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From the Editors

Welcome to the first volume of the Heterodox review. The Heterodox Review is the long-form journal of the Association for Sociopolitical Heterodoxy. Founded in 2019, the Association for Sociopolitical Heterodoxy is a community for scholars seeking to explore interdisciplinary, dissenting analyses of issues in the political and social spheres. We publish two journals, the Iconoclast and the Heterodox Review, and we hold two conferences a year.

Dramatic developments have occurred in both public and academic discourse during the past five years. Sociopolitical differences naturally provoke heated debate: Liberal vs Conservative, Globalist vs Nationalist, Environmentalist vs Capitalist. In recent years, however, the space in which opposing voices can meet to share opinions and debate ideas has narrowed, and ideological opponents have been reduced to shouting at, or trying to do harm to, each other. Within the Academy, and particularly the social sciences, scholars are fearful of uttering, or being associated with, any ideas that could get them into trouble. On campus, the no-platforming of purportedly controversial speakers has restricted students' access to a representative range of intellectual thought, and the creation of 'safe spaces' has reintroduced the type of intellectual segregation scholars once passionately opposed. This trend has been exacerbated by the efforts of tech giants such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to control public expression and regulate who *they* believe should be able to address large public audiences. Since 2016, pro- and anti-Trump factions have been railing against 'fake news.' The result is a quixotic struggle for ownership of truth itself whose main result is the spread of higher levels of political and media disinformation than ever before. The Covid-19 crisis is the latest arena to be exploited by the powerful in formulating unwritten rules determining what can and cannot be said on the news and in the public arena about the virus and the policy response to it (all done in the name of protecting the vulnerable). In this climate, the need for open discourse is more important than ever.

We formed our organization as a modest attempt to push back against these dangerous developments. Predictably, we have had several presenters who were unable to obtain funding to attend our conferences because the word heterodoxy triggered alarm bells among administrators. Others have refused to participate before first clarifying what 'our politics' are, suggesting a willingness to collaborate only with scholars on the 'right' side. While the executive officers would not insult the reader's intelligence by claiming to be apolitical, neither do we hold common political views, and we all welcome opinions from those who sincerely and in good faith question established wisdom or entrenched beliefs. This does not mean that we will accept contributions simply because they are contrarian. While the viewpoints we give voice to may be unorthodox, they must offer empirically supported, consistent analysis of important contemporary social and political issues.

Politics aside, the timing of our founding was inauspicious, to say the least. One of the less important consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the death of in-person academic conferences, and with the popularization of Zoom there is no telling whether the scene will ever return to its former state. We will press on through these difficulties regardless in our mission to provide a modestly sized but healthy forum for free thinkers with good ideas of all political orientations, either by conducting conferences virtually, or by putting less effort into general publicity, and more into inviting specific scholars to join us.

We hope you enjoy our first edition—a collection of papers from our executive officers. For more information, please go to our websites, sociohex.com and iconoclast.jp.

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Tribes of the Internet Age

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ABSTRACT

Marshall McLuhan's provocative aphorism, *the medium is the message*, declares that content is less consequential than the technology through which it is mediated. A great deal of content in the social space is regurgitated from history in superficially new forms, impermanent and soon forgotten (who cares about yesterday's newspaper?). But technologies shape human consciousness, association, and action in radically original ways. According to McLuhan, the development of mass communication technologies in the 20th century marked the beginning of a new tribal age. Contemporary observers bemoaning the corrosive effect of social media on print journalism, or hedge fund managers squeezed from short positions by a viral movement started by an anonymous Reddit poster may well agree with McLuhan. But the implications of McLuhan's ideas run much deeper than they realize: in fact, the joke is on *them*. This paper characterizes contemporary political discourse as a battle between two tribes, the *new wave* and the *old guard*. The new wave is fluent in new communication media, adept at exploiting the affordances they offer for original forms of understanding, expression, and action. It uses irreverent content—memes, trolling, humor, parody, shock tactics—manipulation, and networking, to bewilder and frustrate its luddite opponent. Members of the old guard, by contrast, understand new technology *only in terms of the old*. They see themselves as defenders of order against chaos, protectors of the gilded age of the printed word, and they demand respect. To the new wave this performance is little more than an amateur costume drama played out as simple-minded *semanticism*, 'fact checking' (and worse) of opponents, and appeals to authority. It is a parody of what used to be possible in a Newtonian, reductionist world of linear cause and effect, by people they deem unfit to lick the old masters' boots. An accelerating loss of faith in the ability of the old-guard elite to understand and administer the modern world has generated a desire for strong leadership guided by passion, the transcendent, and shared values—in other words a style of leadership characteristic of tribal societies.

Keywords: Political discourse; tribalism; Marshall McLuhan

Key concepts: figure/ground; spatial association; ages of the media; laws of the media

The medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7).

McLuhan understood the relationship between communication technology and its content through the Gestalt psychology concepts *ground* and *figure*. Print-age man tends to focus on a visually or rhetorically arresting central figure (message)—the “juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 18)—while ignoring the ground (medium). This allows him to navigate everyday life in a logical manner, attending to the most salient matters, and spares him the trouble of making sense of the hidden mechanisms shaping society. In an unchanging world we are as oblivious to the implications of technology as a fish is of water until it is hauled from it, gasping for oxygen. However, times of technological transformation provoke a “wide-eyed awareness in the user, creating a moment of revelation as old and new come into juxtaposition” (Gow, 2011, p. 22), inviting us to look beneath the surface.

McLuhan argued that media manipulate the ratio of our senses, and with it our perception of the world, in different ways. Media operating in the *visual space* transmit information in a *sequential, linear* and *connected* fashion. The visual space is one of detachment, the scientific method, and scholarly or citational erudition (Zingrone & McLuhan, 1997). Acoustic space, meanwhile, transmits information instantaneously and simultaneously, setting up “fields of relations which have an auditory character” (McLuhan, 1957, p. 5) (see Table 1).

Visual		Acoustic
Figure	<--->	Ground
civilized	<--->	tribal
eye	<--->	ear
individual	<--->	group
sequential	<--->	simultaneous
static	<--->	dynamic
linear	<--->	non-linear
figure	<--->	ground
specialism	<--->	holism
send/receive	<--->	network
mechanical	<--->	electrical

Table 1: Two types of spatial association (Adapted from Gow, 2001, p. 75)

Books and Newtonian physics are visual, McLuhan writes, while newspapers and particle physics are acoustic. Modern physics abandoned the specialized visual space of Descartes and Newton, reentering “the subtle auditory space of the non-literate world” (McLuhan, 1962, p. 22). Newspapers are magical institutions whose purpose is to “keep us in a state of perpetual emotion” and to provide us not insights into events, but “merely the thrill of the event.” People do not read newspapers, they “step into them like a warm bath” (McLuhan, 1960, p. 21). The Internet combines all previous modalities and adds more besides, but writ large it is an immersive, acoustic amalgamation of media modalities. Even the written text on the Internet is often speech-like, used for instantaneous interaction in a colloquial manner (Levinson, 2001). It is also hypertextual, incorporating comments and links that lead the participant to other opinions and sources of information. The linearity of language is broken, and the overall effect is associative rather than systematic. Each subsequent piece of information installs itself as an addition to the broader, total view (Doherty, 2014).

Alphabet and print technology biased the sense ratio towards the visual as in *Euclidean space*: linear, flat, straight, uniform, full of connections...As electric media come into play the sense ratio becomes biased to *acoustic space*...a structure whose centre is everywhere and whose margin is nowhere. Visual space permits the idea of closure and acoustic space does not...The world of acoustic space is an arena of rapid interaction where everything is related to everything (Bélanger, 2011, p. 9)

According to McLuhan's historical framework, this new acoustic world hearkens back to an earlier, prehistoric *tribal era*, in which communication was local, immediate, and spontaneous. For the elite, this era came to an end with the invention of the phonetic alphabet in approximately 3000BC. In this *manuscript era*, language became visible for the first time. Communication became increasingly systematic, linear, and asynchronous. Texts could be read repeatedly in private, fostering independent thought. The consequences of the manuscript era included chiefdoms growing into empires, the development of large-scale agriculture and trade, the entrenchment of literate hierarchies, and the development of organized religions with standardized texts (Martin, 2019). The arrival of the *print era* in the 15th century invited increasing numbers of the public into the visual space. The decline of Latin and the growth of vernacular publications made possible national consciousness, the nation state, and nationalism (McLuhan, 1964). Monumental contributions to our understanding of the world by figures such as Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Newton were contingent on the culture of reductionism and specialization made possible by the invention of the printing press. This was the age of the great man with the orderly mind, the tidy desk, and the filing system. But this man at the same time was losing touch with simultaneous modes of awareness and observation (McLuhan, in Zingrane & McLuhan, 1997).

The most recent communication revolution followed the invention of the telegraph in the 19th century. The *electric era* converted the reading public into a mass audience, one that involved everybody in everybody else (McLuhan, 1965). Millions of people sitting in front of the television, were absorbing the modern equivalent of shamanistic lore from authoritative sources in a manner analogous to the tribal systems of tyrannous instruction and control (Zingrane & McLuhan, 1997). Thus, at the end of the 20th century we found ourselves at a juncture similar to that of the Greeks upon the invention of the phonetic alphabet:

The revival of oral culture in our own electronic age now exists in a similar fecund relation with the still powerful written and visual culture...The Greeks went from oral to written...as we are moving from written to oral. They 'ended' in a desert of classified data even as we could now 'end' in a new tribal encyclopedia of auditory incantation (McLuhan, 1969).

The Internet propels us further into acoustic space, towards McLuhan's global village, in which a significant number of people view themselves primarily as members of ideological tribes, dispersed over the Internet, rather than as members of socio-economic classes or nationalities. McLuhan's global village is far from the version taught to school children (environmentally sustainable peace, love and harmony), or the utilitarian Neoliberal vision of free markets and expertise building a better world by dragging the poor into the middle class; it is a place where people get too close, impatient, and savage, a place of arduous interfaces and abrasive situations (McLuhan, 1977). As usual when a new medium swallows an old one, conventional taste protests that vulgarization is occurring (McLuhan, 1964). The pseudo-anonymity of social media, for example, frees members from traditional politeness norms, leading to the expression of extreme sentiments and disparagement of the identities and views of those across the partisan divide (Conover et al, 2011). The virtual and the real world come into conflict because representation rather than sincerity is what counts in online discourse. A journalist can extoll science to generate likes on Twitter while having little knowledge of it; an Internet troll can reap havoc on an online forum while being perfectly polite to his flesh and blood peers. The Internet is making politicians out of an unprecedented number of people, but those belonging to the new wave do not play by the established conventions. They are not trained in the techniques used by professional politicians to negotiate the political swamp by sticking to talking points, flattering the egos of journalists, keeping their private and public positions apart, and adhering to relatively civil discourse norms. For their part, members of the old guard are unwilling to abide by the unwritten rules of the early Internet, most important of all to *never feed the trolls*.

Fighting as a tribe can be enormous fun, yet there is something about the rise of the virtual identity in conjunction with the fading of more traditional social institutions that leaves behind a yearning for former senses of belonging, since human nature does not change—or, if it does, it changes more slowly than technology. McLuhan feared that such crises of identity could lead to “the collective nervous breakdowns of whole societies” (McLuhan, 1969).

McLuhan argued that the best way to study the nature of any new medium is to study its effects on the old “in the manner of Perseus looking in the mirror at Medusa” (McLuhan, 1965). A new medium is not merely an addition to an old one, since it never leaves the old one in peace. It constantly oppresses the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them (McLuhan, 1964). All media, he claimed, have four effects: Amplification, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal. Television, for example, *enhances* shared experience while *obsolescing* detached, individual contemplation, the radio, and kids playing outside; it *retrieves* tribal consciousness; and it *reverses* into parental neglect. A sample of the influences that the Internet has on political behavior, discourse and related phenomena are listed below. Some of these—the proximity of political opinions, the degradation of traditional norms relating to discourse, and changes in social identity—have already been addressed. Those highlighted in bold are given a more detailed analysis in the proceeding section.

What forms of political discourse does the Internet enhance, intensify, make possible or accelerate?

- Immediacy of political discourse and the temptation to participate
- Proximity to the political ideologies of others
- Speed of the news cycle
- Emphasis on spectacle over investigative journalism
- **Access to political information**
- **Emphasis on pragmatic content¹**

What forms of political discourse are pushed aside, or obsolesced?

- Established norms of public decorum
- Established social identities
- **Distinction between the private and public sphere.**
- **Emphasis on semantic content**

What recurrence or retrieval of earlier forms of political discourse are brought into play?

- Tribalism; the tribal leader
- Oral culture; appreciation for rhetoric and polemic over detailed objective analyses.
- The long-form political interview/discussion.

When pushed to the limits of its potential, what forms of political discourse does the Internet flip into?

