character assassinations in social media, intimidation of Chinese students attending Canadian colleges and universities, holding hostage in China the family members of Canadian dissidents, and hacking the communications networks of dissident groups [...]. In all cases, however, the aim is to smother the voices of dissent in Canada, either by intimidating Canadians into silence or by so discrediting them that what they say or do no longer has public or political impact.”**<sup>98</sup>

According to Hao Fengjun, a former agent who “defected” from the 610 Office (610 办公室), an entity fighting against Falun Gong (→ p. 78), the CCP **operates an anti-Falun Gong spying network of more than one thousand agents in Canada** – Chinese Canadians recruited in Canada, professional agents from China, businesspersons and students – with activities seemingly concentrated in Vancouver and Toronto.<sup>99</sup> According to Zhang Jiyan, the wife of an accountant at the Chinese embassy in Ottawa who, in 2007, “defected” and sought asylum in Canada, the embassy had, at the time, “a special unit of about ten people ‘in charge of collecting information on groups that could present a threat, especially on Falun Gong practitioners.’”<sup>100</sup> She added that they **infiltrated Tai-chi and Qigong clubs** to find them. She also explained that the unit produced “material inciting hatred against Falun Gong” transmitted by the ambassador himself to “members of parlia-

95. Ibid., 3.

96. Sam Cooper, “B.C. Politician Breaks Silence: China Detained Me, is Interfering ‘in Our Democracy,’” *Global News* (29 Nov. 2019).

97. Ibid.

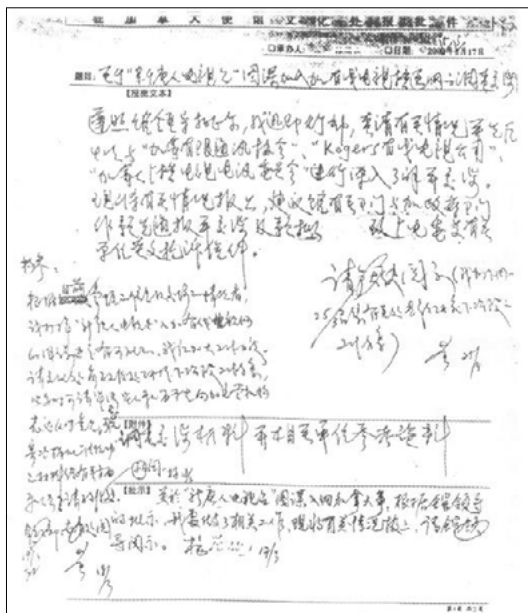
98. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 13-14.

99. Ibid., 22.

100. De Pierrebouurg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d’ailleurs*, 210.



ment, officers in the Canadian government, and to the former Governor General.” Zhang Jiyan also disclosed a confidential memo (see below) to the press stating that one of the goals of this unit “was to use members of the diaspora and students to block the licensing of the Mandarin-language television station New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) by sending petitions and letters of protest. [...] Pressure was also put on a Canadian cable company to discourage it from providing NTDTV to its subscribers.”<sup>101</sup> Zhang Jiyan was eventually granted refugee status in Canada.



Confidential note produced by Zhang Jiyan in 2007. She stated that it had been written by “a member of the embassy and detailed the pressure carried out by Beijing agents to prevent the broadcast in Canada of a television channel of the Falun Gong” (source: archives of Fabrice de Pierrebouurg and Michel Juneau-Katsuya).<sup>102</sup>

**The overseas representatives of Beijing, here its ambassador and consuls in Canada, are directly involved in the intimidation campaigns** because they themselves pen letters to members of government, elected officials, media outlets asking them to avoid any contact with such and such groups labeled as dissidents. In 2005, for instance, following the announcement of an imminent visit of the Dalai-lama, Chinese Consul General in Toronto Chen Xiaoling personally wrote a “warning letter” to 44 city councilors asking them to “neither authorize, nor facilitate” the visit, unless they did not want to maintain good relations with China.<sup>103</sup> “Most of these letters concludes with a not-so-subtle warning. [One] coarse strategy, which can be assimilated to harassment because of its magnitude.”<sup>104</sup>

Canada is but one example: **similar cases testifying to the harassment and intimidation methods used against human rights activists have been documented in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand for example**<sup>105</sup> – in other words, in all the liberal democratic countries with a significant Chinese diaspora. As we saw in the previous part, **Beijing set up the largest transnational repression campaign in the world** (→ p. 166).

101. Ibid., 211.

102. Ibid., 212.

103. Ibid., 215.

104. Ibid., 215.

105. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 7-8.

## IV. A Chinese Willingness to Influence Politics

### A. Politicians under influence

Beijing keeps close tabs on foreign politicians with Chinese roots: a training manual for executives of the United Front “notes approvingly the success of overseas Chinese candidates in elections in Toronto, Canada. In 2003, six were elected from 25 candidates but by 2006 the number jumped to 10 elected from among 44 candidates.”<sup>106</sup> And the CCP does not stop at observing a situation, it acts on it.

#### 1. MPs and Ministers

The then-CSIS director, Richard Fadden, caused a commotion in 2010, the day before president Hu Jintao was set to land in Ottawa for an official visit, when he deplored that “**there are several municipal politicians in British Columbia and in at least two provinces there are ministers of the Crown who we think are under at least the general influence of a foreign government.**” He believed that they weren’t conscious of being used but, nonetheless, their close ties with the said-government ended up “shifting their public policies” over the years.<sup>107</sup> Fadden did not mention China but his speech was largely interpreted as targeting Beijing implicitly, so much so that a parliamentary committee demanded that the government “apologize[s] to the Chinese Canadian community.”<sup>108</sup>

In 2015, an article in *The Globe and Mail* disclosed that one of the ministers targeted by Fadden five years earlier was **Michael Chan**, minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade in Ontario.<sup>109</sup> In response, the Canadian Chinese community organized a defense of the minister, with help from Beijing. Helen Wang, editor-in-chief of the *Chinese Canadian Post*, reported that the Chinese consulate in Toronto pressured the newspaper to publish more articles defending Chan. It also asked them to participate in a press conference with the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations (which president, Wei Chengyi, was none other than the newspaper’s owner) to demand an apology from the *Globe and Mail*. But Helen Wang was eventually fired, and Michael Chan invited to write a weekly column for the *Chinese Canadian Post*, a newspaper so tightly aligned with the CCP that it was previously named the *Red Army Post* and printed in Beijing.<sup>110</sup> More recently, in August 2019, Chan intervened during a pro-Beijing event and denounced the protests in Hong Kong. This event, as many others in Canada and in Australia, was probably organized with some support from the CCP, and some participants were paid (\$100) to attend.<sup>111</sup>

106. James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, “Inside China’s Secret ‘Magic Weapon’ For Worldwide Influence,” *Financial Times* (26 Oct. 2017).

107. David Ljunggren, “Foreigners Influencing Canada Politics – Spy Chief,” Reuters (23 Jun. 2010).

108. Report on Canadian Security Intelligence Service Director Richard Fadden’s Remarks Regarding Alleged Foreign Influence of Canadian Politicians, Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Kevin Sorenson, MP (chair) (Mar. 2011), 6, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/403/SECU/Reports/RP5019118/securp08/securp08-e.pdf>.

109. Craig Offman, “CSIS Warned This Cabinet Minister Could be a Threat. Ontario Disagreed,” *The Globe and Mail* (16 Jun. 2015).

110. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 181.

111. Tom Blackwell, “Former Ontario Liberal Cabinet Minister Headlines Pro-Beijing Rally Near Toronto,” *National Post* (22 Aug. 2019).

To seduce Canadian politicians, as with economic or intellectual figures, Beijing notoriously offers **trips to China, all expenses paid**. Local politicians are targeted, under the pretext of exchanges between municipalities and for the development of commercial relations between the regions, but also members of parliament. **Between 2006 and 2017, MPs from the Senate and the Commons took a total of 36 trips to China**. Many of them were financed by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), a United Front organization. On its own, the Liberal MP **John McCallum** took trips worth CA\$73,300 (€47,600) between 2008 and 2015, all paid by the Chinese government or pro-Beijing groups such as the Canadian Confederation of Fujian Associations.<sup>112</sup> McCallum later became minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (2015-2017) and was appointed ambassador to China. As he was nominated, he stressed his proximity to the country, noting his wife's Chinese roots and his electoral district, Markham, in the suburbs of Toronto, which had a majority of electors of Chinese descent.<sup>113</sup> In Beijing, in January 2018, as he welcomed the Quebecois prime minister, ambassador McCallum started a controversy when he declared that "in some important policy areas such as the environment, global warming, free trade, globalization, the policies of the government of Canada are closer to the policies of the government of China than they are to U.S. policies."<sup>114</sup> Similarly, in January 2019, in the midst of the Huawei scandal, ambassador McCallum started another controversy when he publicly opposed the extradition of Meng to the United States, providing Chinese media outlets with arguments helping out the defense of Meng. Likewise, he endorsed a "deal" between the United States and China to free the two Michaels (→ p. 546). Several days later, Prime Minister Trudeau asked for, and received, his resignation.<sup>115</sup> Chinese media outlets subsequently criticized Trudeau's decision, which the *Global Times* described as "political interference."<sup>116</sup> As James Palmer, who worked at the *Global Times* for seven years, explained, China's disappointment confirmed that its leaders **"clearly saw McCallum as an asset, as somebody who they very successfully wooed through this program."**<sup>117</sup> It took until September to announce a replacement, and the Canadian embassy in China was led for seven months by a "mere" chargé d'affaires.

The previously mentioned figure of 36 trips to China between 2006 and 2017 only accounts for the trips publicized by MPs, who are bound to disclose any trip paid for by a third party – as with any gift. But Senator **Victor Oh** was sanctioned by the Office of the Senate Ethics Officer because he had not disclosed a two-week trip to Beijing and to the Chinese province of Fujian in April 2017.<sup>118</sup> In December 2019, Senator Oh also attended an event in Toronto celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC, and which was co-or-

112. Robert Fife, Steven Chase, and Xiao Xu, "Beijing Foots Bill for Canadian Senators, MPs to Visit China," *The Globe and Mail* (1 Dec. 2017).

113. Catharine Tunney, "John McCallum Fired as Ambassador to China amid Diplomatic Crisis," *CBC News* (27 Jan. 2019).

114. Robert Fife and Steven Chase, "Trudeau Defends Ambassador under Fire for China Trade Comments," *The Globe and Mail* (25 Jan. 2018).

115. Catharine Tunney, "John McCallum Fired as Ambassador to China amid Diplomatic Crisis," *CBC News* (27 Jan. 2019).

116. "Resignation Reveals Political Interference," *Global Times* (27 Jan. 2019).

117. Perrin Grauer, "John McCallum Fell Victim to Beijing's 'Influence Campaign,' Say Former Ambassadors," *The Star* (29 Jan. 2019).

118. Robert Fife and Steven Chase, "Senator Broke Ethics Rules by Accepting Free Travel to China," *The Globe and Mail* (18 Feb. 2020).

ganized by Lin Xingyong, who, several months before, was one of the delegates to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing.<sup>119</sup>



Senator Oh intervened at an event celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC in December 2019.<sup>120</sup>

### The MP Vincent Ke

In 2018, Vincent Ke became the first immigrant from mainland China to be elected MP with the Progressive Conservative Party and to seat in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. His past is not very well known (he refused to answer questions from the *National Post* when it prepared a long profile on him<sup>121</sup>) except that he was born in Quanzhou (China), and that he was a student “cadre” at Fuzhou University (according to Alex Joske, student “cadres” “often act as informants to monitor students and lecturers for politically questionable behavior”<sup>122</sup>). He later moved to Beijing and was selected as an “outstanding young person” by the Haidian District (a title that “would likely be administered by the Communist Youth League and given to someone on a ‘fast track’ for party membership,” according to Charles Burton).<sup>123</sup> Ke later studied in Germany, at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum where he “participated in the work of organizing the Ruhr region Chinese overseas students society”<sup>124</sup> (which seemsto be the local CSSA → p. 280). In 1998, he immigrated to Canada and settled in Ontario. Having to justify himself on his professional past, he declared that he worked as an electronic engineer for the German company Conec (which had a factory in Shanghai) between 1999 and 2018 in Brampton – even though the professional association of Ontario engineers couldn’t confirm it because he had never been registered.<sup>125</sup> He was, however, registered as an insurance salesman. In 2013, he was selected by the Chinese consulate in Toronto to receive one week of training in China, the 14<sup>th</sup> Chinese Overseas

119. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1203841550674989062](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1203841550674989062)

120. “庆祝中华人民共和国成立七十周年图片展今日隆重开幕” (“The Photo Exhibit Celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the PRC’s Founding Opens Today”), 传奇文化 (*The Legends Magazine*) (8 Dec. 2019).

121. Alex Joske, quoted in Tom Blackwell, “MPP’s Ties to China Raise Questions about How Close Canadian Politicians Should Get to Foreign Powers,” *National Post* (6 Sept. 2019).

122. Ibid.

123. Charles Burton, quoted in Tom Blackwell, “MPP’s Ties to China.”

124. Blackwell, “MPP’s Ties to China.”

125. Blackwell, “Regulator Looks at Ontario MPP after Accusations He Improperly Claimed to be An Engineer,” *The Chatham Daily News* (19 Sept. 2019).



Societies Youth and Middle-aged Immigrant Leader's Research Training organized by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) – which became part of the UFWD in 2018. Since he was elected MP in 2018, Ke seems to have maintained “a close relationship with the consulate and Beijing-leaning groups like the Toronto Confederation of Chinese Canadian Organizations.”<sup>126</sup> He was the only MP to take part to the inauguration of the new pro-Beijing Tibetan association that got notorious for being linked to a fake Justin Trudeau letter (→ p. 575).<sup>127</sup>



14<sup>th</sup> Chinese Overseas Societies Youth and Middle-aged Immigrant Leader's Research Training.<sup>128</sup>

## 2. Municipal politicians

“Municipal politicians are often the prime target,” according to Stephanie Carvin, an academic and former analyst at the CSIS.<sup>129</sup> They are indeed more accessible and discrete targets. And there are occasions when many of them can be hooked at once, such as during the **annual convention of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM)**, that brings together 190 regional and municipal districts, as well as 8 First Nations of British Columbia. In 2012, the Consul General in Vancouver, Liu Fei, decided to organize an invitation-only reception during the event, which eventually became a tradition – so much so that, some years, the consulate was not only a sponsor but the main co-sponsor of the convention, along with the provincial government of British Columbia.<sup>130</sup> **China was the only foreign government to sponsor the UBCM.** That said, it ended in 2019 as the Huawei scandal and the worsening of the bilateral relation made China less socially acceptable, and several mayors, including Brad West (Port Coquitlam) condemned the sponsorship. In a letter to the UBCM executive members, West explained, for instance, that collaborating with the PRC “brings the UBCM into disrepute and reflects horribly on all members” because “the Government of China is engaged in a number of actions that are hostile to our country’s interests and the interests of every Canadian, and are completely at odds with our values, the rule of law and the very principles that we were all elected to uphold.” He gave three exam-

126. Blackwell, “MPP’s ties to China.”

127. Tom Blackwell, “Activists Say New Canadian Group Supporting China’s Control of Tibet is a Front for Beijing,” *National Post* (24 Apr. 2019).

128. The picture was taken from this now-inactive web page: <http://116.62.246.242:8087/NewsDetail.php?id=319>.

129. Joanna Chiu, “‘Prime Targets’: Are Canada’s Local Politicians in the Sights of Beijing’s Global PR Machine?” *The Star* (8 Aug. 2020).

130. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 256.

ples: the two kidnapped Michaels, repression in Hong Kong, and Uyghur detention in camps.<sup>131</sup> UBCM eventually yielded and barred foreign governments from sponsoring future events.<sup>132</sup>



Consul General Liu Fei and executive members of the UBCM at the consulate in Vancouver (26 Nov. 2018).<sup>133</sup>

For Jonathan Manthorpe, “the aim of the CCP’s diplomats is clearly to turn social relationships with B.C. municipal officials and politicians into ones where the Canadians feel a sense of obligation.”<sup>134</sup> And some deliver quite well. For instance, **Al Richmond**, a former regional president in British Columbia, who was UBCM vice-president in 2012, became a friend to China. He actually acknowledged having grown closer to the Chinese government over the years “with the goal of facilitating trade, tourism and business connections” for his constituents.<sup>135</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020, he told Xinhua that China was “successful in containing the virus” and that Ottawa could learn a lot from Beijing. With its enormous global firepower, Xinhua catapulted this otherwise unremarkable comment from an obscure local politician to the global stage. In June 2019, in the midst of the Huawei case, Xinhua quoted the same Al Richmond in an article untitled “Canadian small Internet suppliers like to use Huawei technology: local official.”<sup>136</sup>

This CCP interest in local Canadian politics is now well known and has led to several testimonials, including that of **Alan Harris**, who recounted how, while running for municipal office in Clarington, Ontario in 2018, he had been approached by the Canada China Industry Promotion Association. This organization invited him to Xining, China, to enhance their “friendship” but also to talk about investment and trade – a tempting proposal for this rural, poorly connected municipality in need of infrastructure. This time it didn’t work out because Harris was already aware of the dangers of Chinese influence. “I knew enough to ignore the email, but how many candidates across this country replied?”<sup>137</sup>

131. “PoCo Mayer Brad West’s Letter to UBCM Executive,” Scribd, <https://bit.ly/3ara2o2>.

132. Chiu, “Prime Targets.”

133. “Consul General LIU Fei Met with UBCM Executive Members,” Consulate General of the PRC in Vancouver (1 Dec. 2015), <https://archive.vn/isa2Y>.

134. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 257.

135. Chiu, “Prime Targets.”

136. “Canadian Small Internet Suppliers Like to Use Huawei Technology: Local Official,” *Xinhua*, China.org.cn (26 Jun. 2019).

137. Alan Harris, “Running for Municipal Office, I was Targeted by China,” *The Star* (24 Aug. 2020).

## B. Elections under influence

**Electoral interference is harder in Canada strictly speaking** than it was in Australia and New Zealand before they adopted measures against it, and for two reasons. First, a great deal of influence materializes through money, and Canada has adopted stricter regulations on contributions to political parties, with an \$1,000 annual individual limit. Then, the Chinese in Canada are not too interested in politics compared to other communities, such as Indians, who are very politicized for they share an appetite for democracy with Canadians. Now, that could change because Chinese newcomers in Canada are more politically active than their parents and grandparents.

**That said, there are cases of Chinese electoral interference in Canada.** In Australia, like in Canada, this risk is inversely proportional to the level of education: elites are informed and politically conscious but, locally, the working-class population is vulnerable. This is the reason why **Ottawa fears local elections more than parliamentary elections.** In 2014, Michel Juneau-Katsuya, a former head of the Asia-Pacific Office at the CSIS, noted that “CSIS found evidence that **the Chinese Consulate in Toronto was directly interfering in elections**, by sending Chinese students into the homes of Chinese-language-only households and telling residents which candidate the Consulate wanted voters to choose.”<sup>138</sup>

**The Chinese embassy uses local media outlets, but also money, to support certain candidates during local elections**, hoping to rally Chinese communities on a pro-Beijing platform. They target communities where the density of Chinese Canadians is important enough to have an electoral impact, in the **Richmond-Center district of Vancouver**, for instance, where more than half (54%) of the population has Chinese roots.<sup>139</sup> Richmond is the “**most Chinese city in the world outside of Asia.**”<sup>140</sup> In this district, the Chinese consulate is regularly accused of endorsing candidates with a Chinese background.

The Richmond-based **Canada Wenzhou Friendship Society** is an organization created in 2001, ostensibly to help newly-arrived Chinese migrants. It is also a member of the Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, a platform of more than 100 associations with the common objective of building a stronger Chinese-Canadian relationship (the group is known to be tied to Chinese authorities). In October 2018, the Society drew attention when it offered CAN\$26,000 (€16,900) to eight candidates<sup>141</sup> and encouraged voters – through its WeChat group – to vote for specific candidates with a Chinese background in the districts of Richmond, Vancouver and Burnaby, in exchange of a financial retribution – \$20 offered as a “transportation subsidy.”<sup>142</sup>

138. Sam Cooper, “Is China Influencing B.C.’s politicians? Court case, CSIS documents suggest pressure to suppress Falun Gong protests,” *The Province* (14 Sept. 2014).

139. According to the official statistics of the 2016 census available on the Statistics Canada website.

140. Ian Young, “‘I Love My Homeland’: Canadian School under Fire after Screening Trailers for Patriotic Chinese Film ‘My People, My Country’ to Mandarin pupils,” *South China Morning Post* (25 Oct. 2019).

141. Bob Mackin, “Update: Vancouver City Hall Refers WeChat Vote-Buying Scheme to Police,” *The Breaker* (11 Oct. 2018).

142. Jenny Peng, “Vancouver Society at Centre of Vote-Buying Allegations Has Ties to Chinese Government,” *The Star* (16 Oct. 2018).



On the left, David Teng (滕达), a founding member of the Canada Wenzhou Friendship Society, as he made a donation to James Wang, city councillor of Burnaby, BC.<sup>143</sup>

## V. An Influence on Media Outlets

Beijing's global takeover of Chinese-language media outlets – North America included – is a problem that has been known for some time.<sup>144</sup> Nowadays, **nearly all Chinese-language outlets in Canada are controlled by the CCP**: all that remains for Chinese-Canadians hoping to read information not censored by the CCP are Falun Gong-aligned outlets (the newspaper *The Epoch Times* and the TV channel New Tang Dynasty (NTDTV)), which can't be described as models of professionalism.<sup>145</sup> And both are restricted by Chinese (which, for instance, cancelled the visas initially granted to their journalists covering the visit of PM Paul Martin in China in 2005) and Canadian authorities, trying to avoid angering Beijing (when Hu Jintao visited Ottawa in 2005, *The Epoch Times* and NTDTV were denied access to the events; and during a second visit in 2010 as well).<sup>146</sup>

To model journalism in Chinese to its own image, the CCP uses its traditional tools: **the carrot (encouraging newspapers to censor themselves in exchange of business benefits) and the stick (intimidating, threatening, harassing, pressuring relatives in China, firing journalists who resist this pressure, or putting an end to programs deemed dissident)**. The CCP also tries to supervise and **train** journalists, in Canada (a local United Front organization based in Vancouver, the International New Media Cooperation Organization (国际新媒体合作组织), convened pro-Beijing Chinese-language outlets from North America in 2014)<sup>147</sup> or in China (numerous Canadian outlets participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Overseas Chinese New Media Forum in Hangzhou in May 2018. The deputy director

143. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1050970653430505472](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1050970653430505472).

144. See Mei Duzhe, "How China's Government is Attempting to Control Chinese Media in America," *China Brief*, 1:10 (21 Nov. 2001).

145. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 173.

146. *Ibid.*, 176-177.

147. The International New Media Cooperation Organization's headquarter is listed at 1555, 22 Street West, in Vancouver (<https://www.ic.gc.ca/app/scr/cc/CorporationsCanada/fdrlCrpDtls.html?corpId=9110283>). The address is shared with the headquarters of the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Foundations, the World Chinese Weekly Publishing Company, the World Anti-Fascism War Memorialwebsite Cooperation, and of the KF Times Group.



of the UFWD, Tan Tianxing (谭天星), was a keynote speaker at the event and the outlets “signed the Hangzhou Declaration (杭州宣言), a pledge to uphold ‘Xi Jinping Thought in the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想), strengthen the Chinese nation, advance the Belt and Road Initiative, and use their influence as media to spread ‘positive energy’ in Canada”).<sup>148</sup> In May 2019, several Canadian media, including the Ontario-based CCTVmedium (加拿大视传媒), *Chinese Canadian Times* (加中时报), and *New Start Times* (星星文化传媒集团) attended a training in Beijing with 88 media in Chinese from thirty countries, once again led by Tan Tianxing.<sup>149</sup>



On the left, an intervention by the deputy director of the UFWD, Tan Tianxing, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Overseas Chinese New Media Forum, in Hangzhou, in May 2018.<sup>150</sup> On the right, a training for foreign media outlets in Beijing, in May 2019, under the guidance of Tan Tianxing.<sup>151</sup>

**Journalists who do not play by the rules are systematically dismissed.** For example, the Vancouver journalist Huang Hebian (黄河边) (his real name is Gao Bingchen) was a columnist for one of the most widely-circulated Chinese-language Canadian newspapers, the Burnaby-based *Global Chinese Press* (British Columbia), for over a decade. But, after Huang published three critical messages on a personal social media account in June 2016, one targeting Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, the other Ontario minister Michael Chan, the newspaper was pressured into firing Huang.<sup>152</sup> In 2017, its editor-in-chief, Lei Jin, was also fired because he wrote, and tried to publish, an obituary of the academic, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize Liu Xiaobo, who died in a Chinese jail.<sup>153</sup> Another example: Kenneth Yau, host of the Chinese-language station Fairchild Radio in Ontario, was fired in October 2019 for being too critical of China: the week before, he had asked a guest how he could be “100% Canadian” and respect the CCP at the same time. The station received numerous complaints from pro-China listen-

148. UFWD YVR, “Reds vs. Reds: CCP Political Warfare in Canada in 2018,” A Piping hot Canadian tea publication, medium.com (31 Dec. 2018).

149. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1131948011615973376](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1131948011615973376).

150. “[图文快报] 第三届海外华文新媒体高峰论坛杭州启航 凝聚华媒正能量 助力传播中国新时代声音” (“The 3<sup>rd</sup> Overseas Chinese New Media Forum Opened in Hangzhou to Bring Together the Positive Energy of the Chinese Media and Help Outlets Make the Voice of China’s Renaissance Heard”), 红枫林传媒 (*Red Maplewood Media*) (29 May 2018), <https://archive.vn/AaEZq>.

151. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1131948045971599360/photo/1](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1131948045971599360/photo/1).

152. Craig Offmanet and Nathan Vanderklippe, “Columnist’s Firing at B.C.-based Chinese Paper Stirs Press-Freedom Concerns,” *The Globe and Mail* (20 Jun. 2016).

153. Xiao Xu, “Dismissed Chinese Newspaper Editor Files Human-Rights Complaint in B.C.,” *The Globe and Mail* (10 Sept. 2017); On Liu Xiaobo, see Pierre Haski, *Liu Xiaobo: l’homme qui a défié Pékin* (“Liu Xiaobo: the Man Who Defied Beijing”) (Paris: Hikari/Arte éditions, 2019).

ers.<sup>154</sup> A month before, a host of Fairchild Radio in Vancouver, Anita Lee, had already been into trouble after playing the Hong Kong protesters' anthem on the air ("Glory to Hong Kong"). Several days later, she announced that she was taking a break, supposedly because her son was entering school – which did not convince anyone.<sup>155</sup> Then, her show was officially cancelled in May 2020.

The fact that almost all Chinese-language media are controlled by the CCP means that Chinese immigrants who speak little or no English or French have relatively little exposure to democratic and liberal values and are therefore unlikely to change: many of them, "even though they have lived in Canada for many years, still have the same communist mentality."<sup>156</sup>

Furthermore, there are **cases of information manipulation, including doctored translations**. For instance, the *Sing Tao* (星島), a daily Chinese-language Canadian newspaper jointly owned by the Hong Kong-based Sing Tao News Corporation and the Canadian media group Torstar Corporation (owner of the *Toronto Star*, the most widely circulated newspaper in the country) had a deal to translate and publish articles from the *Toronto Star*. But, on several occasions, it became clear that **the *Sing Tao* doctored the articles it took up "to conform with the CCP's view of the world."** In 2008, for example, articles on Tibet "bore very little relation to the original *Toronto Star* stories, which contained vehement criticism of Beijing."<sup>157</sup> Another example: the *Vancouver Sun* launched its Chinese version in 2012, named *Taiyangbao*. But those reading the newspaper in both its English and Chinese versions quickly called out the differences between them. It appeared that **the translators, provided by the consulate, were also censors that cleaned the Chinese version from everything they deemed unacceptable**. Hence, the *Vancouver Sun* found new translators but, within hours, the readership of the *Taiyangbao* website dropped spectacularly: Beijing had decided to block access to it from China.<sup>158</sup>

154. Tom Blackwell, "Host on Chinese-Language Station in Toronto Says He Was Fired for Criticizing Beijing," *National Post* (8 Oct. 2019).

155. Valerie Leung, "(Video) Hundreds Sing for Hong Kong in Aberdeen Centre," *Richmond News* (14 Sept. 2019).

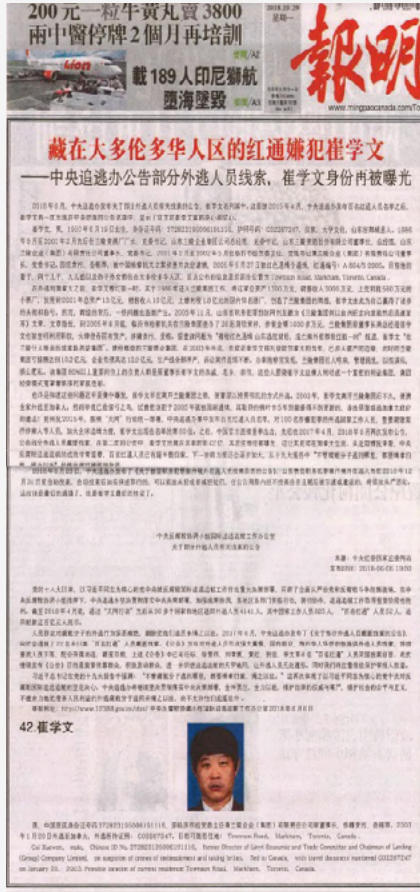
156. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 173.

157. *Ibid.*, 171.

158. *Ibid.*, 176.

### A case of doxing

On October 28, 2018, Beijing published a wanted notice for an economic fugitive, Cui Xuewen (崔学文) – who is also a Canadian resident – in a Canadian subsidiary of the Hong Kong-based newspaper *Ming Pao*. According to Canadian officials we met, this was the first known case of *doxing* (i.e. it disclosed private information about an individual to harm them → p. 397). Until then, efforts to arrest fugitives had been more discrete and kept away from the public. The announcement highlights how unlikely Cui is to avoid being found by authorities, both in Canada (when his official documents lapse) and China. He was targeted by an official program set up by the Central Committee to catch state officials suspected of a crime who have fled abroad.



## VI. An Influence on Education

### A. At the university

Canada has always been a **prime destination for Chinese students**. In 2015, out of the 523,700 Chinese studying abroad, 119,335 (nearly 23%) were in Canada.<sup>159</sup> Two years later, there were already more than 140,000 Chinese students in Canadian universities, according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education<sup>160</sup> – including 10,000 at the sole University of Toronto. And the restrictions implemented by U.S. universities made Canada even more attractive. The problem is that, in Canada as elsewhere in the world, some of these students are working for Beijing (→ p. 273).

In a speech to the presidents of the 15 largest Canadian universities (U15) in April 2018, CSIS director David Vigneault declared that **“CSIS assesses that China represents the most significant and clear challenge for (human-enabled espionage) targeted against Canada’s universities,”** because Chinese services actively “monitor and influence” students and teachers. Hence, students and researchers are “non-traditional collectors” of information for Beijing inasmuch as they “have little-to-no formal intelligence tradecraft training but are often in a position to acquire vast quantities of data or knowledge.”<sup>161</sup>

**Two types of problems** should be considered separately: **first, Beijing targets Canadian universities specialized in sciences and technology to spy and steal technologies**, using not only students, but also researchers, teachers, and collaborations between Canadian and Chinese laboratories. In at least nine Canadian universities, **Canadian academics have taken part to dozens of research projects with Chinese military researchers**, on topics ranging from satellite imagery or secured communications to drones. In some cases, Chinese researchers revealed their military affiliation (because they were tied to military universities such as Zhengzhou, the Changsha University of Science and Technology, or Xi’an Jiaotong University). In other cases, however, they hid it, **pretending to be affiliated to institutions that, in some cases, do not even exist**, such as the “Zhengzhou Information Science and Technology Institute,” a cover used in at least 1,300 scientific articles, according to Alex Joske. He noted that this cover was used by PLA researchers to travel abroad and, for one of them, to work at McMaster University, in Canada.<sup>162</sup> Between 2006 and 2018, at least 687 scientific articles were jointly published by Canadians and Chinese military researchers. As in the Australian case, which is very similar, it raises **the problematic question of knowing to what extent “Canada inadvertently helps China modernizing its armed forces”**<sup>163</sup> (→ p. 295).

**Second, Beijing also uses Canadian universities to political ends: to control what is said on China** (content of conferences, lists of speakers) and to **monitor dissidents who are invited to speak**. In that case, Chinese students are the main actors.

159. Ibid., 39.

160. Gerry Shih and Emily Rauhala, “Angry Over Campus Speech by Uyghur Activist, Chinese Students in Canada Contact Their Consulate, Film Presentation,” *The Washington Post* (14 Feb. 2019).

