

# **The CCP's Deep Infiltration into Social Media and News Media in the Free World**

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Kalen Keegan, a college student at the University of Nebraska, had her Twitter account hacked. Her old posts disappeared and were replaced by content accusing protesters in the Hong Kong democratic movement of “fomenting a ‘color revolution’ backed by an ‘anti-Chinese American conspiracy,’ a message aligned with the tone of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As time went on, the posts were updated to discuss the coronavirus pandemic, again closely following the CCP’s narratives.

Above was a case covered by News Break in a March 2020 article titled “How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on Coronavirus.” Since August 2019, the authors of the article have “tracked more than 10,000 suspected fake Twitter accounts involved in a coordinated influence campaign with ties to the Chinese government.”

## **Hijacked Social Media Accounts**

These hacked accounts were used to spread propaganda and disinformation about the coronavirus outbreak, the Hong Kong protests, and other topics of interest to the CCP. The owners of these hijacked accounts came from all walks of the life. “They included a professor in North Carolina; a graphic artist and a mother in Massachusetts; a web designer in the U.K.; and a business analyst in Australia,” the article wrote.

The article couldn't tell “whether the current fake account holders hacked the accounts themselves or purchased them from elsewhere,” but it indicates that the true scale of the CCP influence campaign is likely much bigger than previously thought. “Our tracking suggests that the accounts we identified comprise only a portion of the operation,” the article added.

The author was able to identify at least one company behind some of these hacked accounts. OneSight (Beijing) Technology Ltd. is an internet marketing company based in Beijing and “held a contract to boost the Twitter following of China News Service, the country’s second-largest state-owned news agency. The news service operates under the

United Front Work Department, an arm of the Chinese Communist Party long responsible for influence operations in foreign countries.”

The article found that operators of these accounts often work together. For example, one fake account may have many other fake accounts as followers, and even the same approved comment could be reused many times in various accounts for numerous articles.

The operators of the fake accounts also offer payments to prominent Twitter users with large followings to post pro-CCP videos. Chinese dissident Baidiucuo in Australia, who had 70,000 followers on Twitter, was once approached by an account that claimed to be a cultural exchange company and offered 1,700 yuan (or \$240) per post.

## **Propaganda in the Orwellian State**

British author George Orwell wrote a novel in 1949 titled *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which he explored the consequences of an imaginary totalitarian regime. One

slogan used by the ruling party was, “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.” It means that because the Inner Party has the capability to rewrite history, it can manipulate public opinion. Similarly, due to its totalitarian power, it believes it has the authority to rewrite history.

Winston Smith, a main character of the book, works in the Ministry of Truth. His responsibility is rewriting historical records that conforms to the Party’s ever-changing views of history. To some degree, it has functions similar to the CCP’s Propaganda Department (later renamed to the Publicity Department) and the United Front. With censorship and lies inside China, as well as disinformation outside China, the CCP actively pushes false narratives to Chinese people and the rest of the world.

Interestingly, the Orwellian state also has several ministries that resemble how the CCP mistreats people. For example, the Ministry of Plenty rations and controls food in the name of raising the standard of living while causing starvation in reality. Under the CCP, officials exaggerated grain production by tens or hundreds of times during the Great Leap Forward movement in 1958, causing the collection of

a high levy and leading to the starvation deaths of at least 45 million people between 1959 and 1961.

In Orwell's novel, *Thought Police* constantly surveil citizens through two-way televisions and hidden cameras. The Ministry of Love monitors and arrests both real and imagined dissidents. In China, officials track people through social media such as WeChat and countless surveillance cameras. Dissidents are suppressed and arrested, and people of faith such as Falun Gong practitioners are detained and tortured for their belief in the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance.

## **White Paper:**

### **Overt and Covert Influences from the CCP**

The Cyber Policy Center at Stanford University published a white paper in July with the title of "Telling China's Story: The Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Shape Global Narratives." This 52-page report analyzed how the CCP uses its extensive apparatus to "advance both its domestic monopoly on power and its claims to global leadership."

Authors of the white paper include Renee DiTesta, Technical Research Manager from the Stanford Internet Observatory, and John Pomfret, former Beijing Bureau chief for the Washington Post.

The report started with an anecdote from the Korean War in which the CCP claimed in 1952 that the U.S. had waged germ warfare that led to the outbreak of bubonic plague, anthrax, and cholera. “[The CCP] established a base of operations in Prague from which they cultivated Western leftist and pacifist sympathizers who amplified their claims in Western media,” wrote the report.

Although this episode has become history, such tactics from the CCP continues. “The CCP succeeded in clouding the record so that belief in American perfidy endures in certain circles,” wrote the report. “This disinformation campaign blended overt propaganda and the recruitment of credulous authorities to amplify and legitimate CCP talking points, seed doubt and suspicion, and build up the domestic and international standing of the CCP at the expense of its adversaries.”

To dominate narratives in international society, the CCP has continually expanded its overseas operations. Xinhua has become one of the largest news agencies in the world, while CGTN operates through dozens of foreign bureaus and broadcasts in seven languages. “China Radio International has contracts to broadcast from more than a dozen radio stations in the United States alone, while China Daily places inserts in newspapers such as the Washington Post, for as much as \$250,000 an issue,” the report explained.

