

A Macdonald-Laurier Institute Publication

THE HARD EDGE OF SHARP POWER

Understanding China's Influence Operations Abroad

J. Michael Cole



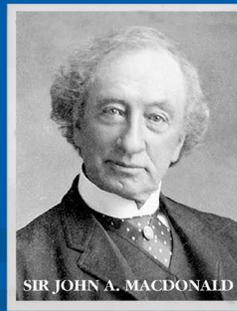
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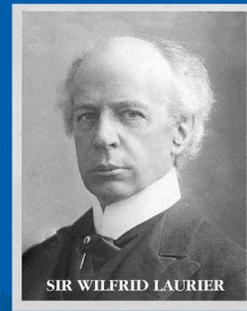
True North in
Canadian public policy



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Executive Summary

In recent years, China has invested billions of dollars in an effort to boost its visibility and improve its image abroad. Investments have been made in a global media presence, international partnerships, academic outreach, and the cultural industry. Although those efforts have paid dividends in some parts of the world, especially among countries in need of major infrastructure investment, China’s “soft power” remains clumsy and, especially under Xi Jinping, has frequently been undermined by China’s self-defeating bad behaviour.

Given its inability to project a friendly face, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has had to increase its reliance on other, less overt ways of promoting Chinese interests internationally. The term sharp power describes what had hitherto been referred to as political warfare or

influence operations. Sharp power encapsulates a strategy by autocratic regimes that “pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has had to increase its reliance on other, less overt ways of promoting Chinese interests internationally.

The CCP does so through co-optation, bribery, incentivization, disinformation, censorship, and propaganda, among other methods. Examples include Beijing’s influence over multiple Chinese diaspora community associations abroad, its cultivation of current and former politicians in Australia, Canada and elsewhere, and efforts to censor books and publications critical of Chinese regime internationally.

Using various examples from around the world, this paper analyses the ideology that lies at the heart of the

CCP’s influence operations abroad and examines the many agencies and mechanisms involved in these sharp power activities. Once we understand how sharp power is undermining our institutions, we must then ask, how should democratic societies respond?

At the heart of the problem is the fact that while some sharp power involves clearly illegal activity, many other aspects of political warfare take place in the grey areas of our legal-democratic systems – not strictly illegal, and difficult to pin down as traditional foreign espionage.

The following are a few recommendations that, if adopted, should help democratic societies begin to better address the challenge created by CCP political warfare. Other countries more aware of this threat have already implemented versions of these solutions. This is a start, and not a full plan, to protect Canada from political warfare.

- Universities and think tanks must develop more rigorous curricula and research programs to ensure that we have sufficiently high-caliber expertise to address the challenges that arise from this new relationship.
- Reduce the grip of pro-CCP board members on think tanks that focus on Asia.
- Update the legal system to address the grey areas and plug blind spots (“illegal” versus “unethical”) that can be exploited by agents of political warfare. Better define the remits of law-enforcement and intelligence agencies to investigate such activities.
- Revise the legal system to make it more difficult for authoritarian regimes and their proxies involved in political warfare to sue journalists and academics for defamation. Provide legal/financial assistance to intellectuals who are taken to court for investigating such matters. Increase protections against wrongful dismissals of editors and journalists working in Chinese-language media.
- Strengthen foreign-investment screening mechanisms in the media, high-tech, and defence sectors targeted by suspect Chinese entities. Bolster transparency requirements in the private and public sectors over their involvement with suspect Chinese entities.
- Strengthen measures to identify, track, and protect society against disinformation/computational propaganda. Changes to the legal system should also be considered to make prosecution of individuals/entities that knowingly spread authoritarian disinformation possible.
- Revise laws to ensure that government officials are not co-opted by foreign agents while still in office. Retired government officials should be barred from employment by foreign entities tied to an authoritarian regime for a minimum of two years after leaving office. Strengthen laws tackling conflicts of interest.
- Increase cooperation among law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. Initiate outreach with foreign partners that had experience dealing with this problem. Expand government communication programs to help educate the public on political warfare.
- Improve outreach to Chinese communities, both for reassurance purposes and to benefit from their knowledge.

We are only in the beginning phase of understanding the nature and scope of China’s sharp power challenge. Simply put, we have failed to pay enough attention to China over the years, or believed, as many did, that engagement would eventually turn the regime into a more liberal, if not democratic, partner in global affairs. Developments in China under Xi Jinping have put an end to such hopes. If we are to fashion the right response to that problem, we must first better understand China and the CCP. We can no longer afford to regard it as a distant phenomenon.

Sommaire

Au cours des dernières années, la Chine a investi des milliards de dollars dans le but d'accroître sa visibilité et d'améliorer son image à l'étranger. Elle a investi dans le réseau mondial d'information, les partenariats internationaux, les milieux universitaires et l'industrie culturelle. Bien que ces efforts aient porté leurs fruits dans certaines parties du monde, notamment dans les pays ayant de grands besoins en infrastructures, le « *soft power* » chinois (stratégie d'influence par la séduction) demeure toujours malhabile et fréquemment écorché par les comportements dommageables et autodestructeurs chinois, en particulier sous la direction de Xi Jinping.

Compte tenu de son incapacité à projeter un visage amical, le Parti communiste chinois (PCC) a dû s'en remettre à des moyens moins transparents pour promouvoir les intérêts chinois à l'étranger. Le « *sharp power* » (stratégie d'influence par la contrainte) désigne ce qui, de nos jours, est associé à l'agression politique et aux opérations d'influence. Le « *sharp power* » est la stratégie déployée par les régimes autocratiques qui « percent, pénètrent et perforent l'environnement politique et informationnel des pays cibles ».

Le PCC exerce ce pouvoir contraignant par le biais de la cooptation, de la corruption, des incitants, de la désinformation, de la censure et de la propagande, entre autres méthodes. À titre d'exemple, mentionnons l'influence de Pékin sur de multiples associations communautaires de la diaspora chinoise, sa présence accrue auprès de personnalités politiques d'hier et d'aujourd'hui en Australie, au Canada et ailleurs et ses efforts visant à censurer les livres et les publications critiquant le régime chinois à travers le monde.

À l'aide de divers exemples recensés à l'échelle internationale, cet article analyse l'idéologie au cœur des opérations d'influence du PCC à l'étranger et examine les nombreux organismes et mécanismes impliqués dans les activités résultant de cette stratégie d'influence par la contrainte. À partir du moment où l'on saisit à quel point ce type de pouvoir peut nuire à nos institutions, nous devons nous demander comment nos sociétés démocratiques doivent réagir.

Le fond du problème, c'est que si la stratégie d'influence par la contrainte repose clairement sur des activités illégales, à bien des égards, l'agression politique passe toutefois par les zones grises de nos systèmes judiciaires et démocratiques – non illégale au sens strict, mais difficile à contrecarrer au même titre que l'espionnage étranger traditionnel.

