ANALYSIS OF THE PROPAGANDISTIC STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL NETWORKS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Abstract

Social networks are shown as a new field of large-scale operations, in which many take advantage of their instantaneousness to influence others and manipulate perceptions on certain issues. This article consists of an updated bibliographic consultation to study the main social networks employed by the People's Republic of China, domestically and internationally, in which they carry out propagandistic actions. To address the issue, a historical context of the country that acts as a trigger for their modus operandi is carried out. As a result of this research, it is observed that China employs three types of disinformative campaigns where it applies cognitive dominance operations to reinforce the positive Chinese discourse, with a focus on "thought management" of the next generation, which are carried out through a complex web of institutions dependent on the Chinese Communist Party and, in turn, the military.

Keywords: *disinformation, People's Liberation Army, social media, People's Republic of China, cognitive operations, propaganda.*

Abstract

Social networks are proving to be a new field of large-scale operations, where many take advantage of their instantaneousness to influence others and manipulate perceptions on certain issues. This article consists of an updated bibliographic consultation to study the main social networks used by the People's Republic of China, both domestically and internationally, in which they carry out propagandistic actions. To address the issue, a historical context of the country that acts as a trigger for their modus operandi is carried out. As a result of this research, it is observed that China employs three types of disinformation campaigns where it applies cognitive dominance operations to reinforce the positive Chinese discourse with a focus on

"thought management" of the next generation, which are carried out by a complex network of institutions dependent on the Chinese Communist Party and, in turn, the army.

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1. Introduction

China employs the most sophisticated methods of propaganda and generates disinformation wars with objectives ranging from intimidation, as a superior power, to economic gain. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Western media accused China of sharing false information, in addition to the lack of veracity or scarcity of information about a then-unknown virus. There were reports of Chinese doctors, *influencers* and more personalities who tried to warn the international community about what was happening in the country and whose actions resulted in detentions and enforced disappearances with no guarantees for these people.

Another interesting case is the relationship between China and Taiwan, two states with a common past and historically divided. Beijing's eagerness to take over the former island of Formosa has led it to interfere in Taiwanese elections, corrupting the media, as well as some people in its favor. Chinese propaganda interference is continuous on the island, which generates both rejection and sympathy, as the country is divided, but with a lower percentage of the latter. Chinese actions generate concern in Taiwan's allied countries such as the United States or the European Union, so the tension is palpable, and it is interesting to understand how the Western media subjectively treat the controversy.

China's control and domination over its population is astonishing, not only because of the most innovative technology it employs for this purpose, but also because of the generation of fear instilled if one is against, not the State, but the Chinese regime of Xi Jinping. Some examples have already been discussed, however, in order to remain constantly updated, it is worth mentioning that the recent events in Taiwan will be the case study of this research to deepen the Chinese propagandistic motivations on the island at a communicative level, and what they generate for a continuously dynamic and changing international society in the face of power games.

2. Theoretical framework

The *agenda setting* theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) establishes that the influence of the media influences the way in which the topics covered in the news are presented and how they impact on the public's mind. To complement this theory, *framing* (Entman, 1993), i.e., a process of selective control, is established. This is the way in which news content is shaped and contextualized within the same frame of reference adopted by audiences, thus perceiving the

world in a similar way. In this way, the objective will be for citizens to determine the importance of a news item within the established context.

It is important to highlight *priming* (Jo & Berkowitz, 1996). This term refers to the extent of the effects of the media in creating the norms or parameters by which citizens evaluate political and social issues. Therefore, this effect will be based on the repetition of news and the establishment of news as the most important in a given space and time.

Bernard Cohen (1963) noted that "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. They may not sometimes succeed in telling people what they have to think, but they do succeed, and very much so, in telling their audiences what they have to think about". Or as Berelson et al. (1954, p.228) succinctly put it: *On any subject many "hear," but few listen.*

To contextualize propaganda, we begin with a definition by Qualter (1962, p.31), who explains that it is the "deliberate attempt by some individual or group to shape or alter the attitudes of other groups through the use of instruments of communication, with the intention that in a given situation the reaction of those thus influenced will be that desired by the propagandist". We understand that the key to the definition lies precisely in the "deliberate intent".

Propaganda contains the elements typical of the communicative relationship, but together with them appears a new one that distinguishes it from other related terms: the existence of a deliberate manipulation of information aimed at affecting the attitudes and opinions of certain audiences and, indirectly, at conditioning their behavior to adapt it to the objectives or purposes intended by the propagandist. Therefore, it is deliberate, partial and conditioning, since it is never neutral and aims to convince the public.

To delve into the conceptualization of propaganda necessary for the development of this research, we highlight two theories: International Propaganda Theory (IPT) (Lasswell 1927, 1935; Qualter, 1972; Pizarroso Quintero, 1991; Taylor, 2003; Pineda Cachero, 2004, 2007, 2008; Barneys, 2008; Vázquez Liñán, 2017) and Theory of the Spontaneous Reproduction of Propaganda (TREP) (Doob, 1935; Ellul, 1973; Bourdieu, 1991; Thomson, 1999; Fernández Gómez, 2011; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 2004).

Two central issues reside in the IPT when we talk about propaganda being a useful tool to achieve a certain objective: on the one hand, the person who puts it into practice must have resorted to a minimum phase of organization of the message; and, on the other hand, that all propaganda is set in motion for a reason, therefore it is intentional. It is worth mentioning that it is convenient to avoid confusion between propaganda organization and intentional propaganda (Tarín Sanz, 2018, p. 193-194), it is necessary to recognize assumable connections between the two: generally, although not necessarily, the dissemination of organized propaganda is carried out in a deliberate and planned manner. Bernays (2008) already argued that propaganda functions to organize the chaos of modern society.

Pizarroso Quintero (1999) names an abstract will to persuade with the Latinism *animus propagandi*, that is, the necessary animus to make propaganda so that it can be considered as such (Tarín Sanz, 2018, p. 195). Therefore, this *animus propagandi becomes* the inclusive-exclusive binary category that sustains this theory.

Pineda Cachero (2007) states that "according to our theoretical framework, different intentions generate different communicative phenomena, and that is the key to distinguish between propaganda, advertising, information, art, etc." is what defines the *animus propagandi.*

> In a unidirectional communication such as propaganda, the content of the Message is designed to contribute to -and only to- the achievement of particular objectives -winning elections, justifying a coup d'état, gaining support for a war, etc.-, which, in short, have as their lowest common denominator the universal objective of propaganda: power (Pineda Cachero, 2007a, p. 77).

The second theory, the TREP, was born with a debate founded by Doob (1935) in which he admits the existence of forms of "unintentional propaganda" that have been caused by the spontaneous reproduction of an ideological message intentionally created by a third party propagandist (Tarín Sanz, 2018, p. 199). Later, other authors have been adding to this theory.