- Outrage culture; deplatforming
- New forms of propaganda and behavioral control
- State surveillance
- Slacktivism, or empty advocacy

Case study: The crisis of journalism

The print age emphasized semantic meaning over pragmatic meaning. Broadly speaking, thinkers of early and late modernity were expected to put down in writing clearly, and explicitly, the entirety of their message. This expectation is still with us: Semantic-heavy content is considered weighty and factual while content that relies more on pragmatic understanding—hyperbole, rhetoric, memes, humor, parody, ridicule and the like—is viewed as a light-weight distraction. But the visual space in which the old guard purport to operate is under assault by technology operating in acoustic space. Arising from the friction between these two spaces is the

¹ “It’s cold in here” can be understood semantically as an evaluation of room temperature, or pragmatically as a request to for the addressee to close the window.

doubling down of the old guard news media into a sort of faux-visual modality—the costume drama referred to in the abstract—whereby semantic accuracy is worn as a badge of honor. 'Faux,' because true objectivity requires the sincere attempt to represent an increasingly acoustic world *as it is*, whereas the current fashion is merely to remove pragmatic meaning from reporting as and when it suits the interests of one's tribe. Consider the following headline from CBS: "Trump says he thinks 3.4% Corona virus death rate is a 'false number'"² (Watson, 2020). Similar headlines appeared in many contemporary articles. They constitute an accusation that Trump was daring to *defy the experts*. Trump's statement was in fact perfectly orthodox: Since many people infected by the Corona virus are asymptomatic and untested, the death rate is probably lower than reported. He was guilty of no more than 'Trump-speak,' and the headlines were therefore deliberately misleading, despite, at a puerile level, being semantically accurate.

The recent journalistic obsession with fact checking speaks to a desperate obsession with *truth as it used to be*, performed unwittingly as parody. This is what is needed, we are told, to counter the new wave which (since they do not understand it) they presume to be completely detached from truth. The new wave is in fact enjoying itself, freed from the bounds of strict semantic accuracy. The troll, for example, may use a slur to provoke a reaction, rather than to present sincerely held beliefs. This, however, leaves him vulnerable to the old guard, who will apply its own petty semanticism against its enemy through accusations that such activity constitutes prima facie evidence of hate speech or 'misinformation' (recently the term 'disinformation' has been making the rounds). 'It was just a joke' does not fly as a defence to the humorless, because pedantic semanticism disregards pragmatic meaning as and when it wishes. This works both ways: An innocuous headline, *Women's world march to be largest assembly of people with disabilities in US history* (Clarke-Billings, 2017), is the subject of mirth to those who question the sanity of people who would wear pink, knitted vagina hats in public—humor is a much more stinging rebuttal than an editorial and ideally suited for viral distribution via memes.

A more precise definition of these two tribes can now be attempted. The first, the *old guard*, presents itself as defenders of the print age ethos. It believes (or believes that it believes, or pretends to believe) that "logical clarity and narrative sequence are always the index of solid meaning" (Zingrane & McLuhan, 1997, p. 10), and demands that government policy be based on the guidance of qualified specialists—the sine qua non, as they see it, of visual space. It finds uncertainty, chance, incompleteness, and unintended consequences troubling, since they are not easily categorized or modelled. It is ill at ease in an Internet environment in which truth is probed at impressionistically rather than following a logical path from start to finish. It is concerned about fake news and post-truth. Its slogan might be "Facts! Science! Experts!" The second tribe, the *new wave*, doubts the old guard's ability to understand and administer a complex, interconnected world, and rates its diagnoses and predictions about society about as highly as those of fortune tellers. It embraces more enthusiastically the rich confusion of acoustic space; it recognizes that facts can be manipulated and distorted by those who deliver them; it prefers common sense to expertise; and it is temperamentally more sympathetic to McLuhan's view that every age, the print age included, contains within it its own biases. McLuhan, a deeply erudite man of literature, cautioned against making a cult of the scientific mind, and argued that its boasted detachment at times may not amount to very much "besides not choosing to link the significance of one part of its actions to other parts" (McLuhan, 1951, p.108). Following Erasmus and More, who believed rationality required a unified ratio among the senses. McLuhan argued that a richer form of common sense involved "translating one kind of experience of one sense into all other senses and presenting that result as a unified image of the mind" (McLuhan, 1989, p. 25). The slogan of the new wave might be: "*Embrace the chaos!*"

Access to information, the everyman, and the decline of the expert

Journalism largely consists in saying 'Lord Jones is dead' to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive.
G. K. Chesterton

² Empirical examples are drawn from the mainstream media's coverage of Donald Trump simply because they are so abundant. The media is congenitally unable to report on Trump honestly, even when doing so would be damning enough. Despite being nearly eighty years old, Trump is a living embodiment of the acoustic era, and thus the ideal subject for the media costume drama.

What are some of the concrete characteristics of the Internet that threaten the old guard and lead to tribal behavior? Let us deal here with the old guard's chief weapon, the mainstream media. The most obvious problem the Internet poses to the media is the way it democratizes access to information, since this undermines the media's gatekeeping role of reporting information to the public. The Internet makes it easier than ever before to identify spin, partisanship, double standards, hypocrisy, or downright lies. A typical example comes in the form of the following headlines concerning comments Trump made at a rally on February 28, 2020:

CNBC: *Trump calls outbreak a 'hoax,'...*(Clinch, Kopecki & Kemp, 2020)

POLITICO: *Trump rallies his base to treat coronavirus as a 'hoax'* (Cook & Choi, 2020)

WASHINGTON POST columnist Dana Milbank: *Remember this moment: Trump, in South Carolina, just called the coronavirus a 'hoax.'* (Dana Milbank, Twitter)

MEDIA MATTERS: *Fox & Friends agrees with Trump that coronavirus is a "hoax"* (Media Matters, 2020)

The excerpt from the rally 'summarized' by these headlines, streamed live and subsequently made publicly available on Youtube, reads as follows:

We have exposed the far left's corruption and defeated their sinister schemes and let's see what happens in the coming months...Let's watch. Let's just watch. Very dishonest people. Now the Democrats are politicizing the Coronavirus, you know that right? Coronavirus, they're politicizing it...They tried anything...They tried it over and over. They'd been doing it since you got in. It's all turning. They lost. It's all turning. Think of it. Think of it. And this is their new hoax (The Telegraph, 2020).

Clearly the implication that Trump was denying the existence of the Corona virus is a disingenuous smear. Rightly or wrongly, Trump was accusing the Democrats of *politicizing the crisis* in the same way that (he claims) they attempted to remove him from power through politically motivated investigations that by this time he was regularly referring to as the Russia Hoax. To the viewer who watches both the source material and reads the media summaries of it, time and time again the conclusion is clear: *The media is lying to me*. This leads to the degradation of discourse between those who view established media as an increasingly subversive political class with far too much power, and those either maintain faith in the mainstream media, despite its faults, as an important institution, or those who rely on it without recourse to source material. If any proof is needed that we live in an acoustic era, it is that for many people this is irrelevant—the beliefs that Trump thinks the virus is a hoax (and that white supremacists are 'good people') are widely held, evidence be damned. They are best understood as tribal beliefs.

Another consequence of universal access to information is that the public gets to see the less-than-gratifying spectacle of journalists in action. As McCarthy (2020b) notes, almost every question at a presidential press conference in the Trump era was an attack intended to hurt the president: "They ask for speculation, then attack him for speculating. Each one of them wants to catch him in a mistake so the clip of their question will go viral." Writing in the Atlantic, James Fallows (2020) accompanied by other outlets (MSNBC, the Boston Globe, the Nation, Daily Kos) argued that the public's access to presidential conferences should be curtailed:

...given the rising falsehood quotient in what Trump says, and his determination to cut off or divert questioners...cable networks should stop airing these as live spectacles and instead report, afterwards, with clips of things Trump and others said, and whether they were true...In time of crisis, cable-news channels are making the public less informed, and thus increasing public danger, by providing such a convenient platform for lies.

As members of the old guard, media organizations believe that the public needs them to represent and interpret events rather than being allowed to make up its own mind. Unsurprisingly, much of the public feels differently. A recent Gallup poll (McCarthy, 2020a) found that trust in the media's handling of the COVID19 crisis was 19 points lower than Trump's, scoring lowest of nine institutions rated. Polls such as these suggest that the mistrust of the press is bipartisan rather than limited to a single side of the political divide.

The row over Trump's use of Twitter which ultimately led to his banning from the platform can be understood as a conflict between those who wish to translate Trump into visual form for their own purposes

rather than allowing him to interface with the public through 'un-presidential' acoustic communication. Trump, despite his age, is part of the new wave. For years he used New York tabloids, and reality TV to manipulate his public image, and Twitter could almost have been tailor made for him. But printed text was not tailor made for many journalists born in the electric era. They are to the visual space what Don Quixote was to chivalry, minus the lovable innocence. Where Quixote, driven by romantic nostalgia, invented Giants from windmills, the media, driven by far more self-serving and mercenary aims, invents scandals through which they hope to deceive the public into believing that they act purely in their interest.

A second disruptive characteristic of the Internet is to cause private sphere values to infuse the public sphere (Ruotsalainen & Heinonen, 2015), eating away at the right of privacy and the sanctity of the individual (McLuhan, 1969). In the television era, the public began to view politicians not as a separate social class, but as people with homes and families *just like us* (Meyrowitz, 1985). Politicians began to perform for the cameras in a more informal manner befitting the *everyman*. The everyman is a familiar, everyday presence, not a hidden ruler, more a tribal chieftain than a politician (McLuhan, 1969). The press has always collaborated with politicians they view favorably to bolster their image. Many were unaware until after FDR's death that he was wheelchair-bound, and the media were willing to cover up JFK's numerous sexual escapades with White house staffers and movie stars. By the time of Bill Clinton their hand was forced, and in the Internet age nothing is off limits, particularly for its enemies. The change in the press's treatment of politicians is generally ascribed to changing cultural mores, but the nature of communications media, if McLuhan is correct, constitutes a more fundamental driver. The kind of explicit image control of the past is inconceivable in the Internet age, and if it is attempted, it can be easily uncovered and ridiculed.

The denigration of the powerful is not limited to politicians and journalists. Academics and celebrities all find themselves *brought down to size* by the Internet. Virtually everyone in the public eye can now be condemned for some past indiscretion. One particularly alarming manifestation of the dissolution between private and social life is the targeting of people for stating purportedly offensive opinions (i.e. anything not meeting the political correctness norms du jour) a decade or more ago, before such statements were thought to be politically incorrect. The 'rational' old guard views this situation as unsavory but necessary (although it makes them uneasy—the witch hunt inevitably bites them)—more truth is always good; their opponents are more likely to believe in the necessary myth of the greatness of leaders—their leaders, at least—or at least to be more accepting of the compartmentalization of private and public life, past and current beliefs, and the inevitable hypocrisy of the human animal. The acoustic space, unlike the visual space, does not require one to get tied in knots in the face of complexity. The problem is not that the media shows peoples' flaws and vices, but the delight they take in the act of denigration as political partisans. In the past, the costs of tearing down a leader might have been measured against the loss of trust this causes in government, and the opportunity cost of what they could be covering instead. But in tribal warfare in the information age these considerations fly out the window. The modern mainstream media appears to exhibit little consideration of the damage their actions can cause through political polarization, instead acting in the immediate interests of their tribe while pleading commitment to truth-telling.

If you believe the doctors, nothing is wholesome; if you believe the theologians, nothing is innocent; if you believe the soldiers, nothing is safe. They all require to have their strong wind diluted by a very large admixture of commonsense.

Lord Salisbury, letter to Lord Lytton, 15 June 1877.

Finally, it is worth considering the position taken by the two tribes towards experts,³ and the ongoing Corona virus provides a timely opportunity to do so. On one side, we have the "trust in science" position of the old guard; on the other an instinctive mistrust of a class that has been involved in the mistakes as well as the successes of political governance. The genuine expert is someone who is knowledgeable about a particular area,

³ A particular class of experts, not including the experts that *always get things done* (engineers, plumbers, carpenters etc.). First, social scientists, including financial forecasters, political scientists, risk experts, and economists. Taleb (2010) writes that they 'serve as experts while offering the scientific reliability of astrologers.' Second, experts from the hard(er) sciences—epidemiologists are a topical example—when their work is applied to the complexities of the social world. I have addressed this issue elsewhere (Pigott, 2018).

but the credentialled expert class of today, swollen by academic inflation, exhibits an alarming obliviousness to the fact that it is as incapable as it ever was of predicting the future of today's complex societies (and besides, how is one supposed to get likes and reTweets by Tweeting "I don't know"?). Research reported in the *Lancet* (Stuckler et al., 2011) estimated that half a million people died of cancer as an economic consequence of the 2008 crisis. What, then, might be the future consequences of the far more severe, current economic lock-down? What if the virus comes in mutated form and public immunity is too low? The specialist avoids including opportunity costs and unintended consequences in his models, because doing so would make writing papers and speaking authoritatively difficult. To be clear, this addresses a particular class of experts including stockbrokers, psychiatrists, 'intelligence' analysts, and political 'scientists,' financial forecasters, risk experts, and epidemiologists. Together they form a class of experts who include many characterized by Taleb (2018) as the *Intellectual-yet-idiot*. As Davies puts it:

...the status of facts in public debate rises too high. We place expectations on statistics and expert testimony that strains them to breaking point. Rather than sit coolly outside the fray of political argument, facts are now one of the main rhetorical weapons within it (Davies, 2016).