Voici quelques recommandations qui, si elles sont adoptées, devraient aider les sociétés démocratiques à commencer à mieux résoudre les difficultés causées par l'agression politique du PCC. Certains pays plus conscients de cette menace ont déjà mis en œuvre des versions de ces solutions. Il s'agit d'un début, et non pas d'un plan complet de protection pour le Canada.

- Les universités et les groupes de réflexion doivent élaborer des programmes d'études et de recherche plus rigoureux afin de veiller à ce que nous ayons suffisamment d'expertise de haut calibre pour relever les défis qui découlent de cette nouvelle relation.
- L'emprise des membres pro-PCC sur les conseils des groupes de réflexion axés sur l'Asie doit être amoindrie.
- Le système judiciaire doit être actualisé pour remédier aux zones d'ombre et éliminer les angles morts (« illégaux » par opposition à « non étiques ») qui peuvent être

exploités par les agents impliqués dans l'agression politique. Il faut mieux définir les missions des forces de l'ordre et des agences de renseignement pour qu'elles puissent enquêter sur de telles activités.

- Le système judiciaire doit être réformé de manière à rendre plus difficile pour les régimes autoritaires et leurs mandataires politiques d'intenter des procès en diffamation contre les journalistes et les universitaires. Les intellectuels appelés à comparaître en cour pour avoir mené des enquêtes doivent bénéficier d'un appui juridique et d'aide financière, et les éditeurs et journalistes travaillant dans les médias de langue chinoise doivent être mieux protégés contre les licenciements injustifiés.
- Les mécanismes de contrôle des investissements étrangers doivent être renforcés pour les secteurs visés par les entités chinoises suspectes dans les domaines des médias, de la haute technologie et de la défense. Les secteurs public et privé doivent être soumis à des obligations de transparence plus strictes lorsqu'elles sont en liaison avec des entités chinoises compromettantes.
- On doit améliorer les mesures visant à identifier et à surveiller les activités de désinformation et de propagande computationnelle et à protéger la société contre ces activités. Le système judiciaire doit également être modifié de manière à rendre possibles les poursuites contre les personnes et les entités qui, en toute connaissance de cause, se livrent à la diffusion de désinformation péremptoire.
- Les lois doivent être modifiées pour veiller à ce que les fonctionnaires toujours en exercice ne soient pas cooptés par les agents étrangers. Les fonctionnaires retraités ne devraient pas être autorisés à occuper un emploi auprès d'entités étrangères liées à un régime autoritaire pendant au moins deux ans suivant la date de leur départ. Il faut renforcer les lois contre les conflits d'intérêts.
- La coopération doit être accrue entre les forces de l'ordre et les organismes de renseignement. Il faudrait entretenir des liens avec les partenaires étrangers qui ont eu à régler ces problèmes et élargir les programmes de communication gouvernementaux visant à éduquer le public en matière d'agression politique.
- La communication doit être améliorée avec les communautés chinoises, tant pour nous réassurer que pour bénéficier de leurs connaissances.

Nous ne faisons qu'amorcer nos efforts de compréhension de la nature et de la portée du défi posé par le *sharp power* chinois. En termes simples, nous avons omis d'accorder suffisamment d'attention à la Chine au fil des ans, ou nous avons cru, comme beaucoup l'ont fait, que l'engagement finirait par transformer le régime en un partenaire mondial plus libéral, peut-être même plus démocratique. L'évolution de la Chine sous la direction de Xi Jinping a mis un terme à ces espoirs. Si nous devons concevoir une réponse appropriée aux problèmes, nous devons d'abord mieux comprendre la Chine et le PCC. Nous ne pouvons plus nous permettre de les considérer comme une réalité très distante.

Introduction

In recent years the People's Republic of China (PRC) has invested billions of dollars in soft power to increase its visibility and improve its image abroad. Through large investments in a global media presence, international partnerships, academic outreach, and the cultural industry, Beijing has sought to shape the international environment in its favour while seeking to reassure the world that an increasingly assertive China is still a benign force. Although those efforts have paid dividends in some parts of the world, especially among countries in need of major infrastructure investment, China's soft power remains clumsy and, especially under President Xi Jinping, has frequently been undermined by China's self-defeating bad behaviour.

Problems with China's soft power have compelled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to increase its reliance on other, less overt types of activities that can also create an external environment more conducive to Chinese interests. More commonly known as *sharp power*, this multifaceted campaign is orchestrated using guidelines provided by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC)

and involves various actors inside and outside China. These include, but are not limited to: Chinese intelligence services, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), businesses, chambers of commerce, United Front Work (UFW) units, cultural enterprises, the media, Chinese students, academics, Netizens, organized crime, and Chinese diplomatic missions abroad.

Facing a challenging external environment, Xi has increased the mandate and scope of UFW operations while ramping up political/information/psychological warfare against targeted countries (Groot 2017). Key targets of such activities include Taiwan, Hong Kong, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the EU, and the UK, as well as

countries targeted by China's globe-spanning Belt and Road Initiative and its 16+1 initiative with Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Given China's global presence, no country is exempt from those influences, which are meant to undermine state and democratic institutions and thereby facilitate Beijing's objectives in those societies. Unsurprisingly, influence operations have also sought to exploit what revisionist regimes like the CCP regard as a strategic opportunity to alter the liberal-democratic order that has governed international relations since the end of the Second World War. In particular, China's leaders see opportunity amid signs of a democratic backsliding characterized by the Trump election in the US, the advent of Brexit, and crypto-fascism in Europe.

Using various examples from around the world, this paper analyses the ideology that lies at the heart of the CCP's influence operations abroad and examines the many agencies and

China's leaders see opportunity amid signs of a democratic backsliding characterized by the Trump election in the US.

mechanisms – co-optation, bribery, incentivization, disinformation (“fake news”), computational propaganda (disinformation using social media generated by bots and/or humans), access granting/denial, censorship, investment, “dual use” firms, academic exchanges, “lawfare” and so on – involved in these activities. It also draws attention to the challenges democratic societies face as they seek to respond to China’s influence operations, which in many cases are not illegal but are nevertheless unethical and have a corrosive effect on the good functioning of our institutions. The paper concludes with a list of recommendations for Canada, whose adoption would help inoculate our private and public sector against undue external influence by an authoritarian regime that is now keen on exporting its model abroad.

Defining China’s Influence Operations

Since the publication in December 2017 of a report by the US National Endowment for Democracy on rising authoritarian influence, global media, academia, think tanks, and governments have adopted the term *sharp power* to describe what had hitherto been referred to as political warfare or influence operations. A derivative of Joseph Nye’s *soft power*, a term coined in the 1990s to describe a country’s ability to influence the behaviour of others through its cultural and political appeal, sharp power encapsulates a strategy by autocratic regimes that, according to the report, “pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries” (Cardenal et al. 2017, 6). In other words, it is not a charm offensive, and its effects are corrosive. “This authoritarian influence,” the report continues, “is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centers on distraction and manipulation” (10).