It is clear that messages can be voluntary or not, which is why Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (2004) use the term "accidental persuasion" to understand involuntary ideological communication as a fortuitous event. For his part, Ellul (1973) understands that there are indeed enough similarities between the two phenomena and consider them one and the same, so he coins the term as "sociological propaganda" so as to incorporate all the speeches that contribute to the creation of a certain common sense (Tarín Sanz, 2018, p. 200). Therefore, the TREP is the simile to sociological propaganda, and is the key to understand the functioning of democratic societies between coercion and consensus since, it is a great tool to build and reproduce the social imaginary and, enhance the development of hegemony. Therefore, according to Ellul, sociological propaganda, harbors:

> To the set of manifestations by which any society tries to integrate within itself the maximum number of individuals, with the aim of unifying the behavior of its members according to a pattern, to spread its lifestyle outwards, and thus to impose itself on other groups. [...] The whole group, consciously or not, expresses itself in this way (that which marks the society); and, secondly, it indicates that its influence aims much more at building a lifestyle than at determining opinions or a particular behavior (Ellul, 1973, p.62).

In this line, Bourdieu in his works *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédée de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle (*1972) and *El sentido práctico (*1991) proposes his concept of *habitus* as the set of discourses, practices and behavior that the individual acquires unconsciously in social interaction, since they are internalized social structures, organized and manifested in some daily actions as a reflex act (Tarín Sanz, 2018, p. 200). Based on this author, part of the ideological discourses that transit in the appearance of propaganda could be the

product of an unconscious reproduction of some class or social customs. However, this would also alter the media, since they are essential spaces of hegemony.

Eco (1979) points out that numerous speech acts are based on the repetition of pre-established communicative structures assimilated by society, so it follows that they are reproduced by involuntary imitation.

Along with propaganda there is another sister phenomenon, disinformation (Bakir & McStay, 2017; Haigh, Haigh & Kozak, 2017; Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017; Bennet & Livingston, 2018; Aslomov, 2018). In propaganda there is disinformation and vice versa, therefore it is crucial to understand disinformation campaigns linked with what was discussed above.

What is known as disinformation are intentional falsehoods disseminated as simulated news or documentary formats to promote political objectives (Bennet & Livingston, 2018). Other scholars (Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2017) share that fake news are constructs of audiences while meanings are negotiated and shared. Thus, news is embedded in interpersonal interaction, while reading, sharing, and commenting are elements of news consumption (Aslomov, 2018).

All of this includes the conceptualization of "peer-to-peer propaganda" as a situation in which "ordinary people experience propaganda publications as shared by their own trusted friends, perhaps with angry comments or reactions, shaping their own opinions and assumptions" (Haigh, Haigh & Kozak, 2017). On the other hand, the concept of "collaborative information warfare" highlights how the response to disinformation campaigns relies on digitally mediated mobilization of a crowd's resources (Khaldarova & Pantti, 2016, p. 892). For their part, Bakir and McStay (2017) highlight how fake news can be considered as "affective content" that provokes emotions, including outrage.

Understanding *fake news* as an outcome and, moreover, a driver of interaction among the users of social social networking sites elicits shifting the focus of misinformation from a specific event to the social consequences of emotional engagement (Aslomov, 2018). Fake news contributes to the transformation of RRSS news sources into a field of discursive conflict where people engage in controversy-related communication that shapes their social circles (Aslomov, 2018).

3. Methodology

A bibliographic consultation has been carried out in which we have studied the Chinese historical context, which is constituted as a propaganda actor, to give way to the search for disinformation and propaganda strategies in social networks. Following the Agenda Setting theory addressed in the theoretical framework (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) we have paid attention to the producers of the message, the effects on the audiences, the communicative strategy, as well as the typology of the campaigns and the operations in social networks.

4. Chinese historical context as a propaganda actor

China felt humiliated for a hundred years because it went from being a world power to a victim of imperialism in the modern world. This era defined the country and created what is now its national identity. The Century of Humiliation refers to a historical period in which China was defeated and subjugated by foreign powers and spans from 1839 to 1945-49. It all began with the plant from which opium is extracted, known as the "doze". At the beginning of the 19th century, China was already an economic power and the most populous country in the world, although by then it was practically closed to international trade. The United Kingdom, already a maritime empire, was buying large quantities of products such as silk and porcelain from China and wanted to export its goods to the country to balance its trade balance. However, this did not please the Chinese emperor, who resisted.

The British then signed up for the flourishing opium trade they were cultivating in India and began to introduce it en masse into China through the ports open to foreigners. Thus, tensions began. China banned the consumption of opium, however, addiction among its population was skyrocketing, and the trafficking of this drug became a lucrative business for the British. Therefore, in the following years the Opium Wars followed one after the other, which resulted in failure for the Chinese.

However, the most humiliating defeat for the country came in 1895 during the First Sino-Japanese War where they clashed over control of the Korean Peninsula, which led to the Japanese demand for the cession of the island of Taiwan. From then on, several Western powers took advantage of China's weakness to establish what became known as zones of influence, beyond the enclaves they already possessed.

All this interference and foreign domination created an anti-foreigner sentiment among the Chinese population that led to the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. This popular movement attacked Westerners and Chinese Christians. The response to the revolts soon came in the form of a foreign union: the United Kingdom, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States formed a military alliance that took Beijing that same year.

The first decades of the 20th century in China were characterized by great political and social instability. In 1912, the Qing dynasty was forced out of power, giving way to the establishment of the republic. Despite changes in government, the foreign presence remained.

The late 1930s saw the beginning of what was undoubtedly the most harrowing period for the country. Japan's power in China was only increasing, especially in the region of Manchuria, which became the Japanese puppet state in 1931. Moreover, in 1937 the Second Sino-Japanese War began with the full-scale invasion of Tokyo and the occupation of the country's most important cities with impressive massacres. During the following years, the Japanese army tortured, raped, slaughtered, etc. the Chinese population.

In 1945 Japan was defeated in World War II. Numerous historians establish this point as the end of China's humiliation. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) places the end

in 1949 when Mao Zedong came to power and proclaimed the People's Republic of China promising to liberate the country from foreign domination.

More than a hundred years later, the Century of Humiliation is still very much present among the population, as the Chinese have an enormous sense of pride and belonging to the world's longest-lived civilization. This nationalistic rhetoric of China's renewed greatness has been reinforced by the current president, Xi Jinping: "Under no circumstances will the Chinese people allow any foreign force to trample, oppress or enslave them "52. 52 The concept of China as a victim has been in the Chinese national psyche since long before the CCP was founded53 . The difference is that today, China considers nationalism a state ideology.

4.1 Chinese strategy of propaganda and disinformation in RRSS

To understand Chinese strategies in social media, it is essential to analyze the sender, the receiver and the message, in which the tactics used are implicit. The PRC's approach to social media is practically an extension of its old strategy of propaganda and psychological warfare, but through a new medium or channel.

The Chinese Party-state and military, which are in charge of the propaganda fabric as we will see in the next point, see information as the most critical domain for success in contemporary warfare and especially in the next generation (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). The "information confrontation system" is framed as so-called information warfare, with information attack and defense as the two key elements that the PLA must master, and those who tailor content to specific audiences (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021).

That "information attack" encompasses the psychological categories of incentive, deterrence, influence and propaganda deception. On the other hand, information warfare comprises three subtypes adhering to the PLA in 2003 which, in themselves, are the tools employed, while the system of information confrontation are the missions and tasks (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). These are psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare as a way of conceptualizing the various vectors of influence (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019). Still, both frameworks focus on the use of multiple types of information to achieve a variety of objectives, as well as treat information from the strategic prism of warfare (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019).

More recently, the PLA has developed an emerging concept called "cognitive dominance operations" that represents state-of-the-art psychological warfare hardware and tactics that focus on affecting an adversary's cognitive capabilities (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019). That is, the PLA intends to use this information to influence foreign perceptions and behaviors against a variety of foreign entities (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019).