In an acoustic world, common sense can trump expertise. Consider the use of surgical masks to stem the flow of the COVID-19 virus.⁴ It is not immediately obvious why wearing a mask would do anybody harm. Medical professionals wear them, presumably with good reason. Slow motion videos of people sneezing with, and sans mask shows the difference (MHLW, 2009). In that case why not encourage people to wear them *just in case*, as a mass exercise of trial and error? It takes an expert-led technocracy to insist first upon producing numerous articles debating the issue while waiting for the results of large-scale control studies (which are inevitably disputed) in order to give the cautious go-ahead. The view on masks has now flipped completely, but the 'science-based' narrative behind it is unconvincing to many. Hence we are in the ridiculous situation whereby members of the new wave are more likely to oppose their use—but again, this is tribal warfare. The utility of specialists in solving society-wide issues declines with complexity. In a sensibly-scaled society, one that is reasonably self-sufficient, one in which citizens and companies have a couple of months-worth of savings set aside in case of emergency, for example, it would be much safer and wiser to turn over policy to the epidemiologists for a month to tackle the most pressing problem of the moment. But in a fragile, interdependent world, these very same experts can become ideologues playing an oversized, and possibly damaging role in decision-making. Wisdom based on an understanding of civilization and history matters too, but to an old guard clinging to a pastiche of the print age, statistics and flow charts are preferable to hard thinking. Besides, when things go wrong, events can be blamed by political leaders on the experts to whom they abrogated their responsibility to lead (plenty more are waiting to take their place). The ideal new wave leader instead listens to a variety of experts, but also to wise non-experts. He examines his own experience and instincts, adds a dose of common sense, thinks hard about the opportunity costs of a given policy, promotes a vision, throws up a prayer, Tweets about it, and *leads*. Leadership in the acoustic space is art, not science. The acoustic age sees a shift from politicians as expert leaders to politicians as celebrity tribal chiefs. Their fame and status rather than their academic credentials set them apart. The expertise rests in the hands of hidden bureaucrats and the journalists who, being of the old guard, view their right to evaluate and judge the performance of the leaders as their God-given right.

In closing

McLuhan was resented by many intellectuals because he heralded their obsolescence just as they were being touted by the wider culture as the salvation of mankind (Zingrane & McLuhan, 1997). His claim that technology is leading society into a tribal age may ring true to both the old guard and new wave, but they will likely understand it differently, the former with foreboding, the latter with guarded optimism. The new wave has a natural edge in the Internet age, because their ideas speak to those who have found themselves outside the more tightly controlled polite political space of traditional media platforms. But the old guard still has the

⁴ At the time of writing public, media, and political opinion was resolutely against mask use. This has now been airbrushed from history as related by the old guard.

greater institutional power which it uses to pressure new media to do its bidding. Should the new wave gain power, the future is uncertain. Should the old-guard retain it (for now), we are faced with new technological forms of oppression that will be used against the new wave.

Despite the power of McLuhan's ideas, it would be irresponsible to view media technology alone as determining the evolution of society. Nothing inherent in the media technology of the 20th century determined that global capitalism must take the form of an supranational empire that supersedes democratic institutions intended to protect individual freedoms, that governments should be allowed to use this technology to surveil, censor and exploit those they rule (Ruotsalainen & Heinonen, 2015), or that corporations such as Facebook and Twitter should be in the position to determine truth, and to stifle political expression (Wintour, 2020). The use of McLuhanism by fundamentalists to claim that absolutely *everything* is determined by technology would be as unhelpful as the use of Marx, Freud, or the Frankfurt school to claim that everything can be understood in terms of class, sex, or power.

McLuhan's response to accusations of technological determinism, the idea that technologies are the fundamental antecedents of societal conditions and change, is somewhat contradictory. When pressed in interviews McLuhan clearly sided with the ancients (Zingrone & McLuhan, 1997, p. 2). He viewed the TV era with "total personal dislike and dissatisfaction," admitting that "No one could be less enthusiastic about these radical changes than myself." (McLuhan, 1969, p. 34). He reportedly implored his daughter not to let her children watch TV, and stated that "The utmost purity of mind is no defense against bacteria...to resist TV, therefore, one must acquire the antidote of related media like print." (1964, p. 35). In his written work, however, he generally goes only so far as to emphasize the importance of *awareness*. If we pay attention, he argued (one suspects he never expected anyone to pay attention), then nothing is inevitable (McLuhan, 1967). At other times he was more pessimistic still:

Even if I opposed them or thought them disastrous, I couldn't stop them, so why waste my time lamenting? ... I see no possibility of a world-wide Luddite rebellion that will smash all machinery to bits, so we might as well sit back and see what is happening and what will happen to us in a cybernetic world. Resenting a new technology will not halt its progress. (McLuhan, 1969).

The irony of McLuhan (who was of course aware of this irony) is that he worked in academia, wrote books, and was himself very much a product of the print age. But there is a reason that his most famous apothegm is *The media is the message!* and not something along the lines of: *A technological modality may, in the long-term, prove to be more influential than the accumulated content transmitted by this mode.* The former is TV-friendly, it gets people thinking, it confuses them, it inspires debate, it punches one in the gut. It provokes the systematic academic who likes things laid out in exhaustive detail from start to finish. Behind it lies not statistics, computer modeling, or a reliance on experts, but deep erudition, insight, and historical understanding. It is a "return to poetic form...extremely appropriate to the all-at-onceness of electric process" (Zingrone & McLuhan, 1997, p. 4). McLuhan's work consisted of probes and broad categories that left much unsaid, leaving to the audience the responsibility of grappling with the implications of his ideas. It is manifestly *new wave*. As Zingrone and McLuhan (1997) put it:

McLuhan's best thought speaks to us in the language of metaphor. In a scientific and logical universe, this makes him suspect: not only do many of his tenets lie beyond present scientific scrutiny; like any voice that speaks primarily in metaphor, McLuhan lends himself to subjective rather than "objective" understanding (p. 272).

Zingrone and McLuhan⁵ (1997) noted two decades ago that McLuhan's reputation had been in a hiatus, waiting for electronic reality to catch up. In 2021 his wisdom is sorely missed.

⁵ Eric McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan's son.

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Memetic Narratives in Information Warfare: The Danger of Viral Self-Contamination.

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the 2016 US Presidential elections, the issue of ‘fake news’ and disinformation increasingly became a major focus of political analysis. The danger of unreliable information, whether shared by politicians, media outlets, or random individuals through the Internet, is especially severe during times of crisis. However, there is also a danger that the framing of discussion about ‘disinformation’ can itself be used as a tool of manipulation. One way this might occur is by labelling such tactics as a tool of ‘the other’ and obscuring or denying their use by one’s own state. The propagation of disinformation by the state is one aspect of information war, another element of which is the art of propaganda. Within state-driven propaganda, one tactic that has made very effective use of the growth of the Internet is the establishment and dissemination of ‘memetic narratives’, belief structures that shape our understanding of how the world works, which are embedded within and spread among target populations. However, as with the use of viruses as a tool of war, there is a risk that narratives will mutate, growing in strength or scope beyond what was originally intended. One potential danger of using them to present disinformation as being solely, or predominantly, the tools of geopolitical opponents, is that it will lead to a form of self-contamination that compromises a state’s ability to respond to situations of potential international conflict, and thus heighten tension and instability in international affairs.

Keywords: Information warfare, propaganda, memetic narratives, memes.

Introduction

The concept of the meme was first described by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) as a unit of cultural information spread by imitation, encompassing everything capable of being transferred by copied behaviour from one mind to another, whether elements of language, art, science or culture. More recently the term has gained widespread use in reference to a specifically online form of expression. These internet memes have been characterised as, “digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form” and which are then “appropriated, re-coded, and slotted back into the internet infrastructures they came from.” (Nooney & Portwood-Stacer, 2014: 249). Another definition classifies them as “a culturally resonant item easily shared or spread online.” (Zakem et al, 2018, 11) Memes in this context can be images, phrases, or maxims whose strength lies in their popularity and the extent to which they can go viral, which is to say, spread rapidly across the Internet. There is, however, a third use of the term, though this is less widespread than the prior two and generally used in the context of security studies. This is the concept of ‘memetic warfare’, which is the inculcation of narrative beliefs into the minds of a target audience for the purposes of achieving political goals.

This third type, which is the focus of this paper, has a much more recent history as a field of study, and is far less familiar to general audiences. That is not to say, however, that it is a new creation. Information warfare refers to any coordinated, manipulation of information by a state to influence a target, and it is a broad field encompassing a variety of psychological operations (Psy-ops). Propaganda, for example, is designed to induce positive or negative sentiment towards a target. This is what Edward Bernays described as “the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses” (Bernays, 1928/2004, 37). *Narratives* are the ingredients of propaganda—the specific thematic messages that the propagandist seeks to establish. In other forms of propaganda, such as commercial marketing or political campaigning, these narratives would typically aim for localised, short term impact, such as encouragement to buy a certain good, to support or deride a specific politician, or to prioritise a specific issue as a critical concern or an insignificant matter. In memetic warfare they seek to establish more robust narrative frames, i.e. belief structures about the way the world works. These are perspectives of right and wrong, self-identity, one’s values, and one’s place in the world that tend to be shared at a broad and deep level within a host population. In America, at their strongest, these would be such things as the belief that ‘the USA is the land of liberty’ or that ‘the USSR was an evil empire’.

Memetic warfare, therefore, is a branch of information war that seeks to use tools of propaganda to instill narrative beliefs within a target population for political purposes. While this is not a new tactic the increasingly ubiquitous nature of the Internet has fundamentally altered how it is used and the influence that it can exert. While some see its primary threat as lying in its use as a tool of manipulation and subterfuge by hostile states, this paper argues that the primary danger actually arises when populations, and their state organs, become infected by memetic narratives crafted by elements of the same state.

By examining memetic narratives as a tool of information war, this paper shows how the representation of Russia as a uniquely perfidious distributor of disinformation is a heavily biased portrayal which, through the omission of important contextual information, clearly qualifies as a state-sponsored, strategic narrative campaign. It shows the danger that exists from self-contamination caused by uncritical acceptance of such narratives and contends that a failure to balance them with more pragmatic, non-partisan analysis leads to a state of mental inflexibility that curtails the range of responses available in critical situations. Such constrained response patterns encourage political polarisation and the adoption of hardline patterns of brinkmanship and antagonism that can only serve to destabilise international relations and increase the likelihood of interstate conflict.

The Development of Memetic Warfare

In 1993 two analysts at the RAND corporation released a paper titled ‘Cyberwar is coming!’ which offered a prescient look at the increased importance that information control and manipulation would play as a factor of security in the Internet age (Arquilla & Ronfeld, 1993). The specific term memetic warfare, however, was not used until the US election campaign of 2002 in reference to online tactics used by supporters of both Bush and Gore (Boyd, 2002). Then, in 2005 a Major in the US Marine Corps penned a dissertation on the use of memetics as a tool of warfare (Prosser, 2006). His thesis was rooted in Samuel Huntington’s theory of a Clash of Civilisations (1996), specifically concerning the threat of Islamic terrorism and how memetic transfer, in

Dawkins' sense of the word, could be used to promote the spread of Western values in a manner that would reduce the threat from these actors. This weaponised Dawkins concept, attempting to strategically embed memes into an out-group's collective consciousness that would be of benefit to one's in-group.

While there was some initial development of the thematic linkage between memes and warfare (Henson, 2006), memetics as a strategic tool received little attention until almost a decade later. Between 2014 and 2019 memetics began to receive renewed interest in two distinct forms. Some authors looked at the Internet meme itself and the changing nature of online communication and social media as being crucial factors, while others further developed the concept of memetic narratives. The sudden surge of interest from the first group was likely in response to the aftermath of the Arab Spring in which social media was perceived to have played a crucial role in organising and sustaining popular protests (Newsom & Lengel, 2012; Lindsey, 2013; Iskander, 2019). According to this view, it was the individual online actors, the creators of memes and the trolls, who would help shape strategic narratives (Kalev, 2015).

The impact of social media and Internet memes has, however, frequently been exaggerated. The sudden blitzkrieg victory of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq was attributed by some to their deft use of social media to scare the Iraqi forces into desertion and defeat (Singer & Brooking, 2019, 4). In fact, apart from the broad dissatisfaction with the Maliki government, their sudden success could more reasonably be explained by the widespread existence of 'ghost units' among the Iraqi military (units that were on paper at full strength, yet in practice only a skeleton force), the poor infrastructure of the Iraqi military, the lack of training of Iraqi troops, and the strategies used by IS, which included making use of American-made 4x4 trucks to rapidly seize key desert crossroads, as well as inserting fighters covertly into the local populace ahead of major attacks (Abbas & Trombly, 2014; Astore, 2014).