*China commands
a comprehensive
and flexible
influencing toolset.*

As another report released in 2018 explains, “China commands a comprehensive and flexible influencing toolset, ranging from the overt to the covert, primarily deployed across three arenas: political and economic elites, media and public opinion, and civil society and academia” (Benner et al. 2018, 6). As Beijing expands its political influence, the report continues, “China takes advantage of the one-sided openness” (2) of our democratic societies. The three principal targets of Chinese sharp power are political and economic elites (“elite capture”); media and public opinion; and civil society, grassroots, and academia.

Much confusion has surrounded the term, however, with many analysts and journalists failing to distinguish between China’s soft power efforts and its more corrosive use of sharp power. This failure to distinguish between the two practices has led some opinion makers, as well as the CCP itself, to draw a moral equivalence by arguing that China’s efforts are no different from other countries’ soft power.¹

While it is true that China has every right to use culture and a global media presence to increase its appeal and visibility worldwide, it would be a mistake to confuse these soft power efforts – which are generally a more natural outgrowth of a country’s image and spillover to its cultural, institutional and even ideological influence – with the political warfare operations of a regime that is revisionist, anti-democratic and, as some would argue, increasingly Orwellian. Therefore, while China’s soft power is perfectly legitimate, its sharp power involves activities that, although not always illicit, often involve co-optation, corruption, censorship, threats, and other elements. In most cases, these actions raise questions of ethics and often are incompatible with the values espoused by democratic societies.

Two examples should suffice to explain the differences between soft and sharp power. In the first case, a Chinese firm acquires or invests in a Hollywood film studio and uses its new influence in that industry to increase China’s appeal and visibility. Often, this is accomplished by

The soft and sharp elements of China’s power are not mutually exclusive.

adding Chinese actors, setting the scene in China, or positioning China as a force for good. Hollywood films can even be used to encourage policy change in Beijing’s favour.² Elements of sharp power arise when Chinese investment in film studios and distributors pressure screenwriters and producers to avoid certain controversial subjects – such as Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Falun Gong – or to deny the participation of actors who have been blacklisted by the CCP for their political views. Issued by China’s Ministry of Culture, by 2016 this blacklist reportedly contained the names of 55 artists from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan (Apple Daily 2016).

A second example involves cultural foundations that organize musical concerts that promote Chinese culture and the “unity” of the Chinese people in societies outside China. While on the surface such events are perfectly legitimate and fall under

the soft power category, less known is the fact that the organizers often have ties to China’s UFW departments and will use the opportunity to co-opt and recruit members within a targeted society; they will also use their influence to censor certain elements within the targeted society (such as by removing the name “National” from a state university in Taiwan used as a venue for a concert) and will rely on pro-CCP triad members to intimidate and/or physically assault protesters (Hsaio 2017).³

As can be seen from the above examples, the soft and sharp elements of China’s power are not mutually exclusive nor are they contradictory. In fact, they tend to reinforce each other and are part of the CCP’s multifaceted approach to shaping the environment in its favour. Consequently, throughout this paper, examples will abound of influence operations that utilize the full spectrum of China’s arsenal; to exclude the non-purely sharp power activities, or to treat those in a vacuum, would fail to present the full picture of the challenges such operations represent to our democratic systems. The CCP makes no distinction; neither should we.

Some organizations involved in China’s political warfare operations have ties to, or overlap with, the intelligence and military apparatus. But we must nevertheless draw a distinction between sharp power or influence activities and traditional penetrative intelligence operations, which can include agent running, collection, industrial espionage, and even the surveillance/

harassment against minority communities abroad.⁴ That being said, these two types of efforts – pure recruitment and directing by intelligence handlers on the one hand; sharp power operations launched by front organizations with ties to intelligence/PLA/UFW on the other – are meant to reinforce each other. As outlined in this paper, however, it is the latter type of sharp power or influence activities that pose a particular challenge to law enforcement and intelligence agencies in targeted countries.

All in all, it is especially important to understand that the CCP's approach to influence operations and political warfare is multifaceted and, counterintuitive as this may sound, sees no contradiction in operations that may appear to be contradictory (for instance, incentives *and* threats being used simultaneously).

Drivers and agents of Chinese political warfare

Besides an elevated role (China Daily 2015) for the CCP's UFW Department, as many as 40,000 cadres are believed to have been added to the body under Xi Jinping (Groot 2015), with a special focus on operations abroad “to fight the bloody battle against our enemies . . . with a strong determination to take our [China's] place in the world” (Griffiths 2018).

Despite the disparate nature of many of the organizations and individuals involved in China's political warfare activities, the general direction and tone is set by the CCP itself. At the very top is the CPPCC, which is where all the relevant actors inside and outside the CCP – party elders, intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, soldiers and political commissars, UFW workers, academics, and business people – come together and where the strategic aims of political warfare and propaganda are developed. Below the CPPCC Standing Committee, nine special committees bring together important national figures inside and outside the party.⁵ This ensures that the overall direction of the CCP's external political warfare operations receives a modicum of coordination and guidance, with a view to maximizing the impact in support for China's strategic objectives.

So far Beijing has largely benefited from the lack of awareness among countries targeted by its political warfare concerning the nature, ideology, connections, and *modus operandi* of the various Chinese agencies and organizations involved in this endeavour. Although Confucius Institutes and firms such as Huawei and ZTE have come under greater scrutiny in the West in recent months (Cheng 2018), a constellation of other organizations continues to operate with little if any attention being paid to the nefarious impact of their actions. To pursue its influence operations worldwide, Beijing has often relied on the Chinese diaspora – including chambers of commerce, cultural associations, Buddhist temples, and Chinese students – to exercise its activities. In several cases, operations were directed or facilitated by local Chinese embassies or consulates, such as when Chinese students and expatriates were called upon to mobilize and protest against universities for inviting “enemies” and critics of the CCP, such as the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, Taiwanese officials, or beauty queens who practice the Falun Gong spirituality.

Among the key players in Chinese political warfare/influence operations abroad are International Liaison Department of the CCP, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the Central Propaganda Department, Hanban (Confucius Institute), party-state media, the China

Association for Friendly International Contact (CAIFC), which has ties to the PLA Political Work Department (formerly the General Political Department – Liaison Department) (Stokes and Hsiao 2013), the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), the Ministry of State Security-linked China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CISS), the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies (CFISS), the China-US Exchange Foundation (CUSEF) (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017),⁶ the Centre for Peace and Development Studies (CPDS), the External Propaganda Bureau (EPB), and the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC) (Cole 2015c), as well as a constellation of organizations worldwide whose names often include variations on the theme of “peaceful reunification” – a telltale sign of political efforts aimed at Taiwan.

Many of those agencies overlap and/or collaborate with an alphabet soup of organizations (for example, the US-China Cultural Exchange Society), a number of which are ostensibly involved in the promotion of Chinese culture (such as the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Unification). Many players who are actively involved in such activities are also “dual use,” in that their sharp power work occurs alongside perfectly legitimate activities.⁷

These organizations are believed to collaborate with elected officials in targeted countries.