In 2004, Hu Jintao covered this methodology with the concept of "local wars under the conditions of informatization", whereas, with Xi Jinping it has evolved to "computerized local wars" (Fravel, 2015). The focus of PLA modernization has been this "computerized" (networked) warfare, for which Xi has set 2035 as the target date, however, the military is transitioning to "smart" warfare, i.e., through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Kania, 2017).

For its part, Chinese power discourse is governed by two principles of censorship, one direct and one indirect. The direct principle involves strict censorship of online content and influencers, as well as the intentional withholding of unwanted information from a publication with a broader meaning (Atlantic Council, 2020). That is, the employment of the "Great Firewall" to filter Internet content and prevent Chinese nationals from accessing Western media.

The indirect principle focuses primarily on pro-PRC messages. This involves an attempt through collective action to distract target audiences from unfavorable narratives (Atlantic Council, 2020). Some techniques for this are *astroturfing*, i.e., creating fake accounts to magnify the impact of messages.

In turn, Chinese scholars recommend combining official and unofficial propaganda to deter opponents, increase influence and momentum, and increase power projection (Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Chase, 2019).

• Message producers

For President Xi Jinping, the way to achieve the power of discourse is by promoting information that demonstrates the soft power of the Chinese Party-State through economic and diplomatic might (Atlantic Council, 2020). Furthermore, the CCP seeks to eliminate, suppress, as well as minimize any kind of negative information about the Party-State that could jeopardize that benevolent power image it projects abroad since, it aims to convince foreign audiences based on sweetened discursive threads about China. On the contrary, if this fails, all unfavorable narratives will be denied.

The propaganda and disinformation network is headquartered in Beijing, and media operations extend outside the capital; it is worth mentioning that some of the apparatuses that project propaganda towards Taiwan are based in Fujian, that is, the province located in front of the island.

The PLA does not have an official doctrine per se on SSNR, however, the military shows a clear interest in the possibilities that this type of media provides them as the threats it can present to them when operating. According to DFRLab's 2020 reports and research, the PRC spends $10 billion a year on propaganda, which would imply that even if only a small part of that is spent on social media, it would have a huge impact. Additionally, it means that it has the ability to openly overwhelm the information environment and therefore have less need to resort to covert manipulation (Hornung, 2020).

The PLA employs verified, authorized, and official military public accounts, public and unverified accounts, and unverified accounts of individual soldiers who are motivated by patriotism and loyalty to the CCP (Atlantic Council, 2020). Their ability to gain attention through sentiment has been enhanced by configuring agenda setting and adaptive messaging methods. This "agenda setting" is applied with subliminal messaging in which an entity selectively informs, i.e., the CCP stoking Chinese nationalism. The CCP adapts nationalist sentiment to issues such as one China when controversies arise, presenting itself as the benevolent choice.

The PLA's official propaganda outlet is the *PLA Daily*, which is the first PLA organization known to have an account on RRSS and opened its Weibo account in March 2010. The PLA Air Forces (PLAAF) was the first army service to open an RRSS account, on Weibo and WeChat platforms in October 2015 (Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Chase, 2019).

For its part, the PLA *Military Correspondent* magazine, which is published monthly, presents a look at the CCP's internal reflections on how to improve its discursive power. The PLA's goals with foreign SSRs include "enhancing and defending the PLA's image," "correcting 'misperceptions,'" "addressing negative reports," "communicating signals of deterrence," communicating resolve," and "undermining enemy resolve" (Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Chase, 2019).

It seems to be a deliberate decision by the CCP authorities that there are no accounts belonging to the PLA that are openly recognized on foreign platforms. The military focuses its efforts on influencing foreign perceptions of its capabilities and behavior, which is curious.

In the following illustration it can be seen that it contains numerous departments in charge of the propaganda of the exterior, the interior and both.
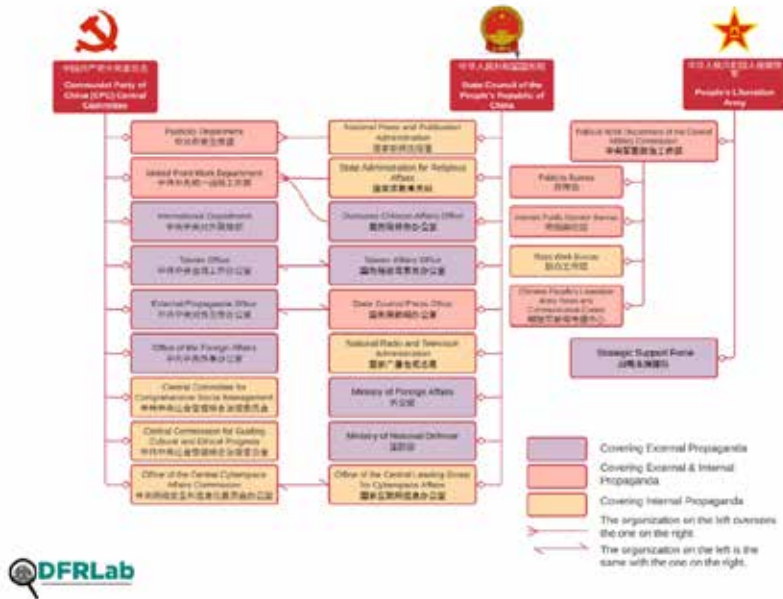
Illustration 1. Organizational structure of government agencies in charge of discursive power.
Source: DFRLab.

The Chinese government has three branches: the Central Committee of the CCP, the State Council (executive branch) and the Central Military Commission of the PRC of the CCP. The latter is responsible for domestic and international propaganda, as well as promoting the discourse of power and is the most isolated of the three branches, since responsibilities overlap between the Committee and the Council.

The Publicity Department, the United Front Work Department, the State Council Press Office and the Taiwan Affairs Office (also known as the Taiwan Work Office) focus on domestic and international affairs and produce and promote content aimed at both. The Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focus their action at the international level, but with domestic and foreign target audiences. The National Administration of Radio and Television focuses on audiences at the domestic level with the use of propaganda with the narrative of power and surveillance of content on the network.

For its part, China's Cyberspace Administration is divided into the Office of the Central Cybersecurity Information Committee under the Central Committee and the National Internet Information Office under the State Council. The general responsibilities of this Administration include overseeing the flow of national information, setting rules for online content, and regulating Internet companies to ensure compliance with the regime's regulations and laws (Xinhuanet, 2020; The Paper, 2020). It is important to note that although these bureaus have different

names, they are essentially the same. Also, this Administration is divided into the Internet News Dissemination Bureau, the Internet Commentary Bureau and Internet Social Work Bureau.

The Internet News Dissemination Bureau is responsible for regulating the production and dissemination of news on the Internet by organizing political training sessions for news professionals and for using the Internet for stronger and more compelling narratives. In addition, it is also responsible for promoting information sharing among both domestic and international online media (China Netcom, 2017; CCTV, 2018; China Gansu Net, 2020).

The Internet Commentary Office researches trends in online commentary to provide a future projection of the online ecosystem. As for the Internet Social Work Office, it is a more direct channel for engaging with Chinese nationals.