A similar claim was made for the response of the Japanese population to IS capture and execution of two Japanese journalists. By posting online memes which mocked IS, it was claimed that the Japanese had inoculated themselves from the effects of IS terror and "taken control of the narrative" (Zakem et al, 2018, 18). In fact, such memes were shared by a tiny fraction of Japan's Twitter user-base, and it occurred over a one-week period in January 2015, consisting of a mere 70,000 tweets and retweets of the relevant hashtag (Taylor, 2015). It was a minuscule social-media event, seen by far less than 1% of Japanese people, which would have done nothing to influence the nation's responses to IS terror had the group actually carried out attacks on the Japanese mainland.

In political terms, such memes can "act as a common frame, or reference point, for political discussion and action" (Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, & Dobusch, 2018) and play a role in political organisation (Bennett, 2012; Hristova, 2014). The way they do this is direct and simple and, when used in information warfare, they play to emotion and bias, simplifying difficult topics and offering a sense of group identity and cognitive closure (Nemr & Gangware, 2019, 6). There have been attempts to use memes to generate specific narratives, such as creating a view of school shooters as weak and ignominious figures (Pech, 2003), but generating viral spread takes either luck or coordinated effort. Even when memes do go viral there is no evidence to suggest they are capable of significantly influencing behaviour (Zakem et al, 2018, 44). Siegel (2017) compared such memes to the role of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices); difficult to control, unpredictable and best used asymmetrically by small groups fighting against entrenched power. You might also say that they are akin to an individual soldier on the battlefield whose actions may cause sudden, dramatic impact but, without the oversight of generals coordinating a campaign, will have only passing influence on wider affairs.

One examination of recent trends broke down the different factors required for online influence campaigns to have noticeable impact. These included emotional appeal, authenticity, communal identity and inundation (Singer & Brookings, 2019, 154). This last, 'inundation', highlights the fact that a successful influence campaign is unlikely to be an isolated event, or carried out on an individual basis, rather it is likely to be coordinated and operating in multiple forms along multiple vectors. This is the form that memetic narratives take, with Giese defining memetic war as:

Competition over narrative, ideas, and social control in a social-media battlefield...a subset of 'information operations' tailored to social media...the collection and dissemination of information to establish a competitive advantage over an opponent (2015, 71).

They employ 'cognitive weapons', ideas that, according to Thomas (2015, 18), are introduced into a target state's intellectual environment in order to weaken its national defense. Such weapons can as easily be employed within the intellectual environment of one's own state as tool of domestic propaganda.

Active Measures and Unrestricted Warfare

In recent years there has been a concerted push to generate a narrative that frames the use of information warfare as tool of almost exclusively Russian influence. These include both popular books (Watts, 2018; Carlin, 2019; Pomerantsev, 2019; Stengel, 2019) and a variety of reports from academic groups and think tanks (Ajir & Vailliant, 2018; Hindman & Barash, 2018; Mazarr et al., 2019; Nembr & Gangware, 2019). Each of these works suffers from a myopic focus on Russia as the instigator of a new form of information warfare, a view that rejects the possibility that the state is simply employing widely used tactics that represent a steady evolution of the techniques used by intelligence agencies for decades. The intent here is not to counter the arguments of these works and say they are fundamentally wrong about Russia's activities, though there is ample room for future works to examine them for evidence of exaggeration, distortion and equivocation. Rather, it is the manner in which they deliver that message, through one-sided analysis and lack of important contextual information, i.e. manipulation by omission, that can itself become a form of disinformation.

They also serve as an example of the inundation required to establish a strong narrative. A single message, through multiple vectors, repeated often enough, will soon become the accepted wisdom. Where a reader might be hesitant to accept the arguments made by one book or report, when they find numerous authors in the same field agreeing on certain core issues they will be likely to assume that a consensus exists among the 'experts' and, all too often, this trust in expert opinion will override any concerns that such arguments might share common flaws. In this case the primary flaw being the suggestion that Russian information warfare activities represent something outside of the norm.

That they may lie within normal bounds does not, however, mean that the conduct of information warfare has not changed in recent years. The term *hybrid warfare* refers to the concurrent use of conventional and irregular forces, with the latter including such things as terrorist groups, criminal gangs, or other non-state actors (Hoffman, 2007, 8). While several of the aforementioned works make use of this term in reference to Russia, it is actually Western in origin. The Russians, when referring to the same thing, tend to use the terms *nonlinear* or *new generation* warfare, while the Chinese have their own phrase, *unrestricted warfare* (Wither, 2016, 79-80). Each of these refers to the understanding that conflict between major states has become an *ongoing state of affairs*. In other words, if a state is a potential strategic threat to you, you are 'at war' with them, whether openly declared or not. In these undeclared wars all possible tools of influence are at play: military force, diplomacy, economic warfare, currency manipulation, soft power, terrorism, disinformation, etc.

The Russian perspective on this was outlined in a 2013 speech by their current Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, in which he encouraged Russia to respond to the frequently Western-driven changes to modern warfare (Gerasimov, 2013). Despite the fact that it was clearly a call for Russia to belatedly address a threatening geopolitical situation, the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' is frequently claimed to be a new Russian strategy for conducting warfare (McKew, 2017; Roblin, 2018), even though the original creator of the term has since stated that this interpretation was contextually inappropriate (Galeotti, 2018). In Russia's own accounts they repeatedly present themselves as being on the defensive from Western efforts to undermine them, whether through colour revolutions against their own government, of the governments of allied states, through the activities of organisations such as the IMF (Wither, 2016, 80-82; Mazarr, 2019, 58), or through bias in international media that consistently portrays Russia in a negative light (Gray, 2018).

Some have singled out Vladislav Surkov, for many years a close personal advisor to Vladimir Putin, as the author of the Kremlin's information war strategy, his alleged aim being to create confusion by backing a variety of apparently disparate ideological groups, so that no one will know what the true political reality behind the scenes might be. Examples given include offering support for both human rights NGOs and nationalist movements, as well as art festivals and fundamentalist religious groups (Pomerantsev, 2014), in other words, groups whose specific aims might be diametrically opposed.

Surkov's view of politics evolved during the 1980s punk music and avant-garde art scene. He held that modern liberal democracy was a sham, that society was in fact always stage-managed by groups other than the

citizenry. These beliefs were shared with another figure who arose from the same background, the writer and political dissident Eduard Limonov, who stated his aim to be:

...to take ideas and attitudes from avant-garde art and music and use them to try and create a new kind of confrontational politics—one that could break through the fake ideas of western democracy to show how the new bourgeois elites were greedily destroying the Russian state. (Curtis, 2012)

The difference between Limonov and Surkov was, in Curtis' view, that the former believed extremism could shake people out of their political torpor, while the latter adopted the stance that society would always be controlled by undemocratic institutions and that ideological underpinnings were mere window-dressing.

This is a view that can perhaps find practical application more easily in Russian than Western politics. In both the USA and the UK there are clear delineations between two competing strands of politics on the Left and Right. Everything political is framed within the spectrum of these competing views. In contrast, Russia is dominated by Putin's 'United Russia,' a catch-all party that aims to appeal to non-ideological citizens rather than a specific mindset. Of course, there are more politically focused or extreme groups on both the Left and Right of Russian politics but in this context it makes sense to appeal to all sides. On the one hand, the funding of opposing groups is a perfectly commonplace political strategy, with the implied threat that a failure to comply with government desires will see funding for your faction cut while that of your opponents may increase. (Smith, 2014) It also ties firmly into the ancient and long-standing political strategy of 'divide and rule', the concept that a public divided into disparate warring cliques will be much easier to control. Yet, it also represents a fundamental difference in how elements in Russia and the West view politics. In the West the ideological beliefs that separate high-level politicians are presented as representing a fundamental division between different types of person, in other words their political cause is viewed as a core aspect of their identity. In contrast, the Russian Surkovian perspective is that these political trappings are a sham and a mere veneer upon the pragmatic and self-serving trade in power and influence that lies at the heart of politics. While Western sources accuse Surkov of distorting reality, his counterclaim would be that the pretense of Liberal Democracy is actually preventing the people of the West from understanding the true nature of politics.

There is a significant difference in the way that politics works, and is viewed, in Russia and the West. It also suggests a possible arena for the war of narrative ideas, namely the contest between the merits of Western Liberal Democracy or lack thereof. However, this is hardly a new phenomenon and we had decades of similar narrative competition between the USSR and the West over the relative merits of communism and capitalism. When looking at the subject of information warfare it is far more important to ask not what narratives are being promoted, but what tactics are being used to accomplish it. The key factor is not whether Russia *sees* things differently but whether they *do* things differently. In other words, can we honestly or accurately accuse Russia of manipulating elections and disseminating online disinformation in a manner fundamentally different from how such operations are conducted by Western powers?

The West's Capacity for Active Measures

In 2002, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Ron Suskind met with a senior aide in G.W. Bush's White House who explained to him that Suskind was:

"In what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality....That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." (Suskind, 2004)

The USA has always excelled at propaganda. It has a long and distinguished history of successful operations, ranging from the creation of the Committee on Public Information whose aim was to support the American First World War effort (Axelrod, 2009), the demonisation of European and Asian enemies in World War Two (Laurie, 1996), the decades-long domestic and international battle against Communism (Belmonte, 2013), up

to and beyond the Invasion of Iraq (Rampton & Stauber, 2003). In recent years it has begun to place a higher level of focus on the role of the Internet in information dissemination. However, it would be unfair to accuse the USA of employing 'cyber-troops' to wage online warfare without acknowledging that it is just one of 70 countries that an Oxford University study found to be carrying out similar activities, including US allies such as the UK, Australia, Germany, Israel, Italy, South Korea, and Sweden (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019, 4). It is more pertinent to highlight the fact that it is one of the few states to show activity in all five areas of activity (supporting approved views, attacking opposing views, dividing opposing groups, distracting from sensitive topics, and suppressing critical information) listed by the study (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019, 14).

2008 witnessed growing calls for the then Global Strategic Engagement Center to be given a wider purview that would allow it to supervise all US strategic communications, i.e. the sum total of the government's efforts to influence foreign opinion (Holmes, 2008). In 2011 DARPA, the Defense Department's research branch, launched a Strategic Communications program which sought to develop technology that would allow it to detect, track and respond to the spread of memetic ideas and concepts in social media due to a view that "events of strategic as well as tactical importance to our Armed Forces are increasingly taking place in social media space." (Waltzman, 2015) In the same year the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication was established, primarily in order to respond to the online propaganda of enemies such as IS. In 2016 it was replaced by the Global Engagement Center (GEC), whose purpose was to fight perceived propaganda from foreign governments and to "proactively advance fact-based narratives that support the United States allies and interests." (US Congress, 2017) During a speech at the Council of Foreign Relations on the subject of disinformation, Richard Stengel, who in his past role as Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy oversaw the creation of the GEC, stated that "every country creates their own narrative story and, you know, my old job at the State Department was what people used to joke as the 'chief propagandist'". Rather than disavow such an interpretation he went on to say that he felt it was necessary, stating, "I'm not against propaganda, every country does it and they have to do it to their own population." (Elmazzi, 2018)

Meanwhile the coordinator of the GEC announced that their strategy would be to cultivate,

the expertise of the tech and the marketing industries, in Silicon Valley, on Madison Avenue, and in other parts of the country. There exists a wealth of knowledge about marketing and messaging in the private sector that the GEC is leveraging. Moreover, we are using sophisticated data analysis software and technologies to track the reach and effect of that content. (Lumpkin, 2016)

This was understandable given the 2014 announcement of the USA Defense Innovation Initiative and expectations that a key focus for military expansion would be information warfare, including psychological operations, cyber warfare and engagement operations. (McGrath, 2016, 17-18).

It is strange to imagine though, that the US would feel a pressing need to expand its capabilities in these areas, especially given that some consider the US to already possess the ideal resume for information warfare, given its dominance in marketing, data collection, digitisation and cyber-warfare (Libicki, 2017, 61). However, the strategic mentality is, to quote Ronald Reagan, that "we maintain peace through strength. Weakness only invites aggression." (Reagan, 1983) Whether or not peace is a priority, this mindset is one in which being able to successfully fight and win just one major war at a time is considered insufficient. The US aim is to be able to dominate multiple opponents simultaneously (Wood, 2019).