In turn, these organizations are believed to collaborate with elected officials in targeted countries to promote China’s interests. Recent controversies in Canada, New Zealand, and other countries have involved elected officials who were of Chinese background and, in some cases, who failed to disclose past ties to the Chinese intelligence apparatus. In these targeted countries, retired government officials, military generals, admirals and flag officers, and senior intelligence officers have been drawn in, “recruited” or co-opted by Chinese firms or organizations involved in political warfare, sometimes with lucrative contracts (as consultants or board members) attached. Be-

sides conferring legitimacy to their operations and amplifying a pro-Beijing message (such as support for the Belt and Road Initiative or the “China model” as an alternative to Western liberal-democracy in these times of democratic backsliding),⁸ high-profile former officials thus recruited can also make their impressive Rolodexes, developed while in government, available to the PRC.

In many cases, this high access can help bypass transparency and accountability rules. While this practice has been particularly effective in countries lacking the rule of law, it has also succeeded in persuading officials in democratic countries to act in ways that benefited China and may have compromised the interests of their own countries. Conferences and trilaterals organized or co-hosted by these organizations have also been used to promote an anti-Japanese sentiment (including “re-militarization” of Japan as a threat, Second World War atrocities, comfort women, and so on), challenge the South China Sea ruling (Cole 2016b), or advocate the “abandonment” of Taiwan (Cole 2015b). The same organizations have used these occasions to befriend foreign academics and draw lists of scholars for future (often all-expens-

es-paid) visits to China, where the agenda and meetings will be determined by CCP officials, who on occasion may also attempt to “recruit” targets. Needless to say, academics whose views are deemed inimical to the CCP are not invited to join these junkets.

Powerful Chinese firms and organizations involved in political warfare have also scored successes through investments and acquisitions in targeted countries, principally, but not limited to, Central Europe. Through these financial activities, Chinese political warfare luminaries have increased their influence on targeted governments, as with the case of the CEFC chairman, Ye Jianming, becoming the special economic adviser to Czech President Miloš Zeman (Barboza, Santora, and Stevenson 2018). In this particular case, CEFC had acquired “landmark properties, a local brewery and a much beloved soccer team” in the Czech Republic. China has also used its membership at the United Nations (and the growing US disenchantment with that body) to increase its influence in some UN agencies, such as UNESCO.

Using disinformation generated by its state-run media (some, such as *China Review News*, with ties to the intelligence apparatus), as well as content farms⁹ and computational propaganda (Monaco), China has also sought to sow confusion within targeted societies, to undermine support for government and democratic institutions, and to give an advantage to candidates whose views are more ideologically aligned with Beijing. Those engaging in disinformation will also exploit high polarization and deficiencies (such as poor fact-checking practices, circular corroboration, and sensationalism) in traditional media to legitimize and disseminate misleading content. Disinformation activities that aim to interfere in democratic mechanisms have also been augmented by creative financing of candidates, often by redirected funds from the private sector, as is believed to have occurred in Taiwan (Wang and Chang 2018), or by exploiting weaknesses in foreign political donation regulations (McKenzie et al. 2017). In Australia, for example, a study of electoral commission data conducted in 2017 showed that “[n]early 80 percent of the foreign donations made to Australia’s political parties since the year 2000 were linked to China” (Gomes 2017).¹⁰

In all, the mechanisms of and key agencies in Chinese political warfare worldwide are only beginning to be better understood, thanks to recent controversies in countries like Australia and New Zealand sparked by academic work and TV documentaries (McKenzie 2017). Most countries, perhaps with the exception of Taiwan, have been slow in acknowledging the problem, in part due to a lack of expertise as well as the economic attractiveness of China – what the Mercator Institute for China Studies report describes as “fits of ‘preemptive obedience’ to curry favor with the Chinese side” (Benner et al. 2018, 7). This has acted as a deterrent against scrutinizing Chinese activities. The greater attention paid to Russian influence, especially in Europe and in the US following the 2016 elections, has also distracted the public from the China problem. This is mainly due to the nature of the Russian opponent, which is better known (seen as a continuation of Soviet activity against the West), and its geographical/

Chinese political warfare luminaries have increased their influence on targeted governments.

civilizational proximity. Russia has also arguably been clumsier than its Asian neighbour in its utilization of sharp power, an art which the CCP, a keen observer, has refined.

Case studies

This section provides a few examples of Chinese political warfare around the world and their impact on targeted institutions. Although it is well beyond the scope of this paper to cover all instances of sharp power, the selection should be sufficient to give a general idea of the scope, means, aims, and impact of such operations on targeted societies.

Academia

One of the most visible aspects of China's sharp power efforts abroad has occurred in the academic sector. Exploiting cash-strapped Western universities' need for full-tuition-paying foreign students, China has used this dependency to its advantage by leveraging its students. According to statistics from China's Ministry of Education, a total of 544,500 Chinese studied abroad in 2016, a number that, according to the *China Daily*, could peak at between 700,000 and 800,000. Of those, as many as 500,000 will be attending colleges and universities, and 200,000 will be pursuing postgraduate education (Luo 2017).

This leverage has been used to pressure academic institutions in the West. One incident in 2017 involved the University of California, San Diego, where the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) at the university, which represents more than 3500 Chinese nationals, raised objections over an invitation to the Dalai Lama to give a commencement address (Reilly 2017). Another incident involved a mobilization by Chinese students to block Anastasia Lin, a former Miss World Canada and a fierce critic of the CCP, appearing on campus at Durham University in the UK (Swerling and Tucker 2017). In both cases, and in several others, there was reason to believe that Chinese student associations were in close contact and collaborating with Chinese embassy or consulate officials.

Chinese embassies and consulates are also known to use this leverage to force the cancellation of cultural events promoting Taiwan (Hou and Hsiu-chuan 2018).¹¹ According to Michel Juneau-Katsuya, a former Canadian intelligence officer, Chinese officials based in Ottawa also mobilized Chinese students to counter-protest during a state visit by then-president Hu Jintao in 2010 (Liu 2017). Overseas Chinese are also known to have been mobilized by local consulates to protest during hearings held by school boards to evaluate the activities of Confucius Institutes, often accusing the hearings – and critics of these institutes – of having an “anti China” sentiment (Alphonso and Howlett 2014).¹²

In other incidents, Chinese students have turned on their professors at Australian universities for referring to Taiwan as a country, or for using of a map of the Sino-Indian border, which the students claimed was “unfair” to China. In one instance, a lecturer at Monash University was suspended for including a test question that suggested criticism of CCP officials (Needham 2017). In those cases, ardent nationalist sentiment cultivated in China since the early 1990s (Wang 2014), rather than directives by Chinese officials in Australia, was probably behind the actions against the professors. The presence of ‘professional students’ among the Chinese student body abroad, who monitor the activities of their cohort, also acts as an incentive for displays of patriotism as well as a source of censorship among the students (Fish 2018). In

just one of many instances reported to this author, a Chinese student at SOAS University of London with a parent who works at the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office publicly berated Chinese students in class over remarks that allegedly belittled the CCP. University professors have also reported the fear, among many Chinese students overseas, of speaking up in class, due to the suspicion that they are being monitored.