161. Quan, “‘Significant and Clear’ Threat” (for all the quotes in this paragraph).

162. Alex Joske, Picking Flowers, Making Honey: The Chinese Military’s Collaboration with Foreign Universities, ASPI, Policy Brief, Report No. 10 (2018), 15-16.

163. Christinne Muschi, “China’s Military Scientists Target Canadian Universities,” *The Globe and Mail* (29 Oct. 2018).



Increasingly aware of these risks, the attitude of universities with which China has long-standing ties, sometimes going back several decades, is changing: five or ten years ago, China was the largest source of foreign students and was seen as an opportunity. For the past five years or so, universities have been concerned that Chinese students are very (too) numerous, that they largely live among themselves, do not participate in university life, do not integrate, and too often mobilize to defend the interests of Beijing. So there is **a growing awareness of the problem**. During the annual meeting of the U15, in 2019, one session was dedicated to it and their unanimously **acknowledged the risk raised by Chinese influence in Canadian universities**.

#### Evidence of the embassy's intervention in student demonstrations

In 2010, as they prepared for the upcoming visit of President Hu Jintao in Ottawa, about fifty Chinese students who had received scholarships from the Chinese government to study in Canadian universities were invited at the embassy. Liu Shaohua, the first secretary for education, gave a speech that was clandestinely recorded by the *Epoch Times*<sup>164</sup> and in which he explained that the embassy would bring 3,000 persons to Ottawa from Ontario, but also Quebec, all expenses paid (hotel, food, transportation, even clothes), so as to organize a welcome party for the president. Some testimonies also mentioned a CA\$50 daily compensation. He presented the visit as a “political struggle” to defend “the reputation of our motherland” against the “Falun Gong, Tibetan separatists, Uyghur separatists, democracy people [who] have already moved onto Parliament Hill.”

After reminding students that their expenses would be covered, even those without a scholarship, Liu asked them not to “talk about it outside [...] to anyone.” He told them of the importance of being numerous because, during the visit of President Hu Jintao in 2005, opponents dominated and Chinese officials were furious. Hence, they needed to organize a better welcome party this time. Then, in case someone asked them why they were there, Liu explained that they should respond that “We are here to welcome President Hu. Long live the Canada-China friendship.” That same day, Zhang Baojun, in charge of education at the Chinese Consulate in Toronto, delivered the same message, by email: she demanded that students “comply with the plan and act in unity.” Students with a scholarship who faced “exceptional difficulties that prevent[ed] them from participating,” were required to “provide an explanation.”

Chinese students do not hide their nationalism on Canadian campuses: they are **organized in associations with a near-military discipline, sometimes raising the Chinese flag and singing the Chinese national anthem on university campuses** of British Columbia for instance. Some act as *de facto* representatives of Beijing: they play a role in monitoring and, if necessary, intimidating students and faculty members on matters tied to China. They also regularly organize demonstrations to defend Beijing's interests (see examples below).

This raises another question: is it possible to **demonstrate that Chinese authorities in Canada (embassy and consulates) effectively mobilize Chinese students**, which would constitute a proven case of foreign interference? In Canada, as in other countries where the mobilization of Chinese students is a problem (i.e. in Australia and New Zealand), **the link is hard to establish, either because Chinese authorities exercise a very discrete control, or because they do not need to be involved as the constraint is internalized:**

164. Jason Loftus, “Tape Reveals Embassy Footing Bill for Hu Jintao’s Welcome Rally,” *The Epoch Times* (23 Jun. 2010), (for all the quotes in the paragraph).

students, who arrive indoctrinated, indebted (scholarships), and worried about their future in China and about what might happen to their families, are spontaneously zealous. Most of the time, it is impossible to show an interference and, in a democratic context in which freedom of expression is protected, the universities and host countries can't stop these mobilizations.

## 1. The Role of CSSAs

The global role of CSSAs was introduced in Part Three (→ p. 280) but Canada provides additional examples. There are indeed **many testimonies of students being pressured by a CSSA to dissuade them from doing this, or on the contrary to incite them to do that**. For example, a student at the University of Ottawa received a threatening e-mail from the CSSA of her university: “according to reports from some other students and the investigation done by the association’s cadre,” the message read, “you are still a Falun Gong practitioner. Watch out.”<sup>165</sup> At the University of Calgary, CSSA members received an email from someone presenting themselves as an agent of the Chinese Public Security Bureau, instructing them not to attend a movie projection organized by the Friends of Falun Gong club, “otherwise your name and photo will be submitted to the Central government.”<sup>166</sup>

The CSSAs’ rhetoric often shows that they are merely proxies for Chinese authorities. When the CSSA of the University of Toronto lobbied the municipality not to recognize a Falun Gong Day in 2004, or the University of Ottawa’s intervened to block the TV channel NTDTV, in 2005, **they used exactly the same sentences, the same expressions in their messages as Chinese diplomats do** in their letters of protest.<sup>167</sup>

The CSIS confirmed the control exerted by Chinese authorities over CSSAs in Canadian universities. **In certain cases, it labeled their activities as espionage**. This was the case of Yong Jie Qu for instance, a Chinese student who registered at Concordia University in 1991, took part to the activities of the university’s CSSA the following years, and applied for permanent residency in Canada in 1994.<sup>168</sup> His application was transferred to CSIS which denied it because, as explained in his rejection letter:

There were reasonable grounds to believe that you had engaged in acts of espionage and subversion against democratic institutions [...]. By your own admission [...] you had communicated repeatedly with the PRC Embassy in Ottawa, provided information on the activities of members of a Canadian student organization [the CSSA] and attempted to corrupt that organization to meet the goals and objectives of a foreign government. [...] you readily acknowledged your numerous contacts with Chinese diplomats over an extended period of time during which you helped “reorganize” the CSSA. You also acknowledged that you provided information to Chinese diplomats about certain members of the CSSA and that you openly disagreed with the pro-democracy students in the organization, identified these students and reported them to the embassy, and sought to change the direction of the CSSA using funds provided by the embassy to support certain activities, to make it “responsive to the Chinese government and Chinese officials.”<sup>169</sup>

165. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*.

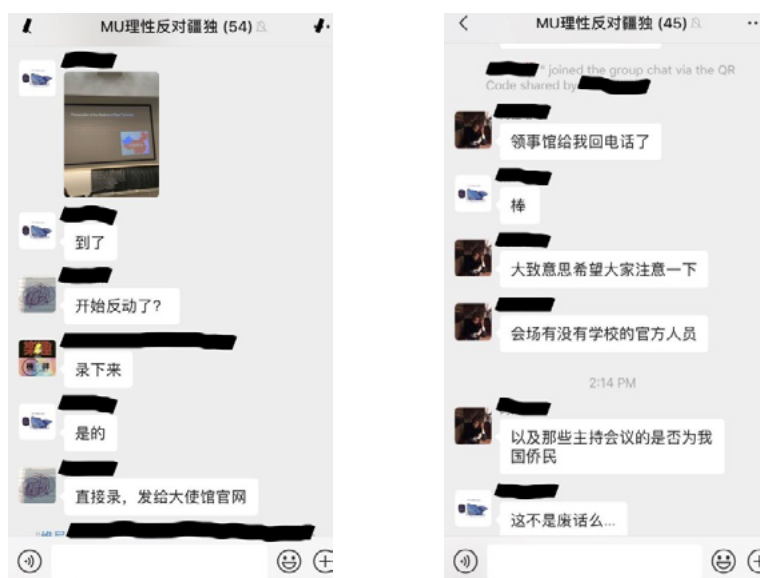
166. *Ibid.*, 189.

167. *Ibid.*, 189.

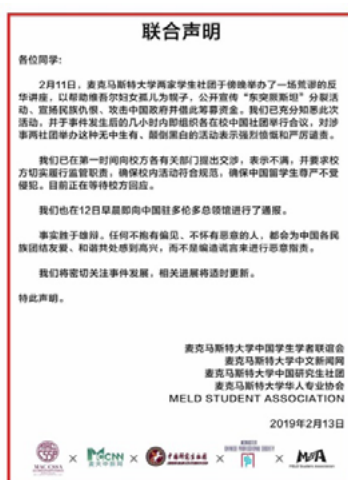
168. *Ibid.*, 190.

169. Quoted in Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 207.

A more recent example helped to **establish a link between a university's CSSA and Chinese authorities: Rukiye Turdush**, a Uyghur Canadian activist, gave a talk at McMaster University in February 2019. The discussion between Chinese students in a WeChat group as they anticipated the conference, showed that they had warned the embassy which, in return, asked them to verify whether university leaders attended, to take pictures of the conference and send them to Chinese officials. A Chinese student filmed it and, as he questioned the speaker, insulted her before leaving the room. **The coordination among Chinese students and with Chinese diplomats is visible on the screenshots of the WeChat group** they had created for the occasion (see below, on the left). We also know that the Chinese consulate in Toronto asked whether Chinese citizens had taken part to the organization of the conference (on the right).



On the left: A: "I'm here" / B: "Started to react?" / C: "Recording?" / A: "Yes" / C: "Record and send it directly to the official website of the embassy."<sup>170</sup> On the right: D: "the consulate called me back" / A: "Great" / D: "Basically, they told us to be attentive" / D: "to check if there are university people there" / D: "and if there are Chinese people among the organizers of the event" / A: "I mean, of course..."<sup>171</sup>



The following day, the university's CSSA released a statement denouncing the conference as an invitation to racial hatred and separatism, and asking the university to ensure that in the future "the dignity" of Chinese students is not violated. Suspected of having intervened because the message was written in the usual style of official CCP communiqués, the embassy denied it while considering the students' approach "just and patriotic."<sup>172</sup> *The Washington Post*, which copied and translated the WeChat messages, noted that it was "unusual to find written evidence of apparent coordination with [Chinese] officials."<sup>173</sup> David Mulrone, the former Canadian

170. Source: <https://twitter.com/BethanyAllenEbr/status/1096159156061589504/photo/1>.

171. Source: <https://twitter.com/BethanyAllenEbr/status/1096165952264331264/photo/1>.

172. Holmes Chan, "Exclusive: How Uyghur activist Rukiye Turdush felt the long arm of the Chinese Communist party, in Canada," *Hong Kong Free Press* (3 Mar. 2019).

173. Gerry Shih and Emily Rauhala, "Angry Over Campus Speech by Uyghur Activist, Chinese Students in Canada Contact Their Consulate, Film Presentation," *The Washington Post* (14 Feb. 2019).

ambassador to China added that “the fact they want to know which academics attend hints at desire to stop academic freedom.”<sup>174</sup>

On February 16, the embassy released a statement affirming that “what happened recently at the University of Toronto [see below] and McMaster University has nothing to do with the Chinese Embassy and Chinese Consulate General in Canada” but also that (in the following sentence) “we strongly support the just and patriotic actions of Chinese students.”<sup>175</sup>

Acting on a demand from other students, some of whom found “extraordinarily terrifying [...] to know that an organization – in its capacity as an [student union]-ratified club – reported activity on campus to the Chinese government,” the CSSA was finally dissolved on September 2019, with 22 student representatives out of 35 voting in favor.<sup>176</sup>

Another interesting case occurred at the same time, on the Scarborough campus of the University of Toronto: that of **Chemi Lhamo**, a 22-year-old Canadian student of Tibetan origin. In February 2019, as she had recently been elected president of a students’ association, she was **targeted by a pro-Beijing and anti-Tibetan hatred campaign**. An Instagram picture of her was the object of thousands of heinous and threatening comments such as “China is your daddy – you better know this,” or “Ur not gonna be the president of UTSC [...] Even if you do, we will make sure things get done so u won’t survive a day. Peace RIP.” A petition demanding her resignation, and promoted by the CCP’s English newspaper *Global Times*,<sup>177</sup> received almost 10,000 signatures. A message also circulated on WeChat asking Chinese students to do everything they could to prevent the student association from being “controlled by Tibetan separatists.”<sup>178</sup>

Michel Juneau-Katsuya believed that “it [was] beyond plausible” that the Chinese government was involved in the campaign: “It is their strategy to try to undermine, to try to mute any form of opposition or dissidence that could at one point or another gain access to a mic.”<sup>179</sup>

**Chinese authorities do not always wait and use students as proxies: they sometimes intervene directly.** For instance, the day before a conference with the president of the World Uyghur Congress, Dolkun Isa, at Montreal’s Concordia University, in March 2019, the organizer, Kyle Matthews, who headed the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, received an email from Consul General Xing Wenjian asking for an “urgent meeting” to which he did not answer. The consulate also contacted Montreal officials to try to cancel the event.<sup>180</sup> But it was not met with success.

174. Ibid.

175. “Remarks of the Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in Canada on Some Media’s Hying Up the Tibet and Xinjiang Related Issues,” PRC Embassy to Canada (16 Feb. 2019), <https://archive.vn/aWk1b>.

176. Owen Churchill, “Chinese students’ Association Loses Status at Canadian University After Protest of Uygur activist’s Talk was Allegedly Coordinated with Chinese Consulate,” *South China Morning Post* (26 Sept. 2019).

177. Deng Xiaoci, “Chinese Students Slam Union Candidate Over Separatist Posts,” *Global Times* (12 Feb. 2019).

178. “‘China is your daddy’: Backlash against Tibetan Student’s Election Prompts Questions about Foreign Influence,” *CBC News* (14 Feb. 2019).

179. Ibid.

180. Marie-Danielle Smith, “Chinese Diplomat Accused of Trying to Shut Down Montreal Event in Third Incident of Alleged Campus Interference,” *National Post* (28 Mar. 2019).



## B. In Secondary schools

**Chinese influence is not limited to higher education: High schools are also affected**, not only by the problem of aggressive counter-demonstrations, harassment and intimidation of student human rights activists (there have been several incidents, with torn down posters, anonymous letters, etc., in high and secondary schools across the country, particularly in British Columbia).<sup>181</sup> Controls and censorship over academic content is also a problem. And, once again, **Confucius Institutes (CIs)** are blamed (→ p. 299) because the 13 Canadian institutes are “typically affiliated with postsecondary education institutes and K-12 schools.”<sup>182</sup> The first Canadian CI opened at the British Columbia Institute of Technology in 2006. In February 2009, there were at least five others: in Edmonton (Alberta School for the Deaf), Waterloo (University of Waterloo – twinned to Nanjing University), Moncton (Atlantic Education International), Montreal (Dawson College) and Sherbrooke (Université de Sherbrooke).<sup>183</sup> And they sometimes received official support: “the Quebecois Ministry of Education granted CA\$65,000 [42,230 euros] for the launch of Confucius Institutes in Quebec during the 2007-2008 academic year.”<sup>184</sup>

In 2019, the New Brunswick Ministry of Education cancelled the contracts that tied the CIs to two dozen middle schools in the province after parents complained about restrictions on the **freedom of expression of the pupils on topics related to China. Some teachers, for instance, forbade any discussion of the Tian’anmen massacre and used maps that integrated Taiwan into China.** The minister acknowledged that the “school system [was] being used [by Beijing] as a conduit for extending [its] influence.”<sup>185</sup> Before that, several universities (McMaster, McGill, Manitoba, and Sherbrooke) had done the same, or altogether refused to host a CI for these reasons (censorship or a control by the Chinese government that was seen as incompatible with academic freedom and so on).

In October 2019, in a Chinese language course at a Richmond high school, in British Columbia, **the fifteen-year-old pupils were shown a propaganda film untitled *My People, My Country* (2019) on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC, and were tested with a questionnaire untitled “I love my country.”** The questionnaire was politically oriented, with questions such as “which words, or sentences from the movie made you feel good?” **Following the ensuing controversy, the test was cancelled.**<sup>186</sup>

181. Angela Jung, “Hong Kong-China Tensions Intensify at Local Demonstration, High School,” *CTV News* (4 Oct. 2019).

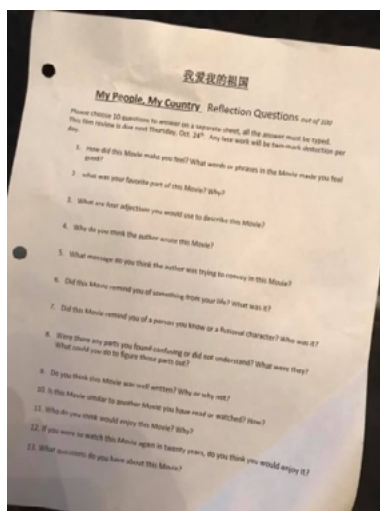
182. Parliament of Canada, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Annual Report 2019* (2020), §174, 71.

183. De Pierrebourg and Juneau-Katsuya, *Ces espions venus d'ailleurs*, 158.

184. *Ibid.*, 158-159.

185. Tom Blackwell, “New Brunswick Turfs China-backed Confucius Institute Out of Elementary Schools to Curb Beijing’s Influence,” *National Post* (27 Aug. 2019).

186. Young, “I Love My Homeland.” The letter sent by the high school to explain the decision is available here: <https://twitter.com/ianjamesyoung70/status/1187781644620402688/photo/1>.



Questionnaire on the propaganda film *My People, My Country* that was shown to Richmond students.

The Chinese title, at the top of the sheet, was “I love my country” (whereas the Chinese title of the movie is more neutral because it could be translated as “Me and my country”).<sup>187</sup>

**Even young children are targeted: in October 2018, for instance,** a Nishan Bookstore (尼山书屋, see below) opened at the Richmond Public Library, in Vancouver,<sup>188</sup> and targeted children with its “China Tales” book collection. One watchful observer noted on Twitter “the Nishan House’s stated propaganda mission: Inviting foreigners to tell China’s story to other foreigners (请外国人讲中国故事给外国人看). In this new decentralized strategy, CCP propaganda targets our children, spread through Nishan’s books instead of a central Confucius Institute. In other words, **local politicians have welcomed the CCP’s Propaganda Department to publish propaganda kids’ books here in Vancouver.**”<sup>189</sup>



Presentation of the “China Tale” book collection dedicated to children.<sup>190</sup>

187. <https://twitter.com/TheFallingStar/status/1187192661976829956>.

188. “Shandong Opens Nishan Book House in Canada,” *Shandong China Daily* (30 Oct. 2018), <https://archive.vn/Kix10>.

189. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1059299475058053120](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1059299475058053120).

190. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1059299471060697088/photo/3](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1059299471060697088/photo/3).

### The Nishan Bookstores

More than thirty Nishan bookstores (尼山书屋) have been created in two dozen countries since 2013.<sup>191</sup> They are overseen by the Jinan-based Shandong Friendship Publishing House (山东友谊出版社), created in 1986 in the administrative center of Shandong. This publishing house produces content to introduce foreign publics to the Chinese culture,<sup>192</sup> a form of “external propaganda” (对外宣传).<sup>193</sup> The company is owned by the Shandong Publication Group Co., Ltd (山东出版集团),<sup>194</sup> an entity financed by the Financial Bureau of Shandong (山东省财政厅).<sup>195</sup>

The Nishan bookstores – from the name of the mountain where Confucius was presumably born – are the overseas editors of the publishing house, tasked with promoting cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world.<sup>196</sup> It began with two bookstores in China in 2012, at the Confucius Research Institute (曲阜孔子研究院) and at the Nishan Shengyuan Academy (尼山圣源书院).<sup>197</sup> Then, three dozen foreign antennas have opened since 2013, including in Valletta, Moscow, Warsaw, Auckland, Macerata, Buenos Aires, Canberra, Gdansk, New York or Los Angeles.<sup>198</sup> After 2018, others were opened at the Richmond Public Library, in Vancouver,<sup>199</sup> at the Confucius Institute of Eötvös Loránd University, in Budapest,<sup>200</sup> at the Confucius Institute in Dusseldorf,<sup>201</sup> in Dubai,<sup>202</sup> and in Kampala, at the Confucius Institute of Makerere University.<sup>203</sup>

## VIII. The Manipulation of Information

### A. The fake letters from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Immigration

On April 20, 2019, the Tibetan Association of Canada (TAC) was inaugurated in Toronto, the latest member of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations (CTCCO), an umbrella platform of more than 90 organizations with ties to the Chinese consulate. It quickly became evident that the TAC was a façade allowing Beijing to circulate its narrative on Tibet. Tibetan people were in the minority at the inauguration, and all were known for their prior ties to the local United Front department and/or to the Chinese con-

191. “Introduction,” Shandong Friendship Publishing House (<https://archive.vn/eYGzH>); “Shandong Opens Another Nishan House in Germany,” *Shandong China Daily* (26 Jul. 2018), <https://archive.vn/URDWz>.

192. “孔子尼山书屋在澳大利亚标准中文学校揭牌” (“Opening of a Nishan Book House in an Australian School of Chinese Language”), 人民网 (*People’s Newspaper*) (28 Nov. 2014), <https://archive.vn/ZBnE6>.

193. “山东友谊出版社有限公司” (“Shandong Friendship Publishing House”), 企查查 (*Qichacha*) (updated 1 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/mAinj>.

194. “山东出版集团简介” (“Introduction to Shandong Publication Group Co., Ltd.”), 山东出版集团 (*Shandong Publication Group Co., Ltd.*) (no date), <https://archive.vn/OiWN3>.

195. “山东出版集团有限公司” (“Shandong Publication Group Co., Ltd.”), 企查查 (*Qichacha*) (updated 3 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/rNBqM>.

196. “Introduction,” Shandong Friendship Publishing House.

197. “Opening of a Nishan Bookstore in an Australian School of Chinese Language.”

198. “尼山书屋：简介” (“Nishan Bookstores: Introduction”), 山东友谊出版社 (*Shandong Friendship Publishing House*) (no date), <https://archive.vn/NW2lm>.

199. “Shandong Opens Nishan Book House in Canada.”

200. “Shandong Opens Second Nishan Book House in Hungary,” *Shandong China Daily* (2 Nov. 2018), <https://archive.vn/IMUGe>.

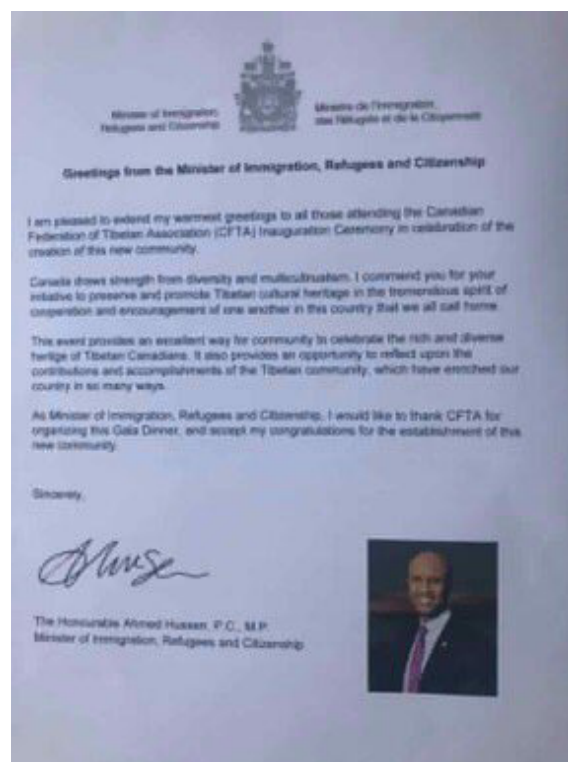
201. “Shandong Opens Another Nishan House in Germany.”

202. “中国尼山书屋落户阿联酋迪拜” (“Opening of a New Nishan Bookstore in Dubai”), *Xinhuanet* (25 Apr. 2018), <https://archive.vn/ZtuRk>.

203. “中国尼山书屋在乌干达麦克雷雷大学孔院落户” (“Creation of a Nishan Bookstore in the Confucius Institute at Makerere University, in Uganda”), *Xinhuanet* (12 Nov. 2019), <https://archive.vn/kDR9y>.

sulate. The Chinese national anthem was played, and the director of the new association thanked Beijing for the economic development of Tibet. The creation of this group was immediately denounced by other Tibetan associations in Canada which highlighted that the TAC wasn't representative and that its creation was certainly motivated by a desire “to divide the Tibetan community in Canada.”<sup>204</sup>

At that precise moment, **two letters of endorsement apparently written by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and his minister of Immigration Ahmed Hussen – both rough counterfeits with grammar mistakes – circulated on Facebook and Twitter.** Several days later, a spokesman for the Prime Minister Office confirmed that the letters had been fabricated. In response, the TAC declared that it had nothing to do with the operation. But, for Jonathan Manthorpe, “this [was] clearly a United Front operation.”<sup>205</sup> Other sources suggested that it might not have been China but another country, to “add fuel to the fire” of bilateral tensions.



## B. WeChat's role

The Chinese phone messaging app WeChat (→ p. 196) is increasingly used in Canada, and not solely by the Chinese community: politicians, for instance, are growing more accustomed to using it in Canada, as in the United States, to reach Chinese-speaking voters. As noted earlier, **WeChat seems systematically used when organizing pro-Beijing counter-demonstrations** in reaction to events linked to the “five poisons.” Another problem arises from this: **Beijing is permanently censoring content** on the app: discussions are monitored and, sometimes, doctored. A professor at a Canadian university shared

204. “Tibetans in Canada Dismayed by New Chinese-backed Group,” Canada Tibet Committee (23 Apr. 2019).

205. Jonathan Manthorpe quoted in Limin Zhou, “Fake Letter Sent in Trudeau’s name Not Isolated Case in China’s Disinformation Campaign,” *The Epoch Times* (7 May 2019).



with us that he had noticed, in a closed discussion group of Chinese-speaking students, researchers and teachers at the university, that messages, and sometimes entire discussions, often disappeared. This was also noted by Freedom House: “in Canada, WeChat censors deleted a Member of Parliament’s message to constituents praising Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement protesters, manipulated dissemination of news reports related to Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou’s arrest, and blocked broader media coverage of Chinese government corruption and leading Chinese officials.”<sup>206</sup> Beyond intervening on the content, **Chinese intelligence uses overseas WeChat groups to detect dissidents and gather personal data.**



Finally, a scandal forced the prime minister to intervene: **the WeChat account of a Liberal minister was used, without her knowledge, to raise funds to finance the legal proceedings against a journalist critical of Beijing.** On April 30, 2020, the journalist Sam Cooper published on *globalnews.ca* an article showing that in mid-January, while China was concealing the extent of the coronavirus epidemic that hit it, it mobilized its relays around the world to acquire and stockpile a gigantic number of personal protective equipment (2.5 billion in six weeks) such as masks, that consulates in Canada relayed these calls and that groups linked to the United Front bought and sent to China a large number of these items – which a few weeks and months later would be sold at a high price by China to the whole world.<sup>207</sup> Several members of the Chinese Canadian community considered the possibility of a class action lawsuit against the journalist and the newspaper.<sup>208</sup>

To that end, a person called Maria Xu, a member of Joyce Murray’s WeChat group – Vancouver’s Liberal MP, president of the Treasury Board and Minister of Digital Government in the Trudeau Cabinet – published a message in the group with a link to a website collecting donations to fund this lawsuit. Once it was detected, the message was deleted and Maria Xu excluded from the WeChat group. At that point, the prime minister intervened to denounce the attacks against the journalist as “absolutely unacceptable” and Murray’s office explained that WeChat was “used to engage members of the Chinese Canadian community” and that “this particular post was unacceptable and in no way reflects the Minister’s views. Participation in this group is guided by posted guidelines and a disclaimer. In this case, guidelines were not followed and the individual who posted is no longer in this group.” In turn, *Global News* explained that it was “increasingly concerned by what appears to be an organized effort to discredit our journalist, our reporting and our news division as we investigate the serious issue of foreign influence in Canadian affairs.”<sup>209</sup>

206. Sarah Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone: The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence since 2017*, Freedom House report (Jan. 2020), 18.

207. Sam Cooper, “United Front Groups in Canada Helped Beijing Stockpile Coronavirus Safety Supplies,” *Global News* (30 Apr. 2020).

208. Bob Mackin, “Analysis: Facts or Fearmongering? Richmond Politician Links Racist Graffiti, Assaults to Second World War Injustice,” *The Breaker* (24 May 2020).

209. Brian Platt, “Trudeau Condemns Use of Minister’s WeChat Group to Promote Fundraiser to Sue Journalist,” *National Post* (26 May 2020).

## VIII. A Myriad of Local Organizations as Relays

In Canada, and particularly in Vancouver and Toronto, **there are many Chinese associations, organizations and groups.** Some are old, such as the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver (1896), the Canada-China Friendship Society in Ottawa (1976) and the Federation of Canada-China Friendship Associations (1980). And all of them are **more or less linked to the UFWD, hence to the CCP.** The groups “promoting the pacific reunification of China,” directly affiliated to the UFWD, are the easiest to uncover. For instance, three Vancouver groups belong to that category: the **China Unification Promotion Council (CANADA)** (加拿大中国统一促进会), created in 1999; the **Canada Chinese Peaceful and Unification Association** (加拿大中国和平统一促进会), created in 2003 to help newly arrived migrants, and the president of which, Wang Dianqi (王典奇), made a name for himself after he convinced a city councillor to raise **the Chinese flag in front of the Vancouver city hall while wearing a red scarf** (which is largely interpreted in the Chinese Canadian community as a symbol of loyalty to the Communist regime) on the occasion of the 67<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC<sup>210</sup>; last but not least, the **North America China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification** (北美温哥华中国和平统一促进会), created in 2016.



On the left, Wang has the Chinese flag raised in front of the Vancouver city hall in 2016.<sup>211</sup> On the right, this advertisement was printed by the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver in the newspapers *Sing Tao* and *Ming Pao* on June 21, 2019.

The 2019 Hong Kong crisis made it easier to clarify, where it was still necessary, how a large number of Chinese associations in Canada position themselves toward Beijing. **A statement released by the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver in June 2019, and signed by 208 associations, adopted the CCP's rhetoric almost to the word<sup>212</sup>:**

210. Mike Laanela, “Chinese Flags and Red Scarves Spark Debate at Vancouver City Hall,” *CBC News* (3 Oct. 2016).

211. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1183465553085644802/photo/1](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1183465553085644802/photo/1).

212. Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver (21 Jun. 2019), <https://archive.vn/6WMMWg>.

As ethnic Chinese and overseas Chinese people residing in Canada, we are all the children of Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang [two of China's mythic founders], **we belong to the same Chinese nation, based on the idea of blood being thicker than water**, patriotism and love of our homeland, we are paying a close attention to the development of the current Hong Kong situation, we are obliged to unite with the Hong Kong residents and not to be taken advantage of by the separatist forces.<sup>213</sup>

The list, which was very usefully translated in English,<sup>214</sup> gives an overview (probably non-exhaustive) of the **reach of Chinese influence in the non-profit sector tied to Chinese Canadian communities**. Among the 208 groups, at least 80 had apparently recently been created, “reflecting the huge surge in mainland Chinese migration since about 2000.”<sup>215</sup> If **many of the signatories have established ties to the Chinese government**, a few elements made some observers believe that the letter was guided by Chinese authorities, including sentences presenting Hong Kong as “an internal affair of China,” opposing “the interference of any foreign forces,” and an endorsement of **ethnic nationalism** (Chinese Canadians are “all the children of Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang [two of China's mythic founders],” their “blood being thicker than water”)<sup>216</sup> that we mentioned in the section dedicated to the diasporas (→ p. 165).

This proliferation of groups made of a multitude of subgroups is a “kind of United Front tactic,” according to Fenella Sung of the Canadian Friends of Hong Kong: “it’s very easy to form a community group. You do not even have to register. If you’re not incorporated, you can just get together [even] two or three people ... and form a group.” In other words, **“it’s really bluffing more than anything. They want to show they are stronger and have more people than they really have.”**<sup>217</sup> Cheuk Kwan, of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China added that “these are basically fake organizations.” “They are what I call **the mouthpieces of the Chinese consulate**. This is a very clearly United Front effort by the Chinese government.”<sup>218</sup>

A similar operation was organized globally in August 2019: a statement signed by 583 Chinese organizations worldwide was circulated by the Chinese embassy in Ottawa,<sup>219</sup> which advertised the involvement of 204 Chinese organizations from Canada.<sup>220</sup> Another example took place in October 2019 with an ad in the *Chinese Canadian Times* bought by the Council of Newcomer Organizations, a self-described apolitical association subsidized by the Canadian government – a detail that caused a public uproar (the spokesperson of Canadian Friends of Hong Kong condemned “our government” for “using taxpayers’ money to enable CCP influence and infiltration into our society and politics”).<sup>221</sup>

213. Ian Young, “Canadian Ads Blasted Hong Kong ‘Radicals’, Invoking Blood Loyalty to China. Was Beijing’s United Front Involved?” *South China Morning Post* (7 Jul. 2019).

214. UFWD YVR, “Pro-CCP Groups of Canada in 2019,” medium.com, (5 Jul. 2019).

215. Young, “Canadian Ads Blasted Hong Kong ‘Radicals.’”

216. Canadian Coalition, *Harassment & Intimidation*, 21-22.

217. Young, “Canadian Ads Blasted Hong Kong ‘Radicals.’”

218. Tom Blackwell, “Open Letter from Chinese-Canadian Groups Boosts Hong Kong government, Blasts Protesters,” *National Post*, (9 Jul. 2019).