Perhaps because of its intention to fight myriad opponents across multiple arenas, it can be difficult to identify a clear strategic pattern linking US infowar activities. Instead, there are short-term, focused bursts of activity geared towards specific immediate goals such as the \$100 million dollars paid by the Pentagon to the Lincoln Group during the Invasion of Iraq to plant pro-US stories in local media (Mazzetti & Daraghi, 2005, 74), or the Earnest Voice campaign which created fake online accounts to counteract terrorist messaging and manipulate their members (Pomerantsev, 2019, 23). One element of this involved requests from the US military for technology firms to develop "persona management" software that would allow a single person to control a multitude of different online identities (Webster, 2011). Occasionally, their operations even appear to target domestic actors, as allegedly occurred when reporters for USA today found themselves victims of a disinformation campaign while investigating the Pentagon for misuse of its information warfare budget (Korte, 2012). We also see graduates of US infowar programs sometimes moving on to establish private companies in

related fields. This was the case with Johnathon Morgan, a former DARPA researcher and Ryan Fox, ex-NSA, who established the firm New Knowledge. In 2018 they made headlines first as the authors of a Senate report accusing Russia of manipulating the election via social media, and then again when it was revealed that they themselves had carried out this precise type of manipulation to influence an election for the senate in Alabama (Shane and Blinder, 2018).

The US does not, of course, stand alone and its key military alliance, NATO, established its own Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in 2014 to develop and implement similar methods of information warfare, one of its core goals being the analysis of “counter-narrative strategies, (and) narrative development and assessment.” (Stratcom, 2020) The strongest US partner within this framework is the United Kingdom which has long made use of dedicated psychological operations groups such as the 15(UK)POG (Psychological Operations Group), formed after the Persian Gulf War in 1991. In 2014 POG was subsumed into a new, 2000 strong 77th Brigade which focuses on online psy-ops using social media networks. Part of their remit is to find “means of shaping behaviour through the use of dynamic narratives.” (Sengupta, 2015) In a 2018 speech the Chief of UK Defense Staff referred to the unit as the foundation of their “information warfare” efforts, providing them with “the capability to compete in the war of narratives at the tactical level,” something he implied was becoming more important than traditional weapon-systems. In the same speech he emphasised the ‘Russian threat’ and the possibility that, “Russia, I think, could initiate hostilities sooner than we expect.” (Carter, 2018) As part of the need to prepare for such eventualities, the UK military promoted the ‘Rainbow in the Dark’ doctrine, which sought to develop a “full-spectrum defense communications” strategy, with the strong implication that this would include *black ops*. Information warfare operations can be classified as white (openly acknowledged), grey (covert), or black (attributed to other sources). The originator of the doctrine, Steven Jolly, at the time, the UK’s Director of Defense Communications, once stated that, “in some situations the psywarrior has the capability—sanctioned by law—to extend his range of activity into areas closed to his PR counterpart (black operations).” (Richards, 2015, 43)

The revelations of former CIA employee Edward Snowden included details of the capabilities of the National Security Agency (in the USA) and the Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group (in the UK) to conduct such black ops both online and through social media. This included carrying out ‘false flag’ operations, designed to appear as though they had been carried out by others (NBC News, 2014), the application of behavioural science techniques to “discredit, promote distrust, dissuade, deter, delay or disrupt” their targets (Greenwald & Fishman, 2015), and the use of tailor-made software to manipulate websites, social media platforms, and target computers (Miller, 2018).

That such clandestine spying, manipulation, and disinformation operations take place should not be surprising since this is the nature of intelligence work. However, this makes it all the more disingenuous, and dangerous, for any one side to be singled by a complicit media as part of a narrative presenting them as the predominant actor in such affairs. Perhaps we are to imagine that in the particular field of election interference Russia is a special case? The record disagrees, with the USA attempting to influence foreign Presidential elections as many as 81 times between 1946 and 2000, a figure that does not include military coups and regime change operations (Levin, 2019). We have seen that both the USA and the UK have the means to do exactly what they accuse Russia of doing (and more besides) and seem to lack any ethical reluctance to engage in such activities. Why then is there such a lack of context on the issue? Why the focused and persistent campaign to present Russia alone as an aggressive and criminal disseminator of disinformation with the ‘innocent’ West reacting only defensively?

It is this imbalance that is the source of danger. Russia is certainly involved in information warfare and that may represent a threat. However, it is one that we are abundantly aware of and it is evident that many people are focused on responding to this somewhat nebulous, danger. As such, the most pressing question regarding Russia is not whether they engage in disinformation, since the narrative has successfully established a broad belief that they do. Instead, it is far more important to ask to what extent their actions might have been exaggerated. Equally relevant is the need to clarify the extent to which our own states are engaged in similar warfare. What lies have they spread about their political enemies? Which ones have been directed at us? Which ones have we believed? To what extent is our understanding of politics shaped by deliberate efforts to distort our perceptions? Without constant consideration of such questions we effectively cede our critical judgment

to literal keyboard warriors. It is, however, an understandable trade off, relinquishing an onerous and uncomfortable intellectual burden for a comfortable and reassuring emotional crutch.

The Danger of Self-Contamination

One of the strengths of an effective narrative is that it plays to human predispositions. Cognitive dissonance refers to the discomfort felt when faced with two or more mutually contradictory pieces of information. As a general rule we prefer certainty to uncertainty and so we will seek to resolve this discomfort by rejecting one of these pieces of information. Without knowledge, skepticism, and effort, which survives will depend purely upon their memetic strength, their ability to ‘infect’ us with their message, whether through rational or emotional means.

In early 2020 the Covid-19 global pandemic provided a further example of how narratives spread in a memetic fashion, as a variety of differing interpretations of the source and severity of, and suitable responses to the problem competed for public acceptance. There are, in fact, strong similarities to be found in the mechanisms of memetic spread and those of biological contagions. Memes, like viruses, spread from host to host by infection. Like viruses, the damage they cause is dependent on their potency. In the case of memes, this means the strength of its message (emotionally or intellectually), the vectors through which it spreads (who is delivering the message), and the speed with which it is transmitted (dependent upon the format of the message, books for example, providing a slower but deeper influence than the internet).

Like viruses, narratives display what is called *host tropism*, a tendency to infect a specific subsection of a populace. Memetic narratives can be aimed at target audiences based upon their political leanings, race, religion, gender, social class, or profession. There are also ‘super-spreaders’, individuals who have a disproportionate ability to promote infection which, in the case of narratives, would be key political figures, journalists, academics or authors. You might even say that they produce similar forms of defensive response. Viruses have to overcome both intrinsic (passive) and adaptive (active) resistance, as well as face the threat of antiviral measures (external). Narrative memes similarly have to overcome our innate preference for the status quo and inherent skepticism (passive), the application of critical thought and evidence-based analysis (active), and the actions of forces, such as fact-checkers and investigative journalists, that might seek to undermine or destroy their legitimacy (external).

Employed at the state level, the dangers that exist in viral warfare can also be found in the construction and dissemination of narrative memes. They can mutate, growing stronger, infecting the wrong target or transforming into an unexpected form that may not serve the intended purpose. Perhaps the greatest danger is that of self-contamination whereby you lose control over your own side’s belief in the narrative that has been crafted. In virology, the term ‘original antigenic sin’ refers to the host body becoming trapped in an initial pattern of response to infection that prevents it from adapting to changes in the virus’s structure (Francis, 1960). If there is an ‘original memetic sin’, it is when a target population accepts a narrative so deeply and uncritically that, even when the narrative shifts in response to new information, the population is unable to react differently regardless of any external evidence that suggests doing so would be in their better interest.

Prominent journalist John Pilger observed that media consolidation in past decades has led to a decline in investigative journalism which makes people more reliant on official sources (Pilger, 2018). The spread of the Internet has, to some extent, offset this by providing independent and alternative news sources with new audiences and a wider reach. However, this has led, especially since the 2016 US election, to a conflict between the mainstream and alternative media over the nature of fake-news and exactly who the public can trust to inform them. Whichever sources they choose, they face a danger wherein initial beliefs can become deeply embedded. Research has shown that people exposed to disinformation can find it difficult to adjust their beliefs even when the falsehood is revealed to them and the very act of repeating a false narrative reinforces it, which means attempts to debunk it can actually increase its impact (Nemr & Gangware, 10-12). Facebook found that when they labeled news items as “disputed” it actually boosted their spread (Nemr & Gangware, 36). This is because the best narratives are contentious and exaggerated, they have emotional appeal, they tell us things we want to believe because it makes us feel better about ourselves and place the blame elsewhere. When the US Inspector General for Afghanistan evaluated the results of the fifteen-year campaign there, he declared,

There is a disincentive, really, to tell the truth. We have created an incentive to almost require people to lie...when we talk about mendacity, when we talk about lying, it's not just lying about a particular program. It's lying by omissions. It turns out that everything that is bad news has been classified for the last few years. (Whitlock, 2020)

This tendency to avoid facts because they are “bad news” or because they would make us face unpleasant realities is especially difficult when they are linked to institutions in which we have placed our trust and which we rely on for our safety and security.

This is what happens when the official narrative is too strong: it overrides our ability to properly assess the situation on the ground and make important adjustments. The same issues can have tactical as well as strategic impact. During the second siege of Fallujah in 2006 the US military deliberately exaggerated the importance and influence of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, attempting to create a media-friendly figurehead for Al Qaeda in Iraq (Ricks, 2006). They were supported in this endeavour by more than ninety embedded journalists who were pressured to help promote the official narrative or face legal action. The fallout from the successful establishment of this narrative was, in the immediate aftermath, a surge in sectarian violence between Iraq's Sunni and Shia, but also, over the long-term, distortion of the United States' own understanding of Islamist command structures and modus operandi that compromised the military's ability to properly assess the growth of IS a decade later (Caputi, 2015).

A successfully established narrative can take such a strong hold on the consciousness that it can influence even its own creators, as happened with the CIA-invented tales of Manchurian candidates during the 1950's Red Scare that eventually led elements of the agency to create countermeasures against 'brain-washing' techniques that did not actually exist (Boissoneault, 2017). More commonly, the problem occurs when one element of the government is unaware of fabrications generated by others, as in the lies regarding the Gulf of Tonkin that helped lead the US into the Vietnam War, or the WMD lies that did the same in the Invasion of Iraq. More recently, a decade-long narrative that Iran was directly responsible for hundreds of US casualties in Iraq was used to justify the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani (Horton, 2020). This story helped push the US population as a whole, military, diplomatic and civilian, toward hardline positions at a time of extreme geopolitical tension, despite the fact that the entire narrative had been effectively debunked the previous year (Porter, 2019). This is one of the key dangers of a well-crafted narrative, the desire to believe it, or the emotional satisfaction derived from it, can often be a stronger influencing factor than rational assessment. When this happens, the ability to respond to crisis situations can be severely hampered by a blinkered viewpoint that can only see a limited range of all the possible strategic options.

We have seen this happen with the RussiaGate scandal in the USA where a massive storm of media coverage playing upon on strong emotions (the distress felt by a large segment of the US population regarding Trump's victory) led many people to uncritically accept information because it provided a sense of comfort. It was more than two years, involving the repeated promotion and retraction of dozens of disparate claims of malfeasance, before the Mueller investigation announced that it, “did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election activities.” (Taibbi, 2019) Despite this, many who supported the investigation simply refocused their emotional needs in a new direction, namely the UkraineGate scandal and the resulting effort to impeach Trump, which also led to an acquittal on all charges. At the present moment, the new focus for these needs is Trump's handling of the Covid-19 crisis. Whether Donald Trump might actually be guilty of crimes and misdemeanours is completely separate from the fact that there are strong emotional factors that prevent many of those invested in the issue from assessing the relative truth of information presented by both sides; a blinkered view which leaves them open to manipulation by others for political purposes. When this occurs during a true crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, a divisive split among the population, characterised in the USA by emotional rather than rational support for or animosity toward their President, can severely impact the state's ability to unite and pursue the most practically effective course of action. In this manner, efforts to frame Russia as being a uniquely malevolent purveyor of disinformation, and specifically the campaign to link this to direct interference in the 2016 election, have played a significant part in creating deeply held narrative beliefs in segments of American society that now compromise the state's ability to set aside emotional factors and rationally assess critical issues.

Conclusion

The man who coined the term Realpolitik, Ludwig von Rochau, stated that just as the law of gravity governs the physical world, so does the law of power govern the political. Great states are rarely held in check by ethical concerns when it comes to the question of whether or not it is 'wrong' to do something that advances the state's interests. If it advances the interest, it must be good. As such, there are very few tools of politics that one pragmatic state will use and which another will balk at, unless they are restrained from doing so by political controls or public concerns, in which case it becomes an issue of 'cannot' rather than 'would not'. As such, it is important to be cautious, even skeptical, when a pragmatic state such as Russia is portrayed as indulging in information warfare tactics that other pragmatic states, such as the US or UK, present as being unethical.

While it is clear that Russia conducts information warfare, it is equally clear that the USA, UK and other Western states are engaged in similar activity. The fact that this goes unmentioned in numerous recent studies of alleged Russian malfeasance calls into question their political neutrality and their interest in promoting comprehensive understanding of the issue. Given that uncritical public acceptance of such a narrative compromises their ability to rationally analyse anything to do with Russia's relations with the West, it is important that future studies attempt to create a deeper understanding of both the accuracy of claims made against Russia and the extent of Western activity in the field of information warfare.

