



## The CCP's Pursuit of Discourse Dominance

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Chairman Gallagher, Ranking Member Raja Krishnamoorthi, and members of the Select Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and testify on this important topic vital to our democratic system of governance.

The term “discourse power” for the global community is what the term “propaganda” is for China domestically. With total control of information and totalitarian censorship of all expressions within China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) practices propaganda at all levels of Chinese society. Within the People’s Republic of China (PRC), propaganda is an essential mechanism for normal governance. For communists, propaganda is not a morally reprehensible act characterized by a false representation of truth. Rather, propaganda is a necessary virtue, a positive and crucial practice of governance.

Globally, however, propaganda is an abhorrent concept involving mendacity and indoctrination. Therefore, realizing this, the CCP needs a new siren call for international propaganda, now sugarcoated as “discourse power” or 话语权.

Let me first say a few words about nomenclature. In my view, “discourse power” is not an accurate translation of the term. A language student might take its literal meaning as “the right to speak.” If you read the French rebel philosopher Michel Foucault, you might render it “the power of discourse.”

But if you understand the original intent of the CCP supreme leaders, especially recent ones such as Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, you will know that the term is part of the CCP’s ambitious international propaganda campaign known as the “Telling the China Story Well Initiative.” This initiative has taken a gigantic leap since the 2017 19<sup>th</sup> CCP Party Congress, where Xi Jinping vowed to break what he termed Western control of international dialogue on China. What the CCP has intended since the beginning is not just to tell its narrative to the world, but to have its narrative prevail as the only global discourse on the CCP, just like how its domestic propaganda works.

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\* Views here are my own, not reflective of official positions of any organizations I am associated with. This written testimony incorporates part of my published article on the same topic for the Hoover Institution, <https://www.hoover.org/research/beijings-woke-propaganda-war-america>

Therefore, the more proper translation of the term 话语权 should be “discourse dominance” which is true to the letter and spirit of the Marxist-Leninist theory of propaganda. In this testimony, I shall use this term, discourse dominance, and the CCP’s foreign propaganda interchangeably.

The CCP’s domestic propaganda campaign against its own people is blunt and direct. It is achieved through absolute monopoly and total control of all news and information platforms, complete censorship, and coerced, systemic indoctrination. Outside information is kept out behind the CCP’s Great Firewall.

The Party’s foreign propaganda is more sophisticated, and chillingly effective. Leveraging the weakness and gullibility of Western elites, as well as the vulnerability of open societies, the CCP’s massive overseas propaganda campaigns to achieve discourse dominance can be delineated into four general categories: disinformation, elite capture, coerced self-censorship, and brainwashing.

**First**, disinformation. The CCP’s disinformation campaign in the West has been massive. And the propagandists determined to undermine America’s confidence are aided and abetted by our country’s growing self-denunciation, from opinion-setting editorial boards to opinion-forming classrooms that see only vice in the world’s oldest continuous democracy but ignore the systemic and inherent goodness at its core.

The scale of this effort is hard to fathom. In 2020 alone, then Twitter, now X—a social media platform banned inside China, along with all other Western social media apps—was forced to shut down close to 200,000 accounts linked to the CCP’s state-sponsored disinformation campaign. One since-removed tweet, from the Chinese embassy in Washington, described Xinjiang as a place of “emancipated women” who are no longer “baby-making machines,” a nauseating euphemism for genocide.

While the CCP conducts wholesale racial genocide against its ethnic and religious minorities, Beijing denounces America’s so-called “systemic racism” using those same tools. The government of the People’s Republic of China’s spokesperson, Hua Chunying, on more than one occasion led her anti-American Twitter tweets with “I can’t breathe” in the aftermath of the tragic death of George Floyd. Hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens, especially ethnic Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Kazakhs in the regime’s massive indoctrination and labor camp systems, are unavailable to comment, on Twitter or any other platform.

Today’s technologies have emboldened propagandists further. In comparison to their cohorts’ and predecessors’ propaganda, the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts have been greatly enabled by advanced technologies, becoming much more systemic, sophisticated, and dangerously effective. With Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, the CCP spreads false information that the PRC is an ordinary democracy with guaranteed individual freedoms.

With its dominant market share in social media in the West, TikTok is a particularly powerful tool for the CCP to maximize their chaos narrative of American democracy, and tout China as a guarantor of peace and stability. Indoctrination always starts with the dominance of information dissemination tools. Because they have no other alternative sources of information domestically, millions of Chinese youths have been brainwashed by the CCP into thinking all Uyghurs are terrorists. The inherent danger of powerful internet tools like TikTok in the West is that at some point, the CCP's control or access to TikTok will ensure that millions of free young people think western democracy is inferior to the CCP's model of governance.

And this is already happening. The most breathtaking example in this regard is the recent episode of top Chinese diplomats lecturing their American counterparts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, in a meeting in March 2021 in Alaska. In a long, uninterrupted disinformation diatribe they expounded the advantages of "the Chinese democracy" over American democracy.