219. “全球近六百家社团发表全球华侨华人严正声明，强烈谴责香港暴乱和颜色革命” (“Nearly 600 Organizations from All Over the World Condemned the Demonstrations in Honk Kong and the Color Revolutions in the Name of Overseas Chinese”), 环球华语融媒体平台 (*Global Chinese Convergence Media*) (10 Aug. 2019), <https://archive.vn/tyqUI>.

220. “加拿大众多华人团体谴责暴力乱港行径 拥护「一国两制」” (“Many Chinese Organizations in Canada Condemn the Violence That Creates Chaos in Hong Kong and Endorse the ‘One Country, Two Systems’”), Website of the Embassy of China in Canada (6 Aug. 2019), <https://archive.vn/GkDzx>.

221. Tom Blackwell, “Hong Kong Democracy Advocates Angry After Ottawa-funded Group Buys Ad Backing China’s Side,” *National Post* (4 Oct. 2019).

### The Transformation of S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

The United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.) is an organization based in Vancouver that provides social services to Chinese immigrants. Created in 1973, it is one of the largest social services agencies in the country, helping more than 60,000 persons on a budget of CA\$50 million (€32.5 million) granted by the government. For years, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. used to denounce the Tian'anmen massacre by signing a joint statement with other organizations on the day of the commemoration of the bloody repression. In 2019, however, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, the organization kept silent – which did not go unnoticed.<sup>222</sup> But the demographics had changed: more than 40% of its “clients” now come from mainland China, and no longer from Hong Kong.

In recent years, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. apparently turned its back: in 2015, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (→ p. 69) labeled it an “Overseas Chinese Service Centre” (OCSC). As Matt Schrader showed with one Toronto-based OCSC, there are proven ties between the centers and the CCP (the Toronto center sent a New Year's card “on behalf of the Consul General of the PRC” that included praise for the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress and, the year before, hosted a welcome banquet for the new consul general during which Lin Xingyong, the president of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, declared that “[We will] give Consul He our strongest support and cooperation”).<sup>223</sup> The decision to label S.U.C.C.E.S.S. an OCSC wasn't anodyne. In fact, the agency also opened an office in Beijing and its members are increasingly parading with diplomats from the Chinese consulate and other pro-Beijing communitarian groups. As such, many of those who had known and respected the work of this agency in previous decades are now surprised and disappointed by this evolution.

The Australian precedent is interesting here: the equivalent of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. in Australia, the Chinese Australian Services Society, based in Sidney, was also labeled an OCSC.<sup>224</sup> As a consequence perhaps, it started to get involved in foreign policy matters in 2017, with a paper suggesting that Australia should reconsider its “strategic alignment with the United States” and develop its relations with China instead.



Meeting between Sing Lim Yeo, then-president of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Foundation, and Qin Yuanping (裘援平), president of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, at Vancouver's Shangri-La (Feb. 2014).<sup>225</sup>

222. Douglas Quan, “Silence on Tian'anmen Anniversary Could be Sign of China's Influence on Canadian Community Groups: Critics,” *National Post* (17 Jun. 2019). All the quotes in this section are taken from this document.

223. Matt Schrader, “Chinese Assistance Centers' Grow United Front Work Department Global Presence,” *China Brief*, 19:1 (4 Jan. 2019).

224. “海外华助中心: 有它就有家 华侨华人什么都不怕” (“The Overseas Chinese Service Centers is Like Family, Overseas Chinese Have Nothing to Fear Anymore”), 国务院侨务办公室 (*Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council*) (6 Apr. 2014), <https://archive.vn/o8jXG>.

225. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1140782943943577600](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1140782943943577600).



**In March 2019, three Canadian representatives of local organizations were in Beijing as delegates to the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC):** Chen Yongtao (陈永涛), president of the Vancouver-based Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, Wang Linan (王立楠), president of the Canada Shandong General Chamber of Commerce, also in Vancouver, and Lin Xingyong (林性勇), president of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations.<sup>226</sup> Ling Yin, the publisher of *Sept Days*, a weekly Chinese-language newspaper based in Montreal, also attended. In an interview for the website Chinaqw.com, he explained that the role of overseas Chinese (like him) was to “tell the history of China” to foreign readers and governments.<sup>227</sup> When, later that same month, Zhang Yunbo, president of the Toronto-based Greater Northwest China Federation of Entrepreneurial Businesses in Canada, was also in China for an event in the Shaanxi province, he granted an interview to a government website in which he said that “to expand abroad, we need to be able to tell a good story about China.”<sup>228</sup>



The three Canadian delegates among others at the CPPCC.<sup>229</sup>

**Each year, new organizations are created.** Between October and December 2018, for instance, the Federation of Transoceanic Chinese Canadian Association (FTCCA), in Toronto, was created to “strengthen economic relations between Canada and China”; its members “will have the opportunity to participate and experience exclusive visits and tours to China.”<sup>230</sup> The logo of the FTCCA actually resembles that of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC), a major United Front organizations.

226. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1103128291433537536](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1103128291433537536).

227. “全国政协报告中的这些话 受到侨胞广泛关注” (“These Words in the CCPPC Report Have Drawn Quite Some Attention from Overseas Chinese”), 中国侨网 (4 March 2019), <https://archive.vn/U5p9u>.

228. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1114971300198359041](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1114971300198359041).

229. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1103128291433537536/photo/2](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1103128291433537536/photo/2).

230. Federation of Transoceanic Chinese Canadian Association (FTCCA), “Mission” (<https://archive.vn/nHEA2>).



The organization's inaugural event, in October 2018, gave an opportunity to United Front agents from the consulate (Yang Baohua (杨葆华) and Li Sining (李苏宁)) to be in the same room as Canadian politicians.<sup>231</sup>

Meanwhile, in Vancouver, Wang Dianqi (王典奇), who was already “simultaneously head of three CCP United Front groups”<sup>232</sup> in the city, formally created a fourth, the Chinese Cultural Harmony and Unity Society of Canada, ostensibly to “study and spread a specific facet of Xi Jinping thought (和合文化).” In reality, Hu Qiquan (胡启全), the consular attaché in charge of political warfare, took part to the initial activities of the new organization and, soon after, Wang Dianqi travelled to China with the local politician Al Richmond (→ p. 561), where he met with United Front agents.<sup>233</sup>



Wang Dianqi and Al Richmond in Ningbo, in November 2018.<sup>234</sup>

In December 2018, the Canada-China New Era Cultural and Economic Development Association (加拿大中国新时代文化经贸促进会) and the Canada Fujian Industry & Commerce Association (CFICA) were similarly created in Vancouver.

231. UFWD YVR, “Reds vs. Reds,”

232. The Canada Chinese Peaceful and Unification Association, the Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, and the Canada China City Friendship Association.

233. UFWD YVR, “Reds vs. Reds.”

234. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1072978867717951489/photo/2](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1072978867717951489/photo/2).

### A public holiday to commemorate the Nanjing massacre

In October 2017, the legislative assembly of Ontario adopted a motion introduced by MP Soo Wong (she was born in Hong Kong and moved to Canada at eight) that designated December 13 as a day of commemoration for the Nanjing massacre. In 2018, several organizations<sup>235</sup> took part to a campaign to convince the federal government to create a public holiday to commemorate it. It was relayed by Jenny Kwan, a New Democratic Party MP who represents East Vancouver in the Canadian parliament. Her speech, in July 2018, stirred a controversy; and Japanese and Japanese Canadians, among others, protested. She has not been met with success for now. Nonetheless, several months later, in October 2018, Kwan inaugurated a monument dedicated to the victims of the Nanjing massacre, in the Richmond Hill neighborhood of Toronto – the first outside of China – with two organizations (Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations and Chinese Freemasons of Canada (Toronto)).



Jenny Kwan and CACA members, including its president Chen Yongtao, demonstrated for the creation of a commemorative public holiday in front of the Parliament of Canada, in late November 2018.<sup>236</sup>

In August 2018, the creation of an **association of PLA veterans residing in Canada**, the Canada Chinese Veteran’s Society, led to protests. Sherman Lai, himself a PLA veteran (lieutenant-colonel) teaching at the royal military college in Kingston, Ontario, held that “they took advantage of democracy, of the Canadian system ... But communism, the PLA is not compatible with democracy and the rule of law. Before their nostalgia, there is a very bloody history,” including the intervention of Canadian troops during the Korean War.<sup>237</sup> Others called out the PLA for its role in state repression, from Tian’anmen to Hong Kong demonstrations, without forgetting Tibet and Xinjiang for instance. The association, which organized events, created a **choir called “Companions in arms,” for instance, which performed in military uniforms and sang military patriotic songs during a festival in Richmond** (British Columbia) in October 2019 (see image below). The association had apparently disbanded in June 2020.<sup>238</sup>

235. Including the Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, the Canadian Sichuanese Friendship Association and the Canada Chinese Peaceful Reunification Association.

236. [https://twitter.com/Plan200\\_ca/status/1070540018861584384](https://twitter.com/Plan200_ca/status/1070540018861584384).

237. Tom Blackwell, “Canadian Veterans of People’s Liberation Army Form Association, Sing of China’s Martial Glory,” *National Post* (30 Oct. 2019).

238. Government of Canada, Federal Corporation Information 1093250-7 (<https://bit.ly/2YDu1dC>).





Canadian Veterans of the PLA Association (<https://archive.vn/TPrTE>).

## IX. Seducing First Nations

Chinese authorities in Canada are engaged in a **strategy of seduction of First Nations that could be used to divide the Canadian society**. They play on the proximity between Chinese immigrants and First Nations, which both assert they are victims of discriminations in Canada.

This can be done in subtle ways, as with the **Musqueam**, an Aboriginal population in the Vancouver area. Some of them have Chinese ancestry because, from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s, Chinese migrants from Guangdong lived and worked on farms on the reserve and had children with Musqueam women. Two documentaries – *Peeking into the Pink Houses at Musqueam: A Migration Story* (a short movie by Sarah Ling, 2015) and *All Our Father's Relations* (a feature film by Alejandro Yoshizawa, 2016) – tell the story of one of these mixed families, the Grants, brothers and sisters who shared a Chinese father and a Musqueam mother.

The synopsis of the second film announced to the viewers that, “as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, relations between Chinese and First Nations in Canada were often respectful and mutually beneficial; **both peoples supported one another in the face of marginalization and racism.**”<sup>239</sup> This bilingual production, in English and Chinese, recorded the family when they travelled to China in 2013 and first visited the village in the Guangdong province that

239. *All our Father's Relations*, “Film Synopsis” (<http://allourfathersrelations.com/synopsis>).



their father had left almost a century before. The trip was financed by the Chinese consulate in Vancouver, which also provided translators for two days. In February 2015, Consul General Liu Fei also “presented a cheque to Howard Grant [one of the Musqueam brothers of Chinese origin] in support of the Musqueam-Chinese history project at the UBC Longhouse.”<sup>240</sup>



The consul general Liu Fei “presenting a check” to Howard Grant in February 2015.<sup>241</sup>

Larry Grant, one of the sons, explained that **“the family was considered Chinese (living) abroad” by the consulate.**<sup>242</sup> The movie also received a CA\$20,000 (€13,000) grant from the province of British Columbia through the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC.<sup>243</sup> At the ceremony where the grant was announced, Consul General Liu Fei declared that “this event formally recognizes the Chinese migrants’ relations with the First Nations people, who buried some of the Chinese on their own land and set up families with the Chinese who faced hard labor and lack of rights in this land.”<sup>244</sup>



On the left, the consul general Liu Fei with the Minister of Justice, Jody Wilson-Raybould, and members of the Grant family, during the projection of the movie *All Our Father’s Relations* at the Musqueam Community Center, in Vancouver, on March 14, 2017.<sup>245</sup> On the right, a delegation of 44 Chinese students of the joined MBA program between the University of British Columbia and Jiao-tong University in Shanghai visited the Musqueam reserve near Vancouver, in 2019.<sup>246</sup>

240. Pacific Canada Heritage Centre – Museum of Migration, “CG Liu Fei of YVR Chinese Consulate presents cheque to Howard Grant in support of Musqueam-Chinese history project” (24 Feb. 2015), <https://archive.vn/y9afz>.

241. Ibid.

242. Florence Hwang, “Film Explores Historical Relations Between Musqueam First Nation and Chinese,” *The Source* (24 Jan. – 7 Feb. 2017).

243. “New Film to Tell Shared History of B.C. First Nations and Chinese Canadians,” *KelownaNow* (12 Aug. 2015).

244. Hatty Liu, “Chinese-1st Nations History Explored,” *China Daily USA* (20 Aug. 2015).

245. PRC Consulate General in Vancouver, “Consul General LIU Fei Attends Screening of ‘All Our Fathers’ Relations,” (17 Mar. 2017), <https://archive.vn/iikNK>.

246. Ibid.

The history of the Grant family is endearing, and there is no doubting the sincerity of anyone, including at the Chinese consulate. But this example pertains to a larger strategy of **seducing First Nations. The Musqueam case is specific because some are considered “almost Chinese.”** In August 2016, the consul general organized a meeting between Musqueam individuals and Sino-Canadian entrepreneurs.<sup>247</sup> In 2019, the joint international MBA program of the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Jiao-tong University, in Shanghai, sent some Chinese students spend two weeks in Vancouver. In fact, since 2019, an “introduction to the heritage of the Musqueam autochthone nation” was added to their curriculum, during which Larry Grand tells them his personal history.<sup>248</sup>



**The consulate has not forgotten the other communities.** In December 2015, the consul general Liu Fei met Grand Chief Edward John<sup>249</sup> of the **Tl'azt'en Nation**. He is one of Canada's main autochthonous political leaders and married to a former Musqueam chief. The **Secwepemc** are also wooed, especially Mike Archie, the former Secwepemc chief in Canim Lake (BC). In late January 2019, he was invited to China by the CPAFFC (Chinese People's Association for

Friendship with Foreign Countries), first to Hefei, to dance at “The Belt and Road World Dance Conference,” and then to Beijing. The objective was to show a particular proximity between Canadian First Nations and China, as made evident by the media coverage of Mike Archie's trip, which stated that **“we established a friendship with Chinese people from China who participated in mining gold panning and building railways more than 160 years ago”** (which implied that they were both exploited by English Canadians), and that “the visit showed how the BRI brings together world cultures,” with many pictures to support that idea.<sup>250</sup>



**The Canadian sanctions against the PRC adopted in March 2021, in response to serious and systematic human rights abuses in Xinjiang, provided Beijing with an opportunity to capitalize on the parallelism between the Chinese and First Nations.**

247. PRC Consulate general in Vancouver, “Consul General LIU Fei Met with Musqueam Indian Band and Local Chinese Canadian Entrepreneurs” (8 Aug.2016), <https://archive.vn/dweCg>.

248. “IMBA students From China Visit Musqueam Traditional Territory to Explore Vancouver's Indigenous Roots,” University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business (16 May 2019).

249. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, “Consul General LIU Fei Met with Friends from BC First Nations (from Chinese consulate General in Vancouver)” (16 Dec. 2015), <https://archive.vn/6bP4j>.

250. “促进中加两国人文交流，加拿大原住民酋长访华收获颇丰” (“To Promote Humanist Exchanges Between China and Canada, Canadian Autochthonous Chiefs Have Led a Fructuous Visit to China”), 中华新闻社 (*China News*) (1 Feb. 2019), <https://archive.vn/JKCPu>.

In a long list of crimes committed by the very people who are giving lessons today (in this case European, British and Canadian people, who announced sanctions in a coordinated fashion on March 22, 2021), the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalled that, in the 1870s, the Canadian government had implemented a policy of “assimilation of indigenous people” and of “cultural genocide.”<sup>251</sup> **This way of turning the accusation around, a *Tu quoque* (you too) fallacy**, is not new: a month earlier, on Twitter, she already stated that the allegations of genocide in Xinjiang were a lie, but that “genocide did take place in Canada.”



Moreover, since one of the human rights abuses Beijing is accused of in Xinjiang is **the forced sterilization of Uyghur women**, the adoption by the Canadian Parliament of a motion condemning the PRC on February 22 also sparked controversy in Canada. **Indigenous advocacy groups accused the federal government of having implemented similar measures against them in the past.** Of course, these groups did not need Beijing to draw the parallel and express public outrage, but one can assume that their mobilization was seen at the Chinese embassy in Ottawa not only as **an opportunity to fan the flames** of this anger, but also as **another reason to maintain close relations** with indigenous communities.

## X. The Canadian case illustrates the russification of Chinese influence operations

The preceding pages show that, as Charles Burton said, “there are strong circumstantial indications **that Chinese influence operations have been notably successful in Canada**,”<sup>252</sup> but also that, not unlike what happened in Sweden, we can see **the early stages of a Russification of these influence operations**. Indeed, in Canada, Beijing

251. “Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s remarks on Xinjiang-related issues,” ambassade de la RPC au Canada, 24 mars 2021 (<https://archive.vn/wIqQW>).

252. Burton, “Recent PRC Influence Operations,” 10.



does not stop at modeling the national debate on China, censoring the “five poison” through pressure on media, and interfering with schools and universities for instance. It also targets the Canadian society and its government in an attempt to divide the population. **For now, like in Sweden, it remains at an intermediate stage where the negative discourse is still linked to China (i.e. it mirrors a positive narrative that is about China).**

Some attacks are anecdotic. For example, they have instrumentalized the legalization of marijuana: Chinese media alerted Chinese Canadians to the dangers of marijuana-filled candies on their children.<sup>253</sup> There are several possible explanations: to try to draw Chinese communities in Canada away from Ottawa (by creating mistrust) and closer to Beijing (by playing the values card); to show that Beijing cares about the well-being of its “flock” all around the world, regardless of citizenship, and that there is therefore a form of ethnic solidarity; but also, according to some, because Beijing does not rule out developing a cannabis industry one day: it is therefore in its interest to limit the success of Canadian cannabis in order to export some.

Cannabis is one of the **potentially divisive issues that may put the Chinese community at odds with its host country Canada.** But there are additional buttons in Beijing’s arsenal, including same-sex marriage, real estate investments, shark fins (a picture of Vancouver’s Richmond MP Alice Wong eating a shark fin soup caused a controversy in 2012) and, obviously, the purported Sinophobia of Canadians and their government.

Rightly or wrongly, **many Chinese Canadians (like their Australian counterparts) feel discriminated.** Then, Chinese authorities and their proxies (associations, entrepreneurs, and students) have an easy time coming to their rescue with a twofold message. First, racial unity. The language used in the June 2019 statement about Hong Kong, which was signed by more than 200 pro-Beijing associations (→ p. 577) wasn’t anodyne: it explicitly called for **racial unity, invoking the Chinese “blood” tying foreigners of Chinese descent, including Canadians, to the population of mainland China.** Bill Chu, of the Canadians for Reconciliation Society, was right to point out that “it’s divisive to say the least. It’s trying to shift our allegiance from one country [Canada] to another [China].”<sup>254</sup> This is precisely their **objective: to convince Chinese Canadians that they are closer to Beijing than to Ottawa.** The same logic was rolled out for First Nations which share, if not the same blood (as is the case of some Musqueam people), at least the same position as victims.

Second, this narrative highlights the CCP’s importance: “you are being discriminated and the solution to that is to have a powerful motherland – China. But without the CCP, your motherland will be weak. In other words, **your ability to stand tall as a Canadian depends on the CCP,** not your own ability or the values of Canadian society.”<sup>255</sup> Sometimes, the message is subtle, internalizing the liberal thought: “you do not need to be with us, and we can keep our political, ideological, cultural differences. You do not need to embrace the CCP but, as we share the same blood, belong to the same group, we will help you.” This powerful message can bear fruits. Hence, **Sinophobia is dangerous as it provides China with opportunities for influence operations.**

253. Interview between one of the authors and a Canadian journalist of Chinese descent, in Vancouver (Apr. 2019).

254. Young, “Canadian Ads Blasted Hong Kong ‘Radicals.’”

255. “Infiltration,” Ask Politicians about CCP (Canadian Friends of Hong Kong), <https://www.askpoliticiansccp.org/infiltration>.



**Other attacks occurred during the Huawei affair, for instance to turn the stigma around:** has Canada really respected the rule of law that it claims to champion when it arrested Meng? Was this arrest really compatible with the democratic and liberal values that Ottawa is supposed to uphold?

As with Russian operations,<sup>256</sup> divisions are envisioned as both internal (here, dividing the Canadian society, particularly the Chinese community from the rest) and external (amplifying potential tensions between a country and its neighbors). **The Huawei case certainly allowed Beijing to maintain and deepen existing tensions between Canada and the United States** by spreading the narrative that, contrary to appearances, this was not a problem between Canada and China but between Canada and the United States, with Ottawa unwillingly finding itself in the crossfire of a Chinese-American cold war after it bowed to pressure from Washington to stop Meng. Beijing exploited the growing anti-American sentiment in Canada by circulating the idea that Washington “threw Canada under the bus.” Furthermore, it played on moral equivalences: China is tough, but so is the United States, and Canada is the victim. This strategy began at the start of the scandal, and received somewhat encouraging news in late October 2020 when the Supreme Court of British Columbia authorized Meng Wanzhou’s lawyers to plead that Canada had been dupped by the United States in obtaining her arrest.<sup>257</sup>

**For now, Chinese operations in Canada remain tied to the Chinese community. But their progressive Russification implies their future “desinization”** – the operations will probably grow beyond issues of interest to the community to target societal issues that concern all Canadians. This is already apparent in the use of English-language media to try to reach, on the one hand, Chinese Canadians who do not speak Chinese, such as second or third generation immigrants and, on the other hand, all Canadians. It is then important to underline, as Jonathan Manthorpe did, that Chinese Canadians are not the only ones targeted: **“Non-Chinese Canadians are just as likely to be recruited as agents of influence by the United Front and Beijing’s other intelligence services.** Indeed, because of naïveté, ignorance, or sheer venality, non-Chinese Canadians are often easy recruits for Beijing. Chinese immigrants are more experienced with the regime most of them have come to Canada to escape.”<sup>258</sup>

256. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcía, Marine Guillaume, and Janaina Herrera, *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*, report from the Center for analysis, prevision and strategy (CAPS) of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Strategic Research of the Ministry for the Armed Forces (IRSEM), Paris (Aug. 2018), 69-70.

257. Timothé Matte-Bergeron, “La Cour permet à Meng Wanzhou de présenter une autre défense” (“The Court Allowed Meng Wanzhou to Submit another Defense”), Radio Canada (29 Oct. 2020).

258. Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda*, 166.

## Chapter 6

# THE INFEKTION 2.0 OPERATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020)

The exact origin of the pandemic remains unknown at the time of writing, and for good reason, as Beijing still refuses an independent investigation.<sup>1</sup> But it appears that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was found in the Hubei province (central China) as early as October 2019.<sup>2</sup> The magnitude and prevalence of the contaminations rapidly unsettled healthcare systems and the societies hit by the virus. And, in the political sphere, the pandemic has already taught us a lot. For observers of China, it revealed obvious elements that had long been forgotten and it undermined the prevalent common sense. For instance, the weight of local institutions in the Chinese political model, a legacy of a singular state trajectory, came to the fore; the local state appeared for what it has always been: a political level resistant to the ambitions of the center, quick to scupper the policies decided by the Party.<sup>3</sup> This could be seen in the clashes between the Hubei and Jiangxi police forces after the lockdown was lifted for the inhabitants of Wuhan.<sup>4</sup> The crisis provoked by the virus has also prompted us to qualify the analyses of those presenting Xi Jinping as a new hegemonic Mao, perhaps forgetting too hastily that Xi's accumulation of power has not entirely eliminated the internal rivalries, the deleterious effect of the suspension of the rules of devolution of power and the gradual induration of a state apparatus distraught by the campaign against corruption.<sup>5</sup>

As it was probed by its population and the international community, **the CCP quickly reacted by conducting several informational operations simultaneously, some carrying a positive message** (championing its management of the crisis and, as such, its political model) **and others with a negative narrative** (attacks against other states, especially Western states, for their inability to manage the virus, or even for an alleged responsibility in its apparition). On this latter point, Beijing circulated **a rumor stating that the virus had originated in the United States, and not in China.** The present case study investigates this singular operation. Without any hint to its “true” code name, if one was ever assigned, and because it appears as a **sort of replica of the KGB-led Infektion Operation** in the 1980s with which the Soviets tried to make people believe that AIDS was US-made, we named this operation “**Infektion 2.0.**”<sup>6</sup> The present study focuses on the first phase of the

1. “Nous souhaitons une enquête sur les origines de la pandémie de Covid-19 approfondie et crédible” (“We Want an In-Depth and Credible Investigation into the Origins of the Covid-19 Pandemic”), *Le Monde* (4 Mar. 2021).

2. Jonathan Pekar et al., “Timing the SARS-CoV-2 Index Case in Hubei province,” *Science* (18 Mar. 2021).

3. Yves Chevrier discusses “the weakness of strong state” instead of “the crisis of a weak state.” See: Yves Chevrier, *L'Empire terrestre [The Land Empire]*, (IBP).

4. Lea Li, “Police, Public Clash Over Border Reopening in China,” *Inkstone* (30 Mar. 2020).

5. On that note, the decision by the very official *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)* journal to publish a speech delivered by Xi Jinping on January 7 was puzzling, as it implicitly highlighted the absence of measures taken by the Party's Secretary General between January 7 and January 20, even though he was then in charge of the coronavirus (<https://archive.vn/afirR>).

6. This chapter was adapted from Paul Charon, *L'opération “Covid-19”: un approfondissement de la russification des campagnes de désinformation chinoises*, IRSEM research paper, April 7, 2020, not published. This paper was diffused

operation, which occurred over a month, between February 22 and March 23, 2020. The CCP-led disinformation went on afterward, but this first sequence adequately illustrates the similarities between the KGB-led Infektion Operation in 1983 and Infektion 2.0.

## I. The Chinese informational war on the coronavirus

We delineated three components in the CCP’s informational war on the coronavirus, which were deployed simultaneously and are identified here without hierarchy between them.

### A. Controlling the hemorrhage

The Party’s first informational objective was to **control narratives internally**. At the very start of the crisis, local and, later, central authorities tried to silence the pandemic by jailing whistleblowers like doctor Li Wenliang (李文亮),<sup>7</sup> and by imposing a tight control over traditional media outlets and social networks.<sup>8</sup> Faced with the evident failure of this strategy, which probably turned the epidemic into a pandemic, and with the growing disbelief of the population – Chinese citizens compared the coronavirus to Chernobyl<sup>9</sup> – **the Party focused on highlighting its efficiency in managing the crisis**, thus building a more positive narrative on what was happening. Hence, sustaining the regime was the priority: the CCP-led operation opted to **flood Chinese citizens with multiple (and sometimes contradictory) counter-narratives** in order to make them doubt its responsibility: the Party was presented as a simple victim.

### B. “Turning the stigma over”

The second act in this informational strategy relied on the tools of the Chinese public diplomacy. They tried to **demonetize critical voices in Western media** that highlighted the Chinese government’s incompetence during the first weeks of the pandemic. At that point, the narrative endorsed by Beijing stressed that, through the adoption of radical measures, China had given time for the rest of the world to get ready for the crisis. China also branded itself as a global savior that provided many countries with medical equipment. The use of icons was fundamental to accompany **the construction of a narrative presenting China at the bedside of the world**, as illustrated by the Italian examples below. Hence, the Chinese campaign was a solid case of **“turning the stigma over,”** an expression coined by Erving Goffman,<sup>10</sup> to construct the image of a benevolent China (*ethos*).

internally (to several ministries) but leaked (not by IRSEM) to Pierre Alonso, who reviewed it in “La Chine à l’école russe de la désinformation” (“China at the Russian School of Disinformation”), *Liberation* (9 Mar. 2021).

7. Alice Su, “A doctor Was Arrested for Warning China About the Coronavirus. Then he Died of It,” *Los Angeles Times* (6 Feb. 2020).

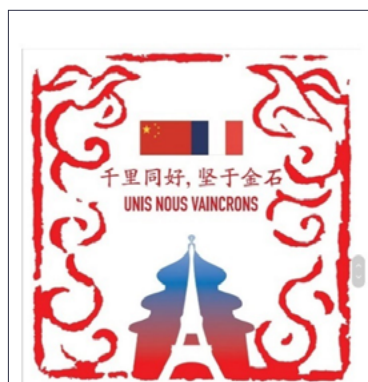
8. Sarah Cook, “ANALYSIS: In a Public Health Crisis, Beijing Sees a Political Threat,” *China Media Bulletin*, 142 (Mar. 2020).

9. Jane Li, “Chinese People are Using ‘Chernobyl’ to Channel Their Anger About the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *Quartz* (27 Jan. 2020).

10. Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Paris: Minuit, 1975).



A similar campaign was observed in several European countries such as Spain<sup>11</sup> or Serbia (→ p. 383).<sup>12</sup> In France, **the Chinese embassy circulated the same message of solidarity**: China helps European countries. The embassy and the Chinese government communicated intensively on the masks provided by China to France. And the Twitter accounts of the embassy and consulates relayed ceaselessly the messages of the Party.<sup>13</sup> This PR campaign targeted the entire French population but the Chinese diaspora more specifically, as shown by the articles that circulated on WeChat.<sup>14</sup>



11. Pablo M. Diez, “China Lanza la ‘Diplomacia de Las Mascarillas’ Para Mejorar su Imagen” (“China Launches the ‘Face Mask Diplomacy’ to Improve its Image”), *ABC* (1 Apr. 2020).

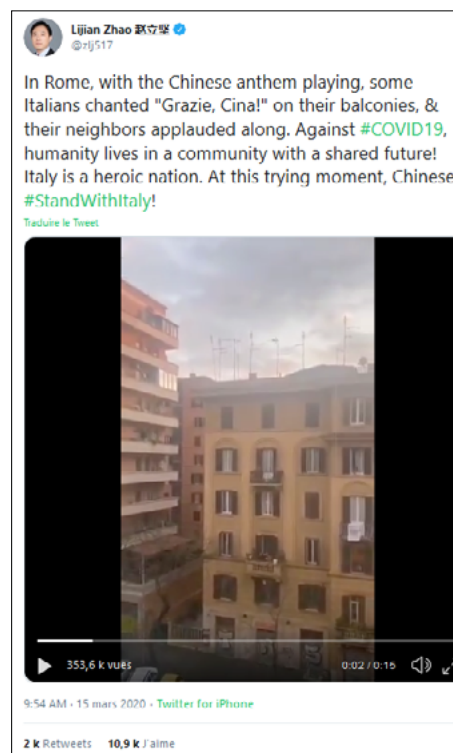
12. “Serbia Sets the Stage for Beijing’s Mask Diplomacy,” *AFP* (2 Apr. 2020).

13. François Bougon and Mathieu Suc, “En pleine pandémie, une ambiance de guerre froide” (“A Cold War Atmosphere Amidst the Pandemic”), *Mediapart* (30 Mar. 2020).

14. “血库告急! 为救重症患者, 法国连军机也用上了! 外长: 中国百万口罩援助来了” (“Blood Banks in despair! To Save the Sickest Patients, Military Planes are Mobilized in France! The Minister of Foreign Affairs: China is Sending Millions of Masks to Help You”), *欧洲时报 (News from Europe)* (19 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/58Ukn>.



Yet, the Chinese government did not stop at this “mask diplomacy” nourished with a particular iconography and repeated propaganda messages. On March 15, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a **video on Twitter showing Romans thanking China for its help and playing the Chinese national anthem** (see images below). But an Italian factchecking website showed that **it was a montage**.<sup>15</sup> The Romans seen on the video had come together to thank healthcare workers, not China. In fact, the video circulated by the Chinese government was a fake made from two videos posted by the *Corriere della Sera* the previous day, and none of them advertised the Chinese anthem or any “thank you” to China. The sound was actually added on the original videos.<sup>16</sup> With that, the Chinese authorities tried to **manipulate European public opinions**.



### C. Discrediting adversaries

This aspect of the informational strategy consisted in **accusing other countries, beginning with the United States, of being responsible for the sanitary crisis linked to the coronavirus**.<sup>17</sup> China took advantage of an ideal timing: as the first country hit by the virus, it was logically the first country to (presumably) control it. Then, it used a flurry of tools to propagate a narrative meant to weaken its adversaries. At that point, Europe and North America were busy managing the urgency of the sanitary crisis and could not dedicate resources to counter this narrative with the strength it would have required.

15. David Puente, “Coronavirus. La Propaganda Cinese e il Montaggio Fake Del Video ‘Grazie Cina’” (“Coronavirus. Chinese Propaganda and Fake Editing of the ‘Thank You China’ video”), *Open*, (20 Mar. 2020).