The UFWD is a department attached to the CCP Central Committee that was established in 1938 as a means of enlisting the support of Chinese civilians. It is currently responsible for setting narratives on strategic issues, especially those labeled "sensitive" such as unification, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, ethnic minorities, or non-party affiliated citizens (Chinese State Council Information Office, 2010; Taipei Times, 2018).

The Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission is related to the political wing of the PLA as it is its main organ and is responsible for the design and promotion of China's narrative ideologies through image and perception beyond its borders. Under its command is the Publicity Bureau, known as the Propaganda Bureau, which is responsible for overseeing the production and dissemination of content focused on the military's reputation, domestically and internationally. Meanwhile, the PLA News and Communications Center carries out content production and promotion, as well as manages its own media and social media accounts, including official accounts on Weibo and WeChat. For its part, the *Mass Work Bureau* focuses more on domestic audiences by promoting that positive energy projected by a morally good society in an affluent economic situation (Atlantic Council, 2020).

Finally, the Strategic Support Force (SSF) established in 2015, whose purpose focuses on bringing together "space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare capabilities" and intervening alongside ground, air, missile, and naval forces (Costello & McReynolds, 2018). It is responsible for overseeing the Network Systems Department, which develops and implements information operation and online warfare capabilities (Costello & McReynolds, 2018). Notably, it is headquartered at Base 311, which it took control of following the 2015 military reform, and is known for being the enclave of psychological warfare (Costello & McReynolds, 2018).

• Effects on audiences

The regime's propaganda efforts begin with the Chinese population, since it possesses means and tactics that are more sophisticated, comprehensive and generate greater control and reach. This group includes Chinese nationals, both those who already consider themselves

Chinese and those minorities with whom it has identity (e.g., Tibet and Xinjiang) and territorial (e.g., Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong) disputes.

On the other side, the international community group encompasses the ethnic Chinese diaspora, Taiwan and foreigners. Xi Jinping himself has stressed that cultural differences between the PRC and foreign countries should be carefully evaluated to produce more relevant propaganda for the respective country's audience (Wei, 2020).

Reaching out to the Chinese diaspora is very important to bring out feelings of belonging and increase pride in the roots of these people. However, it also means that those Chinese of the second generation and beyond carry that positive energy and image of China as a benevolent power. It also makes it easier to connect with those who speak Chinese through Chinese social media, as they are much more likely to be receptive to CCP messages than other audiences. In addition, the Chinese government and military pay special attention to young audiences, as the value of the message will resonate better, especially if it is through social media.

Taiwan is a "double-edged sword" because China considers the island as part of its territory under the motto of one China and because everyone who was once Chinese is still Chinese (for example, territorial disputes with India occur because they once belonged to southern Tibet, and as the current Tibet was and is Chinese, so are these too). Even so, it is aware that its control is not so simple and it does not have its sovereignty. Therefore, we can see that it employs propaganda strategies as with the diaspora, although somewhat more aggressive.

Finally, the rest of the foreigners are also part of its audience with the objective of presenting Chinese benevolence, but at the same time choosing the interests of the regime to influence the international mentality and thus veer towards its goal of positioning itself as a power in the international environment.

• Communication strategy

Experts Walker and Ludwig (2018) observed that the Chinese presence on the Internet belongs to *sharp power* which, despite being part of non-military soft power, demonstrates a more coercive and aggressive presentation of the regime (Atlantic Council, 2020). For his part, Russel Hsiao (2019), an expert from the Global Taiwan Institute, explained the use of Chinese *sharp power* as a tactic that employs propaganda and disinformation among other information operations with the aim of undermining democratic institutions.

PLA perpetrators increased their focus on SSRNs around 2014 and had a new peak in 2016. At practical levels, the PLA has accelerated its use of RRSS, both for offensive RRSS disinformation applications and simply for overt propaganda, i.e., it is moving to a more operational approach (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021).

DFRLab has detected a dramatic increase in the creation of CCP-affiliated Twitter accounts in the period between January and July 2020, which coincides with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The manner in which these new accounts are officially presented as

embassy or consulate related, increased messaging based on a positive PRC response to the outbreak.

Thus, in practice, SSNRs maintain overt messaging and covert manipulation as interrelated purposes. For the former, propagandist authors of EPL shuffle three strategies: rapid response, agenda setting, and adaptive narratives (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). First, public opinion is strongly influenced by first impressions, so it is in the PLA's interest to react quickly to sudden events and anticipate hardened public opinion. Second, when there are no sudden events, the PLA seeks to shape audience perceptions by focusing on the discursive thread of specific issues that favor the CCP. Finally, the PLA knows that the original message content will not have a sufficiently influential effect, so they have adapted to generate more persuasive arguments in the long run (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021).

Undermining enemy morale is based on "demonizing" the enemy. The Chinese military has touted the impact of "creating information chaos" and "exaggerating the conflict of interest within the enemy camp (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). Likewise, the value of disguising Chinese messages through the voice of third parties, i.e., overt state media can retweet celebrities who promote regime narratives or covertly amplify the message (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021).

• Types of campaigns

The PLA Academy of Military Sciences depicts information operations as the "full use of modern means, electronic information operations platforms, and special operations methods" to support "the operational effectiveness of psychological warfare" (Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Chase, 2019). Based on this, the PRC follows three general types of disinformation campaigns:

The first type refers to CCP efforts that remain constantly ongoing and are designed to deepen social divisions, lower morale, and depress confidence in democracy (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). The efforts are not necessarily tied to any specific eventuality, moreover they are intended to serve as a constant ballast in the face of an opposing or enemy organization or society. It can be said that these endeavors are a form of gray zone warfare or a cost imposition aimed at exhausting resources as they are difficult to cope with. It should be noted that the use of this methodology poses a relatively low risk to the Chinese regime.

The second type deals with China's involvement in SSNR and these are intended to support more direct or time-limited objectives, such as hindering a Taiwanese president's trip abroad, affecting the outcome of an election, or hindering a scheduled military exercise. These operations are intended to create a cascade of negative news about an issue. They are much more resource-intensive and involve more deliberate action.

The third type relates to opportunistic attacks on SSRs. These opportunities arise from an adversary misstep or an action by someone within an opponent's society that can be amplified to appear to represent a greater degree of resistance to someone or to a policy stance that the PRC also opposes (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga & Hornung, 2021). In other words, China raises the profile of unfavorable news, whether true or not.

• Operations in RRSS

The Chinese military uses this channel to reinforce the morale and confidence of the population in its leaders and armed forces, as well as to convey the image of benevolence, responsibility and strength. The CCP's first social media account, in this case Twitter, was created in 2009 by China Radio International (CRI), which is now China Plus News. CRI is known for being the common thread of Chinese influence operations in the information sphere around the world and for covertly owning overseas radio channels (Qing & Schiffman, 2015).

The first accusations of Chinese disinformation on foreign social media date back to 2016 after the election of the Taiwanese president. In August 2019, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube publicly announced that they had suspended accounts suspected of being part of a coordinated state campaign, which the companies attributed to China, targeting the Hong Kong protests (Gleicher, 2019; Huntley, 2019; Twitter Safety, 2019). Most overt Chinese propaganda on RRSS is conducted through state-media operated accounts such as Xinhua on Twitter. The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs employs Twitter, Facebook, and other foreign platforms to expand its public diplomacy.