It was estimated that the CCP has spent at least 45 billion yuan (or \$6.6 billion) on overseas propaganda since 2009. In 2011, Xinhua rented a large digital bulletin board overlooking Times Square at the price of \$300,000 to \$400,000 per month. Panda, Great Wall, Forbidden City, and Three Gorges soon became buzz words for the CCP to market itself.

After an international court ruled in July 2016 over contested waters in South China Sea in favor of the Philippines, the CCP immediately launched a campaign through the Times Square bulletin board and played a video

lasting three minutes and twelve seconds for 120 times per day for 12 days straight.

## **Overseas Agents Who Work for the CCP**

As a result of extensive investment and infiltration by the CCP, many overseas news media—including those in Chinese—yielded to the regime and now serve as its mouthpiece.

“Thirty years ago, Chinese-language media outside of China reflected a diverse range of political perspectives. Today, after significant investment from China and pro-CCP interests, Chinese language publications that echo and amplify CCP narratives dominate,” wrote the white paper.

The regime also put in more effort to gain influence in international news media. “China’s government has brought hundreds of journalists from developing countries to China for training courses that showcase the economic and technological achievements of China’s governance model,” the white paper continued. “The Chinese

government typically pays their expenses, offers stipends, and provides generous accommodations and sightseeing opportunities, which return dividends in goodwill and favorable coverage when the journalists return home.”

This strategy dates back to before the CCP took power in 1949. American journalist Edgar Snow interviewed Mao Zedong in 1930 and, based on the one-sided story, published the book of Red Star Over China. This book misled many Chinese and Westerners to support communism.

Snow died in 1972, and his wife, Lois Wheeler, did not truly understand the CCP until the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989. The money she donated to some families of the victims was confiscated. As she visited China again in 2000 with her son, planning to see a mother whose son died in the Massacre, “they were surrounded at the gate of People’s University in Beijing... at least two dozen plainclothes police officers, filmed surreptitiously and prevented [them] from entering,” reported an article in the New York Times in April 2018 with the title of “Lois Wheeler Snow, Critic of Human Rights Abuses in China, Dies at 97.”

Compared to decades ago, the CCP now has much more influence on public opinion. This includes traditional news outlets and various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Wang Liqiang, a Chinese spy who fled to Australia, stated that he had participated in the CCP's meddling in the 2018 Taiwanese local elections by creating 200,000 fake social media accounts. In addition, a Hong Kong front company created twenty other "internet companies" to attack the political party that the CCP disliked. Wang said he also gave 1.5 billion RMB (over \$200 million USD) to Taiwanese media properties to promote a candidate that the CCP favored for the Mayor of Kaohsiung.

## **A State Apparatus That Produces Lies**

Although Chinese scientists confirmed the coronavirus infection in December 2019, the CCP did not acknowledge it until January 20, three days before the lockdown of the epicenter Wuhan. One day after the World Health Organizations (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao

Lijian bluntly blamed the United States for being the origin of the virus.

Amplified through Twitter, WeChat, and TikTok, and pro-CCP media and agents claimed the virus came from Fort Detrick, a U.S. military base in Maryland. Although it is widely known as a hoax outside China, it deceived many people inside China and sparked confusion in the international community.

Since the totalitarian CCP regime mobilizes the entire state apparatus for disinformation and lying, the consequences are severe. “The Chinese Communist Party’s initial mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent attempts to exploit the crisis have produced enduring problems for the rest of the world,” wrote an article in Foreign Affairs on August 11 with the title “An Answer to Aggression: How to Push Back Against Beijing.”

“But the CCP’s behavior has also helped clarify the threat that China poses to the security, prosperity, and well-being of other countries,” the article continues. “The United

States can no longer afford to treat China as just another trading partner.”

“Big brother is watching you” is a well-known slogan in Nineteen Eighty-Four. In today’s China, however, the state-of-art censorship has surpassed what was described in the novel. From various social media platforms to internet control, from omnipresent surveillance cameras to mandatory facial scans even when using public bathrooms, the intensity of monitoring and control has reached an unprecedented level.

Those who dare to challenge the CCP often face serious punishment. Ren Zhiqiang, a property tycoon, has been detained and faces charges for criticizing the CCP leadership. Tsinghua University professor Xu Zhangrun was fired for expressing unfavorable opinions about the CCP. Scholars such as Chen Qiushi and Fang Bin have been missing for months after criticizing the CCP for covering up the coronavirus outbreak.

Inside China, Falun Gong practitioners have been the largest group persecuted for their faith by the CCP.

Because of the CCP's recent disinformation campaigns, more government officials in the international community have come to understand the Chinese regime's threat to the world. Members of the Virginia General Assembly, the oldest continuous lawmaking body in the United States since 1619, wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on July 29, urging him to help stop forced organ harvesting from living Falun Gong practitioners in China.

“We are writing in solidarity with survivors and those who can no longer speak for themselves. We ask for your leadership, and the considerable leverage of the United States, to ensure that next year we are not observing 22 years of persecution,” wrote the letter.

*<http://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2020/9/8/186678.html>*