Such developments have compelled professors and lecturers to self-censor and avoid discussing topics such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, the Cultural Revolution, or the Tiananmen Massacre in the classroom. Due to their need for foreign students, universities have occasionally proven reluctant to defend professors who alienated Chinese students. A recent study observes: "There is an epidemic of self-censorship at US universities on the subject of China, one that limits debate and funnels students and academics away from topics likely to offend the Chinese Communist Party" (Fish 2018). Besides the need to keep Chinese students coming to a university, self-censorship is also used to ensure the continued operation of Western university campuses in China as well as access to China for academics seeking to conduct fieldwork in the country. Visa denial, a growing problem in recent years, has threatened the livelihood of many academics who will therefore engage in risk avoidance by ignoring certain "controversial" topics.

In a reversal of an earlier promise to ensure academic freedom, in November 2017 the CCP ordered foreign-funded universities in China to establish party units and to grant decision-making powers to party officials (Feng 2017). Some professors have also been accused of acting as "agents of influence for a foreign country" and have allegedly collaborated with Chinese intelligence services and other agencies. In one case, an American professor of Chinese descent at the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore allegedly "used his senior position" in the school "to deliberately and covertly advance the agenda of a foreign country at Singapore's expense." According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the suspect "did this in collaboration with foreign intelligence agents," which amounted "to subversion and foreign interference in Singapore's domestic politics" (Channel NewsAsia 2017). The professor in question denied the allegations.

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Publications and Media

Outside campus, China has used its economic clout to compel journals to censor material that is deemed unacceptable by the CCP. In 2017, Chinese authorities demanded that Cambridge University Press (CUP) remove a total of 315 articles in its journal *China Quarterly* and requested that as many as 1000 e-books be taken off the CUP's Chinese web sites. The issues covered in the articles included the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the Cultural Revolution, Taiwan, and Tibet. Meanwhile, the US-based Association for Asian Studies also confirmed that China had requested the censorship of approximately 100 articles in its *Journal of Asian Studies*, which is also published by CUP. In a statement, CUP (2017) reports: "We

are aware that other publishers have had entire collections of content blocked in China until they have enabled the import agencies to block access to individual articles.” (After facing severe criticism from academics over its acquiescence to Beijing’s demands, CUP reversed its decision; see Connor 2017.) That same year, German-based Springer Nature, the world’s largest academic book publisher, removed as many as 1000 articles in its *Journal of Chinese Political Science* and *International Politics* (Shepherd 2017).

Fears of Chinese retaliation also succeeded in convincing publisher Allen & Unwin to cancel a book contract with Clive Hamilton of Charles Sturt University in Sydney, whose book, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*, investigated China’s growing influence operations in his country (Pearlman 2017b). The book was eventually published by Hardie Grant Books, an independent Australian publisher.

Besides investing billions of dollars to establish a global media presence, China has also relied on media deals and partnerships abroad to influence and “rectify” foreign media coverage of China. Through such deals, as

with Australia’s Fairfax Media, various propagandistic inserts, such as the eight page “China Watch,” prepared by the CCP-linked *China Daily*, have appeared in traditional foreign media (Wen 2016). Moreover, seeking to export its own brand of journalism abroad, since 2014 Chinese universities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have held “training programs” targeting journalists from the developing world. Such exercises are certain to ensure favourable coverage of China once the journalists return to their countries, not to mention the possibility that they will have been indoctrinated by the CCP (Zhou and Zhihao 2016).

The purchase of media outlets in Hong Kong already has had noticeable repercussions on the editorial line of major newspapers.

Pressure on Chinese-language media abroad has also resulted in censorship and the dismissal of journalists and editors who are critical of the CCP. The

purchase of media outlets in Hong Kong already has had noticeable repercussions on the editorial line of major newspapers, including the *South China Morning Post*, which was acquired by Alibaba in 2015 (Lo 2017). In 2018, news emerged that Chinese foreign ministry officials had been present at an editorial meeting of the *South China Morning Post* (Wen 2018). Major Chinese firms with ties to the CCP and that are involved in sharp power activities have also attempted to acquire media conglomerates in the West, such as Time Warner’s Central European Media Enterprises (Lopatka, Muller, and Toonkel 2017). Such acquisitions, if successful, could have a detrimental impact on the independence of the media involved, not to mention censorship on various issues.

Mounting CCP pressure on media abroad has led to the dismissal of Lei Jin, chief editor of *Global Chinese Press*, after he attempted to publish an obituary of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, and of Helen Wang, chief editor of the *Chinese Canadian Post*, for her decision

to publish a piece critical of Michael Chan, a China-born and pro-Beijing then-Liberal Ontario minister (Offman 2015). Wang's dismissal came after complaints from the Chinese consulate and pro-Beijing groups.

In 2016, *Global Chinese Press* also canceled a column by Gao Bingchen after he criticized Foreign Minister Wang Yi over his berating of a Canadian journalist who asked Wang a question about human rights during a visit to Ottawa (Xu 2017). Officials seeking to ingratiate themselves with Chinese authorities or to secure lucrative deals have also been complicit in the silencing of media coverage. In 2015, the Premier of Ontario Kathleen Wynne denied access to Canadian media at three events with Luo Zhijun, party secretary for Jiangsu Province, during a visit to Toronto, reportedly at the request of the CCP (Morrow 2015).

China has also used its investments in media outlets worldwide to censor news and pressure editorial boards to avoid sensitive issues. In September 2018, journalist Azad Essa of South Africa's *Independent Online* saw his "Foreign Affairs" column cancelled after he proposed an article on the persecution of Uyghurs in China. China-Africa Private Development Fund (CADFUND) and China International Television Corporation (CITVC) control 20 percent of the publication (Reporters Without Borders 2018). Reporters Without Borders reports: "In South Africa, Chinese group StarTimes has become the majority shareholder of the satellite television provider Top TV," while in Senegal, "national daily *Le Soleil* distributes *Chinafrique*, which is published by Chinese national magazine *Beijing Review*, without charge."