16. “Il Video che Mostra la Propaganda Cinese Sull’Italia e il Covid-19” (“Video Showing Chinese Propaganda About Italy and Covid-19”), *Pagella Politica* (20 Mar. 2020).

17. David Gilbert, “Beijing is Pushing a Conspiracy Theory That the US Army Brought the Coronavirus to China,” *Vice* (13 Mar. 2020).

The CCP did not limit itself to vague insinuations. It put together a robust disinformation campaign that could resist initial fact-checking, to make people believe in an American origin to the coronavirus. This Chinese operation reminded us of the Infektion Operation set up by Service A of the KGB<sup>18</sup> during the 1980s to propagate the idea that the HIV virus had been conceived by the U.S. government to target African Americans and homosexuals.

## II. The Soviet “Infektion” Operation: a Model for China?

Cold War specialists often point to a major difference between Western and Eastern intelligence services: while the former were primarily tasked with collecting intelligence, the latter dedicated a colossal part of their resources to disinformation, what the Soviets called *dezinformatsiya*, an element of the larger “active measures” (*aktivnyye meropriata*).<sup>19</sup> Each KGB “residency” abroad had officers tasked with those missions. In fact, their internal notation was almost exclusively based on their ability to suggest disinformation operations taking advantage of the fault lines in their assigned countries. Moreover, unlike the U.S. system, and more broadly Western countries, where “covert actions” were designed as exceptional, **Soviet “active measures” were largely integrated into the foreign policy of the USSR.**<sup>20</sup> All Party organs had to ensure that the operations were successful.

The “Infektion” Operation (which was apparently named “Denver” by East Germany’s intelligence)<sup>21</sup> was likely motivated by degrading East-West relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Faced with Reagan’s efforts to exhaust the Soviet regime, Andropov, the former head of the KGB, responded with swollen aggressivity and more “active measures” operations.

Beginning in the 1950s, the Soviets launched large-scale disinformation operations that exploited the fear of chemical and bacteriological weapons that had taken hold of Western public opinions.<sup>23</sup> During the 1970s, the field was even more favorable in the United States, where the media had revealed biological warfare programs of the U.S. army, including at Fort Detrick, in Maryland. **When the HIV virus emerged, in the early 1980s, the Soviets immediately took the opportunity to launch a disinformation operation** to make people believe that the U.S. Army was responsible for AIDS, presented as a biological weapon conceived to target African Americans and homosexuals.

The actual operation began **on July 17, 1983, with a letter published in the Indian newspaper *The Patriot***, created in 1962 by the KGB to propagate fake information useful to the USSR’s interests.<sup>24</sup> The document was signed by an anonymous U.S. scientist but

18. Service A was tasked with disinformation and subversion operations.

19. Richard H. Shultz, Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia, The Strategy of Soviet Disinformation* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986); Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Straus et Giroux, 2020).

20. Thomas Boghardt, “Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign,” *Studies in Intelligence*, 53:4 (Dec. 2009).

21. Douglas Selvage, “Operation ‘Denver’: The East German Ministry of State Security and the KGB’s AIDS Disinformation Campaign, 1985–1986 (Part 1),” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 21:4 (2019), 71-123.

22. Boghardt, “Soviet Bloc Intelligence.”

23. Ibid.

24. “Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986 – 87,” *United States Department of State* (Aug. 1987).

actually manufactured by the KGB, and it affirmed that AIDS resulted from experimentations in biological warfare conducted by the U.S. Army.

For two years, there was no particular development in this operation, until September 1985 when the **KGB instructed Eastern European services to propagate the fake information** published in *The Patriot*.<sup>25</sup> In October 1985, the KGB organized the reproduction of the article from *The Patriot* in a Moscow newspaper it controlled, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

In August 1986, the operation took another turn with the **Stasi's involvement**, including its Division X, in charge of disinformation. During the Summit of Non-Aligned Countries, German intelligence services circulated an article written by two biologists, Jakob and Lili Segal, untitled "AIDS: Its Nature and Origin." This article offered a scientific basis to allegations initially published in *The Patriot*. For months, these arguments were relayed ceaselessly by Soviet and foreign media (newspapers, magazines, radios, TV channels) and the couple of biologists was introduced as French scientists. This was how the operation got traction: **hundreds of newspapers, many of them without any tie to the Soviet Union, covered the narrative fabricated by the KGB**, sometimes including information that was not in the original document. For instance, several articles insisted that AIDS was the result of a plot whereas others described it as an accident in U.S. research on biological weapons. **The "theory" continued to spread and found additional relays in the U.S. radical Left.** The *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, which investigated U.S. covert operations, covered the Soviet story and contributed to its prevalence among the U.S. Left.<sup>26</sup> On March 30, 1987, **the narrative fabricated by the KGB reached the primetime show hosted by Dan Rather on CBS News**, which gave another considerable breath of fresh air to the operation.

The Soviet campaign had an **immense impact, especially in Africa and in certain segments of the U.S. population where the theory continues to circulate today.** In 2005, for instance, the rapper Kanye West mentioned it in his song "Heard 'EM Say." Nowadays, this is **a textbook case which probably inspired the Russians in their disinformation campaign targeting vaccines and which now seems to feed the Chinese approach on disinformation.**

In a series of investigative reports published in *The New York Times* in 2018, Adam B. Ellick, Adam Westbrook and Jonah M. Kessel tried to **reconstruct the Soviet methodology of disinformation.**<sup>27</sup> They identified a seven-step process:

- *Primo*, **identify weaknesses in the target country**, dissents or fault lines that could be accentuated and exploited by the Soviet Union.
- *Secundo*, **create a lie** so big that no one could figure out that it was fabricated.
- *Tertio*, add a **portion of truth** to the lie to make the entire message more believable. Ladislav Bittman, deputy-head of the Disinformation Department in the Czechoslovakian

25. "KGB, Information Nr. 2955 (to Bulgarian State Security)" (7 Sep. 1985), *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army (CDDAABCSSISBNA-R), f. 9, op. 4, a.e. 663, pp. 208-9. Obtained by Christopher Nehring and translated by Douglas Selvage (<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208946>).

26. It was founded in 1978 by Philip Agee, a former CIA agent who turned into an indefatigable critic of the intelligence service.

27. The tryptic "Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News," "The Seven Commandments of Fake News," "The Worldwide War on Truth," was published in *The New York Times* (12 Nov. 2018).

intelligence services between 1964 and 1966 stressed that, to succeed, “every disinformation message must at least partially correspond to reality or generally accepted views.”<sup>28</sup>

- *Quarto*, **conceal the origin of the fabrication.** The information needed to appear as coming from somewhere not tied to the Soviet Union.
- *Quinto*, identify “**useful idiots**” capable of **relaying** the message coined by Moscow.
- *Sexto*, make sure the USSR was never mentioned. There was only one rule to avoid that: **always deny** any involvement.
- *Septimo*, **bet on the long run.** All operations were not meant to bear immediate results, and it could seemingly require years before the effects were known.

Arguably, this model now needs to be adapted to account for the changes that followed the introduction of the Internet, which the authors described as “anonymity, ubiquity, immediacy.” And yet, it is a **particularly efficient blueprint for a nation in search of informational power.**<sup>29</sup>

### III. Chronology of the Operation “Infektion 2.0”

Contrary to a Soviet operation that lasts several years, **the Chinese operation was rolled out in a month in 2020, thanks to social media.** Not unlike the Soviets, the Chinese reacted rapidly to a virus that they had not anticipated: HIV, like the Covid-19, are phenomenon that provided these countries’ agents with an opportunity to target their adversaries with disinformation. As it happens, with the coronavirus, **the Russians – not the Chinese – were the first to react:** on January 20, 2020, a TV channel funded by the Russian Ministry of Defense, *Zvezda*, was the first media to describe the virus as a U.S. biological weapon, during an interview with Igor Nikulin, an “expert” that often appears on propaganda TV channels.<sup>30</sup> He was previously known for denying Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons in Syria,<sup>31</sup> and for accusing Americans of using biological weapons for instance.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, in China, when a resident of Inner Mongolia circulated the same story on the app Kuaishou six days later (a video viewed 14,000 times), he was charged with spreading rumors and detained for ten days.<sup>33</sup> And yet, Chinese diplomats and media were spreading that same rumor a month later. In the meantime, Beijing came to understand that there was an opportunity following the “**intense internal criticisms**” that the CCP had to face for its management of the crisis,<sup>34</sup> and which was taken up globally, including in the United States. **On the defensive, the Party-State reacted by diverting the attention,** accusing Washington of being responsible for the pandemic. **Strictly speaking, the**

28. Ladislav Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider’s View* (Washington: Brassey’s Inc, 1985).

29. It could be interesting to question the possible influence of the Soviet model of disinformation on American “covert actions.”

30. Aleksandra Arsentieva, “Эксперт связал вспышку пневмонии в Китае с испытанием биологического оружия” (“An Expert Linked the Epidemic of Pneumonia in China to a Biological Weapon Tryout”), *Zvezda* (20 Jan. 2020), <https://archive.vn/KVmZd>.

31. For instance: “Accusé à tort? Damas ne possède plus d’armes chimiques depuis 2014” [“Wrongly Accused? Damascus Has no Chemical Weapons since 2014”], *Sputnik* (5 Apr. 2017).

32. Weaponized: How Rumors about Covid-19’s Origins led to a Narrative Arms Race, DFRLab, Atlantic Council (Feb. 2021), 16-17

33. Erika Kinetz, “Anatomy of a Conspiracy: With COVID, China Took Leading Role,” *AP News* (15 Feb. 2021).

34. Ibid.



operation started on February 22, with the use of a Chinese study on the transmission of the virus, which had been published the previous day: based on 93 complete genomes of the virus, the scientists defended that the virus could have been imported from a place other than the Huanan market, in Wuhan.<sup>35</sup> The sequence of events then unfolded as such:

- **February 22:** The *Global Times* (→ p. 181) published an article that evoked the concerns of the Chinese government following a Japanese report, on TV Asahi, that affirmed that the virus could have originated in the United States.<sup>36</sup> This article was covered by the *People's Daily* on February 23 which, via its partners (→ p. 189), had it published abroad as well, including in the *Helsinki Times* (February 24),<sup>37</sup> and in the *New Zealand Herald* (February 26).<sup>38</sup> It contributed to the international circulation of the rumor.



- **February 27:** the Chinese epidemiologist **Zhong Nanshan** (钟南山), who discovered the SARS virus in 2003, explained during a press conference that the coronavirus could have originated outside of China.<sup>39</sup>



- **March 4:** the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs joined the fray through its deputy spokesperson, **Zhao Lijian** (→ p. 232). During a press conference, he quoted the declarations made by Zhong Nanshan.

35. Yu Wenbin, Tang Guangda, Zhang Li, and Richard T. Corlett, "Decoding Evolution and Transmissions of Novel Pneumonia Coronavirus Using the Whole Genomic Data," ChinaXiv:202002.00033 (21 Feb. 2020), <https://archive.vn/cqUqj>.

36. Hu Yuwei and Zhang Han, "US CDC Refutes TV Asahi Story, Claiming No Evidence Shows Flu Deaths in US Were Caused by Coronavirus," *Global Times* (22 Feb. 2020).

37. <https://archive.vn/lrFji>.

38. The article was since deleted from its website.

39. 韦杰夫 (Wei Jiefu) 蔡敏婕 (Cai Minjie), "钟南山谈新冠肺炎治疗热点问题: 不可能一个月内研发出新药" ("Zhong Nanshan Discusses the Polemical Question of the Treatment Against the Coronavirus-Induced Pneumonia: It Is Not Possible to Create a New Drug in a Month"), 中国新闻网 (*China News Service*) (27 Feb. 2020), <https://archive.vn/g0Jji>.



• **March 7: the Chinese embassy in South Africa** took to Twitter to relay the words of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman on the unknown origin of the coronavirus. Without certainty on the origin of the virus, the ambassador added that it was not “made in China.”<sup>40</sup>



• **March 12:** the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman, **Hua Chunying**, repeated the statement of Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, acknowledging in front of the House Oversight Committee of the U.S. Congress that several cases of the Covid-19 had mistakenly been labeled as flu. For that reason, the spokeswoman rejected the nickname “Chinese virus.” At about the same time, the ministry's other spokesperson, Zhao Linjiang, wondered, in a tweet, **about the involvement of the US Army**, which he deemed a possible origin of the coronavirus. He instrumentalized the speech given by Robert Redfield; he also highlighted the presence of a US team at the 7<sup>th</sup> Military World Games that took place in Wuhan in October and November 2019, implying that the Americans could have infected the Chinese population in Wuhan.<sup>41</sup>



40. “No Confirmed Case of COVID-19 Imported from China to Africa,” Website of the PRC Embassy in South Africa (17 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/rrlqe>.

41. US Department of Defense, “Military World Games,” <https://bit.ly/3oJDjj0>.



• **March 13:** in two successive messages, Zhao Lijian referred his Twitter followers to two articles published by a **Larry Romanoff**, on [globalresearch.ca](http://globalresearch.ca) ([mondialisation.ca](http://mondialisation.ca) in its French version), an emanation from the Center for Research on Globalization (CRG), a self-described independent think tank based in Montreal (→ p. 602). These two articles endorsed the theory of an American-made virus. During this “peak” of March 12-13, Zhao tweeted no less than eleven times about this topic and his messages were “cited over 99,000 times over the next six weeks, in at least 54 languages.”<sup>42</sup> They were relayed by Chinese diplomats and media, but also “Venezuela’s foreign minister and RT’s correspondent in Caracas, as well as Saudi accounts close to the kingdom’s royal family.”<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Global Times* published an article explaining that the United States was engaged in an informational war against China to make Beijing responsible for the apparition of the Covid-19. The article highlighted the important number of persons (37,000) who had died from the flu in the U.S. in 2019, implying that some deaths might have been caused by the Covid-19 instead.<sup>44</sup>



42. Kinetz, “Anatomy of a conspiracy.”

43. Ibid.

44. These numbers are not notably high: 61,000 Americans died from the flu the previous year. See: “Estimated Influenza Illnesses, Medical visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths in the United States – 2017–2018 Influenza Season,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [https:// www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/2017-2018.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/2017-2018.htm).



An article that covered the hypothesis of an American responsibility largely circulated the same day on both **WeChat** (→ p. 196) and the **Guancha** website (→ p. 491).<sup>45</sup> It evoked in particular the existence of a petition deposited on the dedicated website of the White House to demand that the U.S. government tells the truth about Fort Detrick. It then described a series of strange coincidences: that Fort Detrick closed in July 2019, a virulent flu in the United States (it never happened), a drill on fighting pandemics organized in the United States in October, the emergence of the coronavirus in China and, finally, the suppression of online videos that evoked the closing of Fort Detrick. Its author explained that the petition had been deleted from the website of the U.S. government because it had not received the necessary votes (100,000) in 30 days to be kept online. Furthermore, the article mentioned the evidence uncovered by Larry Romanoff but seemed to lean toward the hypothesis of an accidental infection through U.S. sportspersons present in Wuhan in October and November 2019.



• **March 19**; the Chinese national TV channel **CGTN** (→ p. 176) published an article untitled “10 questions for the U.S.: Where did the novel coronavirus come from?”<sup>46</sup> in which the author, Wang Fuhua, highlighted the very bad performance of the U.S. delegation during the games in Wuhan – which had to be hiding something. Was the delegation carrying the virus? Another question raised suspicion: Wang Fuhua recalled that the United States had conveniently organized a crisis management drill on a pandemic in October 2019, apparently attended by the CIA director. Only one month

45. Circulated on Guancha by a Jin Wei (金微) (<https://archive.vn/UDRJE>) and on WeChat by “Kekekankan” (可可看看) (<https://archive.vn/JUwym>).

46. Wang Fuhua, “10 Questions for the U.S.: Where Did the Novel Coronavirus Come From?” CGTN (19 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/fHcky>.



before the pandemic started in China; for the author, it could not have been a mere coincidence. This is a classical method, even a *topos*, of conspiracy theories, along with pseudo-comparatist efforts: an historical analogy gives the illusion of analytical rigor. For instance, the Spanish flu emerged in the United States but Washington let Spain bear the responsibility for the pandemic, and it was allegedly doing the same today with China today.

- **March 20:** *The People Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) published an article by Zhong Sheng<sup>47</sup> that quoted Daniel Lucey, an expert on infectious diseases at Georgetown University, in Washington, who wrote that the first case of coronavirus probably occurred in November 2019 or earlier.<sup>48</sup> Hence, this official newspaper highlighted the uncertainty around the origin of the virus, which should have encouraged Americans to be more cautious.

- **March 22:** CGTN quoted an Italian doctor interviewed by the U.S. radio NPR who explained that cases of Covid-19 were present in Italy as early as December, perhaps even November, before the pandemic was known in China.



- **March 22:** the same day, the **Chinese ambassador to the United States**, Cui Tiankai (崔天凯) declared in an interview that the conspiracy theories that evoked a possible fabrication of the virus by the U.S. Army were “crazy.”<sup>49</sup> On February 9, he had said the same thing on the TV show “Face the Nation” on CBS.<sup>50</sup>

47. This pen name had been used by the *People's Daily* since November 2008 to write about Chinese positions on international issues. Zhong Sheng (钟声) means “the ringing of a bell,” the shortened version of 警世钟声 (*jingshi zhongsheng*) which can be translated as “the bell rings to alert the world.” The journalists from the *People's Daily* thus play on a homophony because 钟 and 中 (“China”) have the same pronunciation, and 声 also carries the meaning of “voice.” As such, Zhong Sheng can also be translated as “the voice of China” (<https://archive.vn/p0DIv>).

48. Zhong Sheng (钟声), “必须抵御污名化之毒” (“We Need to Resist Stigmatization”), *Renmin ribao* (20 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/LG7vo>.

49. Jonathan Swan and Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Top Chinese Official Disowns U.S. Military Lab Coronavirus Conspiracy,” *Axios*, (22 Mar. 2020).

50. “Transcript: Ambassador Cui Tiankai on “Face the Nation,” February 9, 2020,” *CBS News* (9 Feb. 2020).

- **March 23:** Zhao Lijian published a message on his Twitter account that sharply contrasted with the tone of the previous days.



After this date, the narrative of a U.S. involvement in the creation of the Covid-19 became **less prominently relayed – although it did not disappear**. The Chinese Communist Party then adopted a new narrative that presented China as the country that managed to fight the virus efficiently. It encouraged others to adopt the same methods, while several voices stressed that the nature of the regime was intimately linked to China’s success in managing the sanitary crisis.

Hitherto, **the narrative portraying the United States as responsible for the emergence of the Covid-19 – either as a voluntary aggression or as an involuntary accident – circulated rapidly in Chinese diasporas**, especially in France and Italy, where the theories have been abundantly relayed. Two ideas seemed to be recurring: the virus was presented as a revenge for the discriminations and racism to which the Chinese were subjected at the start of the pandemic; and the fact that an American origin of the virus made it easier to explain why the virus kept circulating elsewhere, in France and Italy especially, when China was able to control its circulation.

This is probably the reason why **the narrative of a U.S. virus was essentially circulating on WeChat**. A WeChat account managed by journalists from the *Global Times* continued to defend the conspiracy theory that the coronavirus may have escaped from a laboratory of the U.S. Army in Fort Detrick. One article covered the history of the laboratory and suggested that it was both highly secretive in its research on biological weapons and badly regulated.<sup>51</sup> Besides, the articles posted on WeChat were also very critical of the U.S. system. Xiakedao (侠客岛), the WeChat account of the *Renmin Ribao* – whom we mentioned previously – affirmed that a third of the Covid-19-related deaths in the United States occurred in retirement homes, calling it a “massacre approved by the government” (a similar accusation was also formulated by the Chinese ambassador to France, as we noted in part three → p. 235).<sup>52</sup> As for CCTV’s account, it declared that the United States had

51. Posted by 补壹刀 (Buyidao), Wechat user “buyidao2016,” “这个神秘的美军P4生物实验室，黑历史多到爆” (“The Darl History of the Mysterious Biological Lab P4 of the US Army”), *Wechat* (14 May 2020), <https://archive.vn/QBHuv>.

52. Result of Weibo Search with the text “#美国死亡病例1/3来自养老院#” (“A Third of the Patients Who Died in the United States Were in Retirement Houses”) (3 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/5vGIz>.

INTRODUCTION

reduced the budget of the CDC, which explained the Americans' inability to deal with the virus. It also inferred that a plot might have explained so much inertia.<sup>53</sup>

## IV. An Analysis of the “Infektion 2.0” Operation

CONCEPTS

Several aspects and details of this operation deserve to be analyzed. First of all, it is necessary to return to what constituted the core of Zhao Lijian's argumentation, in other words **the two articles published by Larry Romanoff**.<sup>54</sup> We then evaluate the motivations behind the operation and its effectiveness.

### A. The CRG

ACTORS

In the two tweets he published on March 13, Zhao Lijian encouraged his readers to visit the website of [globalresearch.ca](http://globalresearch.ca) (CRG) to read the articles published by Larry Romanoff. The CRG was created in 2001 by a Canadian, Michel Chossudovsky, a professor at the University of Ottawa close to Thierry Meyssan and a regular guest on the Russian channel RT.<sup>55</sup> **The CRG is famous for its active role in the “conspirasphere”** (its articles are, for example, taken up on *Le Grand Soir*, a militant newspaper of “alternative information” administered by Maxime Vivas, mentioned in the previous part → p. 335) and as a relay of Russian campaigns of disinformation. In fact, its activities have drawn the attention of NATO.<sup>56</sup> CRG's English website is visited by a million visitors each month (1.59 million in February 2020) and the French version by more than 100,000 visitors (113,000 in February 2020).<sup>57</sup> Its articles adopt the method used by some Russian media outlets: instrumentalizing and hijacking neutral voices and serious outlets to deliver a message that reinforces their own narrative.

ACTIONS

One of the two articles written by Larry Romanoff relied on a report presumably published by Asahi TV in Japan. It also quoted Shen Yi (沈逸), a professor of international relations at Fudan University, in Shanghai and, more importantly, a Taiwanese virologist that intervened in *Zhe ! Bushi xinwen* (這! 不是新聞)<sup>58</sup> (*This! This is not information*), a TV show aired on the Taiwanese channel *EBC Dongsen Financial News* (東森財經新聞台), an emanation of the Eastern Broadcasting Company (東森電視), formerly known as Eastern Television (ETTV).<sup>59</sup>

CASE

Using three different sources, including two that were not expected to be partial because coming from “adversaries” of China (a Taiwanese virologist and a Japanese TV show), Larry Romanoff hoped to bring some objective veneer to his words. In reality, it was only an illusion. First, no link to the Japanese TV show was given; only to an article of the Chinese *Global*

53. Posted by 玉渊谭天 (Yuyuantantian), on Weibo (14 May 2020), <https://archive.vn/7A0JX>.

54. Since deleted, but archived: Larry Romanoff, “China's Coronavirus: A Shocking Update. Did the Virus Originate in the US?” *Global Research* (4 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/2LJR0>; “COVID-19: Further Evidence that the virus Originated in the US,” *Global Research* (11 Mar. 2020), <https://archive.vn/fJYZw>.

55. See the Conspiracy Watch webpage dedicated to Mondialisation.ca: <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/mondialisation-ca>.

56. Nathan Vanderklippe, “Chinese Official Promoting Unfounded Canadian Theory that Coronavirus Has Roots in U.S. Military,” *The Globe and Mail*, (14 Mar. 2020).

57. Data provided by “SimilarWeb.”

58. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvdCKimJzeQ>.

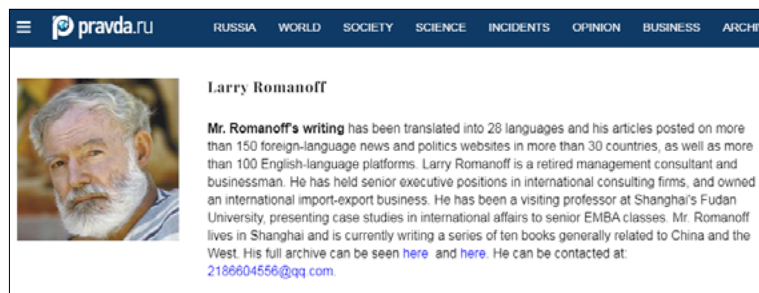
59. The show was largely circulated on WeChat and other platforms.

*Times* mentioning the Japanese program. In fact, Romanoff simply quoted the *Global Times*, not the Japanese report. Then, without assessing the argumentation of the Taiwanese virologist – who used a set of scientific tools to show that the virus could only have come from the United States because the largest number of variants of the virus was in that country – it should be noted that ETTV was already known for its pro-Guomindang (KMT) and pro-Beijing positions. As for Shen Yi, his words (which are quoted without a verifiable source) simply reasserted that China kept wondering about the primary origin of the virus. In conclusion, the evidence shown by Larry Romanoff was weak and certainly not as neutral as he said.

## B. Larry Romanoff

The author of the articles, Larry Romanoff, introduced himself as a former consultant and current professor at Fudan University, in Shanghai, the city where he supposedly lives. He mentioned only one way to contact him: an email address on the Chinese messaging service QQ (2186604556@qq.com). His first article was published on globalresearch.ca on September 24, 2019, in which he described the Tian'anmen events as a U.S. attempt at promoting a color revolution in China. **He wrote 72 articles in six months, all tainted with conspiracy theory, and, after late January 2020, almost all of them dealt with the coronavirus.** Even though they are not academic articles, this was still an important activity.

Investigating Larry Romanoff's background provided few results. Matthew Brown, journalist at *USA Today*, tried to contact Romanoff to obtain more details on some elements mentioned in his articles, but without success.<sup>60</sup> **Larry Romanoff could not be reached.** Moreover, there is **no recent photo of him.** The Russian *Pravda*, which published six of his articles between January 9 and March 9, 2021, illustrated his biography with a photo... of Ernest Hemingway.<sup>61</sup>



This biography simply copied the way he presents himself on his websites “The Moon of Shanghai (上海的月亮) – moonofshanghai.com (created in April 2020<sup>62</sup>) and bluemoonofshanghai.com (in October 2020<sup>63</sup>) – but without any picture of him there as well. We could not find videos either. A **sole audio recording** was posted online in April 2020.<sup>64</sup>

The Chinese-speaking Internet describes Larry Romanoff (拉里·罗曼诺夫) as an “all-powerful” professor (万能<sup>65</sup>) or as a “world-famous scientist” (世界著名科学家<sup>66</sup>)

60. Mathew Brown, “Fact Check: Coronavirus Originated in China, Not Elsewhere, Researchers and Studies Say,” *USA Today* (16 Mar. 2020).

61. <https://archive.vn/KgcS7>.

62. <https://archive.vn/nguZl>

63. <https://archive.vn/ZIuBn>

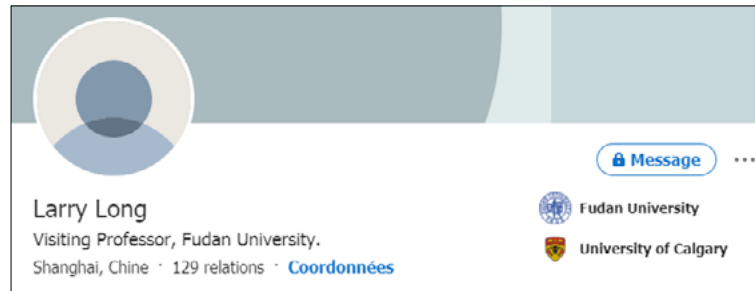
64. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKVnIxQzfv5>

65. <https://archive.vn/97xDk>.

66. <https://archive.vn/ANw3n>.



who is presumably a visiting professor at Fudan University, teaching in the MBA – despite the lack of mention of his name on the English and Chinese versions of the website of the prestigious Shanghai university. The managers of the MBA program interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* confirmed not knowing him, either as “Larry Romanoff,”<sup>67</sup> or under his presumed LinkedIn pseudonym, “Larry Long,” a “visiting professor” at Fudan University, trained at the University of Calgary, and now teaching in the former’s MBA program.<sup>68</sup>



Nonetheless, this fake profile gives some interesting information since it lists bearcanada.com as its personal site, which is no longer online but whose archives show that it had three distinct lives.<sup>69</sup> During the first one, between 2000 and 2005, bearcanada.com was the website of **Treasures of the Orient Inc, a Calgary-based company**, North American representative of Bear Productions, a Hong Kong-based company producing music for a children’s choir (the Bear Children’s Choir of Hong Kong), and an importer of Asian products:



Screenshot of the bearcanada.com contact page on November 29, 2004

67. James T. Areddy, “Coronavirus Conspiracy Theory Claims It Began in the U.S. – and Beijing Is Buying It,” *The Wall Street Journal* (26 Mar. 2020).

68. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/larry-long-a090b9a/> (<https://archive.ph/PWTja>).

69. <https://web.archive.org/web/changes/http://bearcanada.com/>.



INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Romanoff transferred parts of his business on another website, an online marketplace hosted at [members.shaw.ca/toyscanada/toymain.html](http://members.shaw.ca/toyscanada/toymain.html).<sup>75</sup>

CONCEPTS

One can assume, as the *Wall Street Journal* does, that this “Larry” Romanoff of 2001 is the “**Lawrence Delvin**” Romanoff who left another trail in the same *Calgary Herald* three years earlier. A 1998 article reported that he was arrested in 1995 for trafficking in used stamps that he cleaned and resold for new.<sup>76</sup> At his trial three years later, he pleaded guilty but also good faith, explaining that he had tried to raise funds for his church, and producing a letter of thanks that Mother Teresa had personally sent him in April 1995. The article presented him as 55 years old and owner of a small advertising agency.

If this is indeed the same person (who would therefore be 58 years old in the photo above), it would mean that he quickly reoriented his career after his 1998 trial, since his company Treasures of the Orient Inc. was created the following year. The Alberta Business Registry indicates that **Treasures of the Orient Inc. was registered in September 1999 and deregistered in 2005.**<sup>77</sup>

ACTORS

And for good reason, in 2005 the home page of [bearcanada.com](http://bearcanada.com) indicated a move from Calgary to Shanghai:



Screenshot from the [bearcanada.com](http://bearcanada.com) website, on November 26, 2005.<sup>78</sup>

His departure was confirmed by a readers’ letter published by *The Economist* in July 2005 in which Larry Romanoff signed a letter from Calgary.<sup>79</sup> In 2008, in another letter mailed to the *Globe and Mail* this time, he presented himself as “businessman living in Shanghai” critical of the Chinese policy of the Prime Minister Stephen Harper.<sup>80</sup>

CASE

Thus began the second life of [bearcanada.com](http://bearcanada.com), which was a transitional phase: **between 2006 and 2009, the site was essentially an empty shell**, with only the home page changed. It presented a “Canadian business, staffed by Canadians, and resident in Shanghai” that offered “a variety of products manufactured in China”.

CONCLUSION

75. <https://web.archive.org/web/20021220081932/http://www.members.shaw.ca/toyscanada/toymain.html>.

76. “Used stamp sales admitted,” *Calgary Herald* (22 Jan. 1998), B5.

77. <https://albertacorporations.com/treasures-of-the-orient-inc>.

78. <https://web.archive.org/web/20051126062205/http://bearcanada.com/>.

79. In which he explained having sold his house in Calgary in 1984 for CA\$131,000 (Letters, *The Economist* (7 Jul. 2005)).

80. “Canada has missed the boat on the miracle of China’s development. I believe Stephen Harper’s foreign policy is thoughtless and short-sighted, subject to a right-wing blindness for which all Canadians will pay dearly” (Larry Romanoff, “As China’s friend, we’re history,” *The Globe and Mail* (28 May 2008), A16).

## Your One-Stop source for consumer goods from China

We are a Canadian business, staffed by Canadians, and resident in Shanghai. Our location is near the city of YiWu, which is the largest commodities market in the world, with more than 400,000 different items available, and we therefore have the ability to source a vast array of high quality goods.

Our principals have for many years been engaged in purchasing consumer goods in China, both for our own account and for our wholesale customers, and exporting to North America, Europe and the U.K.

We have also had extensive experience in the North American wholesale and retail markets, having operated retail stores and a substantial international wholesale business in Canada. We understand Western markets and your pricing structures.

We have supplied our customers with a wide variety of products manufactured in China, from hair goods to footwear, and toys to stationery and gift items. Today, our primary interest is in consumer goods including all children's products, gift items, small electronics, leather goods, hair goods, etc.

We can easily supply any traditional Chinese cultural items and Chinese language educational materials, and can access specialty items like Chinese silk rugs and cultured freshwater and saltwater pearls.

We will be updating our website catalogue with many new product examples, but would welcome your expressions of interest in specific products.

You may contact us at [export \(@\) bearcanada.com](mailto:export@bearcanada.com).