It is worth returning to the concept of "cognitive domain operations" mentioned above. A 2017 PLA Daily article by leading PLA theorist Zeng Huafeng of the National University of Defense Technology (NUDT) determines that "cognitive space" is the "area in which feelings, perception, understanding, beliefs, and values exist, and is the field of decision-making through reasoning" (Xueling & Huafeng, 2017). In addition, it includes intangibles such as leadership, morale, public opinion, expertise or cohesion. Also, the article anticipates the use of "popular cultural and spiritual information and products as weapons to influence people's psychology, will, attitude, behavior and even change ideology, values, cultural traditions and social systems" and "targeting individuals, groups, countries and even people around the world" (Xueling & Huafeng, 2017).

Zeng Huafeng (2014) identified four tactics for gaining that "mental superiority" within the cognitive space:

1- The "manipulation of perception" through propagandistic narratives;
2- "Cutting through historical memory" so that the targets are open to new values;
2- "Changing the paradigm of thinking" by targeting the elites to change their ideology;
4- and "Deconstructing Symbols" to challenge national identity.

NUDT researchers state that the cognitive domain is already the main battlefield for other countries, so it is essential to achieve superiority in this field. They establish six types of technologies, which are divided into two categories: cognition and subliminal cognition. The former affects a person's ability to think (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019), while the latter affects a person's emotions, willpower or underlying beliefs (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, 2019).

There is strong evidence that the PLA is seeking to implement such full-scale operations. The clearest examples are in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The PLA has even started patenting technologies related to cognitive maneuvers since at least 2018.

The approach it takes to "thought management" in networks, as well as how it applies it to strategies in domestic and foreign social networks, is described below.

a. Approach to "thought management" for the next generation

The PRC's intention to dominate the electronic media has led to new propaganda mechanisms being implemented since 2019. To this end, it is resorting to AI and in August 2019, the CCP CPD, together with several government ministries, issued a document entitled "Guiding Opinions on Promoting Deeper Integration of Culture and Technology" (Thorne, 2020). Its strategy is divided into three main pillars:

Early warning: in order to craft effective propaganda content, state authorities and media must map issues around which there is ideologically incorrect thinking and identify impending crises (Thorne, 2020). To this end, CCP analysts view AI as a tool to "continuously monitor websites, forums, blogs, Weibo, print media, WeChat, etc. to achieve a timely, comprehensive, and accurate understanding of public opinion trends and public attitudes and sentiment" (Cyberspace Administration of China, 2016). Therefore, through AI, a very accurate and comprehensive study about ideological behavioral profiles would be conducted from macro data in order to identify and prevent unapproved narratives from going viral.

Effective content: generating influential and ideologically correct content. AI helps content authorities and producers monitor and evaluate the impact of messages, with the goal of further refining production algorithms. Particularly for international audiences, AI would help China's journalists identify keywords around a topic of interest so that they can use the right terms when creating outward-facing propaganda, thus maximizing audience and resonance China Social Sciences Net, 2017). Also, machine translation will expand the reach of China's messages around the world (People's Daily Online, 2019).

Targeted distribution: finally, AI as a mechanism to disseminate content and have the greatest possible impact. Therefore, to achieve the expected reach, messages will be designed and tailored to meet needs in a personalized way. AI will allow media to tailor content based on variables including how much time a person spends consuming news, what time of day

they are online, the type of content they interact with, and many other factors (University of Electronic Science and Technology, 2018).

b. Chinese platforms

Disinformation operations on Chinese Weibo, WeChat and TikTok China's social media networks are mainly targeted at domestic audiences to promote the political legitimacy of the CCP. Consequently, RRSS companies, despite being private, remain under strict government control over the topics to be covered as well as the management of users. To this end, there is a limitation on the volume and traffic of politically sensitive topics, the promotion of pro-CCP debates and narratives, and strict censorship of users who are considered to promote the anti-CCP narrative (Atlantic Council, 2020).

These domestic communicative maneuvers extend to overseas audiences, as exemplified by the phenomenon of the "Little Roses", who started organized online attacks with the motive of defending Chinese discourse. These comments defend China's territorial legitimacy as well as its pride with messages appealing to unity in reference to Taiwan.

Weibo: Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblogging web space similar to Twitter created in 2009 and is positioned as the second largest social media platform in China, after WeChat, with 252 million daily active users and 586 million monthly active users, according to data from December 2022. If monthly data is compared with December 2021 data, 2022 had 3 million more active users.

The government reformed the platform on numerous occasions, but among the latest overhauls is an expanded list of taboo words and phrases. An estimated 2,500 words are banned, including phrases such as "one-party dictatorship" or "today we are all Hong Kong citizens" (Atlantic Council, 2020). The aim of this is to prevent communities from mobilizing and gaining online support on issues categorized as sensitive.

When a user initiates a search for a banned term or hashtag, the query returns the following statement: "Sorry, no results found for [taboo word]" (Atlantic Council, 2020). Even so, even if a search for the term yields no results, the term may still appear in posts on the social network.

Illustration 2. Implicit content filtering in Weibo search that says: "Sorry, can't find results related to 谢阳 (Xie Yang) + 指定监视居住 (Residential Surveillance at Designated Location)". Source: The Citizen Lab .

Illustration 3. Notification to users that "According to relevant laws, regulations and policies, search results for 高智晟 (Gao Zhisheng) cannot be displayed." Source: The Citizen Lab

Another reform in favor of limiting traffic on certain topics involved "search trending list." In 2018, the Head Office and Beijing Office of the Cyberspace Administration of China summoned Weibo executives to warn them about the vulgar content and bad influence Weibo's trending list has on society (Atlantic Council, 2020). Which led the corporation to suspend the platform's listing for a short period of time. When it was up and running again, there was a new section at the top of the trending list dedicated to party-affiliated media and "positive topics" (Atlantic Council, 2020). According to Weibo vice president Zenghui Cao, "the power of official voices and traditional media would increase after this reform" and it would be because the platform prioritizes specific messages by placing them at the top of the list.

Further, Weibo has highlighted the ability of users to capitalize on traffic and attention to their accounts based on followers and active views. An implicit fact about earning revenue through this activity is that, with government control of content, *influencers* have incentives to use "positive energy" content that is already high on the list of trends that guarantees success (Atlantic Council, 2020). Consequently, the owner of these accounts, which generally promote entertainment news by providing hashtags that are more likely to climb positions on the trending list, is unknown.

Another way of constructing positive Chinese discourse is by promoting a fair and benevolent image of the government through the collective *doxing* of anti-government protesters. This technique uncovers the "bad guys" within the "country's history," as the CCP calls them.

WeChat: is China's most popular social network and instant messaging application with monthly active users exceeding 1.3 billion by the end of December 2022 (Statista, 2023). It is not only Chinese nationals who use this platform, but also the diaspora, business partners or friends.

Additionally, WeChat has complementary services such as WeChat *Moments*, which is a means to create a circle of friends in which a user can post thoughts and repost article. In other words, it is employed as a *blogging* service; and a payment service. This blogging service has been active since 2012.

Along the same lines as Weibo, tactics employed to limit politically sensitive speech. Censorship of private chats and WeChat *Moments* incorporates textural keywords, hashtags, images and memes, according to research conducted by the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab. The censorship mechanism does not prevent the banned message from being sent, but the recipient who receives it can no longer view it because it is "sensitive" content.