A powerful narrative is hard to overcome, it taps into deep emotional currents and often achieves viral status through the simplicity of its message and a common need to lay the blame for our personal discontent at the feet of a scapegoat. When this occurs in relation to a specific state, i.e. a simplistic message that paints things in moralistic terms of black and white divides, it is important to retain an element of doubt in regard to what we are told. In other words, when any state, or any individual figure, especially one that we have a proclivity to view with suspicion or animosity, is presented as being a unique source of evil or malicious acts, it is important to remember that our own states have the capacity to manipulate information, and that memetic narratives framing opponents in a negative light are likely to be used by both sides of any political conflict. It is equally important to keep in mind that the key driver of this caution is not a desire to safeguard the reputation or image of such potentially maligned actors, but to ensure that we ourselves are not infected by a cognitive virus that will degrade our ability to assess and respond to matters of import.

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Power and Control in the HKSAR: The CCP does what it can, and Hongkongers suffer what they must

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ABSTRACT

Hong Kong has long been a success story. Under British rule it became one of the Asian Tigers, that group that were the first to successfully develop in the post-WWII era. They became models for others to emulate. For the Chinese Communist Party, however, Hong Kong has always been a symbol of all that it despised. Regardless of that, the CCP planned to both exploit and replicate Hong Kong's success. In this way, Hong Kong was vital to China's later success at economic development. While this paradox was tolerable, the CCP cannot accept continuation of the 'one state, two systems' that it agreed to in the 1980s. The ideology of the CCP is entirely incompatible with liberal democracy. In fact, the CCP recognises that liberal democracy is a threat to its rule. This is the primary lesson that the CCP took from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the PRC is a totalitarian dictatorship, with fragile legitimacy. Its legitimacy comes from its form of nationalism, and from its success at economic development. Its legitimacy is therefore incumbent upon its continued growth as an expansionist state. Likewise, it cannot allow Chinese to enjoy both a higher income as well as individual freedoms protected by the rule of law.

Keywords: *Hong Kong, Chinese Communist Party, democracy, totalitarianism*

2 Introduction

3 For most people in the world, the year 2020 has been extraordinary. In 2019, no-one could have imagined how
 4 our lives would be impacted by COVID-19. Over a million people have died from the disease that originated
 5 in China. Many governments have implemented draconian lockdowns, forcing their citizens to stay in their
 6 homes. On top of the death toll from the virus itself, the human cost has been enormous. The economic impact
 7 of the lockdowns is immense and will probably last much longer than the virus itself. In essence, for the first
 8 time in modern history, many governments around the world have deliberately forced their national economies
 9 into recession. Many once liberal democracies have displayed decidedly totalitarian tendencies. The impact on
 10 those millions of workers who cannot work from home, and do not have safe, secure incomes has been
 11 devastating. It is difficult to know the extent to which things could have been different if governments and
 12 organizations had acted differently. Certainly, the pandemic has sharpened the focus of governments around
 13 the world on the way in which the Chinese government interacts with other states. It is almost universally
 14 recognized that the Chinese government at the very least misled the international community. The Australian
 15 government for example, in April 2020 called for an independent investigation of the causes and spread of the
 16 virus (Probyn, 2020). French President, Emmanuel Macron was another prominent world leader who
 17 questioned China's transparency regarding the crisis (BBC News, 2020a). Before the world was hit by COVID-
 18 19, former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, stated that we were "in the foothills of a Cold War"
 19 (Bloomberg, 2019). Because of COVID-19, there has been a sharp spike in the number of policymakers who
 20 now accept that we are in a New Cold War. This is probably reflected in the opinions of most populations. The
 21 people of Hong Kong, however, knew what was coming. This is not in reference to the pandemic, or the related
 22 lockdowns. The people of Hong Kong have for a long time been expecting a far more serious lockdown of a
 23 different type. Reflecting this, according to a survey carried out by the University of Hong Kong, 71 percent of
 24 Hongkongers do not feel proud about being Chinese. Young Hongkongers especially, have a negative view of
 25 the PRC government (Cheng, 2019). They have known for some time that the Chinese Communist Party did
 26 not intend to keep their promise of 'one country, two systems' for the stipulated period. Whilst they hoped for
 27 the best, back in 1997, many no doubt expected the worst, and some did perhaps plan for what was indeed to
 28 come.

29 This paper shows how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has little choice but to end Hong Kong's
 30 relative autonomy as soon it possibly can. It begins with a brief background to Hong Kong's position vis-à-vis
 31 the mainland. Firstly, there is British colonial rule and the negotiations for its return to Chinese control. These
 32 negotiations essentially laid the legal foundation for what would be a transition period from colonial rule to
 33 full integration with mainland China. Second, there are the burgeoning economic transactions between the
 34 mainland and Hong Kong, that grew after the opening up of China in the early 1980s. This section will include
 35 an examination of the key role Hong Kong played in realizing the CCP's plan to modernize their economy.
 36 Third, there is an outline of the political crisis that triggered enormous protests in 2019, which continued into
 37 2020. The second part of this paper will break down the rationale for the CCP's premature take-over of Hong
 38 Kong. This is therefore an analysis of the CCP worldview, highlighting the incompatibility between this
 39 worldview and the continuation of Hong Kong's special status. We will show that it is inevitable. This
 40 inevitability stems not just from the nature of the current leadership, but also from the ideology of the Chinese
 41 Communist Party itself, as well as from the institutional manifestation of that ideology in the government of
 42 the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is the reason for the title of this paper which is a slight adaptation
 43 of, "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides, p. 236). This famous phrase
 44 from Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, is the most appropriate way to summarize the
 45 mindset of the CCP, and the actions of the PRC.

47 British Colony

48 As a result of the First Opium War, Hong Kong Island was 'given' to the United Kingdom in the 1842 Treaty
 49 of Nanking. According to this treaty, Hong Kong was to become "possessed in perpetuity" by Great Britain
 50 (Article III, Treaty of Nanking, 1843). In 1898, the territory of Hong Kong got larger when Britain got a 99-
 51 year lease for the New Territories. This was the era of Gunboat Diplomacy and Imperialism, in which the "the
 52 strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Thankfully, such behavior by states is (mostly)
 53 long gone. The Chinese government calls treaties of this era 'unequal treaties' because they were forced to sign

54 the treaty by a much stronger power. In essence the Chinese side had no choice and so the treaty was not an
 55 agreement. Recognizing this injustice, the British government agreed to return all of the territory of Hong
 56 Kong when the 99-year lease (for the New territories) ended in 1997. For the CCP, Hong Kong was the final
 57 lingering relic of the Century of Humiliation, that period of foreign domination and national degeneration,
 58 from the mid-19th Century to the mid-20th Century.

59 Some have argued that Hong Kong is an example of how the consequences of colonization are not
 60 uniformly negative. Hong Kong was one of the Asian Tigers, that group of four states that successfully
 61 developed after the 1960s. In 1965, GDP per capita in Hong Kong was \$7,064.¹ With a modern transport
 62 infrastructure, manufacturing developed. However, Hong Kong really developed into a financial and trading
 63 hub. The importance of cultural factors in explaining the relative success of Hong Kong should not be
 64 underestimated, nor should the significance of international structural factors. Nevertheless, it seems
 65 incongruous to ignore the role of the colonial government in such a success story. By 1980, GDP per capita was
 66 \$16,216. By the end of British colonial rule in 1997, it had risen to \$35,327².

67 On the mainland, meanwhile, the CCP was going through its own home-grown national degeneration.
 68 A series of radical ideological policies resulted in millions of deaths. This culminated in the self-destruction
 69 that was the 10-year Cultural Revolution. After the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping began his
 70 programs to modernize China at the end of the 1970s. The programs were titled, *Boluan Fanzheng*, or
 71 ‘eliminating chaos and returning to normal.’ However, Deng Xiaoping’s plans were much more than merely
 72 returning to normal. He planned to move China away from the endless revolution and class conflict of
 73 Maoism/Marxism, and towards modernization and economic development. Hong Kong was to play a key role
 74 in this. A number of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) were established, the primary one being the Shenzhen SEZ
 75 just north of Hong Kong. This was a way to harness the economic expertise of Hong Kong and use it as the
 76 gateway to the world economy. These SEZs would be regulated in a way to attract foreign direct investment,
 77 which would then export to global markets. In terms of industrialization and economic development, Shenzhen
 78 was an enormous success, and provided the evidence needed to initiate Deng Xiaoping’s *Socialism with Chinese*
 79 *characteristics* on a national scale.

81 **Negotiations for return**

82 Deng Xiaoping was also instrumental in negotiations with the British government over the return of Hong
 83 Kong. It seems that the British Prime Minister of the time, Margaret Thatcher had hoped to maintain British
 84 control over Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, which were not included in the 99-year lease that was to expire
 85 in 1997 (Wall Street Journal, 2013). However, Deng Xiaoping would not accept this. He famously told the
 86 British Prime Minister, “I could walk in and take the whole lot this afternoon.” To which, Thatcher replied,
 87 “There is nothing I could do to stop you, but the eyes of the world would now know what China is like”
 88 (Gittings, 1993). In fact, the PRC did have an invasion plan, and it seems that Deng seriously considered taking
 89 Hong Kong by force (Sheridan, 2007). Clearly, the PRC of the 1980s did not yet feel empowered enough to
 90 ignore the norms of international society.

91 In 1984, the British and Chinese government signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, an
 92 international treaty in which both sides agreed to the return of Hong Kong to China. This treaty became Hong
 93 Kong’s Basic Law, which would take effect in 1997 when Hong Kong became the Hong Kong Special
 94 Administration Region (HKSAR), and part of China again. The Joint Declaration is the law that clarifies the
 95 framework of ‘one country, two systems.’ It states that two-systems means, “the current social and economic
 96 systems in Hong Kong will remain unchanged.” Furthermore, “rights and freedoms, including those of the
 97 person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association...” will be protected. Essentially, the PRC was stating
 98 that it would allow Hongkongers to live within a liberal democracy, according to the rule of law that protects
 99 citizens. A final important point is that the Basic Law “will remain unchanged for 50 years”, until 2047. In
 100 essence, there was to be a 50-year transition period. The Joint Declaration was ratified by both sides, becoming
 101 international law. As such, it was registered with the United Nations in 1985 (UN Treaty Series, 1985).

102

¹ International dollars, at 2011 prices, and adjusted for inflation (Our World in Data website).

² Ibid.

103 **Exploit and Replicate**

104 Following the ratification of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the CCP planned to take advantage of the
 105 position of Hong Kong in the world economy. We should say though, that the CCP intended to not just exploit
 106 Hong Kong, they also planned to replicate it. It is indeed ironic that the CCP planned to emulate that which it
 107 also condemned. Under colonial rule, Hong Kong had developed as a trading hub, and it was this role that the
 108 CCP wanted to exploit. In 1998, one year after the take-over, Hong Kong's trade to GDP ratio was 259 percent
 109 (Singapore had a trade to GDP ratio of 269 percent). Hong Kong had long performed the role of an East Asian
 110 *entrepôt*. Hong Kong became important to the Chinese economy for three reasons: as a consumer of Chinese
 111 exports, as an *entrepôt*, and as a facilitator. The *entrepôt* has two functions: the first is re-exports, which count
 112 as part of Hong Kong's trade. The second is trans-shipment, which is not included as part of Hong Kong's trade.
 113 The goods that are re-exported may be repackaged or further manufactured in some way and thereby become
 114 Hong Kong products. The importance of Hong Kong to the industrialization of mainland China in the early
 115 1980s can be understood through examining a breakdown of Chinese exports. While China's total direct world
 116 exports increased from US\$20 billion in 1982 to US\$21 billion in 1984, the total amount of indirect (via Hong
 117 Kong) world exports increased from US\$2.4 billion in 1982 to US\$3.6 billion in 1984. Over this short period,
 118 China's total world exports increased by about 10 percent, while indirect exports, through Hong Kong increased
 119 by about 50 percent (Sung, 1986, p. 85). Alternatively, we can say that the increase in the value of China's
 120 exports (indirect) that went through one place—Hong Kong—was greater than the increase in the total value
 121 of China's exports. In 1985, 10 percent of China's exports were consumed in Hong Kong (making it the second
 122 largest market after Japan). In addition to this, 17 percent of China's total exports were re-exported through
 123 Hong Kong (Sung, 1986, p. 83). It has been estimated that about the same amount was trans-shipped through
 124 Hong Kong. So, perhaps close to 40 percent of China's exports went through Hong Kong in the mid-1980s
 125 (Sung, 1986, p. 83). By 1985, 62 percent of Hong Kong's imports from China were re-exported, which allows
 126 these goods to be classified as Hong Kong goods. In this way, goods from mainland China could get privileged
 127 access to global markets. For the period 1988-1998, 53 percent of Chinese exports were shipped through Hong
 128 Kong. The re-exports accounted for 10 percent of HKs GDP (Sung, 1986, p. 88).