Screenshot from the website bearcanada.com on October 12, 2006.<sup>81</sup>

It is the third life of the site that is the most interesting as far as we are concerned, because it is the one that reveals the Larry Romanoff we know today. **In 2010, bearcanada.com, completely redesigned, became an anti-American and pro-Chinese conspiracy site.**

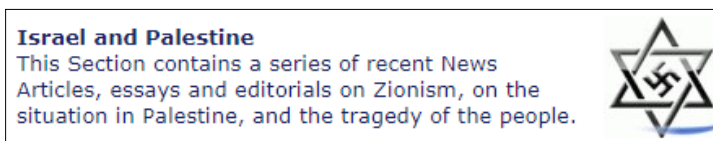
Screenshot from the website bearcanada.com on October 12, 2011.<sup>82</sup>

81. <https://web.archive.org/web/20061012014843/http://www.bearcanada.com:80/>.

82. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111103223650/http://www.bearcanada.com/index.html>.



The site is also particularly anti-Semitic, with a dedicated section containing numerous articles and unambiguous visuals:



Screenshot from the website [bearcanada.com/fae/fae.html](http://bearcanada.com/fae/fae.html) on July 12, 2012.<sup>83</sup>

The articles were signed 龙信明, which literally means “Larry Romanoff,” as did the header where the same name was indicated on the left. In a section entitled “Shanghai Diary,” the author published photos and comments from his walks around the city. Several remarks (about missing Canadian lobsters, comparing climates or prices between Shanghai and Calgary, his nephew Eddie in Canada, his return to Canada for Christmas, etc.) leave little doubt that the author was indeed Larry Romanoff, the Canadian from Calgary. He published a very large number of articles, on a wide variety of subjects. **This version of the site was active between 2010 and 2013:** publications were less frequent in 2013, **the site stopped evolving from July 2013 and disappeared between May and December 2014. It has since been offline.**

**In 2012-2013, several “alternative” news sites reposted its articles,** including 4thmedia.org, the English version of the “April Internet” website we mentioned in Part II due its links to the CYL (→ p. 77). One of the most shared articles is a rewriting of the events of Tian’anmen, which would not at all have happened as the “Western” media described it.<sup>84</sup> These articles are signed “doctor” or “professor Long Xinming of Fudan University,” presented as the founder and author of the website [bearcanada.com](http://bearcanada.com).<sup>85</sup> **Long Xinming, 龙信明 in Chinese, is the alias that Larry Romanoff admitted using. He also signed “Larry Romanoff (龙信明)” in 2010 and in 2020.**<sup>86</sup> The LinkedIn page we mentioned earlier is actually a mix of the two names (“Larry Long”). The equivalence **Larry Romanoff = Long Xinming (龙信明) = founder and author of boardcanada.com is therefore indisputable.**

In addition, **the link between the third version of boardcanada.com (2010-2014) and Larry Romanoff’s current sites, moonofshanghai.com and bluemoonofshanghai.com (since 2020), is also established since** we find on both his current websites the banner that appeared previously on [boardcanada.com](http://boardcanada.com):



On the left, header of [boardcanada.com](http://boardcanada.com) (2010-2014); on the right, extract of [moonofshanghai.com](http://moonofshanghai.com) and [bluemoonofshanghai.com](http://bluemoonofshanghai.com) (since 2020).

83. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120712073754/http://www.bearcanada.com/fae/fae.html>.

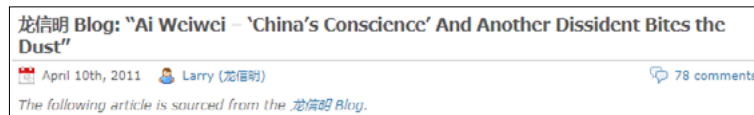
84. <https://archive.ph/5GwUd> (original publication on [bearcanada.com](http://bearcanada.com): <https://archive.ph/eZ8tY>).

85. See for instance: <https://archive.vn/QATd9>; <https://archive.vn/zNAIw>; <https://archive.vn/DaLSL>; <https://archive.ph/5GwUd>.

86. <https://archive.vn/tb5tl> and <https://archive.vn/nguZl>.

Romanoff did not appear to have used this alias after 2013. Moreover, when Ramesh Thakur, former UN Under Secretary General and Vice-Rector of the UN University, revisited in 2019 the site on which “Long Xinming’s” article on Tian’anmen was published in 2013, he found that “the author’s name had changed to **Bhaidil Fiverr**, which might raise questions about authenticity”.<sup>87</sup> The site in question is since inaccessible, and Bhaidil Fiverr is a unique name, which is not used anywhere else.

Between 2010 and 2012, Romanoff was also one of the contributors to the collective blog **Hidden Harmonies**, created in February 2010, on which he reposted some of his articles. Note that his biographical presentation did not change between 2010 and 2021.



**Larry Romanoff (龙信明)** [guest] is a retired management consultant and businessman. He has held senior executive positions in international consulting firms, and owned an international import-export business. He has been a visiting professor at Shanghai's Fudan University, presenting case studies in international affairs to senior EMBA classes. Mr. Romanoff lives in Shanghai and is currently writing a series of ten books generally related to China and the West. He can be contacted at: 2186604556@qq.com. He is also a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Source : <https://archive.vn/tb5tl>.

He did not contribute to Hidden Harmonies for seven years, then came back in March 2020.<sup>88</sup> He was listed as a contributor again, and re-published one of the two articles on the coronavirus originally published on GlobalResearch.ca and relayed by Zhao Lijian on March 13.<sup>89</sup>

**In conclusion, while a quick analysis of Larry Romanoff’s latest publications (2019-2020) could legitimately lead to the belief that he was “probably a fake blogger created from scratch by the Chinese to echo their messages,” all of the above makes this hypothesis less credible** as the means deployed to create Romanoff’s “legend” would be disproportionate to the expected gain.<sup>90</sup> **Most likely, Larry Romanoff exists and is a “useful idiot,” perhaps influenced and mentored by the Party-State. However, several elements in his trajectory remain to be clarified:** his initial links with China (how does a Canadian from Calgary become the North American representative of a choir of Hong Kong children?); his anti-American and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that suddenly emerged in 2010 (had he been developing them for a longer period?); and the “gap” of about six years, between 2013 (the end of bearcanada.com) and 2019 (his debut on GlobalResearch.ca), during which this already prolific author seemed to have stopped publishing, at least under his own name as well as under his alias Long Xinming (why?).

87. Ramesh Thakur, “Which Tian’anmen narrative is true?,” *The Japan Times* (6 Jun. 2019).

88. In fact, he was no longer listed as a contributor in this capture of a June 2015 presentation: <https://archive.ph/R32Tk>.

89. <https://archive.vn/fGFIF> and <https://archive.vn/Clsmv>.

90. Antoine Bondaz, quoted in Vincent Nouzille, “La grande offensive des espions chinois,” *Le Figaro Magazine* (17 Jul. 2020), 42. In the unpublished IRSEM note of April 2020, we ourselves envisaged that Larry Romanoff could be a front name, a virtual agent, behind which hides an agency of the Party-State apparatus, or a non-state actor in its pay, which would imply relatively important means of coordination (Charon, *L’opération “Covid-19”*).

## C. The motivations behind the operation

There is no lack of possible motives to explain the CCP's decision to launch such an operation, and they were mentioned all through this report: **creating a diversion for the Chinese population toward an evident scapegoat; offering an indirect contribution to the perennity of the regime; or an easier switch to the narrative presenting China as benevolent by concentrating attacks on the United States.** It might also have been an attempt at weakening the democratic model of government with the narrative on the “good” sanitary governance, and even with the efficient Chinese model of crisis management that was used in targeting the public of “soft targets” (Italy, Spain, Serbia...), with important mediatic resources. The operation could also be partly explained by the weakening belief among the party's leadership that China needs to maintain good relations with the United States.

**This operation could also be understood as a Chinese retaliation, or a warning sent to the United States,** following a series of particularly offensive decisions taken by Washington in February: on the 10<sup>th</sup>, four Chinese soldiers from the 54<sup>th</sup> research institute were criminally charged for the 2017 Equifax hack (image below);<sup>91</sup> Huawei was charged with extortion on the 13<sup>th</sup>;<sup>92</sup> and Washington decided to label Chinese state media as CCP agents on the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>93</sup> It is however impossible to confirm that hypothesis with the information at our disposal at the moment, but the proximity of the events deserved to be noted.



Now, we need to explain the reasons behind the end of the operation “Infektion 2.0.,” or at least behind its reduced intensity. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian interpreted it as a sign of the adoption of Russian methods by China.<sup>94</sup> With such an interpretation, Cui Tiankai's declarations would thus be motivated by the will to spread contradictory slogans to confuse the enemy. But it might also have been done to appease the United States – which is all the more possible as **the CCP could leave the fake information circulating unattended, finding its own relays** in the conspiracy spheres in Europe and in the United States, or in Chinese diasporas.

91. Brian Barrett, “How 4 Chinese Hackers Allegedly Took Down Equifax,” *WIRED* (10 Feb. 2020); see also: FBI, “Chinese PLA Members, 54<sup>th</sup> Research Institute,” <https://bit.ly/3aAvmb0>.

92. “Chinese Telecommunications Conglomerate Huawei and Subsidiaries Charged in Racketeering Conspiracy and Conspiracy to Steal Trade Secrets,” The US Department of Justice (13 Feb. 2020).

93. Lara Jakes and Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Designates China's Official Media as Operatives of the Communist State,” *The New York Times* (18 Feb. 2020).

94. Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Takes a Page from Russia's Disinformation Playbook,” *Axios* (25 Mar. 2020).

## D. The Operation's efficiency

It is too early to evaluate the efficacy of an operation the consequences of which may be felt over a few years and through unexpected channels. The future will tell us how the belief in an American origin of the coronavirus settled in the minds. At the moment, the Chinese narrative has seldom been reused, which could be a sign of resistance in the targeted societies, except perhaps in Chinese diasporas. That said, the operation undeniably contributes to the **fragilization of democratic societies** by insidiously questioning the nature of their institutions and by attacking the very possibility of truth, which is the key to consent in liberal societies.

## V. An Undeniable Russification of Chinese methods

For the authors, this operation is interesting because **it confirms the Russification/sovietization of Chinese methods of disinformation**. To illustrate this evolution, we can simply bring back the seven steps identified earlier by the authors of *The New York Times's* article: (→ p. 594):

- *Primo*, China, like the USSR before, **promptly reacted** and saw an opportunity for concealed disinformation in the Covid-19.
- *Secundo*, there again, the Soviet method was precisely respected. The idea of a virus created by the U.S. Army and implanted in Wuhan through the World Military Games is **so difficult to conceive** that it could only be true.
- *Tertio*, the Chinese lie was built on **enough truthful elements** to make it credible: the speech delivered by Robert Redfield on earlier cases of Covid-19, the near coincidence between the games in Wuhan and the epidemic, the U.S. drill on a similar scenario a month before the epidemic, the uncertainty over the exact origin of the virus and on its initial transmission by animals, the historical analogy with the Spanish flu. All these elements reinforced the plausibility of the Chinese narrative.
- *Quarto*, **the Chinese hand was largely hidden**, at least without a thorough investigation. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs relayed elements made public by third-party actors. The Party never directly advanced new arguments, and simply relayed them – such as the Soviets did. Larry Romanoff could be perceived as a neutral actor.
- *Quinto*, **useful idiots** were legions: the Taiwanese virologist was one of them, as were Michel Chossudovsky and Larry Romanoff. The WHO could be listed as well as it kept defending the Chinese version against all odds.
- *Sexto*, like the Soviets, **China denied any involvement**. When the narrative changed, after the intervention of Cui Tiankai on U.S. TV, the Chinese government evoked democratic processes internal to the party to explain the diverging opinions among diplomats. Yet, all this could be seen as a pure construction because the implementation of the operation by Zhao Lijian, a mere diplomat, gave an opportunity for the party to present his declarations as an isolated and unofficial position. But it is unimaginable that the Party left a high-ranking diplomat say such things, for several weeks, without making its



disapproval known. Hence, the narrative advertised by Zhao was validated by Chinese authorities.

- *Septimo*, this is where **China seemed to have kept its distance from the “ideal type” of the Soviet operation.** The Chinese campaign ended too quickly and without enough time to assess its reach. It is also impossible to tell what the hopes of the regime were: briefly diverting the Chinese public by weakening an adversary? Forcefully inscribing the possible American creation of the virus in the minds? Or was it a more “experimental” approach to an operation, one that could pave the way for more complex disinformation activities in the future?

Similarly to the Soviets, the Chinese have an integrated vision of political warfare: “active measures” are routine methods used by the CCP that involve numerous and diverse actors. **But the exact level of coordination between these actors remains a question mark.** Did diplomats act on their own initiative? It seems improbable. The articles published during the operation also suggested a common action with the propaganda arms of the Party.

Finally, we found that the coronavirus did not simply lead to the implementation of a Chinese influence operation modeled on the Russian and Soviet operations, but also to concurring actions that named the United States as the source of the virus. For instance, an article published by RT hijacked the words of Wilbur Ross, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, to increase the perception that the United States had an economic interest in seeing the virus circulate.<sup>95</sup> For that reason, **the Russian narrative was easily inscribed in the Chinese narrative and it provided the latter with a breath of fresh air by bringing it to a larger public.** In fact, a possible cooperation between Russian and Chinese actors is one of the questions to which the conclusion of the present report will try to answer.

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95. “Feast in Time of Plague? Trump Official Says China Coronavirus is Good for US Economy,” RT (31 Jan. 2020), <https://archive.vn/nXgbo>.

## SUMMARY OF THE FOURTH PART

Taiwan and Hong Kong are on the frontline of the “political warfare” waged by Beijing: first because they are CCP priorities but also because they are outposts, training grounds, and “R&D lab” for Chinese operations – which are later perfected and implemented on other targets worldwide. This is not different from how Georgia and Ukraine were useful to Russian operations. The first step to widen the circle of Chinese operations targeted Australia and New Zealand. Then, it reached new targets globally, such as Europe and North America (among others). This part introduced six case studies: Taiwan, Singapore, Sweden, Canada, an operation that targeted Hong Kong protestors in 2009, and another that framed the coronavirus as an American creation.

**On Taiwan,** Beijing does intervene from the outside: the traditional Chinese media form a powerful system to disseminate Party propaganda, but they have only limited influence. As the Party became aware of it, new dedicated outlets were created, including VTS, CHBC and Hai-feng – all covers for the PLA Base 311. However, most Chinese influence operations use local relays, following Lenin who stated that “the easiest way to capture a fortress is from within.” It allows the Party-State to hide its tracks and increase the likelihood of positive results. Among these relays are Taiwanese media outlets that are enticed and/or forced to follow Beijing through various means (including access to the Chinese market). There are cases of Taiwanese outlets censoring themselves to do business in China for instance. But there are other options: advertising contracts, equity participations through the purchase of shares (and sometimes overall control of the company), buyouts by Taiwanese tycoons – as illustrated by the emblematic purchase of the China Times corporation by Want Want, with clear consequences for its editorial line – and additional levers such as clandestine funding, nominations to key positions, or bilateral forums. Beijing also relies on private cyber-armies, i.e. groups of individuals that can be hired to wage campaigns for/against something/someone; political parties (the KMT has become less central as the Party-State is seeking to diversify its channels, with three small pro-unification parties serving as its relays: the New Party (NP), the Chinese Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) and the Home Party (HP)). Politicians are also targeted individually for their possible or proven pro-Chinese inclinations and based on their strategic position in the Taiwanese political sphere. Among the influencers and other intermediaries used by Beijing, there are groups and personalities from the cultural and artistic spheres, civic organizations, networks of Buddhist and Taoist temples, business circles, soldiers, YouTubers, discontent citizens, Taiwanese living abroad (in mainland China) and Chinese insiders (in Taiwan).

Besides, Taiwan is also interesting for the numerous cases of information manipulation that have targeted the island, including the Jebi typhoon affair (2018), which caused the death of a man, or the electoral interferences during the municipal elections in November 2018 first, and later the presidential and legislative elections in January 2020. Furthermore, agriculture has long been an important target for disinformation, and the example of a Chinese that pretended to be a Taiwanese YouTuber showed that language is no longer a sufficient barrier to protect Taiwan from Chinese information manipulation operations. Li Jie (2019), the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), and the bilateral diplomatic relation were additional examples. Finally, there is the case

of the (permanent threat of) military might: the use of military drills for psychological warfare against Taiwan is also one of the main levers of Chinese influence operations – and they have increased in recent years.

In conclusion, the Chinese political war against Taiwan brought some tactical successes inasmuch as it contributed to polarizing the Taiwanese society. But it was a strategic failure and even a counterproductive policy: both incentives and punitive measures under Xi Jinping did not produce the expected results. A majority of the population remains favorable to the president and to the DPP and it has grown more distrustful of China. In fact, the nationalist sentiment rises: the number of people that describe themselves as “solely Taiwanese” has never been higher (67%). The Hong Kong crisis was no stranger to this, having acted as a powerful deterrent. And the government took a number of measures to combat interference, especially Chinese interference, which should make influence operations more difficult to conduct in the future. It also reinforced its determination to reduce the country’s dependence on China, insisting on diversifying its economy – especially in the sectors used as levers by Beijing (i.e. tourism). In general, the recent increased aggressiveness of China against Taiwan, and against the rest of the world, has considerably boosted the attractiveness of the island. In a word, Chinese efforts to weaken and isolate Taiwan have had the opposite effect.

**Hong Kong demonstrators were targeted by informational operations in 2019**, which were also tied to Taiwan (the same recycled methods and content were apparently adapted: on the one hand, the Hong Kong crisis helped structure the narratives against Taiwan; on the other hand, China seemingly used its Taiwanese allies to intervene in Hong Kong). Most of the time, it was political “spamming” meant to flood (local and international) public opinions with doctored sensationalist content (i.e. comparing Hong Kong demonstrators to cockroaches or jihadist terrorists). To that end, they used social networks with an international audience, such as TikTok (censored and instrumentalized by Chinese authorities), but also Facebook and Twitter, both banned in China (but patriotic trolls are authorized and even encouraged to “hop” over the “Great Firewall” that is supposed to prevent Chinese Internet users from accessing the non-Chinese cyberspace). Twitter explained that it suppressed approximately 200,000 fake accounts part of a “coordinated state-backed operation” aimed at “undermining the legitimacy and political positions of the protest movement.” The platform also published the archives of the 936 most active accounts, all originating from the PRC. The data showed that the campaign was launched hurriedly with two traditional types of accounts, the “mercenary” (bought or stolen) and “dormant” accounts; they spread three main narratives: a rejection of the demonstrators, support for the Hong Kong police, and conspiracy theories on the participation of “Westerners” in the protests. One of the main clues to the “massive and coordinated” but also hurried nature of the disinformation campaign could be found in the dates when the accounts were created: more than half were created within three months. Our investigation also identified a series of dormant accounts that had been reactivated, and relaying accounts (used to retweet and share content published by the main accounts). Moreover, it confirmed that the two main arguments justifying the attacks were the alleged violence of the protestors and their manipulation by “anti-Chinese foreign forces.”

Finally, the Hong Kong example highlighted the importance of the (relatively) new “corps of volunteers,” or “water armies,” usually used to artificially increase the popularity of a star or product, but that can be refitted in times of crisis to conduct veritable campaigns of hatred. Two of the most famous of these groups are Diba and Fanquan, and they conducted joint actions against Hong Kong demonstrators.

**Singapore**, which has an ambivalent relationship with China, a mixture of proximity and defiance, has a number of particularities that makes it particularly vulnerable, but at the same time particularly resistant, to Chinese influence. The city-state is structurally vulnerable due to its size, hyperconnectivity, common use of both English and Chinese, its dependence on imports, tense relation to Malaysia and, most importantly, because of the very multiethnic and inter-communitarian nature of the Singaporean society. The country also has vulnerabilities specifically attractive to China: a majority of its population has Chinese roots (74.5%), which encourages Beijing to present Singapore as a “Chinese country.” Besides, the population is organized in clan associations, faces heightened Chinese immigration and is economically attracted to China. Finally, Beijing can rely on mediatic and individual relays, and on a similar approach to human rights. In this context, Beijing’s goal is to “impose a Chinese identity onto Singapore,” to make the city-state stop training its armed forces in Taiwan, stop speaking about freedom of navigation, and further increase its trade relations with China.

Several events are symptomatic of the Chinese influence in Singapore and played a part in the rapidly rising awareness of the public: with the Terrex affair culminated a series of incidents in the bilateral relation in 2016, and several spying scandals (including Huang Jing and Jun Wei Yeo).

That said, Singapore is also particularly well-equipped to counter this pressure. Its defense relies on the development of a counter-narrative on a unique national, multiethnic and multicultural identity, and more specifically on a singular Chinese Singaporean identity. On the paper, three-fourth of the inhabitants are “Chinese” but a large majority of them describe themselves as Singaporean. The cultural penetration of China is weak. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the risks posed by Chinese influence, which is catalyzed by a personality like Bilahari Kausikan, a former diplomat and secretary of state, who stated that China “uses a range of tactics—from legitimate diplomacy to more covert and often illegal deployment of agents of influence and operations—to sway decision makers or public opinion leaders.” He believes that these operations against Singapore were intended “not just to direct behavior, but to condition behavior. China does not just want you to comply with its wishes, it wants you to... do what it wants without being told.” Singapore is therefore very aware of its vulnerabilities. Moreover, in the field of combating information manipulation, Singapore is, along with Sweden, one of the most advanced states in the world.

**Sweden** is a typical case of a “Machiavellian moment.” While the bilateral relationship was developing and China’s image was quite good, the appointment of a new ambassador in August 2017 – who became one of the precursors of the “wolf warrior” diplomats – altered the situation. Indeed, the ambassador quickly multiplied offensive and threatening declarations, against media outlets for instance. Some Swedish journalists have gone public about becoming the victims of intimidation attempts from Chinese diplomats but also from diverse organizations of Chinese students. This aggressive Chinese drift in Sweden had notable consequences: the Chinese-Swedish relation has considerably deteriorated, Sweden closed all its Confucius Institutes, rewrote its “Chinese strategy,” and the city of Goteborg cancelled its twin-city program with Shanghai. Finally, Sweden banned all Chinese (Huawei and ZTE) equipment from its ongoing 5G call for tender. Now, approximately 80% of Swedish citizens view China negatively. This is a disastrous track record for the ambassador but what may seem incomprehensible from the outside, because blatantly counter-productive, can be explained in the following way: the goal was to seduce the CCP, not Sweden. And the latter was a good “testing ground” for this new strategy of wolf warrior diplomats for several reasons: the perfect size (small enough not to become a threat, but large enough to be significant, at the European-scale at least), a world champion of liberal and democratic values (which criticized China’s record on human rights), a competitor in important economic sectors, and, finally, a bilateral relation already irritated by a few stories (including the Gui Minhai scandal).



With Sweden, Beijing sent a warning to other countries, especially in Europe. It was both an opportunistic test and one of the symptoms of a broader trend that is now widespread throughout the world.

Two affairs in particular were symptomatic of the lasting pressure Beijing exerts on Stockholm. On the one hand, there is the case of the Chinese tourists who were presumably violated by the Swedish police, an accusation instrumentalized by Chinese authorities to raise accusations of human rights violations precisely when the Gui Minhai case reached its apex and to develop a narrative presenting Sweden as a dangerous and decadent society. Soon after, a satirical Swedish TV show that drew inspiration from the accident provoked Beijing's ire (cyberattacks, harassment, intimidation). On the other hand, the case of Anna Lindstedt, described as the "greatest diplomatic scandal in modern Sweden," involved the Swedish ambassador in China (Anna Lindstedt) and the daughter of Gui Minhai. Overall, Beijing can rely on numerous local relays in Sweden, such as associations affiliated to the UFWD or the Schiller Institute.

Several elements in the Swedish case are symptomatic of a more widespread evolution, acknowledged in the present report, toward a Russification of Chinese influence operations. Using varied narratives focalized on accidents, criminality, immigration, negative stories about Sweden to instill the image of a violent and unstable society is precisely what Russian outlets have been doing for years. Likewise, we note a convergence of views on Sweden among Chinese and Russian authorities and the U.S. alt-right, accompanied by cooperation with Swedish radical movements and parties. Even the choice of Gui Congyou as ambassador is less surprising that may be thought at first sight: sent to Sweden, where Russia is particularly active, the Chinese ambassador speaks Russian fluently and is a known expert on Russia. As such, this pro-Russian profile makes sense if China means to get closer to Russia, learn from it, and even work with it on the informational operations that Moscow has long conducted in Sweden.

**Canada** has drawn Beijing's interest for various reasons, none the least for its Chinese diaspora, which hosts a large number of proven or presumed dissidents. As in Australia, the Party-State uses its entire repertoire of actions there. For a long time, and despite recurring CSIS alerts and numerous cases published by the press, political resistance – in this case the propensity to see Beijing as a partner rather than a threat – remained strong in Canada. Yet, people have begun to awaken to the problem after 2018, due to several factors: the ripple effect of the Australian precedent (the similarity between the two countries prompted comparison) and above all the Huawei affair, i.e., the brutal deterioration of the bilateral relationship following the arrest in Canada of Huawei's Chief Financial Officer at the request of U.S. courts, to which Beijing immediately responded by arresting two Canadians on its soil, without any justification (hostage diplomacy), and by adopting trade sanctions.

One of the main goals for Chinese operations in Canada is to quiet dissidents. There are many well-documented cases of harassment and intimidation of citizens and residents considered as dissidents or threats by Beijing. Beijing organizes (via WeChat usually) aggressive counter-demonstrations, conducts harassment and intimidation campaigns against targeted individuals, helped by fake accounts and doctored images, uses relatives and family members who stayed in China as levers. Besides, the country constantly monitors certain communities, most prominently ethnic minorities (including Uyghurs), conducts cyberattacks against dissident groups and individuals, and usurps identities (attackers, for instance, sent insulting emails to ministers and MPs pretending to be Falun Gong members to discredit them). It also implements travel restrictions (Canadian activists were denied visas to China, were arrested, detained, intimidated at Chinese airports, and forced to leave the country). In any case, the goal remains the same: to censor dissenting voices. Beijing's representatives abroad, including its ambassador and consuls in Canada, are directly implicated in some intimidation campaigns.

Furthermore, Beijing also tries to influence:

- *Canadian politics*, by approaching and coopting certain politicians (some MPs and ministers at the federal level but most prominently local politicians, in British Columbia and Ontario especially, where the largest communities of Chinese live). There were a few cases of electoral interference too: the Chinese consulate in Toronto sent Chinese students to Chinese-speaking homes to tell voters whom to vote for, and the consulate in Vancouver is regularly accused of endorsing candidates of Chinese descent in the Richmond district, where a Chinese organization once incited voters – via WeChat – to vote for specific candidates in exchange for money.

- *Media outlets*: almost all Canadian outlets in Chinese are controlled by the CCP, and the Party-State uses both the carrot (encouraging newspapers to censor themselves in exchange of trade advantages) and the stick (intimidation, threats, harassment, pressures on relatives in China, ousting journalists who resist pressure, closing dissenting programs) against them. There were also cases of information manipulation, especially through doctored translations.

- *The educational system*: in the universities first, including some that are relatively dependent on Chinese students (like in Australia, but less prominently). Two types of problems need to be considered separately: on the one hand, Beijing uses Canadian university programs in science and technology to spy and steal technologies; and Canadian academics take part to dozens of research projects with Chinese military universities. On the other hand, Beijing uses Canadian universities to political ends, monitoring what is being said on campuses and surveilling the dissidents that speak up. Some organizations have adopted a near-military discipline, sometimes raising the flag and singing the Chinese national anthem on Canadian campuses, where Chinese students do not hide their nationalism. There is also evidence of the involvement of Chinese authorities (embassies and consulates) on Canadian campuses, especially through student associations (CSSAs). Then, secondary education has not been left untouched – with the opening of Confucius Institutes especially. In that context, there are examples of restrictions of the students' freedom of speech, on topics tied to China: some teachers forbade discussions of the Tian'anmen massacre and used maps that included Taiwan in China for instance.

Furthermore, there are cases of information manipulation, including forged letters sent on behalf of the prime minister and minister of immigration in favor of a new “Tibetan” organization that was nothing but a façade used by Beijing to circulate its narrative on Tibet. Also, WeChat is regularly criticized for its role in controlling persons and contents on campuses, organizing public counter-demonstrations, and in interfering with the electoral process. Chinese services have used WeChat groups abroad to detect dissidents and harvest personal data. In one case, the WeChat account of a Liberal minister was used against her will to collect money meant to fund legal pursuits against a journalist critical of Beijing.

In Canada, the Party-State relies on hundreds of local organizations that are more or less affiliated to the UFDW (hence to the CCP). Each year, new organizations are created, in all areas of life. Besides, Beijing is engaged in a strategy to seduce the First Nations, which may be used to divide the Canadian society (with the narrative that “the two people must help each other to fight marginalization and racism”). The example of the Musqueam, an autochthonous people from the Vancouver region, is particularly interesting as some have Chinese ancestors. Hence, Beijing's efforts toward them are significant, but they are not the only targets.

Finally, as in the Swedish case, the Canadian example testifies to the Russification of Chinese influence operations. First, the Party-State does not stop at shaping the national debate on China, censoring dissidents, the press, interfering in schools and universities, and so on. It also criticizes the Canadian society and its government to try to divide the population. It exploits several potentially divisive topics to alienate the Chinese community from its host country and, ultimately, convince them that they are closer to Beijing than to Ottawa. The Huawei scandal also provided Beijing with the opportunity to stir tensions between Canada and the United States, circulating the idea that, contrary to appearances, it was really a problem between Canada and the United States, not Canada and China; that Canada found itself inadvertently in the middle of

a Chinese-American cold war. Now, Chinese operations remain tied to the Chinese community in Canada, but their progressive Russification indicates that they are increasingly “de-Sinicized,” i.e. they have widened their reach from strictly communitarian questions to addressing societal issues that affect all Canadians.

The last case study discussed **the operation meant to redefine the coronavirus as U.S.-made**. The informational war launched by the CCP on the coronavirus had three components: controlling the hemorrhage internally (emphasizing its efficient management of the crisis, and flooding Chinese citizens with multiples, sometimes contradictory, counter-narratives); turning the stigma over (demonetizing the critical voices heard in Western media and building a narrative presenting China at the bedside of the world – even when it implied manipulating facts and information, such as in Italy); and discrediting adversaries (blaming the sanitary crisis on other countries, especially on the United States). There lied the operation we nicknamed “Infektion 2.0,” for its similitudes with the KGB’s Infektion Operation conducted during the 1980s to make people believe that Americans had created the AIDS virus.

The Chinese operation was deployed considerably faster in 2020, in a month (four years for its Soviet version, between 1983 and 1987 – a difference due to the virality of social networks). Early on, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was involved, relaying the theory that the virus originated in the United States, not in China. It drew on the Canadian website *globalresearch.ca* (known for its active role in the “conspirasphere” and as a relay of Russian campaigns of disinformation) and on the articles published by “Larry Romanoff,” a retired Canadian settled in Shanghai.

Beijing’s motivations may have been diverse: diverting the attention of the Chinese population to an evident scapegoat; then contributing indirectly to the perennity of the regime; helping out the switch to a narrative that presented China as benevolent by disparaging the United States; weakening the democratic model of governance by circulating the narrative of a “good” Chinese management of the sanitary crisis, etc. This operation successfully confirmed the Russification/sovietization of Chinese methods of disinformation as they followed, almost to the letter, the steps of the KGB’s operations: a prompt reaction; a story so difficult to conceive that it could only be true; based on enough truthful evidence to be believable; in which China’s role was hidden; with the help of some useful idiots. Lastly, like the Soviets, Beijing denied any involvement.

## CONCLUSION A MACHIAVELLIAN MOMENT

In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of *The Prince* (1532), Machiavel asked “whether it is better to be loved than to be feared or the contrary,” to which he answered that “it is much safer to be feared than to be loved.”<sup>1</sup> This posture has most famously been associated with Russia – particularly with President Putin<sup>2</sup> – rather than with China. **For a long time, it was said that China tried to be loved rather than to be feared:** the country wanted to seduce, to project a positive image of itself onto the world, and to provoke admiration. We did write, in an article comparing China and Russia in January 2020, that “China is more preoccupied with its moral image (respectability) on the international stage, being a good global citizen,” and that it was, as such, “more reluctant to use certain methods potentially presenting a greater reputational risk.” Russia, on the other hand, “not only cares less about its reputation (it has less to offer but also less to lose), it actually cultivates the image of a strong state using security and military with audacity”<sup>3</sup> to denigrate its adversaries and impair their power of attraction. This is at least the Russian interpretation of the soft power (*мягкая сила*).<sup>4</sup> Now, the difference between China and Russia has become thinner.