This whole web revolves around a damaged or about to be damaged sensibility from the CCP's political point of view. Even banal and neutral images are censored, both for PRC nationals and foreigners. The following image comes from Citizen Lab's research in which Chinese censorship is evident at the moment when it removes the photo. At first glance, the photo of the chair may seem normal, but its meaning is not. Engraved on the back of the chair are the years 1955-2017, which correspond to the years of Liu Xiabo's life. This was a Chinese writer who fought against censorship and for human rights and democracy, to the point of becoming an enemy of the regime and having spent a long time in prison, and also, among his milestones, having been a Nobel Prize winner.
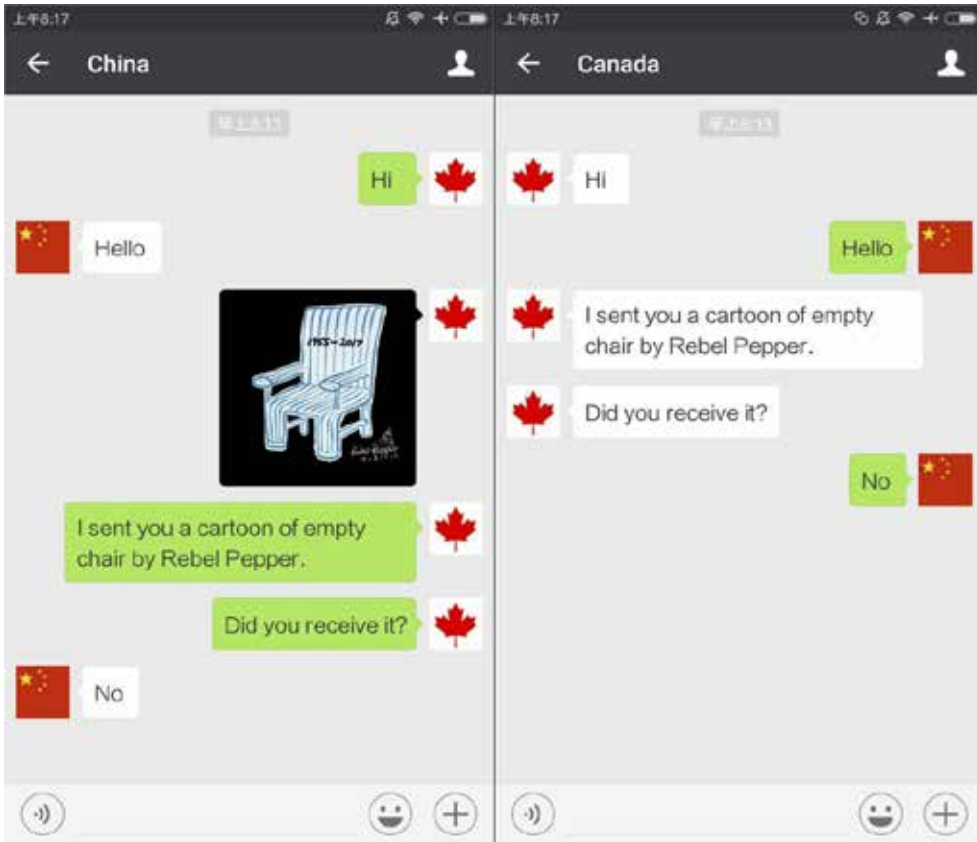
Illustration 4. Image censorship test in WeChat's one-to-one chat feature from Citizen Lab tests
conducted in July 2017. Source: The Citizen Lab.

It is important to emphasize that all of their private messaging accounts are verified by providing a phone number and other personal identification information such as an ID in order to create an account. Accounts that are originally registered with mainland Chinese phone numbers are governed by the terms of service and remain under them even if the user subsequently links their account to a non-Chinese phone number (Knockel, 2020). Files and communications sent to or from accounts registered in China are evaluated for political sensitivity among other categories of content (Knockel, 2020). If the content of communications is determined to be sensitive, it is censored for all Chinese-registered accounts on the platform (Knockel, 2020).

Another Citizen Lab investigation found that several images related to the 709 *Crackdown* ("709 Repression") were blocked from a group chat from an account registered with a mainland Chinese phone number (Ruan, Knockel & Crete-Nichihata, 2017). This well-known "709 Crackdown" was a nationwide crackdown on Chinese lawyers and human rights activists that took place in the summer of 2015.
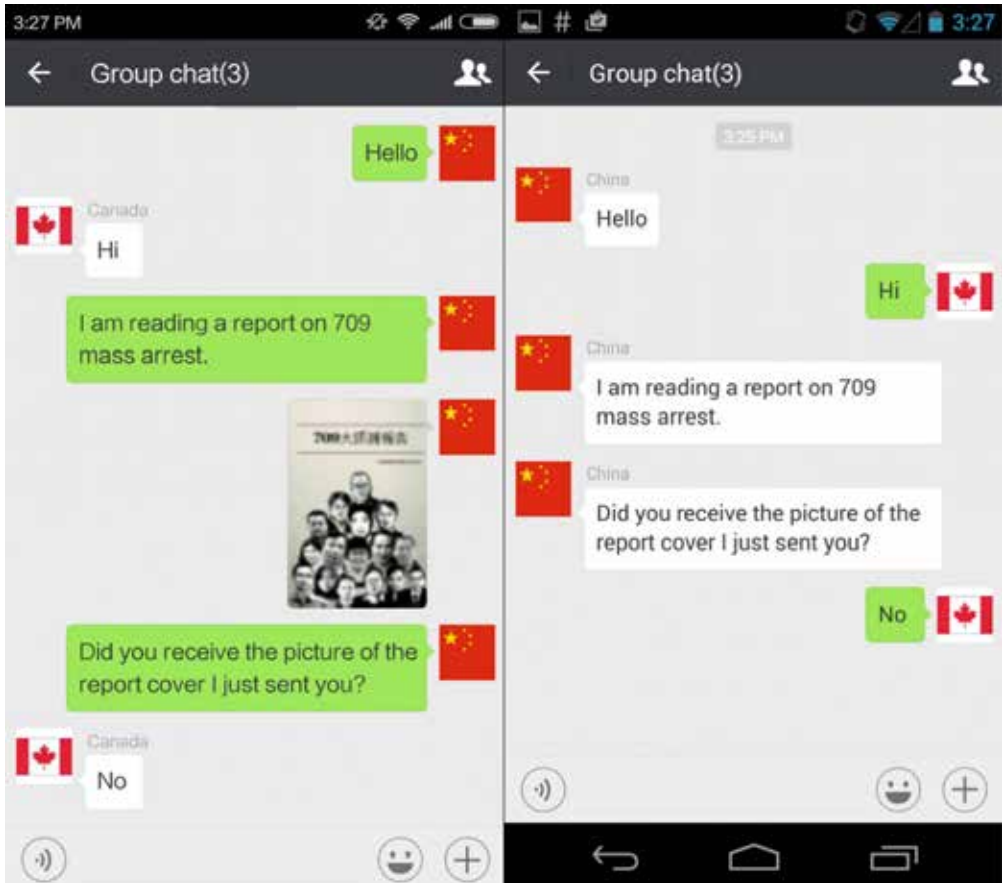
Illustration 5. Image censorship test in a WeChat group chat from Citizen Lab tests conducted in January 2017. Source: The Citizen Lab .

c. Foreign platforms

Although the PLA is not officially present on foreign social media platforms, the government is keen to use them as tools to distribute its discourse. It is suggested that the military manages fake personas or users, as well as *bots* to distort public opinion in foreign states. However, its operations are less effective than at the domestic level since it maintains tight control; although, they are more covert.