129 Of course, Hong Kong also got a huge benefit from this. Its per capita GDP rose from \$18,897 at the
 130 time of the negotiations with the UK in 1984 to \$47,043 in 2016. Using the same measure, UK per capita GDP
 131 was \$39,162 in 2016. Importantly, the composition of the Hong Kong economy changed because of its changing
 132 relationship with the mainland. For example, in 1980, manufacturing employed 45.9 percent of workers in
 133 Hong Kong. By 1997, just 9.8 percent of workers were employed in manufacturing (Tao and Wong, 2002, p.
 134 2345). In essence, the businesses of Hong Kong had done what many others around the world would later do,
 135 they shifted their manufacturing to the mainland. This was the way in which the CCP would be able to replicate
 136 the success of Hong Kong on the mainland. To get a clearer understanding of the increasing integration of the
 137 two economies, we can look at an example of the institutionalization of this relationship.

139 **Economic Integration**

140 Even though the CCP had promised to maintain two political and social systems, economic integration was
 141 another thing entirely. While we have outlined the critical role played by Hong Kong in the mainland's
 142 economic development prior to 1997, after the handover, economic forces on both sides pushed for more formal
 143 economic integration.

144 In 2003, HKSAR and the PRC signed the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), which is
 145 essentially a bilateral free trade agreement. One of the purposes of the CEPA was to further facilitate, and
 146 prioritize, commercial trade between Hong Kong and the mainland. Following this, the Outward Processing
 147 Arrangement (OPA) became effective in 2005 (Trade and Industry Department, HKSAR, 2005). This agreement
 148 specifically concerns the textile industry. The textile industry is often regarded as crucial to early
 149 industrialization, and this was certainly true in the cases of both Hong Kong and the PRC. Reflecting this, in
 150 1998, outward processing of textiles accounted for 48 percent of Hong Kong exports to China and 83 percent
 151 of Hong Kong imports from China (Feenstra and Hanson, 2004, p. 5). Outward Processing basically means that
 152 some part of the manufacturing process can be subcontracted to a foreign producer. This means that some part
 153 of the process can be done in another country, while the product itself is classified as being produced in the
 154 home country. This is a very common feature of production in the global economy. For example, in the case of

155 the OPA, Hong Kong manufacturers can subcontract subsidiary and finishing processes to mainland factories,
 156 as long as the ‘major transformation’ of the garment takes place in Hong Kong. According to the OPA, any
 157 products exported to China for outward processing must be reimported to Hong Kong within 2 months.
 158 However, importantly, ‘major transformation’ needs to amount to just 10 percent of total cloth processing. Such
 159 outward processing can also obviously be done tariff-free because of the CEPA. The OPA is therefore, the
 160 framework for shifting manufacturing from Hong Kong the mainland.

161 Both the HKSAR government and the PRC were exploiting Hong Kong’s status as a trustworthy
 162 member of the global economy. Through these agreements, economic actors on both sides were taking
 163 advantage of the perception that ‘Made in Hong Kong’ meant certain standards, and hence a certain level of
 164 quality (Wordie, 2020). At the same time, they were exploiting the relatively cheap cost of labor on the
 165 mainland. Importantly too, these official public agreements enabled private actors to bypass the import quotas
 166 that were being initiated in the EU and the US to counter the massive inflow of textiles from the PRC.
 167

168 **Political Integration**

169 In the first few years after the handover of Hong Kong, the CCP had ‘done what it could,’ focusing merely on
 170 increasing economic integration, and allowing Hongkongers to live as if in a liberal democracy. However, it
 171 became increasingly clear that the CCP had much more in mind, and Hongkongers began to realize that they
 172 would likely have to ‘suffer what they must.’ Just twenty years after the handover, in 2017, a spokesman for
 173 China’s foreign ministry alluded to what the CCP planned for Hong Kong. The spokesman stated that the 1984
 174 Sino-British Joint Declaration was “a historical document” that had no “practical significance” (Reuters, 2017).
 175 Furthermore, the spokesman claimed that the law “is not at all binding for the central government’s
 176 management over Hong Kong...” This was despite the stipulation that the ‘one country, two systems’
 177 framework would be preserved until 2047. This is a clear indication that the PRC does not view international
 178 law as being in any way binding. We could postulate that the PRC thinks of international treaties made in the
 179 late-20th century as being similar to those made in the mid-19th century. In this way, the CCP view them as
 180 equally ‘unequal treaties.’

181 In February 2019, the Hong Kong government proposed the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal
 182 Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill (Legco, 2019). It would have created a mechanism
 183 to allow extradition from Hong Kong to Taiwan, and to Macau and mainland China. Ostensibly, it was proposed
 184 in response to the inability of Hong Kong authorities to extradite a criminal who had confessed in Hong Kong
 185 to a crime committed in Taiwan. However, a pro-Beijing party had proposed the Bill, and this, in combination
 186 with heightened public concerns about PRC security forces’ activities in Hong Kong, caused a public outcry
 187 against the proposed legislation. It was what many Hongkongers had feared. The PRC would be able to expand
 188 its judicial system to cover Hong Kong, and the freedoms of speech, expression, association, etc. would be gone.
 189 For many citizens of Hong Kong, this was confirmed in the summer of 2019 when PRC officials expressed
 190 support for the new legislation. Parliamentary discussions and negotiations over the Bill highlighted the
 191 seemingly irreconcilable differences between the pro-Beijing parties and the pro-democracy parties. Public
 192 demonstrations grew in scale, from March through to June. Hundreds of thousands, possibly over a million,
 193 citizens joined these protests (Purbrick, 2019, p. 465). On 4 September, after 13 weeks of protests, HKSAR Chief
 194 Executive Carrie Lam officially promised to withdraw the bill upon the resumption of the legislative session
 195 from its summer recess. On 23 October, Secretary for Security John Lee announced the government’s formal
 196 withdrawal of the bill.

197 The results of the November 2019 district council elections were indisputable. On November 24th, 2.9
 198 million people (71 percent of the electorate) voted for their representatives in all 18 District Councils of Hong
 199 Kong (Feng, 2019). Political parties belonging to the pro-democracy camp won control of 17 of the 18 district
 200 councils. All pro-Beijing parties lost considerable numbers of seats. Regardless of whether such an assertion is
 201 even necessary, it was irrefutable evidence of the desire of the citizens of Hong Kong for democracy, and the
 202 freedoms and protections it provides.

203 In 2020, as COVID-19 spread from mainland China to the rest of the world, the government of Hong
 204 Kong also took its cues from the mainland. In response to the widespread protests, and the election results,
 205 democracy activists were arrested. This included high-profile media figures such as Jimmy Lai, and the 81-
 206 year-old Martin Lee, the founder of the Democratic party and a senior barrister (BBC, 2020b). These two pro-

207 democracy activists were arrested following the creation of a whole new framework for dealing with such
 208 matters. More importantly even than this highly symbolic clampdown on democracy in Hong Kong, the CCP
 209 passed a new law, which made its intentions vis-à-vis Hong Kong crystal clear. In June 2020, as the world was
 210 gripped by its pandemic, the PRC passed the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National
 211 Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. This has since become known simply as the Hong
 212 Kong National Security Law. This law is clearly designed to extend the power of the CCP's national security
 213 apparatus over Hong Kong. It severely restricts transparency and accountability of state apparatus. It weakens
 214 the autonomy of the judicial branch of government, thus also weakening the rule of law. It prohibits anyone
 215 convicted under the law from ever standing for public office. Much of the implementation of the law will be
 216 done in Beijing and not in Hong Kong. To all intents and purposes, it is the imposition of the judicial system of
 217 the PRC on Hong Kong. It was perceived by many to be 'the nail in the coffin' of Hong Kong Democracy
 218 (Howie, 2020).

219 The National Security Law was soon put to work. In addition to the two previously mentioned high-
 220 profile cases, on 30 July 2020, one day before the nomination period ended, 12 opposition candidates were
 221 disqualified from the 2020 Legislative Council election (Yu, 2020). This included incumbent Legislative Council
 222 members and incumbent District Councilors. Its purported justification was undermined by the Chief
 223 Executive of Hong Kong, Carrie Lam's decision to use the Emergency Regulations Ordinance to postpone the
 224 2020 elections for one full year. Whilst the excuse given was COVID-19, it was widely interpreted as an attempt
 225 to prevent a rerun of the 2019 District Council elections.
 226

227 **No choice: The rationale of the CCP**

228 **Early years of CCP rule**

229 In order to understand how the turn of events was 'inevitable', it is necessary to understand the ideological
 230 evolution of the CCP. The Communists took control of most of China in 1949, and Mao Zedong declared the
 231 establishment of the People's Republic on 21 September. This was a considerable success for the Communists,
 232 although it was also, as with all new states, just the start of the State-Building process. The CCP had to establish
 233 control over all its territory and prove itself capable of governing. Governing here means the creation of order
 234 within the territory, as well as progress according to the communist doctrine of Mao Zedong. To this end, the
 235 CCP invaded Tibet in 1950 and soon annexed the territory. However, the CCP was unable to dislodge the
 236 Kuomintang government from their safe haven in Taiwan. Remnants of the Kuomintang also continued to fight
 237 the CCP in the South-west of China, using Burma as a base for operations. In terms of government policy with
 238 the goal of establishing a communist economic system, a key part of this was the continuation of land reform
 239 that had begun prior to 1949, in areas under communist control. As in the Soviet Union, land reform involved
 240 taking land from landlords and rich peasant farmers and redistributing it to previously landless peasants. As
 241 with the case of the Kulaks in the Soviet Union, landowners were designated as class enemies. Again, as in the
 242 Soviet Union, the result was the mass murder of millions of citizens. As a continuation of policies to pursue
 243 communist development, in 1958 the CCP initiated what it called *The Great Leap Forward*, the purpose of
 244 which was to increase agricultural production. The result of this, as with the earlier case of the Soviet Union's
 245 Collectivization, was widespread famine. Again, just as in the Soviet Union, many millions died.
 246

247 Following on from these mammoth tragedies, in 1966 Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution,
 248 which was an extended political and social upheaval that was to last for ten years. It could be seen as an
 249 extended Reign of Terror, although it dwarfed the late-18th century French version in terms of both time period
 250 and carnage. It is almost impossible to know exactly how many Chinese were killed during the Cultural
 251 Revolution. However, it has been reported that one of the most senior military officials of the time, Ye Jianying,
 252 claimed that "20 million people died, 100 million were persecuted" during the Cultural Revolution (Li, 1981,
 253 p. 3).

254 Considering such enormous policy failures, it was not possible through these years of Communist rule
 255 to overturn the 'unequal treaties' and reverse the *Century of Humiliation* (Wang, 2013, p. 399). It would take
 256 the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, and the resulting economic growth, to make the continuation of the
 257 communist project possible.
 258

259 **Communist Ideology**

260 The 1982 Constitution states that China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship. This is
 261 the Chinese version of the Marxist, 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which, in theory, is the combination of the
 262 state's total control over the economy and society, and the working class' total control over the state. In practice,
 263 this means the Communist Party's total control on behalf of the working class. The 1982 Constitution does not
 264 specifically state that the Chinese Communist Party is the party of the state, but this is the reality. The CCP is
 265 the PRC and the PRC is the CCP. One cannot exist without the other. It is difficult to know just how many
 266 party members are 'real' communists, but the CCP has diverged from traditional Marxism-Leninism since the
 267 disasters of the pre-Deng Xiaoping era. However, the rhetoric of the CCP is still heavily flavored with
 268 Communist/Socialist rhetoric. 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics,' and the 'primary stage of socialism,'
 269 merely accept the efficiency of the free market in improving productivity, while keeping a socialist utopia as
 270 the ultimate goal, importantly under the guidance of the CCP. All leaders since Deng Xiaoping have followed
 271 the same line. The latest manifestation of this, *Xi Jinping Thought*, has 14-points, the first of which is "ensuring
 272 Chinese Communist Party leadership over all forms of work in China" (Garrick and Bennet, 2018).

273 Clearly, the PRC does not follow the principles of government, or state-society relations of political
 274 liberalism, which is the political and philosophical foundation of Liberal Democracy. The CCP do not believe
 275 in the concept of the separation of state powers. They do not believe in multiparty democracy, and indeed see
 276 it as antithetical to Communism. We can see this from the party itself. In a 2013 article entitled, "A Comparative
 277 Study of Constitutional Governance and the People's Democratic Regime", Yang Xiaoqing asserts that Socialism
 278 and constitutional governance are mutually exclusive (Creemers, 2013). This is reiterated through the classic
 279 Marxist position that liberal democracy merely serves the interests of the capitalist class. Also, in 2013, a
 280 "Communique on the Current State of the ideological Sphere" was approved by the central leadership of the
 281 CCP and circulated to all party organizations. It gives a clear insight into the CCP's view of liberal democracy.
 282 Section 1 of the document is entitled "Promoting Western Constitutional Democracy: An attempt to undermine
 283 the current leadership and the socialism with Chinese characteristics system of governance". The last part of
 284 this section states that enemies of the CCP want to "use Western constitutional democracy to undermine the
 285 Party's leadership, abolish the People's Democracy, negate our country's constitution as well as our established
 286 system and principles...". There can be no doubt that liberal democracy, and all its component elements are
 287 seen as direct threats to the CCP. There can be no way for the CCP to allow such elements to exist, let alone
 288 flourish in Hong Kong. There can be no way for citizens of the PRC to be allowed to visit Hong Kong and
 289 experience first-hand what life is like for Chinese living in a liberal democracy.