Obviously, **China has not renounced its strategy of “seducing and subjugating”** (→ p. 147), its attractiveness, or its ambition to model international norms. The CCP remains careful not to “lose face” (丢脸-丢面子) and to avoid damaging its image in many domains. For that reason, the Chinese *ethos* has not become Russian. However, at the same time, **Beijing is more and more comfortable with “infiltrating and constraining”** (→ p. 161). Undeniably, as shown in the hundreds of pages in this report, **its influence operations have grown considerably tougher in recent years, and they have come to resemble Moscow’s more and more closely.** The reasons behind the aggressive turn of Chinese diplomacy (which started before the Covid-19 pandemic) are revealing: ambassadors are now primarily targeting Beijing, they are in a zealous race to win favors (→ p. 239). For Beijing, **defending the Party has become more important than winning the hearts and minds of foreign populations** which, in any case, are already constrained by China’s

1. Niccolò Machiavelli and Peter Bondanella, *The Prince*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter XVII, 57-8.

2. See, for instance, the June 2014 issue of *La Revue des deux mondes* dedicated to “Machiavelli or Putin.”

3. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer and Paul Charon, “Russia as a Hurricane, China as Climate Change: Different Ways of Informational Warfare,” *War on the Rocks* (21 Jan. 2020).

4. Maxime Audinet, “Un soft power d’État russe: la *mâgkaâ sila*,” (“A Russian State’s Soft Power: The *mâGkaâ Sila*”), in J.-R. Raviot, ed., *Russie: vers une nouvelle Guerre froide? (Russia: Toward Another Cold War?)* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2016), 150-173; Yulia Kiseleva, “Russia’s Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power,” *Politics*, 35:3-4 (2015), 316-329; Vincent Charles Keating and Katarzyna Kaczmarek, “Conservative Soft Power: Liberal Soft Power Bias and the ‘Hidden’ Attraction of Russia,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2017), 1-27. For a comparison between the Chinese and Russian approaches to soft power, see: Jeanne L. Wilson, “Russia and China Respond to Soft Power: Interpretation and Readaptation of a Western Construct,” *Politics*, 35:3-4 (2015), 287-300.



INTRODUCTION

economic might. In other words, the CCP demonstrates a will **to arouse not only admiration, but also fear**. And this is precisely for that reason, – because the Party now seems convinced that “it is safer to be feared than to be loved” – that it can be said to have **entered, since 2017 or so, into a “Machiavellian moment”**<sup>5</sup>, the main symptom of which is the increasing Russification of Chinese operations.

CONCEPTS

## I. The Russification of Chinese influence operations

Despite their common ideological matrix, significant skills transfers from the USSR to Maoist China (at least until the early 1950s), and jointly-led operations,<sup>6</sup> **China’s informational strategies have long remained different from** its vast neighbor’s. For instance, Beijing has always seemed to cherish its international image, which meant usually (but not always) opting for the diffusion of positive messages about itself – whereas Moscow took on the image of the spoilsport, stirring up social, political, ethnic, or religious conflicts in targeted countries. Furthermore, Beijing’s operations mostly focused on Chinese diasporas throughout the world whereas Russia had more general and diverse targets. Finally, and that was the major difference for the past twenty years, the PRC’s power allowed it to wield its influence without having to systematically use secret operations, while Russia’s endemic weakness renders the asymmetric weapon of informational operations more necessary.

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Yet, we suggested in January 2020<sup>7</sup> that **a Russification of Chinese operations** was underway. It wasn’t a novel idea: the Russification of Chinese operations – or at least borrowings from Russian tactics – has been discussed for years. **A parallel was drawn, for instance, during the 2018 municipal elections in Taiwan**, which were targeted by “a Russia-style influence campaign.”<sup>8</sup> At the time, it already alerted some observers; in the columns of *The Washington Post*, for instance, Josh Rogin wrote a premonitory assessment: “the fact that Beijing is using Russian-style political interference tools should prompt a full-scale national security alarm. The capabilities Beijing is honing in Taiwan could do huge damage if applied to the United States. China is testing them on a country it knows well but preparing for their use around the world.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Beijing had tested tactics in its regional environment before it began implementing them globally (→ p. 626), exactly what Moscow had done a few years earlier. **In 2019, this assessment was updated, and the fears renewed, during the operations that targeted Hong Kong. And this is in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, that the world finally took notice of the problem.**

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Initially, Chinese media outlets covered the pandemic in a rather positive manner, in that it highlighted Chinese efforts. Then, as Western countries were affected and China increasingly blamed, they adopted a more offensive stance that integrated a negative cov-

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5. Hence, our “Machiavellian moment” does not refer to the debate on the republican interpretation of Machiavelli (on this: John Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Paris: PUF, 1975); Claude Lefort, *Le travail de l’œuvre Machiavel (The Work on Machiavelli’s Writing)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986); Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

6. During the Korean War, for instance, (→ p. 633). See: Ricardo Barrios, “Virulent Rhetoric: Chinese State Claims of US Biological Warfare from the Korean War to COVID-19,” *Center for Advanced China Research* (1 Apr. 2020).

7. Jeangène Vilmer and Charon, “Russia as a Hurricane, China as Climate Change.”

8. Chris Horton, “Specter of Meddling by Beijing Looms over Taiwan’s Elections,” *The New York Times* (22 Nov. 2018).

9. Josh Rogin, “China’s Interference in the 2018 Elections Succeeded – in Taiwan,” *The Washington Post* (18 Dec. 2018).

erage of the management of the crisis by other countries. Hence, comparing models, it used the pandemic as an illustration of the apparently chaotic and inefficient democratic model of government. While using different tactics (“from promoting conspiracy websites to the use of trolls and bot networks to pushing false narratives couched in science on Chinese state media”), “Beijing [engaged] in **an aggressive information campaign to try and reshape the global narrative around COVID**. [It did] this in attempt to make the world see China as the global leader in the response rather than the source of the pandemic.”<sup>10</sup>

**The tactics employed by the Chinese government in these successive episodes** – coordination between diplomats and state media, use of Western social networks, systematic attempt to discredit Western media, cooptation of conspiracy outlets, clandestine operations on social networks etc. – led the **ASPI to write that “the CCP’s propaganda apparatus has been watching the tactics and impact of Russian disinformation.”**<sup>11</sup> The Global Engagement Center of the U.S. State Department noted the same thing: “we’re seeing the CCP adopt Russian-style tactics.”<sup>12</sup> And a growing number of publications from all over the world have stressed it: **the Russification of Chinese operations is now widely recognized.**

That said, discussing the “Russification” of Chinese operations **does not imply that there is one coherent and homogenous Russian approach.** With Camille François, we can regret that observers are too quick in recognizing a “Russian playbook” when it “is akin to a Russian salad: not very Russian, and with different ingredients every time.”<sup>13</sup> Russian actors are actually diverse and not all tied to state structures; they experiment and adapt themselves along the way, keeping and improving the recipes that worked. Ultimately, they are certainly not the only ones using those tactics. And yet, these are often described and investigated – rightly or wrongly – as being “Russians.”

Concretely, the Russification of Chinese operations accounts for three elements that are described in the following pages: **Beijing draws from Moscow** in several ways, but **differences remain** between them. Interestingly, there is also **a degree of cooperation.**

## A. Russian inspiration

For attentive observers of influence operations, it is now evident that “China has been studying Russian activities for quite a number of years and learning from its experiences. They are getting better than the Russians in many ways.”<sup>14</sup> The PLA, for instance, explicitly endorsed this “model”.<sup>15</sup>

10. Lea Gabrielle (GEC coordinator), “Briefing with Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle, Global Engagement Center Update on PRC Efforts to Push Disinformation and Propaganda around COVID,” US Department of State (8 May 2020).

11. Jake Wallis *et al.*, *Retweeting through the great firewall: A persistent and undeterred threat actor*, ASPI Policy Brief Report No. 33/2020, Jun. 2020, 5.

12. Gabrielle, “Briefing with Special Envoy.”

13. Camille François, “Moving Beyond Fears of the ‘Russian Playbook,’” *Lanfare* (15 Sept. 2020).

14. J. Michael Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power and Taiwan,” Brookings Institution (11 Sept. 2018), 3.

15. The argument can be made that this amounts to a “return” to this model because the CCP had been influenced by the Soviet model: Elizabeth Chen, “China Learning From Russia’s ‘Emerging Great Power’ Global Media Tactics,” The Jamestown Foundation (12 Apr. 2021).

### For the PLA: Russia is a model to emulate

**For its experience manipulating social networks**, at least since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (closely followed in China, by the PLA notably), **Russia “provided China with a model to emulate.”**<sup>16</sup> In 2014, a member of the PLA General Staff Department wrote an article drawing **three lessons** from the “war on [the Russian] public opinion” in Ukraine:<sup>17</sup> **“take the offensive by pushing your narrative first, present legal arguments, and back it up with hard power”**<sup>18</sup> Several similar articles were published afterward, which testified to a clear willingness, on the part of the Chinese military, to learn from the Russian precedent.<sup>19</sup>

In 2018, an article investigating RT’s coverage of the American bombings in Syria recommended an “investigation of RT’s communication methods [:] without losing its ‘objectivity,’ we can silently influence the emotions and inclinations of the public and make it more dependent on information from our media outlets.”<sup>20</sup> **RT has regularly been quoted as a model to emulate in publications of the Chinese military**, especially for its activities on social networks. Indeed, analysts from the PLA National Defense University compared the Russian channel to “a propaganda aircraft carrier,” stressing its performance on YouTube.<sup>21</sup> Another article published in 2018 insisted on “RT’s value for disinformation, reflecting a shift in the PLA’s discussion of offensive uses of social media.”<sup>22-23</sup> Actually, it was the first “positive and detailed evaluation”<sup>24</sup> of **the Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign**. The article highlighted how “Russia’s bots improved the effectiveness and lowered the costs of propaganda, and that RT spread disinformation on social media to confuse people.”<sup>25</sup> Several months later, another article showed **admiration for the way RT exploited divisions within Western societies, suggesting China should do the same**: “we can also make full use of the latent contradictions between different countries and the influence of opposition factions within Western countries to prevent enemies from coming together to form an anti-China front, and to emphasize how its interminable conflicts and difficulty in reaching consensus contrast with our unity.”<sup>26</sup>

16. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Michael S. Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea: The Chinese Military’s Use of Social Media for Influence Operations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Policy Papers (2019), 36.

17. 朱宁宁 (Zhu Ningning), “乌克兰政局动荡中俄对乌舆论战谋略运用探析” (“An Analysis of Russia’s Unfolding Media Warfare Tactics Amid the Turbulent Political Situation in Ukraine”), 军事记者 (*Military Correspondent*), 5 (2014).

18. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 36.

19. 李桥铭 (Li Qiaoming), “从俄罗斯两场战事看现代战争新发展” (“Analysis of Modern Warfare Development Based on Russia’s Two Conflicts”), 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*) (16 Aug. 2016); 邓秀梅 (Deng Xiumei), 严振华 (Yan Zhenhua) and 张佳璐 (Zhang Jiayu), “乌克兰危机中的社交媒体战” (“The Social Media War in the Ukrainian Crisis”), 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*) (25 Sept. 2015).

20. 刘力铭 (Liu Liming), “在突发军事行动中抢占舆论主导权: 以CNN和RT对美国空袭叙利亚的报道为例” (“Seizing Control of Public Opinion Guidance in Sudden Military Operations: Taking CNN and RT’s Reporting on U.S. Airstrikes on Syria as an Example”), 军事记者 (*Military Correspondent*) (26 Sept. 2018).

21. 马建光 (Ma Jianguang), 张秀波 (Zhang Xiubo) and 张乃千 (Zhang Naiqian), “俄罗斯布防网络媒体新阵地” (“Russia’s New Front for Defending Internet Media”), 中国军 (*China Military Online*) (13 Apr. 2016).

22. 马超 (Ma Chao) and 孙皓 (Sun Hao), “俄罗斯对外舆论传播的特点: 以‘今日俄罗斯’电视台为例” (“The Characteristics of Russian Public Opinion Propagation: Taking ‘Russia Today’ TV Station as an Example”), 军事记者 (*Military Correspondent*) (14 Jun. 2018).

23. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 38.

24. *Ibid.*, 94.

25. *Ibid.*, 95.

26. 刘力铭 (Liu Liming), “在突发军事行动中抢占舆论主导权: 以CNN和RT对美国空袭叙利亚的报道为例” (“Seizing Control of Public Opinion Guidance in Sudden Military Operations: Taking CNN and RT’s Reporting on U.S. Airstrikes on Syria as an Example”).

Before assessing to what extent Moscow might have inspired Beijing, we need to emphasize that **they have mutually inspired each other. On some elements, Moscow is actually taking cues from Beijing.** This is the case, for instance, of **the policies targeting the diaspora.** “The second-biggest diaspora in the world, after the Chinese,”<sup>27</sup> is the Russian, and they both adopted a **similarly wide and homogenous conception** of the diaspora. Indeed, the manner Beijing conceives “overseas Chinese,” both its nationals but also people of Chinese descent whatever their citizenship may be (ethnic nationalism → p. 165), is similar to the way Russia perceives its “compatriots abroad”: not solely the Russians strictly speaking, but also Russian speakers that share a common history and culture. As Mikhail Suslov noted, “the Russian diaspora is not a diaspora in the strict sense, and nor is it ‘Russian.’ This ‘Russian’ diaspora is in fact a post-Soviet diaspora, its homeland no longer in existence.”<sup>28</sup> In both cases, the extension of the “subjects” over which these states claim, if not sovereignty, at least some form of control, is very broad. They also tend to conceive these diasporas as a homogeneous bloc, which is obviously not the case, primarily because they include a significant proportion of dissidents. In any case, the regimes try to homogenize them, with varying degrees of effectiveness. In that case, **Russia is actually doing less well than China.** Indeed, “the Russian political elite has been aware of the potential of the ‘Russian compatriots,’ but at the same time its ways of relating to them are awkward and confusing.”<sup>29</sup> Here, Russia is the one taking heeds from China, as the president of the French Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots admitted.<sup>30</sup>

Now, **Beijing emulates the Russians in a number of ways:**

- **1) In leading clandestine informational operations on Western social networks** (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), using trolls, fake accounts, and bots. Freedom House noted that **one of the main evolutions of the Chinese informational operations since 2017 has been the development of “Russian-style social media disinformation campaigns.”**<sup>31</sup> They seemingly debuted “as early as mid-2017” (the earliest such operation was presumably launched in April 2017)<sup>32</sup> and grew more intense in 2019 when the Chinese government extended those methods to Western platforms: “[until] the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, most evidence of Chinese computational propaganda occurred on domestic platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and QQ. But China’s new-found interest in aggressively using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube should raise concerns for democracies.”<sup>33</sup> The 2019 campaign in Hong Kong was a test: “Beijing began experimenting

27. Mikhail Suslov, “*Russian World*”: *Russia’s Policy Toward its Diaspora, Russie*. *Nei.Visions* 103, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) (Jul. 2017), 5.

28. *Ibid.*, 10; see also: Andis Kudors, “‘Russian World’ – Russia’s Soft Power Approach to Compatriots Policy,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, 81 (2010), 2-4.

29. Suslov, *Russian World*, 5.

30. Quoted in Maxime Audinet, *Une fabrique étatique du soft power: acteurs et pratiques de l’influence par la diplomatie publique en Russie post-soviétique* (The State’s Construction of Soft Power: Actors and Influence Methods in the Public Diplomacy in Post-Soviet Russia), Ph.D. Thesis in Political Science, University Paris Nanterre (10 Sept. 2020), 235.

31. Sarah Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone: The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence Since 2017*, Freedom House special report (Jan. 2020), 2.

32. Tom Uren, Elise Thomas, and Jacob Wallis, *Tweeting Through the Great Firewall: Preliminary Analysis of PRC-linked Information Operations Against the Hong Kong Protests*, ASPI, Report No. 25 (2019), 29.

33. Samantha Bradshaw and Philipp N. Howard, *The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation*, Computational Propaganda Research Project, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University, <https://bit.ly/3cDVvbe>.



with covert information operations on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, using false personas and pages that aimed to discredit the protesters by portraying them as violent.”<sup>34</sup>

**Since 2019 (Hong Kong), and especially 2020 (pandemic), a consensus has emerged to recognize that China is engaged in aggressive and clandestine “Russian-style” campaigns.** Since 2020, many investigations have shown “that pro-Beijing actors are carrying out a whole range of covert activities in multiple countries and languages. The campaigns aim to spread proven falsehoods, sow societal discord and panic, manipulate perceptions of public opinion, or undermine the democratic process.”<sup>35</sup> **As for now, these campaigns have mostly targeted China’s near abroad (Taiwan, Hong Kong), Australia and the United States.** From this perspective, Europeans – who are battered by more visible Russian campaigns<sup>36</sup> – may still be underestimating the threat of Chinese information manipulations. And yet, it is obvious that, without matching the intensity and sophistication of Russian efforts, China is bound to develop its operations targeting Europe or a European country in the informational domain.

- **2) In investing massively, openly, and aggressively in social networks,** as illustrated by the “Twitterization” of diplomats participating in the “**wolf warrior diplomacy**” – something Russian authorities were already doing.

- **3) In widening the reach of warfare beyond the sole diasporas.** Traditionally – and this was a classical difference between the approach of Beijing and Moscow – the United Front concentrated its efforts on monitoring and surveilling overseas Chinese in Western countries, i.e. suppressing dissidents, constructing the narrative circulated in Chinese-language media outlets, and mobilizing the largest possible number of individuals to act in conformity with the Party’s interests. However, during the last decade (2010-2020), the targets of the United Front have expanded to include, among others, the non-Chinese political, entrepreneurial, media and academic elites of targeted countries, as noted in the online version of the *People’s Daily*: the main targets have been “**individuals who are representative due to their political influence, economic power, social position, and high academic status, as well leaders of communities.**”<sup>37</sup>

The extension of the domain of struggle is particularly visible in the media landscape, where Beijing has evolved from a focus on international outlets in China and its immediate environment (Hong Kong, Taiwan) ten years ago to **an attempt at influencing and censoring media outlets everywhere in the world** nowadays. It has used, especially after 2017, “tactics that were once used primarily to co-opt Chinese diaspora media and suppress critical coverage in overseas Chinese-language publications are now being applied – with some effect – to local mainstream media in various countries.”<sup>38</sup>

34. Laura Rosenberger, “China’s Coronavirus Information Offensive,” *Foreign Affairs* (22 Apr. 2020).

35. Sarah Cook, “Welcome to the New Era of Chinese Disinformation,” *China Media Bulletin* (May 2020), 2.

36. Martin Svárovský, Jakub Janda and Veronika Vichová, *Handbook on Countering Russian and Chinese Interference in Europe*, European Values et Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2019), 15.

37. Original text in Chinese: “海外统一战线工作对象是台湾同胞、港澳同胞、国外侨胞及一切热爱中华民族的人们。重点是政治上有影响、经济上有实力、社会上有声望，学术上有造诣的代表性人士 和社团领袖，” in “海外统一战线工作” (“Work from Overseas United Front”), 人民网 (*The People’s Daily Online*), <https://archive.vn/xLRQI>. Quoted in Clive Hamilton, “Chinese Communist Party Influence in Australian Universities,” lecture at the University of Queensland, Brisbane (28 Aug. 2019).

38. Cook, *Beijing’s Global Megaphone*, 2.

• **4) In switching from a positive narrative on itself to a negative narrative on the others.** Beijing's objective is no longer solely to promote a positive narrative and to prevent the circulation of negative representations on China: in Italy and Serbia during the pandemic, for instance (→ p. 591), a critical (and, in that case, unwarranted) narrative on the EU was added. In fact, we observe more and more cases where **Beijing is “seeking to manipulate conversations even on topics not directly related to China,”**<sup>39</sup> which is a recent development. The Party-State is acting gradually, **blurring the line between its defensive and offensive objectives.**<sup>40</sup> It is not always easy to understand when the country is defending itself and when it is being offensive, contrary to the Kremlin, which endorses more openly the offensive character of its operations. In any case, Beijing is “seeing the need not just to defend its own system publicly but to unleash open criticism of ‘western democracy’ through its officials and propaganda machinery rather than confining this language to internal Party documents and speeches.”<sup>41</sup>

• **5) In trying to divide and sow discord** in target countries, as illustrated by the several operations launched against the United States, including a campaign of text messages meant to create a panic in March 2020 (→ p. 392). On that matter, “American officials said China, borrowing from Russia's strategies, has been trying to widen political divisions in the United States.”<sup>42</sup> The United States is no exception: other examples in this report highlighted how Beijing tried to divide Canada, Europe, South Korea or Japan. In trying to **seduce discontent individuals**, those who believe they have been left on the sidelines – such as Canadian First Nations (→ p. 583) or separatist movements, in Japan for instance (→ p. 401) –, Beijing has adopted a method commonly used by Moscow, which has not refrained from endorsing protesters in some countries (the Yellow Vests in France for instance).<sup>43</sup>

In a previous report, we noted that the divisions used by Moscow were not only internal to a country (to fracture its society) but also external, stirring up tensions between neighboring states and allies.<sup>44</sup> Several examples in this report showed that **Beijing has also tried to divide Europe, the transatlantic relation, and the U.S.-Canadian relationship**, among others.

• **6) In interfering with elections.** As noted earlier (→ p. 268), China interfered in at least a dozen elections in Asia, Australasia, and in North America. In the United States, APT31, also known as Zirconium, a group of hackers backed by the Chinese state, **tried to penetrate the emails of the Biden campaign in a manner (fishing) similar to the hack that allowed GRU officers to conduct the DNC Leaks operation against**

39. Sarah Cook, “Recent Wins and Defeats for Beijing's Global Media Influence Campaign,” *China Media Bulletin* (Nov. 2020), p. 4.

40. Michael J. Mazarr et al., *Hostile Social Manipulation: Present Realities and Emerging Trends*, RAND Corporation, 2019, p. 164-165.

41. Andrew Small and Dhruva Jaishankar, “‘For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns’: Explaining China's New Assertiveness,” *War on the Rocks* (20 Jul. 2020).

42. Edward Wong, Matthew Rosenberg, and Julian E. Barnes, “Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages that Sowed Virus Panic in U.S., Officials Say,” *The New York Times* (22 Apr. 2020).

43. Colin Gérard, Guilhem Marotte and Loqman Salamatian, “RT, Sputnik et le mouvement des Gilets jaunes: cartographie des communautés politiques sur Twitter” (“RT, Sputnik, and the Yellow Vests Movement: Mapping Political Communities on Twitter”), *L'Espace politique*, 40, 1 (2020).

44. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcía, Marine Guillaume, and Janaina Herrera, *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*, Report from the Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (CAPS) and the Institute for Strategic Research at the Military School (IRSEM) of the Ministry of the Armed Forces, Paris (Aug. 2018), 70.

**Hillary Clinton** four years earlier.<sup>45</sup> Here, China follows Russia's lead, seemingly positioning itself as a copycat – even though it would not go as far because, as usual, it *hacks* but does not *leak*. A report of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) stated that, contrary to Russia, Beijing did not try to interfere or to influence the 2020 U.S. presidential election for different reasons, including the fact that opposition to Beijing is bipartisan in Washington – there was no pro-China option in the electoral field. That said, in the same report, the officer dealing with cyber questions added a “minority opinion” according to which Beijing still tried to harm the Trump candidacy through actions on social networks and in the media, but “calibrated its influence efforts to avoid blowback” in a manner that still qualified as “electoral influence.”<sup>46</sup>

• **7) In circulating conspiracy theories**, via official (diplomatic) channels for instance, as was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. An article published in a PLA magazine in 2018 suggested that conspiracy theories should be spread out in Western media outlets if China were to be losing the battle for public opinions. According to its author, a student from the department of public opinion warfare at the National Defense University, Beijing “**should cultivate a group of media outlets and think tanks having a small ‘grey’ audience to spread lies and create a database of negative topics and conspiracy theories.**”<sup>47</sup> Doing so, it should focus more particularly on “targeting the younger Western audiences’ distrust of mainstream media, politicians, and even values.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, it could use “official channels to amplify conspiracy theories and to sow doubt about established facts in the context of major political events [...], a tactic often used by Moscow.”<sup>49</sup> “China’s recent promotion of known conspiracy websites is another move taken from the Russian playbook.”<sup>50</sup>

• **8) In using its near abroad as a testing ground before launching operations worldwide:** Moscow tested its methods during the color revolutions of the mid-2000s, in Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2014), before it turned them against Western democracies. Similarly, Beijing started its operations in Taiwan and Hong Kong before widening their reach globally, including in (but not limited to) Australia, Canada, the United States and Europe. From Argentina to Denmark, everyone can see a globalization of Chinese operations.

• **9) In subcontracting portions of its informational operations to intermediaries.** The frequent use, on the Chinese side, of content farms (→ p. 367) that are outsourced in Malaysia or elsewhere echoes the Russian troll farms, some of which are based abroad (such as the troll farm uncovered by Graphika in the suburbs of Accra, in Ghana).<sup>51</sup>

• **10) In moving closer to political radicals.** The ties between the Chinese embassy in Sweden, the nationalist far-right party Alternativ för Sverige and the Schiller Institute

45. David E. Sanger and Nicole Perloth, “Chinese Hackers Target Email Accounts of Biden Campaign Staff, Google Says,” *The New York Times* (4 Jun. 2020); Tom Burt, “New Cyberattacks Targeting U.S. Elections,” Microsoft.com (10 Sept. 2020).

46. NIC, *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections* (10 Mar. 2021), declassified version published on March 15, 2021, p. 8, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf>.

47. 刘力铭 (Liu Liming), “叙利亚内战中美俄的舆论博弈 与启示” (“Insights and the Public Opinion Game Between the U.S. and Russia in Syria’s Civil War”), 军事记者 (*Military Correspondent*) (Dec. 2018).

48. Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Chase, *Borrowing a Boat Out to Sea*, 95.

49. Jessica Brandt and Bret Schafer, “Five Things to Know About Beijing’s Disinformation Approach,” Alliance for Securing Democracy, GMF (30 Mar. 2020); see also: Ilya Yablokov, “Social networks of Death: Conspiracy Panics and Professional Journalistic Ethics in the Post-Soviet Russia,” *Quaderni*, 94/3 (2017), 53-62.

50. Rosenberger, “China’s Coronavirus Information Offensive.”

51. Ben Nimmo et al., *IRA in Ghana: Double Deceit*, Graphika (Mar. 2020).

(with its sulfurous reputation) startled observers. The same occurred in France when the CCP-affiliated *People Daily* used Damien Viguier to discredit the coverage of China by *Le Monde*. Viguier, who had been condemned for his denial of crimes against humanity,<sup>52</sup> is the lawyer of the far-right ideologist Alain Soral.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, *Egalité et réconciliation*, the association founded by Alain Soral, relayed the Chinese conspiracy theory according to which the coronavirus would have its origin in the American laboratory of Fort Detrick (→ p. 589).<sup>54</sup> Last but not least, the Chinese embassy in Paris promoted a book on Uyghurs written by the far-left administrator of a website that has “repeatedly relayed conspiracy theories” (→ p. 335).<sup>55</sup> Examples elsewhere are legions, such as in Italy where Beijing has grown closer to the far-right.<sup>56</sup> According to an April 2021 report from the Soufan Center, as of March 2020 **China was the state actor “most involved in amplifying QAnon narratives on Facebook,”** ahead of Russia. Between January 1 and February 28, 2021, for example, 58% of QAnon posts on Facebook would have originated in China, while less than half would have originated in Russia. The report concludes that “China’s goal, most likely, is to sow further discord and division among the American population.”<sup>57</sup> If the precise data is to be taken cautiously, as the methodology of the report has been questioned (the exact origin of the operators of the Facebook accounts involved are unverifiable except by Facebook itself<sup>58</sup>) the very involvement of Chinese state actors in the amplification of QAnon stories remains plausible. Facebook, like Twitter and Google, has reported manipulations of Chinese origin on several occasions and, as we have seen, some of these manipulations were indeed aimed at increasing divisions within the U.S. society. This relatively new tendency is another symptom of the Russification of Chinese attitudes (and diplomatic practice) as the country no longer refrains from displaying itself with local extremes, something Russia has done for a long time.

Yet, the motivations are different: **in general, people aligning themselves with China are motivated by financial gains, more than by a convergence of views or interests;** while Russia benefits from a genuine ideological proximity with those groups (pro-traditions, pro-sovereignty, anti-European feelings, etc.). That said, China’s conduct in the Xinjiang – putting a million Muslims in concentration camps as part of an ethnic cleansing or even genocide – may seduce some far-right fringes.

**Some anti-Semitic signals** in the Chinese discourse must probably be interpreted in the context of this rapprochement with the political extremes. Not only some of the relays of this discourse have been notoriously conspiratorial and anti-Semitic websites, such as the one Larry Romanoff had as early as 2010 (→ p. 608); but some Chinese diplomats, journalists and influencers have recently made some disturbing references. On May 24, 2020, the Embassy of China in France published on its Twitter account a

52. Olivia Dufour, “Non, l’immunité de l’avocat n’est pas totale” (“No, a Lawyer’s Immunity is Not Without Limits”), *Gazette du Palais*, 16 (23 Apr. 2019), 5.

53. “French Lawyer Condemns *Le Monde’s* Stigmatization of China,” *People’s Daily Online* (3 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/6iGfs>.

54. “Pékin contre-attaque: le laboratoire militaire américain de Fort Detrick à l’origine du Covid?” (“Beijing strikes back: the US military laboratory at Fort Detrick is the source of Covid”) (from: [voltaire.net](http://voltaire.net)), *Egalité et réconciliation*, June 29, 2021 (<https://archive.vn/uNwtp>).

55. <https://www.conspiracywatch.info/le-grand-soir>.

56. Martin Svárovský, Jakub Janda, and Veronika Víchová, *Handbook on Countering Russian and Chinese Interference in Europe*, European Values et Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2019), 16.

57. *Quantifying the Q Conspiracy: A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Threat Posed by QAnon*, The Soufan Center (Apr. 2021), 26.

58. David Gilbert, “No, Russia and China Didn’t ‘Weaponize’ QAnon. It’s a Homegrown Nightmare,” *Vive* (22 Apr. 2021).



caricature (see below) that has largely been interpreted as conspiratorial and anti-Semitic (the Israeli flag on the scythe of Death seemed to imply that the Israeli-American alliance sawed death in a number of countries and, here, in Hong Kong) before it deleted the message and claimed its account had been “falsified.” The explanation did not convince anyone because, as Antoine Bondaz noted, the caricature continued to be “liked” by the Embassy’s account (not to mention that it was republished in April 2021, by the account of the Chinese embassy in Japan this time, before being deleted again – see image below).<sup>59</sup> Another example was also caught by Antoine Bondaz: on March 23, 2021, the journalist and writer Zheng Ruolin (郑若麟) – and “old friend” of Maxime Vivas (→ p. 335)<sup>60</sup> – attacked the French MEP Raphaël Glucksmann on Weibo, highlighting that “his whole family was Jewish,” with an image on which the star of David was added (Glucksmann was also deemed responsible of the death of Samuel Paty, the French teacher who was beheaded by an islamist terrorist, because he had presumably “attracted Chechen refugees to France and [...] a Chechen terrorist decapitated the French professor” – see the image below).



Sources: “Chinese embassy in France says its Twitter account was ‘falsified’ after polemical tweet,” La Libre (25 May 2020); <https://www.sankei.com/article/20210430-4QVL4S364FMCTPP7KOBFEJBW7A/>; <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1374617640598126595/photo/2>.

We can add to the list the influencer Lu Kewen, author of several articles including “How to assess the value of Jews?” (May 29, 2021), with comments on their physical peculiarities, illustrated by a profile photo showing a characteristic nose, or “What kind of people are today’s Jews really?” (June 28, 2021).<sup>61</sup> In another article (August 9, 2021), he addresses the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, whom he reminds that he is “Jewish” in these terms: “You, the rulers of the American Empire, the Jews who control

59. <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1264851073929445376>.

60. Thaïs Chaigne, “Qui est Maxime Vivas, ce Français qui dénonce les ‘fake news’ sur les Ouïghours et fait le bonheur de Pékin?” (“Who is Maxime Vivas, the Frenchman who Denounces ‘Fake News’ on Uyghurs and Pleases Beijing?”), *Libération* (30 Mar. 2021).

61. He has 400,000 subscribers on Zhihu and 1,450,000 on bilibili. The first article is: “如何评价犹太人?” (“How to assess the value of Jews?”), WeChat account 卢克文工作室 (29 May 2021), [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CRemOpfC\\_0ZHgSsxtHV1Ew](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/CRemOpfC_0ZHgSsxtHV1Ew); the second: “今天的犹太人到底是一群什么人?” (“What kind of people are today’s Jews really?”), WeChat account 卢克文工作室 (28 Jun. 2021), [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/X3DcNenhxA95Wb\\_mRemFMg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/X3DcNenhxA95Wb_mRemFMg).

finance and the media, and the Japanese invaders of the small islands, cannot imagine what each of us, a member of the Chinese nation, is willing to consent to in order to contribute to the rebirth of this country, and how much we have accepted humiliation for so many years, only to recover the glory of our most illustrious forefathers.”<sup>62</sup> In May 2021, it was CGTN’s star presenter Zheng Junfeng who drew the ire of the Israeli authorities for explaining U.S. support for Israel by the power of Jewish lobbies in the country.<sup>63</sup> The Israeli embassy in China reacted by saying that it showed “blatant anti-Semitism.”<sup>64</sup> These examples are so far isolated, and nothing indicates a more widespread tendency: China is possibly using all the levers in its hands against its enemies, in an uninhibited discourse that no longer forbids itself anything. Yet, this lever could find an echo in several anti-Semitic groups in Russia, in Europe, or in North America for instance.