According to Bloomberg, China has invested nearly €3 billion in equity interests in various media outlets in the past decade (Tartar, Rojanasakul, and Diamond 2018). In Taiwan, pro-Beijing media like the China Times Group, whose owner made his fortune in China, have collaborated with various groups with known ties to political warfare, while engaging in censorship, spreading or amplifying pro-CCP disinformation, and pressuring editorial staff into resignation. In some cases, China has also pressured host governments seeking closer partnerships with Beijing into denying accreditation to journalists who are known critics of the CCP ahead of state visits by the Chinese (Cole 2016c).¹³

While continuing its harassment of foreign correspondents in China, often by refusing to renew visas as well as through intimidation, brief detention, and seizure of computer equipment (Hui 2017), the CCP and Chinese organizations involved in sharp power have also resorted to legal action, or the threat thereof, to intimidate and silence investigative journalists who have sought to expose the nexus between ostensibly legitimate Chinese organizations and those that engage in political warfare. In recent years, Chinese individuals, firms, or organizations have filed defamation lawsuits or taken other (usually frivolous) legal action against journalists in Canada (Ferguson 2015), Australia (Australian Associated Press 2018),¹⁴ and Taiwan (Liberty Times 2018), while several academics and journalists have been threatened with legal action in the US, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, China, and elsewhere. Others, as in New Zealand, have received threatening letters and have suffered break-ins at their home and office (New Zealand Herald 2018).

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A number of journalists, editors, and owners of media critical of the CCP in Hong Kong have also been victims of physical assault, with the suspected involvement of triads operating on Beijing's behalf (Kaiman 2014).¹⁵ In several cases, CCP-linked agencies have pressured critics to "have tea" with them, a well-known form of intimidation, or turned to pro-CCP media to tarnish their targets' reputation via editorials and news articles.¹⁶ Chinese embassies have also used this tactic to discredit investigative journalists, for example, those who have been investigating the kidnapping and arrest of CCP critic Gui Minhai (Forsdick 2018). Media critical of the CCP have also been the targets of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks (Lai 2014).

China has used "lawfare" to impose a cost on journalists and academics who expose its sharp power activities, and often engages in "jurisdictional tourism" to identify countries where the legal system makes it easy to file defamation lawsuits against individuals and/or media. Usually, the aim is to have a critical article deleted. Agencies whose ties to political warfare are exposed by journalists and academics are also known on occasion to have subsequently deleted or altered incriminating information on their own or related web sites.¹⁷

Foreign governments

Revelations have surfaced in recent years that ministers and MPs of Chinese heritage in New Zealand and Canada respectively may have used their positions to influence their government's policies in ways that are favourable to Beijing and could compromise the national interest. This includes National MP Jian Yang, who prior to moving to New Zealand taught at a PLA school (a fact he failed to declare) (Smyth 2017) and the aforementioned Michael Chan in Ontario. Chan filed a \$5 million defamation lawsuit against the *Globe and Mail*, which had run an exposé on "the minister's questionable dealings with China" and whose frequent contacts with China's consul general in Toronto had sparked concerns at the Canadian Security Intelligence

Service. In 2016, then Conservative MP Jason Kenney said of Chan, "I get the impression that he sometimes regards himself as an unofficial ambassador for the People's Republic of China. I don't think I have ever heard Michael Chan assert Canada's interests as against Chinese policy as I've never heard him assert Canadian principles with respect to human rights as it relates to the PRC. So, I think that undermines the Canadian position, which should be a balanced one" (Offman 2016).

Using its vast investment resources and the lure of the Chinese market, China has succeeded in influencing, recruiting, and co-opting "persons of influence," among them retired government officials and members of the armed forces around the world. Although not illegal per se, it is possible that in some cases

China has succeeded in influencing, recruiting, and co-opting "persons of influence."

China's luring of officials occurred while they were still in office by promising them lucrative positions as advisers or board members upon retiring from public service, which would raise serious ethical questions, and in some instances may have led officials to make decisions that did not entirely have the interests of the province or state they represent as their top priority.

Evidence of undue influence and corruption emerged in November 2017 when Chi Ping Patrick Ho, secretary general of the aforementioned China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC) think tank in Hong Kong, was charged by a US court for violating the *Foreign Corrupt Practices Act* by international money laundering and conspiracy.¹⁸ Financed by the CEFC China Energy Company Limited, a Shanghai-based Fortune 500 energy firm, Ho's CEFC had collaborated with various suspected UFW agencies and in recent years had played an important role building China's influence abroad through conferences and possible co-optation, many of them directed at Taiwan and China's claims to the South China Sea.

The Ho case reached all the way to the president of the UN General Assembly. Coincidentally, in 2015 the aforementioned Ye Jianming,¹⁹ chairman of CEFC China Energy Company Limited, was appointed Special Honorary Adviser to UN General Assembly (CEFC China 2015). The same year, as noted earlier, Ye also became an economic adviser to the Czech president. (On its web site, CEFC also claimed it had "partnerships" with a variety of organizations worldwide, among them the Privy Council's Office of Canada and the United Nations Economic and Social Council.) In late 2018, US prosecutors also alleged that Ho had brokered arms transactions with Libya, Qatar and South Sudan via an unnamed intermediary (Lum 2018). Prosecutors also alleged that Ho had offered US\$50,000 as well as a free trip to Hong Kong to John Ashe, the head of the UN General Assembly between 2013-2014, in exchange for cooperation after Ashe stepped down from the position. At this writing, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has refused to call for an internal investigation.

CEFC was a clear example of "dual use" companies.

CEFC was a clear example of "dual use" companies which, while having a legitimate component, also often recycle the revenue generated by their commercial activities to fund sharp power operations. The CEFC case drew global attention to what had hitherto been a little-known energy giant and agent of sharp power, leading to Ye's disappearance and possible arrest in China for "economic crimes" (Lim 2018) and the takeover of CEFC's assets in the Czech Republic by the Chinese state-owned CITIC Group Corporation (Lopatka 2018). For the time being, the controversy may have halted CEFC's inroads into the Czech Republic and elsewhere in Central Europe, although it remains very active in Georgia.

CEFC, which had threatened litigation against a number of journalists and academics worldwide, was exposed, its downfall the result of the very activities it had sought to prevent inquisitive minds from exposing. Like recent revelations in New Zealand and Australia, the CEFC case alerted countries worldwide to the reality of Chinese influence operations in our own backyards and revealed some of the techniques used by the Chinese to infiltrate our societies and institutions.

Diaspora communities and front organizations

The Chinese diaspora abroad has come under pressure from pro-CCP organizations operating in those communities. In a number of cases, individuals from a minority group were punished by pro-CCP elements for participating in, or funding, activities that are seen as “anti-China,” such as the promotion of Taiwan in various activities. In these cases, the targeted individuals saw their businesses boycotted by the Chinese diaspora and their ability to access the Chinese market severely curtailed. As a result, many Taiwan-related activities have failed to receive the support they need to continue.²⁰ More recent arrivals of overseas Chinese have also gradually displaced Chinese communities that had emigrated several decades ago, transforming the communities and often promoting the CCP’s agenda.