Twitter: the platform is used to amplify CCP voices with repurposed accounts, as well as exploring avenues for official party accounts on this network. In June 2020, Twitter suspended, i.e., deleted thousands of China-linked accounts that were part of a "manipulated and coordinated" campaign to spread disinformation about COVID-19 and Hong Kong (Twitter Safety, 2020).

Although the PLA does not have an official account open on Twitter, it does not mean that they are not active. Open source researcher Saikiran Kannan noted that there was an increasing creation of Twitter accounts as of January 2020. The users holding these accounts are diplomats, spokespersons, embassies and state media attached to the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to The Wall Street Journal (2020), the Chinese government purchased a large number of Twitter accounts belonging to foreign entities, which it repurposed for political content. These repurposed accounts, however, have lacked the sophistications necessary for a successful information campaign (Xiao, 2020). Chinese influence operations on Twitter have shown their operators to be sloppy, fast, disorganized, and open. Typically, Twitter account identifiers are made up of a random series of numbers and letters, a common sign of inauthenticity, thus accounts had absurdly high numbers or a near-total lack of followers, another sign of inauthenticity (Atlantic Council, 2020). These accounts also present clear indicators that they were repurposed and noted that several of these accounts and pages previously belonged to operators in Bangladesh (Uren, Tomas & Wallis, 2019).

This use of RRSS by the PRC dates from before 2016, so it is understood that the Chinese disinformative and propagandistic processes began and intensified with Xi Jinping's rise to power.

Facebook: is inaccessible to the mainland Chinese population as its use is prohibited. However, there is Chinese-language content on this platform aimed at overseas Chinese communities, i.e. the diaspora. To understand the Chinese disinformation dynamics on Facebook, it is essential to understand that, in this case, "content farms" come into play, which are the typical strategy of this medium.

Facebook content farms. According to Professor Puma Shen of Taipei University, CCP has so-called "content farms" located in Malaysia and Taiwan. These are websites set up to create a very high volume of content as well as traffic. A content farm does not actively manage information, i.e., they contribute articles without providing editorial control, leading to many of these articles providing false, excessive, and exaggerated information (The Reporter, 2019).

Once such articles are created, the farm operators recruit individual users on social media, who are usually given financial compensation for their dissemination. It is worth noting that the PLA subcontracts freelancers from Malaysia, Bangladesh or even those Chinese nationals who are abroad to disseminate the disinformative content. The main objective of this recruitment action is to hide to avoid being traced to the CCP. Incredible as it may seem, this strategy is highly effective, since, thanks to these farms, the production and expansion of content has attracted great attention.

One popular content farm is *KanWatch*, which was specifically designed so that users were remunerated for sharing information provided by the CCP. The process to register is based on completing a basic information form along with a Paypal account (Taiwan Gazette, 2020). Once registered and accepted, one will earn money either by sharing articles on their RRSS or by writing those articles (Taiwan Gazette, 2020). According to the Taiwan Gazette, an

individual user can make as much as 10 Singaporean dollars, which is equivalent to 7USD (as of March 2020 data), for every thousand views the shared or published article receives.

After the 2020 Taiwanese elections, many of the suspicious Facebook accounts from these farms were closed or deleted. It is important to note that most of the content producers of the farms are not located in Taiwan, they are driven solely by financial gain and not by political motives.

While they are used to avoid being traced back to the CCP, it is worth mentioning that the party has never been reached, so it is not 100% certain that the government was involved, but the content is aligned with the regime's narratives, i.e. pro-China with "positive energy" and against Western democracy. The content farms, besides the one already mentioned, most known are those located in Malaysia, which often disguise themselves using a different, but very similar, URL when posting links on Facebook.

Facebook pages constantly coordinate when publishing content, which is generally identical. In this case we are talking about *Qiqu Web* which varies in the following forms: https://www. qiqu.live/, http://www.qiqu.pro/, http://www. qiqu.world/, http://www.nanyang.news/, or http://funnies. live/. *Qiqi Read News* also has variations: twitter-qiqi.com, hotqiqi.com, xqiqis.com, facebook-qiqi.com, or newqiqi.com.

DFRLab uncovered a network in which nine of the pages were created in 2016, six in 2014, and the remaining ten in the intervening years between 2010 and 2018 (Atlantic Council, 2020). Thirteen of the pages had administrators based in Malaysia, while two of these thirteen, "Global Zhongzheng Express Us" and "Malaysia Zhongzheng Express" also had two administrators and one administrator in the United States, respectively (Atlantic Council, 2020).

All these pages are interrelated, closely associated with Malaysia. Generally, the postings are about Malaysian politics, traditional and simplified Chinese characters are used, so a search in English or another language would not yield any results. Despite the focus on Malaysia, pro-PRC stories, anti-Western sentiments, etc. are also shared from the *Qiqu Web* thread.

Another network identified by DFRLab contained nineteen Facebook pages as well as participating in a news promotion linked to *Qiqu Web*. These pages contained a large number of followers and were located between China, Taiwan and Malaysia. Like the previous network, the posts were written in simplified and traditional Chinese. They were all given similar names, some containing the words "Chinese diaspora around the world" or "China" with a very attractive character and appealing to loyalty to the country as the posts contained anti-American, anti-Trump, anti-Western sentiment; so it is understood that the main focus of Chinese diaspora is the U.S. The Facebook domain changed to *Nanyang News*, which redirected to "qiqu.world".

Page Name	Translation	Page Created At	Location
全球華人聯盟總主頁	Global Chinese Alliance General Page	December 30, 2014	Malaysia (6) China (1) Taiwan (1)
全球華人盟主專區	Chinese Chinese Leader Community	February 11, 2015	Malaysia (6)
全球華人寰宇聯盟	Global Chinese Universe Alliance	November 23, 2015	Malaysia (6) China (1) Taiwan (1)
全球華人盛世聯盟	Global Chinese Best World Alliance	December 2, 2015	Malaysia (6) Taiwan (1)
全球華人科技聯盟	Global Chinese Technology Alliance	December 2, 2015	Malaysia (6) China (2) Not available (1)
全球華人亞洲聯盟	Global Chinese Asia Alliance	March 8, 2016	Malaysia (6) China (1) Not available (1)
全球華人鐵血聯盟	Global Chinese Iron Blood Alliance	March 13, 2016	Malaysia (6)
兵部尚書	Military Leader	March 25, 2016	Malaysia (6)
全球華人風雲聯盟	Global Chinese Alliance	March 25, 2016	Malaysia (6)
天天頭條	Everyday Headline	May 12, 2016	China (1) Malaysia (1) Not available (2)
全球華人鋼鐵聯盟	Global Chinese Iron Alliance	May 17, 2016	Malaysia (6)
繁華中國	Prosperous China	February 21, 2018	China (1) Malaysia (1) Not available (2)
我有中國夢	I have a China Dream	February 21, 2018	China (1) Malaysia (1) Not available (2)
原來如去	Look Around	March 1, 2018	N/A
全球華人盟主專頁	Chinese Chinese Leader Page	March 16, 2018	Malaysia (1)
世界日報	World Daily	April 9, 2018	China (2) Malaysia (1) Taiwan (1)
中國軍武	Chinese Military	April 5, 2019	Malaysia (1)
全球華人風雲聯盟Pro	Global Chinese Alliance Pro	September 23, 2020	N/A
全球華人軍事聯盟Pro	Global Chinese Military Affairs Alliance Pro	September 23, 2020	N/A

The nineteen pages, their number of followers, the dates of page creation and the locations of the page administrators. Cells of different colors in the Location column indicate identical administrator locations. Cells in the Location column indicate identical administrator locations (Atlantic Council, 2020).