Source: <https://twitter.com/MEMRIReports/status/1395818681628778496>.

- **11) In instrumentalizing the terrorist specter** in discussing Uyghurs. It brandishes the terrorist threat, but also the myth of a happy population (Chinese media circulate many images of the happy daily life in Xinjiang), and attacks against the presumably ignorant, lying, and interfering Western outlets – all of which “reflect many classic elements of Russian disinformation with a uniquely Chinese twist.”<sup>65</sup>
- **12) In using “gangster methods.”** The examples of pressure, intimidations, aggressions, arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, breaks in, hackings, sabotages that are described in this report show that Beijing is willing to use “gangster methods,”<sup>66</sup> in sharp contrast to the *ethos* that it apparently hoped to project on the international scene – a benevolent and pacific power – and in an attitude which is closer to the brutal image that never really bothered Moscow.

62. The Chinese term used here (倭寇 - wokou) refers to the pirates who plundered the Chinese coasts between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and who were not only ethnically Japanese but also Korean and even Chinese. The term underwent a semantic shift in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to qualify the Japanese invader. It has an obvious depreciative connotation.

63. “布林肯的野望：围堵中国大战略” (“Blinken’s ambition: a grand strategy to encircle China”), WeChat account 卢克文工作室 (9 Aug. 2021), <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7XkWDQlyXbILR4SWivIMBQ>.

64. <https://twitter.com/IsraelinChina/status/1394653723901579264>.

65. Brandt and Schafer, “Five Things to Know.”

66. Reporters Without Borders, *China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order* (2019), 19.

Hence, to discredit “the West,” it is now obvious that **Beijing has adopted the Russian approach** that Ben Nimmo summed up in 2015 as the “4Ds:”<sup>67</sup> **dismiss** (“If you do not like what your critics say, insult them”), **distort** (“If you do not like the facts, twist them”), **distract** (“If you’re accused of something, accuse someone else of the same thing”<sup>68</sup>), and **dismay** (“If you do not like what someone else is planning, scare them off.”)<sup>69</sup>.

Unlike Russia, China has often been described as **refraining from using aggressive disinformation campaigns targeting the divisions of a society, and also as not having a global field of intervention (only a regional sphere)**.<sup>70</sup> These two elements were the two missing pieces of a hybrid arsenal, according to the infographics of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center (below). But if it was true a few years ago, this is no longer the case today, as this report shows. **China now checks the two elements. In fact, it checks all of them: China has the most comprehensive arsenal of any country.**



Finally, **the Russification may also be partly a Sovietization**. In other words, it could reach beyond information manipulation on social networks to a return to tradition as a way to counter more and more frequent detections (as shown in the exponential growth of reports on Chinese operations). Like the jihadists who use short waves to prevent the interception of their (GSM or satellite) phone communications, the more observers scrutinize and denounce Chinese actions on social networks and on the Internet, the more China could be tempted to implement disinformation on other channels. To do that, the repertoire of actions elaborated by the **KGB’s Service A** constitutes a precious source of inspiration for the Chinese preparing influence operations. Bound to grow in the years ahead, this tendency is well illustrated by the operation that we named “Infektion 2.0” which subtly mixes disinformation on social networks and controlling front organizations.

67. Ben Nimmo, “Anatomy of an Info-War: How Russia’s Propaganda Machine Works, and How to Counter It,” *StopFake* (19 May 2015).

68. An argumentative figure also known as a metastasis.

69. <https://twitter.com/benimmo/status/670230827377295360>; <https://twitter.com/benimmo/status/670230827377295360>.

70. “Hybrid Tactics of Russia, China and Iran,” Ukraine Crisis Media Center (22 Dec. 2020).

## B. Some differences subsist

• **1) China has a more complete toolkit**, not only because its own platforms (WeChat, Weibo, TikTok) are used worldwide, while the Russians rely on U.S. platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), but also because it has real “offline” influence: “China’s online activities frequently support offline influence operations that make extensive use of in-person networks of human agents of influence, overtly attributed state media in English and other non-Chinese languages, and ‘grey propaganda’ with less obviously attributable ties to the mainland. This robust and well-resourced collection of tools should equip China to execute integrated influence operations on a scale that Russia cannot match.”<sup>71</sup> Generally speaking, **Beijing has many more levers than Moscow, in particular economic ones.**

• **2) China also benefits from a plethoric workforce.** “Russians still rely very much on bots, so its computers, and zombie computers that are propagating disinformation, whereas the Chinese still seem to be using human beings, which means that the content can react more quickly to situations. All of that is probably also augmented by cyborgs, so basically the original information is generated by human beings, and then it is spread by computer systems, and all that, so to saturate the environment, but one thing is sure, is that China has a lot more people that can produce disinformation content than Russia does.”<sup>72</sup> **This comparative advantage is however countered by the growing use of artificial intelligence** in informational operations, including in the production of content.

• **3) Still, Russian information manipulations are more sophisticated.** The Chinese operations that have targeted Western social networks after 2017 are impressive by their sheer number but usually hastened and of poor quality, hence easier to notice. Russians, on the contrary, are more meticulous and have **a more precise knowledge of local media ecosystems and public opinions.** Like KGB officers before them, Russians “do ethnographic research (IRA operatives toured the United States) and ingratiate themselves into the communities they are pretending to be members of (e.g., Black Lives Matter activists or Texas secessionists). They put in effort to build relationships with influencers, to ensure that authentic influential voices amplify their content.”<sup>73</sup> **The Chinese generally learn languages but not cultures, and they lack of adaptive capacity:** “we see young people speaking the language fairly well but showing really inappropriate behaviors,” a Swedish interlocutor told us.<sup>74</sup> Yet, it appears that in Middle Eastern countries (especially in Gulf states and in Algeria), Chinese diplomats not only speak the language quite well – in both its classical and dialectal forms – but also have a precise knowledge of local cultures.<sup>75</sup>

• **4) Russia better integrates cyber with the rest:** its cyberoperations are conceived as parts of wider campaigns of influence (such as *back-and-leak*). They are used in a sequence that brings in intelligence services, but also media outlets, as we have seen over

71. Renée Diresta et al., *Telling China’s Story: The Chinese Communist Party’s Campaign to Shape Global Narratives*, Stanford Internet Cyber Policy Center, Hoover Institution (Jul. 2020), 3.

72. Cole, “A Conversation about China’s Sharp Power,” 3.

73. Diresta et al., *Telling China’s Story*, 44.

74. Interview with one of the authors, Stockholm (Feb. 2020).

75. Interview of the authors with Fatiha Dazi-Héni, Paris (Feb. 2021).



the years, especially with the DNC Leaks and the Macron Leaks.<sup>76</sup> Beijing, however, segments its operations (cyber on one side, then the rest): **Chinese cyberoperations are numerous and sophisticated, but they are not (yet) integrated into wider informational operations despite knowing that several actors, such the MSS, have come to master the entire process.** The fusion ultimately looms ahead if the Russification continues.

• **5) China still believes in the attractiveness of its model.** As they attack Westerners, Chinese media outlets are still mainly focused on **promoting China and its model of governance.** CGTN and Xinhua do not behave like RT and Sputnik. China talks a lot more about itself than Russia does: more than 50% of the content circulated on the YouTube channels of CGTN and CCTV focus on China, compared to only 4% of the content released on the YouTube channels of RT America and RT UK dealing with Russia.<sup>77</sup> RT France’s website does not have a Russian news tab, for example, while that of CGTN Français even places the “China” tab first on its toolbar. In a word, **Chinese outlets are ego-centered.**

• **6)** Consequently, the differences are not playing in China’s favor: **Russian media are better implanted in their local ecosystems, their websites receive a lot more visits, and their profiles on social networks more engagement** because they deal with French topics in the French context, for instance, and with divisive issues (unemployment, demonstrations, crimes, immigration etc.). Chinese platforms, however, usually speak about China in France, which is less interesting to many readers. **In other words, China stands far above Russia in its artificially high number of followers on social networks but the Russians are more efficient, more convincing.** Thus, they have comparatively more impact on social networks. It does not seem to be a Chinese priority however: they want to “demonstrate to superiors total commitment by generating high levels of activity [...] while actual efficacy or impact may be secondary.”<sup>78</sup> As such, the disciplinary campaign marshaled by Xi Jinping probably reinforced the propensity of actors on the field to favor quantitative operations at the expense of real success. Obviously, they may figure that out and make their future operations more subtle, thus less detectable and more influential.

To sum up, Beijing has an advantage in several domains, Moscow in others, and it can be said that **“China copied Russia’s tactics [...]. But it lacks Russia’s skillset.”**<sup>79</sup> It does not mean, however, that one is less dangerous than the others, none the least because China’s room for improvement is considerable. Furthermore, we should not confuse the whole with the part: **the Russian superiority on information manipulation is evident, but when we account for all influence operations, the reverse is true.** First, Beijing follows the same tradition (communist techniques refined all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the country is on a path to acquire the same expertise, perhaps even a better one in some areas. Also, China’s economic might and the attractiveness of its internal market means that it is harder to say no to. Finally, the country is both more subtle and **apparently innocuous** in

76. Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, *The ‘Macron Leaks’ Operation: A Post-Mortem*, IRSEM/Atlantic Council (Jun. 2019).

77. Brandt and Schafer, “Five Things to Know.”

78. Diresta et al., *Telling China’s Story*, 44.

79. Edward Lucas, Jake Morris, and Corina Rebegea, *Information Bedlam: Russian and Chinese Information Operations During Covid-19*, CEPA (Mar. 2021), 3.

its operations. What To wrote about the efforts directed at overseas Chinese, the *qiaowu* (侨务) – i.e. “an effective tool for intensive behavioral control and manipulation, yet appearing benign, benevolent, and helpful”<sup>80</sup> – can apply to the entire effort of the United Front, and to most Chinese influence operations. Finally, as Ryan Fedasiuk noted, “if the past twenty years are any indication, **foreigners should expect the CCP’s influence operations to continue growing in size and sophistication.**”<sup>81</sup> The Party-State learns fast and it can enjoy considerable resources at its disposal.

## C. Cooperation

**The Sino-Russian – or, more accurately, Sino-Soviet – cooperation on information manipulation is not a new phenomenon.** When, in 1949-1950, Soviet propaganda accused the United States of testing biological weapons on the Inuit populations of Alaska, this fake information was relayed by Chinese state propaganda, which asserted that the United States was then collaborating with the former chief of the Japanese program on biological weapons, and ready to use these weapons against China. In 1952, during the Korean War, the Soviets in turn relayed a Chinese and North Korean disinformation campaign averring that the United States was conducting a bacteriological war by airlifting insects infected with microorganisms carrying diseases such as the plague and cholera. Together with the Soviets, they doctored the evidence by creating two fake zones of contamination.<sup>82</sup>

Nowadays, the Sino-Russian relationship is growing stronger. For more than a decade, **the two powers have continuously come closer** as the distance with the United States widens. After 2014, the fallout of the annexation of Crimea and of the Donbass War – that is, the rupture with Europe – contributed to reinforcing the partnership between Moscow and Beijing. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic gave the impression of a “united front” in defense of the authoritarian model of crisis management to counter presumably inefficient, even chaotic, liberal democracies, as described by the media of the two countries. Although specialists have repeatedly emphasized the fragility, or at least the somewhat artificial and unsustainable nature of this profoundly asymmetrical agreement – the gap having widened between the two – the fact remains that in the field of influence operations, and more precisely in the informational sub-field, the two powers are undertaking a clear rapprochement.

- **1) Media cooperation.** An annual Russia-China Media Forum debuted in 2015, during which dozens of contracts are signed between media outlets from both countries. In 2017, Sputnik signed cooperation agreements with Xinhua, the Guangdong radio and TV channels,<sup>83</sup> and the *Global Times*,<sup>84</sup> while Rossia Segodnia (RS, overseeing RT and Sputnik) partnered with Alibaba Culture Communication.<sup>85</sup> In 2018, RS and

80. James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 50.

81. Ryan Fedasiuk, “A Different Kind of Army: The Militarization of China’s Internet Trolls,” *China Brief*, 21:7 (12 Apr. 2021).

82. Milton Leitenberg, “China’s False Allegations of the Use of Biological Weapons by the United States during the Korean War,” Working Paper, 78, *Cold War International History Project* (Mar. 2016); Milton Leitenberg, “False Allegations of U.S. Biological Weapons Use during the Korean War,” in Anne L. Clunan, Peter R. Lavoy, and Susan B. Martin, eds., *Terrorism, War, or Disease? Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); Wu Zhili, “The Bacteriological War of 1952 is a False Alarm” (Sept. 1997), History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Yanhuang Chunqiu 11 (2013), 36-39.

83. “Sputnik Signs Cooperation Agreements with China’s Xinhua, Guangdong Agencies,” *Sputnik* (4 Jul. 2017).

84. “Global Times Begins Cooperation with Sputnik,” *Global Times* (19 Apr. 2017).

85. “Sputnik News Agency, Alibaba Group Sign Memorandum of Strategic Cooperation,” *Sputnik* (6 Sept. 2017).

China Media Group (CMG, controlling CGTN and RCI) signed a strategic cooperation agreement to officially **develop common content** (documentaries, news reports) **and promote each other's national content on their respective platforms**. They also set up a platform to release content translated from Russian or Chinese and produced by media in each countries ([www.sinorusfocus.com](http://www.sinorusfocus.com)). In 2019, agreements were signed between RS and Huawei,<sup>86</sup> and again between Sputnik and Xinhua (to share content in Spanish and Arabic this time).<sup>87</sup> An agreement with Roskomnadzor – the Russian regulatory authority in charge of media and communications – granted a cable and digital broadcasting license to the Russian version of CGTN, another type of decision made at this event. At the Russian political level, the vice-minister of Digital Development and Mass Communications, Alexei Voline, seems to be shepherding the negotiations.

Besides, several **Chinese journalists are invited every year to the Russian Young Leaders program**, “Новое поколение” (New Generation), organized by the agency Rossotrudnichestvo, in cooperation with Sputnik. These are master classes where RS employees train individuals to the “Russian methods of international journalism pertaining to media production and social network uses.”<sup>88</sup>

This rapprochement is motivated by a shared belief in the competitiveness of the international mediatic field, and in the necessity – for Russian and Chinese outlets – **to ally themselves in the face of Western heavyweights** (notably CNN and the BBC) and offer an “alternative” editorial line. During the state visit of Xi Jinping in Moscow, in July 2017, RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonian intervened in front of both heads of state at the Kremlin: she endorsed the framework of an “informational war” and asked them to increase cooperation between Russian and Chinese outlets to ensure “the survival of our resources [...] in the face of the powerful Western mainstream journalism.”<sup>89</sup> One RT employee interviewed by the researcher Maxime Audinet in 2015 even admitted that **several producers and journalist from CCTV came to observe the editorial methods of the Russian channel and the construction of its pretended “alternative” editorial line, which is both incisive and very offensive toward the West** (during the Ukrainian crisis in particular).<sup>90</sup>

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic provided another reason to call for a deeper cooperation between Chinese and Russian media to form a common front against critics. For instance, during the 2020 China-Russia Online Media Webinar, which took place on December 18, 2020, Niu Yibing, the Deputy-Director of the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission (中央网络安全和信息化委员会), called on Russian and Chinese media to “work together to tell more vivid stories about the fight against the pandemic, **jointly fight against attacks and provocations from Western countries**.”<sup>91</sup>

86. “Huawei & Russian Media Group Rossiya Segodnya Sign Deal on Strategic Cooperation,” *RT* (4 Sept. 2019).

87. Janaina Camara da Silveira, “Time for BRICS Media Groups to Strengthen Cooperation,” *China Daily* (1 Nov. 2019).

88. See: Audinet, *A State's Construction of Soft Power*.

89. “Симоньян: Ни одна война в последние годы не начиналась без поддержки прессы” (“Simonian: No Recent War Has Begun without Support from the Press”), *RT Russia* (4 Jul. 2017), <https://youtu.be/FX3Me2Yxv1Q>.

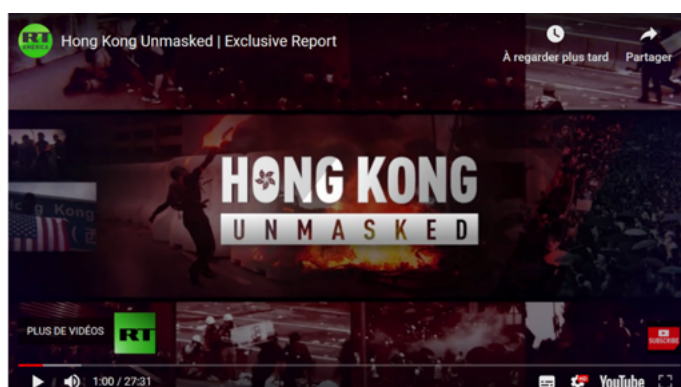
90. Interview with Maxime Audinet, Paris (Nov. 2020).

91. Ren Qi, “Chinese, Russian Media Have Role in Virus Fight,” *China Daily* (19 Dec. 2020), <https://archive.vn/1Q19L>.



2020 China-Russia Online Media Webinar (©Zhu Xingxin/chinadaily.com.cn).<sup>92</sup>

• **2) Cooperation on social networks.** During the 2019 Hong Kong crisis, RT broadcast a thirty-minute documentary untitled “Hong Kong Unmasked,” which concluded that the U.S. government had intervened in the crisis through think tanks, NGOs, and state agencies, including the CIA. The documentary was posted on YouTube on November 29, and viewed more than 100,000 times before being abundantly relayed on Weibo and other social networks.<sup>93</sup>



“Hong Kong Unmasked | Exclusive Report,” video published on the YouTube account of RT America, November 29, 2019.<sup>94</sup>

That same day, the website RIAFAN.ru, which belongs to the network of troll farms of the Internet Research Agency, published a particularly biased article on the Hong Kong opposition that contained many inexactitudes, including fake quotes from Joshua Wang.<sup>95</sup>

As a rule, **Chinese and Russian (but also Iranian) propaganda websites help each other, quote each other, and amplify the same anti-Western content in an**

92. Source: <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202012/19/WS5fdd3bb7a31024ad0ba9cc21.html>.

93. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CUgy-Hzyfo>; Simone McCarthy, “Russian TV Production Echoes China’s Line on Hong Kong Protests,” *South China Morning Post* (9 Dec. 2019); Jane Li, “Russia Is Beijing’s Best Ally in the Disinformation War against Hong Kong,” *Quartz* (11 Dec. 2019).

94. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CUgy-Hzyfo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CUgy-Hzyfo&feature=emb_logo).

95. Fatima Tlis, “Russian ‘Troll Farm’ Posts Ersatz Report on Hong Kong Thanksgiving Rally,” *Polygraph.info* (3 Dec. 2019).



apparently “circular” fashion.<sup>96</sup> “Since November 2019, three of the top five most retweeted news outlets (not including China’s state-backed media), were funded by the Iranian or Russian governments. PressTV, RT, and SputnikNews were the third, fourth, and fifth most retweeted outlets.”<sup>97</sup> “So we saw that in Italy, we saw **Russian-linked social media accounts were amplifying content that was promoting pro-Chinese narratives**. So, tweets, for example, from China’s MFA and the *Global Times* to Italian audiences.”<sup>98</sup> Russian intelligence services (GRU) may have contributed to amplifying manipulated information on the coronavirus, more specifically in circulating the Chinese conspiracy theory on the American origin of the virus.<sup>99</sup>

• **3) Cooperation in the “fight against disinformation.”** In September 2020, the spokeswoman of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the minister and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, had reached “an important consensus on the fight against disinformation.” She denounced the countries that, “in the context of the Covid-19,” were circulating disinformation and invited them “to respect the facts.”



Sources: <https://twitter.com/SpokespersonCHN/status/1304445728907952129>;  
<https://twitter.com/mlrchr/status/1304822970368569345>.

Because Russia and China are largely seen, by the rest of the world as two of the largest producers of disinformation, this announcement provoked many ironic comments. But for attentive observers of influence operations, it was perceived as an **avowed sign of cooperation in the field, not to “fight” disinformation, but to produce it**. This is also suggested by the Chinese use of narrative materials usually adopted by the Russians.

96. Brandt and Schafer, “Five Things to Know.”

97. Ibid.

98. Gabrielle, “Briefing with Special Envoy.”

99. Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, “Russian Intelligence Agencies Push Disinformation on Pandemic,” *The New York Times* (28 Jul. 2020).

Thus, after the publication by the *Jyllands-Posten* of caricatures of the PRC flag, Chinese Internet users (including the Diba group) mocked the “weakness” of the Danes, who were only able to resist the German invasion for 4 hours on 9 April 1940, which is a recurring argument in Russian disinformation campaigns.<sup>100</sup> The presence of this “reference” in Chinese campaign makes it possible to suppose that the two countries practice transfers of competences.

• **4) The use of common relays.** As a consequence of the fact that, as we have seen, the Party-State no longer hesitates to keep company with the political extremes (→ p. 626), it **frequently draws from the same sources as Moscow**. Most of its anti-American relays are known to be, correlatively, pro-Russian. For example, in order to deny the oppression of Uyghurs, to discredit the German researcher Adrian Zenz,<sup>101</sup> or to deny the Chinese origin of the coronavirus, Chinese authorities readily rely on **Max Blumenthal**, an American journalist, and his site **The Grayzone**, which are cited by the Chinese press as well as by the spokespersons of the Foreign Ministry.<sup>102-103</sup> An article by Blumenthal published in *The Grayzone* on February 18, 2021 was relayed on Twitter by Zhao Lijian, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by CGTN, which gave an interview to Blumenthal for the occasion, and by a number of embassies. Some even reproduced the article in its entirety on their websites.<sup>104</sup> However, Blumenthal, who founded his site one month after a trip to Moscow for the tenth anniversary of RT, was until then known mainly for being a relay of Russian propaganda (and an advocate for Bashar al-Assad).<sup>105</sup> His site *The Grayzone* was also cited by the spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry.<sup>106</sup> He is now one of the many common sources of Beijing and Moscow.

• **5) Cooperation between security services?** We can suppose – without concrete evidence however – that media outlets and diplomats from both countries are not the only ones cooperating on influence operations (which they call operations of counter-influence) and that their armed forces and intelligences services, for instance, are also exchanging information, and perhaps “good practices,” when their common objective is to weaken and divide liberal democracies. It is all the more logical to assume it that **cooperation between intelligence services already exists** through the Shanghai

100. Interview with the authors in Denmark (Feb. 2020).

101. On this topic, see: Albert Zhang, Jacob Wallis, and Zoe Meers, *Strange bedfellows on Xinjiang: The CCP, fringe media and US social media platforms*, ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre (Mar. 2021).

102. At least 252 times in the state media *Global Times*, CGTN, and *Xinhua*, and 61 times in the *People's Daily* between December 2019 and February 2021, according to Zhang, Wallis, and Meers (Ibid., 8). See, for example, Liu Xin, “Not anti-US, but speak for betrayed Americans: The Grayzone founder,” *Global Times* (25 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/9zuh3>; “Founder of The Grayzone disputes conspiracy theories targeting China,” CGTN (27 Apr. 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBp3oqTMRjs>.

103. See, for example, “April 1, 2020 Press Conference Held by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying,” PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1 Apr. 2020), <https://archive.vn/zAuDc>; “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on April 20, 2021,” PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (20 Apr. 2021), <https://archive.vn/wH3g8>; “What's False and What's True on China-related Human Rights Matters,” Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC in the Hong Kong special administrative region (2 Jul. 2020), <https://archive.vn/UUHb9>.

104. Gareth Porter and Max Blumenthal, “US State Department accusation of China ‘genocide’ relied on data abuse and baseless claims by far-right ideologue,” *The Grayzone* (18 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/w9gKk>; Zhao Lijian's tweet can be found here: <https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1363852209272676356>; the interview is available here: <https://archive.vn/Pk778>; see the tweet posted by the Chinese embassy in Brussels, on March 1, 2021: <https://archive.vn/qcxwX>.

105. Sam Charles Hamad and Oz Katerji, “Did a Kremlin Pilgrimage cause Alternet blogger's Damascene conversion?,” *Pulse* (22 Aug. 2017).

106. “Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow on February 26, 2021,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (26 Feb. 2021), <https://archive.vn/YHjLh>.

Cooperation Organization (tasked with fighting terrorist threats and illegal drug trafficking for instance). What is certain, as the Chinese military publications demonstrate, is that there is *at least* a Chinese interest in Russian tactics and, as the Chinese grow more powerful, probably a reciprocal interest on the Russian side for Chinese experiences.

## II. Some Tactical Successes but a Strategic Failure

Machiavelli affirmed that “it is much safer to be feared than to be loved.” Yet, having read Cicero,<sup>107</sup> he immediately added that “a prince must nevertheless make himself feared in such a way that he will avoid hatred, even if he does not acquire love; since one can very easily be feared and yet not hated.”<sup>108</sup> This is precisely what Beijing has failed to do.

Chinese influence operations have been met with **tactical successes**. China is able to constrain private companies, such as airlines or hotel chains, to name their destinations differently (“Taipei, China”), or the NBA to apologize for the tweet of a club official. It also demonstrated an ability to inflict high financial damages (when it blocked the website of *The New York Times* in 2012, as a retaliation for an article Chinese authorities did not like, the group’s stock market value fell by 20% in twenty-four hours). Additionally, from fear of retributions, many companies refrain from publishing ads in media outlets critical of China, which impoverishes these outlets. Yet, despite these little victories, the offensive has been a **strategic failure**. China’s influence in the world has led to a backlash against it that is both widespread and growing.

This is not a new trend: **China remains its own best enemy in terms of influence**. It can be seen **in Africa**,<sup>109</sup> where China’s image has changed: the honeymoon is over as the country is increasingly criticized as predatory—its projects not benefiting local populations – and for being as harmful as colonial powers were. In many places, as in Mali, the populations are exasperated, not only by the plundering of natural resources, particularly gold, but also by the working conditions, the illegal entry of Chinese workers and the pollution it generates. The fact that the leaders, benevolent towards the Chinese presence, generally do not take into account the complaints of the population on this subject contributes to the distrust of the elites and the polarization of societies. **The BRI also faced numerous setbacks** in the past couple of years, with the same complaints (“Chinese try to take everything they can, without paying attention to the employees or the local companies. They act as if we were a colony. But we won’t let it happen,” according to people working in the port of Piraeus, which was bought by Cosco in 2016).<sup>110</sup> The BRI is also “running out of steam” for economic reasons, as Jean-Pierre Cabestan reminds us: “not only because the countries of the South are finding it increasingly difficult to repay their debts to Chinese state banks, but also because Beijing needs more financing to support domestic growth.”<sup>111</sup> The reflux is generalized and it had started before the more aggressive turn of the past couple of years. Now, **with its “wolf warrior” diplomacy, its information manipulations and brutal**

107. Cicéron, *De Officiis*, Livre II, VII. The Roman author questioned the use of fear and love by governments. He asserted that only the second ensured durable power.

108. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 58.

109. Luke Patey, “The Chinese Model is Failing Africa,” *Financial Times* (26 Aug. 2018).

110. Marina Rafenberg, “Vent de fronde antichinois au port du Pirée” (“Winds of Anti-Chinese Revolt in the Piraeus Port”), *Le Monde* (11 Mar. 2021).

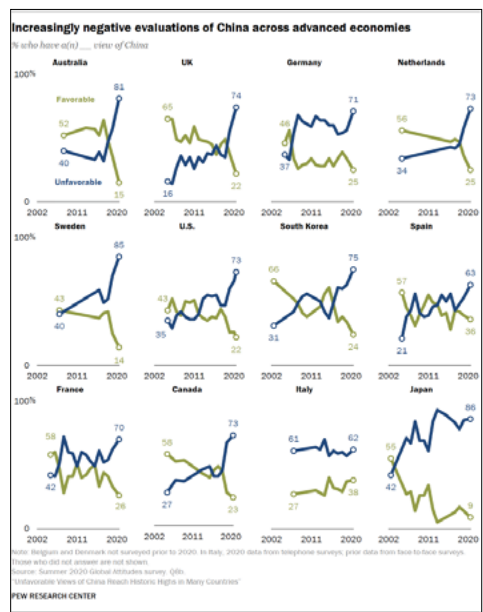
111. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, preface to Pierre-Antoine Donnet, *Chine, le grand prédateur* (Paris: éditions de l’Aube, 2021), 14.

**methods**, Beijing has definitely altered its image. It was a done deal: the CCP could not become as aggressive as Russia and, at the same time, maintain on the international stage the *ethos* of a responsible actor peacefully rising.

This is precisely what some in China, more lucid than others, had feared, especially inside the CICIR, the think tank of the MSS (the main civilian intelligence agency). In early April 2020, an internal report from the CICIR, presented to Xi Jinping, affirmed that **the pandemic could provoke the strongest wave of anti-Chinese feelings in the world since Tian’anmen** in 1989, and that it could also feed into the resistance against BRI projects and invite Washington to increase its financial and military support to Asian allies – increasing the risk of confrontation.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, Shi Zhan (施展), director of the World Politics Research Center at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing warned that “this ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy is unsustainable and risks isolating us.”<sup>113</sup>

Again, this Chinese fall from grace on the international scene is the latest trend of a downward **evolution that started before the pandemic**. Several affairs, including the case of espionage against the African Union headquarters, the “hostage diplomacy” used to coerce Canada and a growing number of other countries, the revelations about the concentration camps for Uyghurs (“China Cables”)<sup>114</sup> and the management of the Hong Kong crisis have all contributed to the **deterioration of Beijing’s image after Xi Jinping came to power**.

**However, this evolution is relative**: it is among the developed economies, especially Western states (Europe and North America) and their allies (Japan, South Korea), that China’s image has deteriorated significantly. It remains correct, and is even improving in developing countries. This polarization reflects **Beijing’s double discourse, which “plays on confrontation with the West and seduction of the South,”**<sup>115</sup> in Africa, Latin America and Asia.



Source: Pew Research Center (5 Oct. 2020), <https://pewrsr.ch/3IETMoy>.

112. “Internal Chinese Report Warns Beijing Faces ‘Tian’anmen-like Global Backlash over Virus,” Reuters (4 May 2020).

113. Shi, quoted in Frédéric Lemaître and Brice Pedroletti, “Chine: la diplomatie du ‘loup combattant’” (“China: The ‘Wolf Warrior Diplomacy’”), *Le Monde* (30 Apr. 2020).

114. Harold Thibault and Brice Pedroletti, “‘China Cables’: révélations sur le fonctionnement des camps d’internement des Ouïghours” (“‘China Cables’: Revelations on the Working of Uyghur Internments Camps”), *Le Monde* (24 Nov. 2019).

115. Mathieu Duchâtel, quoted in Sébastien Falletti, “Pékin veut conquérir la planète par le Sud” (“Beijing wants to conquer the planet from the South”), *Le Figaro* (2 Jun. 2021), 11.



This deterioration has been gradual, but **it seems to have accelerated since 2017-2018**, especially in **Australia** (→ p. 544) and **Sweden** (→ p. 521) as noted previously, but also in **Canada** (→ p. 539) and elsewhere in the world. In the **United States**, the election of Donald Trump in 2017 catalyzed an ineluctable confrontation which the president dubbed a new “cold war.” Americans now measure the extent of Chinese influence at home. In July 2020, the director of the FBI explained that “the FBI is opening a new China-related counterintelligence case about every 10 hours.”<sup>116</sup> Several months later, *Newsweek* noted that they had found “600 such groups in the U.S., all in regular touch with and guided by China’s Communist Party – a larger-scale version of a pattern found in other countries around the world.”<sup>117</sup> In the **United Kingdom**, the deterioration of the relations – after the “golden age” lauded by David Cameron during the 2015 visit of Xi Jinping in London<sup>118</sup> – accelerated after 2019, first with the crisis in Hong Kong, which was particularly sensitive for the British as they retroceded the former colony to China in 1997, and later with the sanitary crisis (London criticized Beijing for its lack of transparency, the diffusion of fake news, and for the cyberespionage that targeted British laboratories). Also notable was the British change of mind that led to the exclusion of Huawei from British 5G networks, decided in July 2020 (the Chinese embassy described it as an “error” for which the British would “pay the consequences”) – a threat that apparently did not dissuade Germany and Romania from also banning Huawei from their future 5G networks in April 2021. On February 4, 2021, OFCOM, the British media regulatory agency, cancelled CGTN’s broadcasting license based on the assessment that CGTN wasn’t the one making the editorial choices for the channel, but the CCP. This added to the deterioration of the bilateral relation.<sup>119</sup> As in the United States, this changing attitude toward China is a bipartisan issue widely endorsed by a public opinion increasingly wary of Beijing.