Lastly, a plethora of front organizations worldwide have been involved in political warfare activities that serve the CCP’s foreign policy interests, including, but by no means limited to, the “reunification” of Taiwan and China (Xinhua News Agency 2005). These organizations include the Chinese Canadian Alliance for China’s Peaceful Reunification, Peaceful Reunification of China Association of New Zealand, and more. As mentioned in the previous section, many of those operate under the guise of cultural promotion or as business associations and are actively involved in the “management” of overseas Chinese communities.

Other examples of political interference by ostensibly benign “underground organizations” include the Chinese Ryukyu Study Society and Ryukyu Independence Study Association, which are known to have collaborated with pro-unification with Taiwan groups such as the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) and New Party, and have been promoting Okinawan independence and an end to the US military presence there as well opposing “Japanese militarism,” all positions that are part of the CCP’s efforts to expel the US from the Asia-Pacific (Cole 2015a). China also lays territorial claims to the Ryukyus (McCurry 2013). A 2013 editorial in the *Global Times*, a CCP mouthpiece, warned that “if Japan seeks to be a pioneer in sabotaging China’s rise, China can carry out practical input, fostering forces in Okinawa that seek the restoration of the independence of the Ryukyu Chain” (Global Times 2013). It continued: “If Japan, binding itself with the US, tries to threaten China’s future, China should impose threats on the country’s integrity.”

Challenges

How to address the many types of activities described above is a challenge in and of itself. While identifying sharp power activities and the agents involved constitutes the first step in dealing with this problem, an equally challenging element in all this is how democratic societies should respond. At the heart of the problem is the fact that while some of the sharp power involves clearly illegal activity (such as in the Ho bribery case), many other aspects of political warfare take place in the grey areas of our legal-democratic systems – not strictly illegal, and difficult to pin down as traditional foreign espionage. Sharp power activities such as co-optation, censorship, and disinformation are undoubtedly unethical, but our legal systems are ill-equipped to address those. Those activities therefore fall between the cracks in our systems, leaving law enforcement, counterintelligence agencies, and the courts at a loss as to jurisdictions.

Another challenge is the fact that, by often relying on overseas Chinese in our societies, Chinese political warfare exposes journalists, academics, and intelligence officers to accusations of racism, “demonization,” and “red baiting.” This became a problem in Australia after initial reports drew attention to the “China problem” in that country, with the pro-Beijing camp playing that card to discredit the entire enterprise (Ai Jun 2018). There is indeed danger in overreach, which in turn could turn into a “witch hunt” (to use Beijing’s term) and end up alienating entire communities that, in multicultural societies like ours, are vibrant, energetic participants in the national experiment.

Failure to distinguish between those who wittingly participate in political warfare – the illicit and unethical activities that are the object of this report – within our borders and the majority of members of that visible minority will only contribute to divisions and instability which can then be exploited by the CCP. As we fight this Orwellian assault against our societies, we must not, in our response, become Orwellian ourselves, as doing so would only assist China in its efforts to undermine the good functioning of, and our belief in, the democratic institutions that define who we are.

Our legal systems, media, and intellectuals must discern between China’s soft power, which is perfectly legitimate, its economic interests, which as a major power are also expanding and legitimate, and those aspects of Chinese activities abroad that constitute an assault on our values and institutions – the sharp power activities described in this paper. Only by deepening our understanding of the CCP’s ideology and worldview, and by better grasping the mechanisms of influence it uses as a global power bent on rewriting the rules of the international order, can we strike the right balance between the permissibility inherent in our democratic societies and the prophylactics we need to protect our way of life against authoritarian revisionism.

We are only in the beginning phase of understanding the nature and scope of this challenge. In large part this is due to the fact that we have failed to pay enough attention to China over the years, or believed, as many did, that engagement would eventually turn the regime into a more liberal, if not democratic, partner in global affairs. Developments in China under Xi Jinping, where hopes of reform have been reversed by stricter authoritarianism and the extraterritorial application of that model, have put such hopes to rest once and for all. If we are to fashion the right response to that problem, we must first better understand China and the CCP. We can no longer afford to regard it as a distant phenomenon.²¹

We are only in the beginning phase of understanding the nature and scope of this challenge.

Responses and recommendations

The following are a few recommendations that, if adopted, should help democratic societies better address the challenge created by CCP political warfare. It is not an exhaustive list, and some of the solutions have already been implemented by countries that have become more aware of this threat.

- With China becoming a fact of life in our societies, universities and think tanks must develop more rigorous curricula and research programs to ensure that we have sufficiently high-caliber expertise to address the challenges that arise from this new relationship.
- Reduce the grip of pro-CCP board members on think tanks that focus on Asia. Among other things, this would include a more thorough screening of board members and their affiliations to identify potential conflicts of interest, including that of corporations that depend heavily on the Chinese market. Greater diversification of experts and fellows should be considered, and this should be done in a way that reflects Canadian values and interests rather than fears of angering a particular country (e.g., the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada inexplicably has no experts or fellows whose work focuses on Taiwan).
- Update the legal system to address the grey areas and plug blind spots (“illegal” versus “unethical”) that can be exploited by agents of political warfare. Better define the remit of law-enforcement and intelligence agencies to investigate such activities. For example, laws should clearly state that upon retirement, senior government officials should be barred from entering in any remunerated contract with the Chinese state or Chinese companies for a specified duration (2-3 years). Officials who operated in sensitive sectors should be barred outright from employment in China for a minimum of 10 years. Unethical behaviour in office that is deemed to have compromised the national interest should be prosecutable under national security laws. Strengthen laws tackling conflicts of interest among government officials and individuals operating in sensitive sectors.
- Revise the legal system to make it more difficult for authoritarian regimes and their proxies involved in political warfare to sue journalists and academics for defamation. This can be achieved by raising the threshold for defamation and libel, and by imposing stiffer penalties on a plaintiff whose case is deemed to have been frivolous and solely meant to intimidate a journalist or academic. More rigorous rules on legal jurisdiction should be implemented to prevent jurisdiction-shopping by authoritarian regimes like China. Provide legal/financial assistance to intellectuals who are taken to court for investigating such matters. Increase protections against wrongful dismissals of editors and journalists working in Chinese-language media.
- Strengthen foreign-investment screening mechanisms in the media, high-tech, and defence sectors targeted by suspect Chinese entities. Bolster transparency requirements in the private and public sectors over their involvement with suspect Chinese entities. Organizations like the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and others should be mandated with investigating Chinese investments in any company that operates in a sensitive area to identify any potential tie to the Chinese military and/or intelligence apparatus. Investment by Chinese state-owned enterprises should be subject to particularly rigorous screening. Better communication between agencies like CSIS and the

media would help communicate these issues with the public and make it more difficult for the Prime Minister's Office to ignore the Service's recommendations. Create a special foreign-investment commission with enough authority to block investments and takeovers by problematic foreign entities. Impose stiffer penalties for companies that fail to divulge information about Chinese interests in their operations, possibly by making foreign investment by authoritarian non-market economies subject to national security laws.