290 Actually, when we say that the CCP are communists, what we really mean is that they are totalitarians,
 291 since communism cannot be implemented without a totalitarian state. However, looking at the recruitment
 292 methods of the CCP, we can see a clear process of targeting the elites. In fact, as argued by Gang Guo,
 293 universities have become the main venue for recruitment (Gang Guo, 2005). In 2010, college students made up
 294 40 percent of new recruits. This is compared to farmers (19 percent) and workers (6 percent). This type of focus
 295 on 'the educated' is paralleled in left-wing political parties of Liberal Democracies too. The CCP is by no means
 296 a political party of the proletariat, a party of the people. It is a party of the elite. It is, in reality, a party of *the*
 297 *bourgeoisie*, dominated by highly educated professionals. This is also a feature of left-wing parties in most
 298 liberal democracies around the world. However, the Party is also akin to a hereditary patriarchy, whereby an
 299 important factor in recruitment is a father's Party membership. As a condition of submission into the Party,
 300 new members must take one year's worth of courses in Party ideology. Finally, it is true that the Party controls
 301 the top positions in society (state, education, SOEs, banking, etc.), and this is despite the veneer of the free
 302 market economy (Dickens, 2014). In this way, Party membership provides opportunities for advancement.

304 **Expansionism**

305 Given that the Communists were the victors of an extended civil war, and considering also that the Communists
 306 had spent a decade fighting Japanese imperialist forces, it is no wonder they have a strong nationalist element
 307 to their political identity. Upon declaring nationhood in October 1949, an important element of the state-
 308 building efforts of the CCP was territorial. While continuing to fight the remnants of Nationalist forces in
 309 Southwest China, the CCP turned their attention to Tibet and what is now Xinjiang. In its early years, the PRC
 310 had border wars with India, and later with Vietnam. The Cultural Revolution considerably weakened the forces

311 available for such efforts, but the successful economic development of China since the 1980s has revived them.
 312 The PRC has expanded dramatically into the South China Sea, building artificial islands on what were once
 313 merely reefs (CFR, 2021). Such expansionism is reminiscent of the colonial period that saw Hong Kong become
 314 a British colony. In this way, we can see that the CCP is pursuing those exact same policies that resulted in its
 315 own *Century of Humiliation*; it is most guilty of that which it criticizes others for.

316

317 **Totalitarian Dictatorship**

318 According to Marxism-Leninism, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is the form of government in which the
 319 proletariat, the workers, hold political power. This is done through the Communist Party. The previous
 320 discussion outlining the membership of the CCP makes it clear that the CCP is not dominated by workers and
 321 farmers, the proletariat. Mao Zedong was indeed a dictator, but the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, put a two-
 322 term (10 year) limit on all key leadership posts. Deng Xiaoping was a key architect of this new constitution,
 323 and he obviously saw the danger of dictatorship. He experienced firsthand the chaos that resulted from the
 324 accumulation of too much power in the hands of one man. All Party General Secretary's since Deng have
 325 followed this term limit. That is until Xi Jinping. Coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping immediately initiated a
 326 seemingly comprehensive anti-corruption campaign. This campaign gained popular support due to the
 327 widespread public perception of systemic corruption within the CCP. It also allowed Xi to consolidate personal
 328 power within the Party. We can see this in the official naming of the Central Committee of the CCP. Between
 329 2012 and 2016, it was referred to as "CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as General Secretary".
 330 However, after 2016, it was referred to as "CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core"
 331 (People's Daily Online, 2018). Xi had been elevated to the heights of status previously held only by Mao and
 332 Deng. The culmination of this consolidation was the March 2018 amendment of the 1982 constitution to allow
 333 Xi to remain in power beyond 2022. To all intents and purposes, Xi Jinping is now a dictator comparable to
 334 Mao and Stalin, far more powerful even than Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's modernization. Given
 335 that Communism can only be implemented with a one-party totalitarian state, it is inevitable that there is a
 336 tendency towards dictatorship. Just as there always exists a propensity towards oligarchy within all social
 337 institutions, there is always a propensity towards dictatorship within all oligarchical social institutions. Claude
 338 Lefort had another explanation for this phenomenon, which he referred to as a general paradox within the
 339 ideology of modernity (Yurchak, 2005, p.10). There is a fundamental paradox between the ideological
 340 enunciations, or rhetoric of the Party, and actual ideological rule (this is manifest in the practical concerns of
 341 the modern state's political authority). This paradox can be overcome with an actual dictator. In reference to
 342 Stalin and the Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak argues that to overcome this paradox 'a master' is necessary. The
 343 master, who stands outside or above political discourse, is the embodiment of the ideology. In this way, the
 344 objective truth of the ideology appears through the master (Yurchak, 2005, p. 13). Therefore, a dictator is always
 345 and everywhere the only way to implement Communist rule. The dangers of dictatorial rule must therefore be
 346 accepted as a necessary cost which must be borne.

347

348 **The lesson from the Collapse of Soviet Union**

349 It seems likely that the leadership of the CCP are fully aware of the fragility of their hold on power, and that
 350 this is why they have accepted Xi Jinping as dictator. Leaders before Xi had called for continued reform and
 351 liberalization. However, many leading CCP officials, probably including Xi himself, blame the collapse of the
 352 Soviet Union on one man, Mikhail Gorbachev. He was referred to as a 'revisionist' (Waldron, 2009). This is
 353 part of the CCP narrative that saw nothing intrinsically wrong with the Soviet system itself, but explains the
 354 collapse of the Soviet Union as being caused by failures within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).
 355 The CCP see the collapse of the Soviet Union as being caused by the abandonment of Marxism/Leninism by
 356 the CPSU (Waldron, 2009). According to this argument, it was the political reforms initiated by the CPSU itself
 357 that caused its own collapse. In this way, it was a kind of collective suicide. The CCP will never allow itself to
 358 make the same mistake.

359 The Soviet Union provides a good example not only for the members of the CCP, but also for anyone
 360 wishing to understand the collective mentality of the CCP and its resulting policies and actions. However, far
 361 more importantly, life in the Soviet Union also provides an insight into life in Communist China. Life under
 362 Totalitarianism can be succinctly summarized with the following quote from the famous Soviet dissident, Natan

363 Sharansky, “I was a loyal Soviet citizen until the age of 20. What it meant to be a loyal citizen is to say what
 364 you are supposed to say, to read what you are permitted to read, to vote the way you are told to vote and, at
 365 the same time, to know that all this is a lie” (Wharton, 2013). As the previous quote implies, everyday life under
 366 totalitarianism involves complete and total acceptance and adherence to the Party line, whilst at the same time
 367 knowing that it is all a lie. Yurchak calls this an example of *hypernormalization*, a condition in which the
 368 language of the Party ideology becomes unhinged from reality (Yurchak, 2005, p. 50). Under such conditions,
 369 it is inevitable that citizens understand that they are lies but feel that they have no choice but to utter them.
 370 Yurchak shows how, even after the initiation of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985, many people still thought
 371 nothing would change. In fact, as we all know, the Soviet Union collapsed just six years later. It must be the
 372 case that the CCP are very aware and fearful of this condition of hypernormalization. However, there is no
 373 other option for them. The contradictions inherent within Communist Totalitarianism make
 374 hypernormalization the inevitable outcome. A simple manifestation of this is the CCP order to use ‘comrade’
 375 to refer to all senior Party officials. However, it seems to be the widely held perception that it would be political
 376 suicide to call any senior Party official ‘comrade’. In the words of one cadre, “In present-day official circles,
 377 [even if you] beat me to death, I would still not dare to address any leader as ‘comrade’” (Kohlenberg, 2017).
 378 Regardless of the reality, the ideology of Communism is built on the lie of equality between all Party members,
 379 and this stipulates the official use of ‘comrade’.

380

381 **The fragility of CCP legitimacy**

382 Hong Kong highlights the fragility inherent in the hypernormalization of totalitarian communism. For the
 383 CCP, it is a danger equivalent to that of *perestroika* and *glasnost* to the CPSU. Hong Kong is the reality that
 384 vividly shows the paradox inherent to communist ideology and CCP rule. It has often been proposed that the
 385 legitimacy of the CCP comes from its success at economic development (Chu, 2013). It is indeed true that the
 386 share of the Chinese population living in extreme poverty³ has been reduced from 66 percent in 1990 to less
 387 than one percent in 2015 (Our World in Data). Using the national poverty line, the percentage of people living
 388 in poverty has been reduced from 17 percent in 2010 to 3 percent in 2017 (China Power). While GDP per capita
 389 rose just \$757 in 1950 to \$1384 in 1976, the year of Mao’s death, it had risen to \$12,320 by 2016 (Our World in
 390 Data). According to this perspective, the dramatic increase in living standards, and the recognition that the
 391 CCP has been the manager of this underpins public loyalty to the Party. Certainly, this is a discourse encouraged
 392 by the Party. However, it has also been argued that support for the CCP among the population is not dependent
 393 on the success of economic development. In fact, levels of support and trust in the Party decline as prosperity
 394 rises (Dickson, 2014). It surely must be the case that the CCP are aware of this contradiction, and if we assume
 395 that they are, then we can see that the example of Chinese living successfully under a liberal democratic
 396 government, provides a potentially dangerous alternative to CCP rule. The CCP cannot allow such a situation
 397 on its border. We can again use the Athenian argument against leniency towards the Melians that would
 398 encourage “subjects smarting under the yoke, who would be the most likely to take a rash step and lead
 399 themselves and us into obvious danger” (Thucydides, p.237). In this way, the Melians are the Hongkongers,
 400 and Athenian leniency would be the CCP allowing the autonomy of Hong Kong to continue. It would
 401 encourage citizens in the mainland “smarting under the yoke” of CCP rule to “take a rash step” such as at
 402 Tiananmen Square in 1989. This would “lead themselves (citizens of the PRC) and us (the CCP) into obvious
 403 danger”.

404

405 **Concluding Inferences**

406 We have shown how the CCP have no choice but to end Hong Kong’s relative autonomy under ‘one-state,
 407 two-systems’. It is a national security issue of the highest priority. For the CCP, international law is irrelevant,
 408 and for a totalitarian state, this is even more so with regards to issues of national security. The state building
 409 efforts, combined with CCP nationalism, also provide a powerful incentive. This incentive is further justified
 410 by the need to overcome the national grievance that remains from the Century of Humiliation. Of course, we
 411 could state that this is likely merely an excuse, although it may equally be the case that the CCP is seeking
 412 revenge for past grievances. We could then postulate the question of what better revenge than to inflict pain

³ Extreme poverty is defined as living with less than 1.90\$ per day (in 2011 International Dollars).

413 on a symbol of that grievance? Of perhaps equal importance in incentivizing CCP policy towards Hong Kong
 414 is the direct danger of having a far more prosperous state of Chinese living next door in a liberal democracy.
 415 Nothing highlights the paradox of CCP rule more than this. It is quite simply the overwhelming and irrefutable
 416 evidence that ‘the grass is indeed greener on the other side’.

417 Beyond doubt, the CCP is behaving as the colonial powers once did. It is a spectacular irony that the
 418 PRC behaves in the same manner as those states that the CCP claims were responsible for inflicting on China
 419 the Century of Humiliation. It is of equally spectacular irony that the CCP regard an International Treaty
 420 between itself and Britain signed in the 1980s, in the same manner in which it regards the ‘unequal treaties’ of
 421 the 19th Century. This would seem to indicate that the CCP still function according to the norms of that era.
 422 These norms can be best summarized by, “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”.
 423 The danger for the international community is that such behavior by states was one of the primary factors that
 424 caused World War One.

425 Finally, we can infer from CCP policy towards Hong Kong, that the CCP are prepared to bear the cost
 426 of such actions. It cannot be the case that the CCP are ignorant to the potentially negative impact of their
 427 actions on the peoples and the economy of Hong Kong. The CCP used Hong Kong as a boost for its own
 428 industrialization. We could perhaps postulate that China’s enormous success at industrialization would have
 429 been substantially more difficult had it not been able to exploit and replicate Hong Kong. This means that we
 430 should also say that Hong Kong was a necessary component of China’s success, since Hong Kong and its people,
 431 enabled the economic development of the PRC. Regardless of this, we must conclude that the CCP no longer
 432 needs Hong Kong, and are therefore prepared to destroy it, if that is necessary to maintain CCP rule over the
 433 PRC.
 434

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