Source: DFRLab

Within the network there was a pattern of seventeen pages re-uploading the same posts frequently from the last two pages highlighted in Figure 9 ("Global Chinese Alliance Pro" or "Global Chinese Military Affairs Alliance Pro"), and also belonging to Qiqu. The following table shows the behaviors of these pages when sharing the same link to the "news videos" of *Qiqu Web*. The first video, highlighted in light yellow, was titled "Two at 169, why does Trump still boast of leading the world against the pandemic?" and was first shared by "Global Chinese Alliance Pro" (Atlantic Council, 2020). The second video, in dark yellow, was titled "US hegemony sparks public outrage, foreign media: once Trump is re-elected, it will harm the world," first shared by "Global Chinese Military Affairs Alliance Pro" (Atlantic Council, 2020).

Page Name	Created	Type	Engagements	Message	Link Text	Description
全球華人風雷聯盟Pro	2020-09-29 08:34 EDT	Link	18		2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」	?
全球華人盟主專頁	2020-09-29 08:36 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人盟主專區	2020-09-29 08:37 EDT	Link	7		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人聯盟總主頁	2020-09-29 08:38 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人盛世聯盟	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	5		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人鐵血聯盟	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	3		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人鋼鐵聯盟	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	3		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
兵部尚書	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	6		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人寰宇聯盟	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	4		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人亞洲聯盟	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
中国军武	2020-09-29 08:55 EDT	Link	5		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
天天頭條	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
繁華中國	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
康來康去	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
我有中國夢	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人科技聯盟	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	7		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
世界日報	2020-09-29 08:56 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	2比169，特朗普還好意思吹噓自己「領導世界抗疫」 ?
全球華人軍事聯盟Pro	2020-09-30 07:16 EDT	Link	20		美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界	
全球華人盟主專頁	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人盟主專區	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	7		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人聯盟總主頁	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人盛世聯盟	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人鋼鐵聯盟	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
兵部尚書	2020-09-30 07:24 EDT	Link	3		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
世界日報	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	4		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
中国军武	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	1		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人寰宇聯盟	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	27		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人亞洲聯盟	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	8		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
天天頭條	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
繁華中國	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
康來康去	2020-09-30 07:25 EDT	Link	0		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
我有中國夢	2020-09-30 07:26 EDT	Link	4		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界
全球華人科技聯盟	2020-09-30 07:26 EDT	Link	2		This is a re-share of a post	美國霸權引發眾怒，外媒：特朗普一旦連任，將禍害全世界

Behavior of these pages when sharing the same link to the Qiqu Web "news videos".
Source: DFRLab

It is important to note that *Qiqu Web* sources its video from external organizations, including the *Global Observation media outlet.* This is controlled by the Chinese regime; one of the Global Times video channels; numerous channels on "iXigua," a video platform, and *Today's Headline*, a news platform, both of which are owned by China's ByteDance; and YouTube channels that praise both the PRC's soft and hard power (Atlantic Council, 2020).

5. Conclusions

Social networks open a new way to interfere in people's minds and appear as a new battlefield, a new front that only evolves rapidly with objectives beyond the banalities of getting in touch with other people. Governments, and in this case the PRC, have made use of these to establish and base their ideology, the vision of an emerging nation stronger than ever and ready to occupy a position in international society at any cost. That is why its race to the top has led it to be a proponent of censorship, control and the use of propaganda and disinformation to make its narratives much more attractive and thus manipulate perceptions about the "giant of the East" and its enemies.

First of all, an understanding of the Chinese historical context evidences, but does not justify, its *modus operandi*. In other words, the Chinese population has suffered greatly with the

so-called Century of Humiliation, which was besieged by the colonialist powers of the time and with the obligation to open its borders for commercialization where its citizens were wounded with constant wars and opiates. It was part of the two world wars facing the Japanese yoke, which committed countless massacres and subjected the Chinese to one of the darkest periods of their history. Therefore, they take refuge in all that pain suffered and drag it since then by way of victimization and, thus, justify their actions in all areas under this pretext.

The application of the propaganda apparatus goes beyond China's borders, this system is critical to ensure that the CCP can "enhance its ability to engage in international communication to tell China's stories well, make China's voice heard, and present a true, multidimensional, and panoramic view of China to the world" (Xinhua, 2018; Thorne, 2020). All with the goal of escalating positions geopolitically.

The dictatorial Chinese government exercises severe control over the media. In fact, the media are an extension of the regime since they must love and protect it and its leader, Xi Jinping. Consequently, the propaganda system is in full swing thanks to social networks, especially if they are owned by the Chinese state.

Chinese analysts are truly aware of the differential value of the various types of platforms on which you can operate. Consequently, they establish a whole range of typologies of campaigns with which to act and on which to apply their operations of cognitive dominance, i.e. mind control to reinforce the Chinese power discourse. The PLA, mainly, and the other branches of this institutional framework in charge of this type of operations are the ones who draw up the strategies and implement them on behalf of the CCP. The number of branches coming from the military units in charge of this type of actions is astonishing, which gives a clue of the importance the Chinese government gives to the constant control of the Chinese population, the diaspora and targets such as Taiwan.

Its propaganda style is focused on the political one, which is the only one that will provide the continuity and legitimization of the regime in the eyes of its citizens and abroad. Therefore, it employs a series of tactics to strengthen its powerful discourse such as "wolf warrior diplomacy", where numerous openings of accounts of Chinese embassies and consulates abroad on the Twitter platform were detected; control of the Chinese diaspora as a target audience easy to reach either because they use Chinese social networks, have knowledge of the Chinese language or because they have a sense of cultural belonging; as well as information warfare or disinformation campaigns with the use of false or misleading news, and *trolls*.

In addition, its methodology includes "next generation thinking" management of cognitive domain operations based on early warning systems, effective content and targeted distribution. All this thanks to the possibilities provided and driven by AI, which is presented as a very powerful mechanism to more easily achieve the objectives of the CCP.

Finally, the PRC's involvement in all detections of disinformation and propaganda cases is dubious. Just as many publications do link directly to content farms and, with further tracking, centers in mainland China, direct Chinese government involvement is not always found. Although yes, those suspicious publications that do not have a Chinese sender and follow the same patterns of extolling Chinese culture, power discourse narratives, etc. generate

uncertainty and make it difficult to detect the producer, as well as their incentives to act in this way, or if it is ultimately an untraceable PLA author.

In short, the CCP exerts its influence by capturing people since, it has its own state ideology, and it does so mainly through the RRSS through covert manipulation in order to ensure the survival of the regime, bind its followers and have greater control and legitimacy at the international level. As Morris Berman (Broudy, 2018, p.172) observed, "people have ideas, but ideologies have people."

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