- Strengthen measures to identify, track, and protect society against disinformation/computational propaganda. Changes to the legal system should also be considered to make prosecution of individuals/entities that knowingly spread authoritarian disinformation possible. This inevitably raises issues of freedom of expression and should be handled with utmost care. A properly composed review commission or prosecutors should be able to demonstrate without doubt that an entity *consciously* intended to spread disinformation that was harmful to the targeted country's security and to its democratic institutions. Penalties should be incremental, starting with warnings and only resulting in prosecution after a certain number of offences.
- Increase cooperation among law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. Initiate outreach with foreign partners, including Taiwan, that have experience dealing with this problem. Expand government communication programs to help educate the public on political warfare. For example, the Five Eyes partners are now sharing intelligence on Chinese influence operations with allies, including Japan. Track 1.5 and Track 2 initiatives between targeted democracies should be ramped up so as to include government and civil society in this dialogue, as Chinese political warfare targets every sector of society. Such dialogue should also touch on disinformation and cybersecurity. The US and Taiwan have done so with the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) bilateral initiative, which other governments in the region are now able to participate in. Better collaboration will help identify agents and practices which have gone unnoticed for far too long.
- Improve outreach to Chinese communities, both for reassurance purposes and to benefit from their knowledge.

About the Author



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Photo courtesy of Huang Chien-Hsien

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Endnotes

- 1 See for example, James Miller, 2014, “Will Canada Ever End Its Demonization of China?” *Star*, November 5.
- 2 See, for example, Michael Martina, 2016, “China Official Says Film ‘The Martian’ Shows Americans Want Space Cooperation,” *Reuters*, April 22.
- 3 Pro-CCP groups and triad members have also physically assaulted activists from Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as members of the Falun Gong. Triads like the Bamboo Union have also occasionally provided extra protection for visiting Chinese officials from the State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) and semi-official Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS). Buddhist organizations, especially Matsu temples, are known to have ties to organized crime and have been used to facilitate contact and possibly money transfers for pro-CCP united front organizations. Some have also been involved, along with groups in Hong Kong, with promoting China’s claims to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets in the East China Sea controlled by Japan.
- 4 In China’s case, those include Falun Gong practitioners, the Hong Kong diaspora, and Chinese rights activists, as well as Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Taiwanese.
- 5 The Proposal Handling Committee; the Economic Affairs Committee; the Demographics, Resources, and Economic Committee; the Education, Science, Culture, Health and Sports Committee; the Social and Legal Affairs Committee; the Ethnic and Religious Affairs; the Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs Committee; the Foreign Affairs Committee; and the Learning and Cultural and Historical Data Committee.
- 6 The China-US Exchange Foundation has funded projects with various think tanks in the US and other activities, such as the Sanya Initiative, which is led by the PLA Political Work Department’s Liaison Bureau – the Chinese military’s leading body for the conduct of political warfare – and the China Association for Friendly International Contact (CAIFC). Through its activities and the funding of various projects in the US, CUSEF is not only shaping perceptions of China but, just as importantly, it is dictating the terms of engagement with China, which can have a detrimental effect on journalistic and academic freedom. Some of the American participants in the Sanya Initiative, which brings together retired US military and PLA officers, include Admiral William A. Owens, General Ronald R. Fogelman, General Raymond T. Odierno, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, and General Charles H. Jacoby, Jr. In some cases, it is possible that participants on the US side are unaware of the sharp power elements involved in such exchanges.
- 7 The analysis necessary to establish a complete picture of the Chinese UFW/political warfare “layers of support” (if a complete picture is indeed possible), is the kind of work that probably can only be carried out by a fully resourced intelligence agency.
- 8 For examples of organizations involved in influence operations that have developed relationships with former senior US officials in the political, intelligence, and energy sectors, see *China Daily*, 2016, “One Belt, One Road Seen as Bilateral Plus,” *China Daily*, December 1 and *China Daily Asia*, 2016, “CEFC Calls for Solidarity of Chinese People,” *China Daily*, September 26.
- 9 Also known as content mills, *content farms* are web sites that pay contributors to produce disinformation, with the aim of such disinformation being picked up by traditional media outlets or spread via social media. In the past year, China has often relied on such sites to target Taiwan.

See J. Michael Cole, 2017, “Taiwan Confirms China’s ‘Black Hand’ Behind Anti-Reform Protests,” *Taiwan Democracy Bulletin* 1, no. 10, July 18.

- 10 See also: Jonathan Pearlman, 2017, “Australia Bans Foreign Donations To Political Parties after China Controversy,” *Telegraph*, December 5.
- 11 See also: J. Michael Cole, 2016, “China Spews Vitriol Over ‘Taiwan Night’ in Ottawa,” *Thinking Taiwan*, April 21.
- 12 See also Doris Liu’s 2017 documentary film, *In the Name of Confucius*.
- 13 See also: Susan Delacourt, 2010, “Harper Helps Hu Keep Critics Away,” *Star*, June 25.
- 14 See also: Aaron Patrick, 2018, “John Garnaut-Chau Chuk Wing Lawsuit a Microcosm of the Chinese Influence Debate,” *Australian Financial Review*, June 12.
- 15 See also: Danny Mok, 2013, “iSun Affairs Publisher Chen Ping Beaten by Baton-Wielding Thugs,” *South China Morning Post*, June 4 and Claire Baldwin, 2015, “Controversial Hong Kong Media Tycoon’s Home Firebombed,” *Reuters*, January 12.
- 16 See for example, China Times, 2017, 吳建國》嚴防外力破壞兩岸, China Times (Taiwan), June 26.
- 17 Examples include the China Institute of Culture Limited (CIOC) and the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC). The author has taken screen shots documenting these cases.
- 18 This multi-million-dollar case also involved an ex-foreign minister of Senegal, a Ugandan foreign minister, Chad’s president, the UN, and oil fields controlled by CPC Corp, Taiwan in Chad (Sealed Complaint, United States v. Ho, No. 17MAG8611 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 16, 2017)). Federal prosecutors “quietly” dismissed charges against Cheikh Gadio, the former Senegalese government official, in September 2018, after he agreed to testify against Ho. See: Alvin Lum and Si Xinqi, 2018, “Co-accused to Testify Against Former Hong Kong Minister Patrick Ho in HK\$22.8 Million Bribery Trial,” *South China Morning Post*, September 18.
- 19 Ye’s involvement in the PLA CAIFC system has accumulated. According to publicly available records (including a company annual report), Ye was deputy chairman of CAIFC Shanghai Branch between 2003–2005, which the company initially denied. See Scott Cendrowski, 2016, “The Unusual Journey of China’s Newest Oil Baron,” *Fortune*, September 28.
- 20 Private conversation with a Taiwanese diplomat posted to a Western country, March 2018.
- 21 For Canadians, a good primer on this is *China and the Age of Rivalry: Highlights from an Academic Outreach Workshop*, a report published in May 2018 by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. The full report, which includes a section on foreign interference in democratic systems, is available online; see the reference list for a hyperlink.



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