In **France** as well, awareness, although more discrete, is nevertheless palpable, with a clear acceleration in the first quarter of 2021 (see below).

### The French Awakening

As elsewhere, **the image of China has deteriorated in France for the last couple of years, and especially after the appointment of Ambassador Lu Shaye in Paris (2019), a “wolf-warrior diplomat”** who contributed to making the embassy more aggressive, especially on social networks, as we saw in this report (→ p. 234). The Covid-19 pandemic aggravated this tendency because the embassy was on the defensive and multiplied its attacks – such as an April 2020 article on the “EHPAD nursing staff” (who had “abandoned,” “deserted” and “left their pensioners to die from hunger and illnesses”), following which the ambassador was summoned by the French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs (→ p. 238).

Other cases have contributed to mobilizing the French public opinion against Beijing, including the November 2019 revelation that Huawei **was suing the researcher Valérie Niquet for libel** (→ p. 53); she instantly received many messages of support. **The persecution of Uyghurs**, better and better documented, was a powerful accelerator to raise attention on the topic – especially thanks to researchers who have been mobilizing for years (in a collective

116. Christopher Wray, “The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States,” FBI (7 Jul. 2020).

117. Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Exclusive: 600 U.S. Groups Linked to Chinese Communist Party Influence Effort with Ambition Beyond Election,” *Newsweek* (26 Oct. 2020).

118. “China, Britain To Benefit from ‘Golden Era’ in Ties – Cameron,” Reuters (18 Oct. 2015).

119. Alex Hern, “Chinese State Broadcaster Loses UK Licence after Ofcom Ruling,” *The Guardian* (4 Feb. 2021).

op-ed in *Le Monde* in 2018 for instance<sup>120</sup>), as well as to the commitment of several politicians, including the French MEP Raphaël Glucksmann, who has incidentally become a target of the embassy.<sup>121</sup> In September 2020, President Macron publicly denounced “unacceptable practices” in Xinjiang for the first time.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, **a growing number of investigative reports have documented the Chinese power, influence, or espionage** – including several issues and special issues in several French magazines in 2020.<sup>123</sup>

The negative view of China in France can be measured: a poll conducted in October and November 2020 showed that “62% of those polled have a negative or very negative view [...] regardless of political affiliation, suggesting that there is a high level of consensus,” which puts **China “the second most negatively-perceived country [...] just after North Korea, and followed by Russia.”**<sup>124</sup> And several stars have contributed to this awakening, such as the football player Antoine Griezmann who, in December 2020, announced he had terminated his contract with Huawei, “due to the strong suspicions that [the company] had contributed to the development of a “Uyghur Alert” thanks to a facial recognition software.”<sup>125</sup>

In October 2020, an article by Laurence Defranoux in *Libération* noted a **“change of tone” in France vis-à-vis Beijing**. While, “for a long time, in the face of Beijing’s propaganda and attempts at censorship and intimidation, the response in France was muted, if not non-existent, as the fear of economic retaliation was great,” things were visibly beginning to change.<sup>126</sup>

During the first months of 2021, several elements testified to **an acceleration of the French awakening**. On January 21, the Ministry of the Armed Forces published its **2021 Strategic Update**, updating the *2017 Strategic Review*: the document mentioned China not only more times than in 2017, but also more than Russia. It also presented the country first and foremost as a “strategic rival.”<sup>127</sup> **Media have also increasingly reported on the growing aggressiveness of Beijing. And they have broadened their audience**, for instance with the 70-minute TV documentary “China, the great offensive” broadcast on France 2 on February 25. The following day, a long investigation was printed in the weekly *Le Point* on “how China pushes its pawns at the University,”<sup>128</sup> which notably charged Christian Mestre, the former president of the University of Strasbourg, who subsequently resigned his position as ethics officer of the Strasbourg Eurometropolis (→ p. 409).<sup>129</sup> On March 18, the same *Le Point* journalist, Jérémy André, the weekly’s correspondent to Hong Kong, published another investigation on “[how] Beijing takes advantage of our researchers.”<sup>130</sup> These demonstrations had already been common in Australia, in the United States, in Canada and even in the United Kingdom, as we showed in this report, but they had never been done with such a level of details in France.

**The persecution of Uyghurs** is also more insistently denounced from the printed press – which no longer hesitate to discuss “the hidden genocide” on its cover, such as *L’Obs* did in early March<sup>131</sup> – to the political class. **The Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, denounced in several official speeches “the unjustifiable practices used**

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120. “La Chine doit fermer les camps de rééducation politique en région ouïgoure” (“China must close political re-education camps in Uighur region”), *Le Monde* (10 Oct. 2018).

121. “Vive altercation entre Raphaël Glucksmann et l’ambassade de Chine au sujet des Ouïghours” (“Lively Altercation Between Raphaël Glucksmann and the Embassy of China on Uyghurs”), *L’Obs* (14 Oct. 2020).

122. Laurence Defranoux, “Macron condamne publiquement la répression des Ouïghours” (“Macron Condemns the Uyghur Repression Publicly”), *Libération* (8 Sept. 2020).

123. For instance: “Espionnage: l’offensive chinoise” (Espionnage: the Chinese Offensive), *Le Figaro Magazine* 23613 (17 Jul. 2020); *La Chine démasquée, Les dossiers du Canard enchaîné* (China Unmasked, the Investigations of Le Canard enchaîné), 157 (Oct. 2020).

124. Marc Julienne et al., *French Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19: Political Distrust Trumps Economic Opportunities*, “Sinophore Borderlands Europe Survey,” Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic, IFRI (2020).

125. “Antoine Griezmann rompt son contrat avec Huawei, accusé de participer à la surveillance des Ouïghours” (“Antoine Griezmann Broke Off his Contract with Huawei, Allegedly Involved in the Surveillance of the Uyghurs”), *Le Monde* (10 Dec. 2020).

126. Laurence Defranoux, “Vers la fin de la ‘diplomatie du paillason’ face à la Chine?,” *Libération* (15 Oct. 2020).

127. Ministry of the Armed Forces, *Actualisation stratégique 2021*, <https://bit.ly/3aqJnrm>. See also, the Twitter threat written by Antoine Bondaz: <https://twitter.com/AntoineBondaz/status/1355140803572752385>.

128. Jérémy André, “Comment la Chine pousse ses pions à l’université” (“How China Pushes Its Pawns at the University”), *Le Point*, 2532 (25 Feb. 2021), 46-50.

129. “Démission du déontologue de l’Eurométropole de Strasbourg” (“Strasbourg Metropolis Ethics Officer Resigns”), *Les Echos* (3 Mar. 2021).

130. Jérémy André, “Comment la Chine profite de nos chercheurs” (“How China Takes Advantage of Our Scholars”), *Le Point*, 2535 (18 Mar. 2021), 48-51.

131. “Ouïghours. Le génocide caché” (“Uyghurs: The Hidden Genocide”), *L’Obs*, 2940 (4-10 Mar. 2021).

INTRODUCTION

against Uyghurs, and [a] large-scale institutionalized surveillance and repression system” (February 16); or “the forced sterilization, the sexual abuses in the camps, the disappearances, massive detentions, the forced labor, the destruction of the cultural heritage, starting with the places of worship, and the generalized surveillance over the population” in Xinjiang. He renewed his “insistent call for an impartial, independent and transparent mission of international experts to be sent to Xinjiang, as soon as possible, supervised by the High Commissioner for Human Rights” (March 10).<sup>132</sup> He also stated that the term “genocide” “deserves to be discussed and we are ready to consider it.”<sup>133</sup>

CONCEPTS

Finally, a new level was reached when, within a few days (March 15-22), it was revealed that the Embassy of China had pressured senators to cancel a planned visit to Taiwan and insulted the researcher Antoine Bondaz, who had defended them. The Twitter account of the embassy called him a “small strike,” a “mad hyena”, and an “ideological troll,” leading to a unanimous condemnation and a high diplomatic coverage – a symptomatic episode of the perverse effect (which we labelled the “Bondaz Effect”) of the “wolf-warrior” diplomacy (→ p. 237). And it did not stop there: at approximately the same moment, Beijing announced sanctions against 10 Europeans, including the French MEP Raphaël Glucksmann, in retaliation for sanctions adopted by the EU due to the repression of Uyghurs. For all these reasons (insults and sanctions), the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs summoned the Chinese ambassador on March 22 but the latter did not come to the meeting, which provoked the anger of Clément Beaune, the secretary of state for European Affairs: “France and Europe are no doormats. Someone summoned ought to oblige.”<sup>134</sup> When the ambassador finally came to the Quai d’Orsay, the following day, he was received by the director of the Directorate for Asia and Oceania, Bertrand Lortholary, who told him that “the methods of the embassy, and the tone of its public communication, are totally unacceptable and cross the line of what is commonly deemed acceptable for any diplomatic representation, wherever it may be.”<sup>135</sup> This sequence in March 2021 was disastrous for the image of China in France and contributed to a heightened awareness among politicians and the general public of the unacceptable practices of Chinese authorities.

ACTORS

A few months later, another sequence drew attention to “Beijing’s offensive against academic freedom [which] calls for defensive measures,” as diplomat Pierre Buhler explained on June 10 in an article denouncing “a disturbing policy of Beijing, which constitutes a threat to higher education and research in democratic countries.”<sup>136</sup> Early July, the Senate launched an information mission on “extra-European state influences on French universities, the academic world and on their impact,”<sup>137</sup> which quickly heard Pierre Buhler and has since questioned a large number of French and foreign experts, including the authors of this report.<sup>138</sup> The rapporteur is Senator André Gattolin, who is highly invested in the defense of human rights (having, for example, publicly displayed his support for the demonstrations in Hong Kong in 2019<sup>139</sup>), co-chair for France of the Inter-parliamentary alliance on China (IPAC → p. 252) and an excellent authority on China’s influence strategy in France.<sup>140</sup> If the information mission is interested in several countries, the rapporteur believes that China represents “80% of the problem.”<sup>141</sup> A few weeks later, several articles on “Chinese entryism in French universities” published in *Libération* (July 27, 2021) caused the embassy to react in a

132. Speech at the high-level format of the 46<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva (16 Feb. 2021), <https://bit.ly/3sdCamr>; Response of Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, to a question on the situation of the Uyghurs in China, Sénat (10 Mar. 2021), <https://bit.ly/3se4o06->

133. Jean-Yves Le Drian, interviewed by France Info (26 Mar. 2021).

134. “Chine: la France et l’Europe ‘ne sont pas des paillassons’ déclare Clément Beaune” (“China: France and Europe are not Doormats,” declared Clément Beaune”), *Le Figaro* (23 Mar. 2021).

135. Christian Chesnot, “Qui est Lu Shaye, ambassadeur de Chine en France, ‘loup combattant’ de la diplomatie chinoise?” (“Who Is Lu Shaye, Chinese Ambassador to France, “Wolf-Warrior” of the Chinese Diplomacy?”), *FranceInfo* (23 Mar. 2021).

136. Pierre Buhler, “L’offensive de Pékin contre les libertés académiques appelle des mesures défensives” (“Beijing’s offensive against academic freedom calls for defensive measures”) *Le Monde*, June 10, 2021, 29.

137. See: [http://www.senat.fr/commission/missions/influences\\_etatiques\\_extra\\_europeennes.html](http://www.senat.fr/commission/missions/influences_etatiques_extra_europeennes.html).

138. On July 13, 2021, for its first plenary hearing, the minutes of which are online: <https://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20210712/miie.html>.

139. “Manifestations à Hong Kong, un entretien avec le sénateur André Gattolin” (“Hong Kong protests, an interview with Senator André Gattolin”), *Asia Pacific News*, October 10, 2019.

140. Which he notably deciphered in an interview for New Tang Dynasty Television (NTD) broadcast on November 5, 2020 (<https://ntd.tv/fr/andre-gattolin-senateur-dechiffre-la-strategie-insidieuse-dinfluence-du-pcc-en-france/>).

141. Béatrice Bouniol, “Ingérences étrangères à l’université, l’autre menace” (“Foreign interference in the university, the other threat”), *La Croix*, July 27, 2021, 9.

press release accusing, as usual, all critical voices of racism and confirming Godwin's law (it said it was "revolted" by these articles "which, in a racist tone, publicly incite anti-Chinese and Sinophobic sentiment [...]. It is astonishing to discover that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some people still use "Nazi-like" propaganda to advocate this kind of extreme racism in the media").<sup>142</sup>

Published on October 5, 2021, the Senate report considers that France is "an important target of these operations" and "would benefit from being inspired by foreign examples in raising awareness, or even collaborating with certain states to develop appropriate responses". This report, which was branded as "**a first alert to the whole scientific community,**" formulates several proposals.<sup>143</sup>

Finally, still in the Senate, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense adopted on September 23, 2021, another information report which bore the question: "Can France contribute to the European awakening in a Chinese 21<sup>st</sup> century?"<sup>144</sup> The two vice-presidents of the commission and rapporteurs, Sens. Pascal Allizard and Gisèle Jourda, respectively declared on this occasion that they "were very struck, four years ago, by the absence of Europe in the face of China's global deployment. We must react and give ourselves the diplomatic, legislative and monetary means to face this power strategy"; "We must be aware of the weight of the Chinese United Front, which is not a form of influence, but of interference!"<sup>145</sup> The French awakening is in fact part of a **European awakening**, that the MEP Nathalie Loiseau embodied when she declared in January 2021 that "**the time to be naive is behind us.**"<sup>146</sup>

In concrete terms, this means that, thanks to the vigilance of researchers, journalists, politicians, diplomats and the general public, **France is now a less soft, less easy target for Chinese influence.** Tongues are loosening, self-censorship is becoming less acceptable, pressure is being denounced, as is complacency. When *Livres Hebdo* published an article announcing that "The Frenchman Maxime Vivas receives a prize at the Beijing Book Fair,"<sup>147</sup> as if it were neutral news, a few days later a score of researchers, sinologists, tibetologists, specialists of Uyghurs, including the president of INALCO Jean-François Huchet, published a tribune in which they condemned what "seems to be a copy-paste of what can be read in the official organs of the Chinese Communist Party [...]. That *Livres Hebdo* highlights the prizes awarded by the Chinese Communist Party is fine, but one would expect from a magazine intended for book professionals that the reviews bring a critical, detailed and well-argued perspective and are not simple relays of Chinese propaganda."<sup>148</sup> This example, taken among others, illustrates the fact that the French, or at least a growing number of them, have finally "woken up" and are making the environment less permissive to the ambitions of the Party-State. **In summary, awareness in France of the risks posed by Chinese influence has been strong and growing since 2019, with a clear acceleration in 2020-2021. It is in this context of a "French awakening," which now seems irreversible, that the publication of this present report in September 2021 takes place.**

Even **Central and Eastern European countries**, the traditional spearheads of Beijing in Europe (→ p. 310), are becoming more reticent: the "17+1" Summit, on February 9, 2021, was actually a "17-6" meeting because, in front of Xi Jinping, six European states limited their participation to a mere ministerial delegation. The reasons for this loss of appetite are known: "the Chinese infrastructural promises have disappointed, trade exchanges have

142. "Les échanges culturels entre la Chine et la France ne peuvent souffrir aucune stigmatisation" ("Cultural exchanges between China and France cannot suffer any stigma"), Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the French Republic, August 2, 2021, <https://archive.vn/Jq57U>.

143. Sénat, Rapport d'information fait au nom de la mission d'information sur les influences étatiques extra-européennes dans le monde universitaire et académique français et leurs incidences (Information report made on behalf of the information mission on extra-European state influences in the French university and academic world and their impact), by Sen. André Gattolin, submitted to the French Senate on September 29, 2021.

144. An executive summary is available here: <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r20-846/r20-846-syn.pdf>.

145. Virginie Robert, "Face à la Chine, les recommandations du Sénat pour l'Europe" ("Facing China, the Senate's recommendations for Europe"), *Les Échos* (23 Sep. 2021), 12.

146. Nathalie Loiseau, interviewed on Public Sénat (30 Jan. 2021).

147. Thomas Faidherbe, "Le Français Maxime Vivas reçoit un prix à la Foire du livre de Pékin" ("Frenchman Maxime Vivas Wins Award at Beijing Book Fair"), *Books Weekly* (24 Sep. 2021), <https://archive.vn/L2Isc>.

148. "*Livres Hebdo*, Maxime Vivas et les fake news" ("*Livres Hebdo*, Maxime Vivas and fake news"), *Mediapart* (3 Oct. 2021).



been tremendously advantageous to Beijing, and Chinese propaganda, in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, has seriously tarnished the image of the Middle Kingdom.”<sup>149</sup> Some now believe that the “17+1” format – which was meant to be a European door for Beijing – is becoming a “zombie mechanism” which could progressively unravel. **Lithuania** has led the way by withdrawing in March 2021 and calling on the other eleven European members to do the same.<sup>150</sup> In September, the Lithuanian foreign minister explained that the only format in which the balance of power would be balanced would be a 27+1, which would require unity among European countries when facing China.<sup>151</sup> The bilateral relationship had deteriorated sharply in July 2021 when Lithuania announced the opening of a representative office of “Taiwan” (not “Taipei”) in the country. The following month, Beijing and Vilnius recalled their ambassadors. In September, the Lithuanian National Cybersecurity Center issued a report concluding that the phones of three Chinese brands (Xiaomi, Huawei and OnePlus) posed risks, including remote censorship, and the deputy defense minister declared: “Our recommendation is not to buy new Chinese smartphones and to get rid of those already acquired as quickly as possible.”<sup>152</sup> And the press emphasized how “small” Lithuania has become a symbol of resistance to the Chinese superpower.<sup>153</sup> The **Czech Republic** is another example: despite Beijing’s strong proxies in that country, particularly in the political (starting with President Miloš Zeman and several members of the government) and economic spheres (PPF → p. 272), the Chinese influence is increasingly being challenged and denounced, from the resistance of the mayor of Prague (→ p. 266) to the Senate president’s visit to Taiwan (→ p. 267), to the exclusion of Huawei and ZTE from 5G-related tenders, and to the publication of reports by the cybersecurity agency (NUKIB) and the Security and Internal Intelligence Service (BIS), whose regular alerts contribute to the debate.

**One after the other, states reevaluate their relations to China**, taking legislative, economic and political actions to protect themselves from it. Increasingly, states also **coordinate their actions to “stand together”** against China. Here, March 26, 2021 was rather exceptional: the diplomats of 26 countries – Canada, but also the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and others – met in front of the Chinese tribunal where Michael Kovrig was tried<sup>154</sup> – one of the two Canadians victim of the “hostage diplomacy” (→ p. 411). Meanwhile, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada sanctioned several Chinese officials involved in the repression against Uyghurs, in a coordinated effort that sent “the clearest message [...] that **the international community** will not turn a blind eye to such serious and systematic violations of basic human rights,” according to the UK Foreign Secretary.<sup>155</sup> These were actually **the first European**

149. Sylvie Kauffmann, “À l’appui de sa stratégie d’influence en Europe, Pékin dispose d’une arme redoutable: les vaccins anti-Covid-19” (“To support its Influence Strategy in Europe, Beijing Owns a Redoubtable Weapon: Anti-Covid-19 Vaccines”), *Le Monde* (10 Feb. 2021).

150. Eglė Kristopaitytė, “Does Lithuania withdraw from the 17+1 format? The URM sees ‘more purpose participating in a format with all EU countries,’” 15MIN.LT EN (25 Mar. 2021), <https://bit.ly/3sl3or7>; Stuart Lau, “Lithuania pulls out of China’s ‘17+1’ bloc in Eastern Europe,” *Politico* (21 May 2021).

151. Teddy Ng, “Lithuania urges European Union to cut reliance on China,” *South China Morning Post* (4 Sep. 2021).

152. Nathalie Guibert, “Se débarrasser de ses smartphones chinois ‘aussi vite que possible’: le message d’alerte d’un ministre lituanien” (“Getting rid of your Chinese smartphones ‘as quickly as possible’: the warning message of a Lithuanian minister”), *Le Monde* (23 Sep. 2021).

153. Andrew Higgins, “Lithuania vs. China: A Baltic Minnow Defies a Rising Superpower,” *The New York Times* (30 Sep. 2021).

154. Teng Jingxuan, “Michael Kovrig a subi son procès en Chine” (“Michael Kovrig Was Tried in China”), *La Presse* (22 Mar. 2021).

155. “Uighurs: Western countries sanction China over rights abuses,” BBC (22 Mar. 2021).

**sanctions in more than thirty years**, the last (an embargo on weapons) dating back to 1989 – an additional sign of the degradation of the relations. Furthermore, and again, on that very day, the Chinese sanctions against four entities and ten European officials only **reinforced the European solidarity against Beijing**, at all levels, even among the civil society. Three days later, the directors of 32 European think tanks and research institutes, from more than twenty countries, signed a declaration denouncing Chinese sanctions against European researchers and the most important European research center on China, MERICS (→ p. 285).<sup>156</sup>

The result is paradoxical: **while one of the Party-State’s strategies is to divide Europe, its behavior unites Europe against itself**, losing the levers (such as the 17+1) it had hoped to enjoy. In the same way, while one of the strategies of the Party-State is to weaken the transatlantic relationship, by making European countries keep their distance from the logic of the Sino-American “cold war” and adopt a third way instead, by its behavior it is bringing them closer to Washington – all the more so since, with the change of administration, the U.S. discourse on China is less caricatural, and therefore more acceptable. As Sylvie Kauffmann summarizes it well, **“through clumsiness or hubris, China is pushing the Europeans into the arms of the Americans.”**<sup>157</sup> It is, in short, **self-sabotage**.

This movement is not limited to state officials: populations are awakening to the problem and, in almost all countries, China’s image has never been as bad as it is today.<sup>158</sup> **China is facing an “unpopularity problem.”**<sup>159</sup> A European study, conducted in September and October 2020, confirmed the largely negative opinions of China, except in Serbia and in Russia.<sup>160</sup> In Australia, “trust in China is at the lowest level ever recorded in the Lowy Institute Poll, with only 23% of Australians saying they trust China somewhat or a lot ‘to act responsibly in the world’, a 29-point fall since 2018.”<sup>161</sup> Even in South Korea, a country that has maintained close ties to China, the discontents toward China have reached 75%.<sup>162</sup>

Since 2020 approximately, and particularly after the start of the pandemic during which China became more aggressive, analysts have tried to explain the **“counter-productive behavior”**<sup>163</sup> adopted by Beijing. Even if the explanation is known – for the Party-State, the priority is not to seduce local populations but to ensure its survival and to strengthen its power in China – the Party-State was probably not prepared for the fallout of such a behavior. Indeed, **its unpopularity has become a problem so pregnant that it could indirectly weaken the Party, including vis-à-vis the Chinese population.** Anyhow, this is certainly the message that needs to be carried to make Chinese officials more cognizant to the consequences of their actions.

156. “Statement by European Research Institute Directors,” The Swedish Institute of International Affairs (25 Mar. 2021), <https://bit.ly/3sl1kiR>.

157. Sylvie Kauffmann, “Par maladresse ou par hubris, la Chine est en train de pousser les Européens dans les bras des Américains” (“By Clumsiness or Hubris, China is Pushing the Europeans into the Arms of the Americans”), *Le Monde* (14 Apr. 2021).

158. Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries,” *Pew Research Center* (6 Oct. 2020).

159. Elisabeth Braw, “China’s Unpopularity Problem,” *Politico* (6 Nov. 2020).

160. Richard Q. Turcsanyi et al., *European Public Opinion on China in the age of COVID-19: Differences and common Ground Across the Continent*, “Sinophore Borderlands Europe Survey,” Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic, IFRI (16 Nov. 2020).

161. Natasha Kassam, *Lowy Poll Institute 2020* (Jun. 2020), 4.

162. Peter T. Charles, “Beijing’s “Wolf Warriors” Score Own Goals,” *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute (22 Jan. 2021).

163. Small and Jaishankar, “For our enemies, we have shotguns.”



## GLOSSARY

- A2/AD:** Anti Access/Area Denial
- ACFROC:** All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (中华全国归国华侨联合会)
- ACCWS:** Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies
- ADIZ:** Air Defense Identification Zone
- APT:** Advanced persistent threat
- ASIO:** Australian Security Intelligence Organization
- ASPI:** Australian Strategic Policy Institute
- BATX:** Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Xiaomi
- BRI:** Belt and Road Initiative
- CAIFC:** China Association for International Friendly Contact (中国国际友好联络会)
- CAPCC:** China Association for Promotion of Chinese culture (中华文化发展促进会)
- CASS:** Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中国社会科学院)
- CCP:** Chinese Communist Party (中国共产党)
- CCPPNR:** China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (中国和平统一促进会)
- CCTV:** China Central Television (中国中央电视台)
- CDC:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- CEFC:** China Energy Fund Committee (中国能源基金委员会)
- CGTN:** China Global Television Network (中国国际电视台)
- CHBC:** China Huayi Broadcasting Corporation (中国华艺广播公司)
- CI:** Confucius Institutes (孔子学院)
- CIA:** Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
- CICIR:** China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (中国现代国际关系研究院)
- CIIS:** China Institute of International Studies (中国国际问题研究所)
- CIS:** Community of Independent States
- CMC:** Central Military Commission (中央军事委员会)
- CMG:** China Media Group (中央广播电视总台)
- CNA:** Central News Agency (中央通讯社) (Taiwan)
- CNR:** China National Radio (中央人民广播电台)
- CPAFFC:** Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (中国人民对外友好协会)
- CPPCC:** Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议)
- CRG:** Center for Research on Globalization (GlobalResearch)
- CRI:** China Radio International (中国国际广播电台)
- CSIS:** Canadian Security Intelligence Service
- CSSA:** Chinese Students and Scholars Association (中国学生学者联合会)
- CUSEF:** China-United States Exchange Foundation (中美交流基金会)



**CYL:** Communist Youth League (中国共产主义青年团)  
**DGSE:** General Directorate for External Security (France)  
**LD/GPD:** Liaison Department of the General Political Department (总政治部联络部)  
**DPP:** Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨)  
**ECOSOC:** United Nations Economic and Social Council  
**EU:** European Union  
**EWI:** East West Institute  
**FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization  
**FPI:** *Fondation Prospective et Innovation* (France)  
**FSB:** Federal Security Bureau (Russie)  
**GAFSA:** Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon  
**GPD:** General Political Department (总政治部)  
**GRU:** Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Russia, foreign military intelligence agency)  
**ICAO:** International Civil Aviation Organization  
**ILD:** International Liaison Department (中央对外联络部)  
**IRA:** Internet Research Agency (Russia)  
**IRIS:** The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (France)  
**ISO:** International Organization for Standardization  
**ITU:** International Telecommunication Union  
**KGB:** Committee for State Security (URSS)  
**KMT:** Kuomintang (國民黨)  
**LD/PWD:** Liaison Department of the Political Work Department of the CMC (中央军委政治工作部联络局)  
**MFA:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
**MG:** Major-General (少将)  
**MPS:** Ministry of Public Security (公安部)  
**MSS:** Ministry of State Security (国家安全部)  
**NATO:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization  
**NPC:** National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会)  
**NTDTV:** New Tang Dynasty Television  
**OC:** Overseas Chinese  
**OCSC:** Overseas Chinese Service Center (华助中心)  
**OSINT:** Open-Source Intelligence  
**PLA:** People's Liberation Army (中国人民解放军)  
**PLAAF:** People's Liberation Army Air Force (解放军空军)  
**PRC:** People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国)  
**PWD:** Political Work Department (中央军委政治工作部)  
**R&D:** Research and Development  
**ROC:** Republic of China (Taiwan)  
**RSF:** Reporters without Borders  
**RT:** Russia Today  
**SAR:** Special Administrative Region  
**SARS:** Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome  
**SASS:** Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (上海社会科学院)  
**SDG:** United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

**SSF or SSFPLA:** Strategic Support Force of the People's Liberation Army (解放军战略支援部队)

**SVR:** Foreign Intelligence Service (Russia)

**TAO:** Taiwan Affairs Office (中共中央台湾工作办公室 ou 国务院台湾事务办公室)

**TCM:** Traditional Chinese Medicine

**UDN:** United Daily News

**UFWD:** United Front Work Department (中央统一战线工作部)

**UN:** United Nations

**UNAIDS:** UN Program on HIV/AIDS

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program

**UNEP:** United Nations Environment Program

**UNESCO:** United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNIDO:** United Nations Industrial Development Organization

**USSR:** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

**VPN:** Virtual Private Network

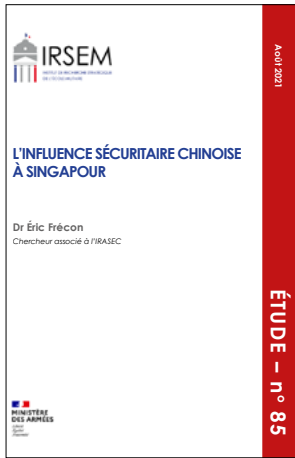
**VTS:** Voice of the Strait (海峡之声广播电台)

**WHO:** World Health Organization

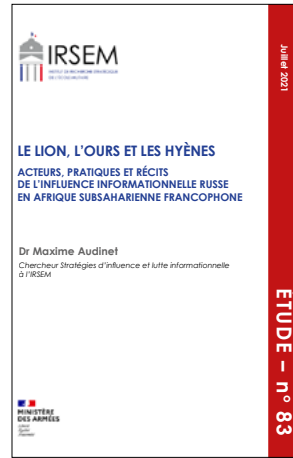
**WRSA:** Western Returned Scholars Association (欧美同学会)

**WTO:** World Trade Organization (欧美同学会)

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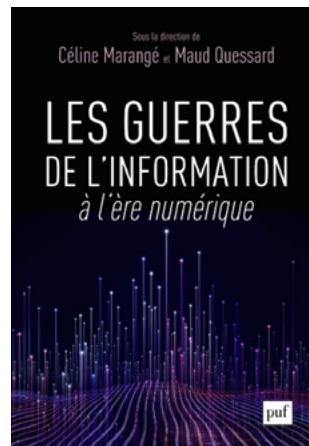
Éric Frécon, *L'influence sécuritaire chinoise à Singapour*, Étude de l'IRSEM n° 85, August 2021 (60 p.)



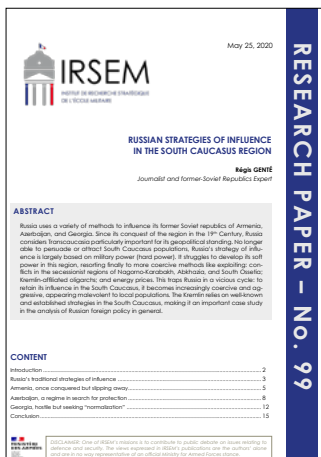
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Maud Quessard, *La diplomatie publique américaine et la désinformation russe : un retour des guerres de l'information ?*, Note de recherche n° 54, IRSEM, 30 April 2018 (13 p.).



Céline Marangé, *Les Stratégies et les pratiques d'influence de la Russie*, Étude de l'IRSEM n° 49, March 2017 (55 p.).



For a long time, it could be said that China, unlike Russia, sought to be loved rather than feared; that it wanted to seduce and project a positive image of itself in the world, or to inspire admiration. Today, Beijing has not renounced to seduce, nor its overall attractiveness and its ambition to shape international standards, and it is essential for the Chinese Communist Party not to lose face. And yet, Beijing is also increasingly comfortable with infiltration and coercion: its influence operations have become considerably tougher in recent years and its methods are resembling more closely the ones employed by Moscow. This is a “Machiavellian turn” inasmuch as the Party-State now seems to believe that “it is much safer to be feared than to be loved,” in the words of Machiavelli in *The Prince*. This is a clear Russification of Chinese influence operations.

This report delves into this evolution, with the ambition to cover the whole specter of influence, from the most benign (public diplomacy) to the most malign methods, that is, interference (clandestine activities). To do that, the report is divided into four parts: successively laying out the main concepts; the actors implementing these operations, including the Base 311 of the People’s Liberation Army; the actions conducted by Beijing toward the diasporas, the media, diplomacy, economy, politics, education, think tanks, and in terms of information manipulations – some levers among others; then, several cases are studied (Taiwan, Singapore, Sweden, Canada, the operations that targeted Hong Kong protestors in 2019, and the one that branded the Covid-19 as an American fabrication in 2020). The conclusion returns to this “Russification”, which has three components: Beijing is inspired by Moscow in several ways, there are obviously differences between the two, and there is also a certain degree of cooperation. Finally, the report assesses the effectiveness of this new Chinese posture, which can boast some tactical successes, but constitutes a strategic failure.

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