**Second**, elite capture, euphemistically referred to as the United Front Work, has long been a seasoned practice of the CCP in their efforts to conduct propaganda in the West.

On July 13, 1990, the Vice-Consul of Culture, Propaganda, and Exchange in the PRC's San Francisco Consulate General, who defected to the U.S. in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Massacre, told a Berkeley, California audience about how easy it was for the CCP propagandists, like himself, to capture American intellectual and social elites to function as the CCP's proxies in the U.S.:

*"The tactic Chinese propagandists use is not really very complicated. It is simple. It is always to work on your ego, on your business interests, on your curiosity, and especially with the Chinese students (in the U.S.), on your patriotism."*

The former CCP propagandist further tellingly disclosed that:

*"In the early 1970s when Nixon visited China, his visit was followed by a swarm of China experts from Hong Kong and the West. Surprisingly, these people were the easiest targets of all because they were self-important. They thought they knew everything about China."*

Indeed, since Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the American elite's ego, business interests, and curiosity about Chinese culture have supplied fertile ground and ample opportunities for the CCP to create a permanent class of CCP propaganda proxies in the United States.

But elite capture goes further. Former senior government officials, including cabinet-level figures, routinely defend the CCP's murderous acts, including the Tiananmen Massacre and other egregious human rights violations. Some of these former officials have even become registered agents for the Beijing regime and its CCP-controlled business interests in the U.S. Many of our leading universities and their talented professors are often co-opted by the CCP to voice Beijing's views in the U.S., which they masquerade as research and objective surveys.

Not every captured elite is a hapless useful idiot. Yet, a significant portion of America's intellectual and political elites share the responsibility for perpetrating key CCP propaganda agendas, including misleading the American public by minimizing the degree to which the PRC is still a country ruled by a Marxist-Leninist communist party.

The manipulation of language is a prime example of this endeavor. Few people in the United States refer to the Chinese supreme leader by his real title, and the only one that matters: General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, who is without an exception a die-hard communist ideologue in command of a ruthless Leninist Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Instead, most Americans have almost universally, and falsely, rebranded him as "president" of China, a much more democratic-sounding but meaningless honorific.

The CCP uses such doublespeak to sell the American people a false ethos of modern China as a justly aggrieved nation, with its 1.4 billion diligent, CCP-loving people, being led by enlightened leaders working toward a historic comeback after a "century of humiliation." Too many of our own intellectual and political elites have helped perpetuate this falsehood, and too often they hold a paternalistic view of the Chinese people as a monolithic block burdened by its 5,000 years of history.

The real history of the last century is very different from the Party's lies. The fact is, ever since the 1919 May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, the real guiding ethos of modern China has been one of striving toward universal values such as democracy and constitutional rule, and fighting against tyranny and dictatorship; and the CCP does not represent the 1.4 Chinese people—if it did, it would allow them to vote and stop gagging them.

**Third,** beyond disinformation and elite capture, the CCP's propaganda is effective in the U.S. because of the widespread self-censorship of our key cultural institutions out of fear of the CCP.

Hollywood and the National Basketball Association are the most obvious examples. Maverick's jacket in the upcoming *Top Gun* sequel will be missing a patch with the flag of Taiwan. The villains in the *Red Dawn* sequel were to be Chinese military officers, but the insignias were swapped with the North Korean flag—it doesn't matter much to the bottom line if Pyongyang bans a studio's film. The Houston Rockets—a basketball team close to Chinese citizens' hearts because of Yao Ming—also got into hot water when their General Manager retweeted in support of Hong Kong pro-democracy protests. He was forced to apologize, and few figures from the NBA have spoken up since.

**The fourth,** and most severe form of communist propaganda today is brainwashing.

The CCP-controlled Confucius Institutes and the affiliated Confucius Classrooms have penetrated hundreds of college campuses and K-12 schools in the United States alone. Rather than serve as common forums to foster competition of ideas focused on the teaching of Chinese language and culture, they have introduced to American youths the principle and practice of unanimity of opinions and self-censorship on topics considered ideologically incorrect by a communist dictatorship thousands of miles away, --topics such as Tiananmen Massacre, the

Dalai Lama, and Falun Gong. They potentially make learning environments on free soil the same as on the CCP-controlled territories.

The effects of this brainwashing are shown in the American social movements' adoption of the CCP's key concepts and nomenclature. The Black Panthers got their initial ideological grounding and many of its political slogans from *Chairman Mao's Quotations*, given to them for free in Oakland, California, by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. Today's common use of the word "progressive" by a significant portion of American body politic traces its intellectual origin straight to the Marxist-Leninist "dialectical" categorization of people into reactionaries and progressives. It is not from the modern legacy of the American Progressive Movement represented by William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Robert M. La Follette, and Henry A. Wallace.

Beijing's newfound power in the twenty-first century and the emerging technologies at its disposal make the problem of communist propaganda in our time urgent. But the most brutal and disturbing brainwashing campaign in modern history took place in the early 1940s in the CCP enclave of Yenan in North China, and was known as the Yenan Rectification. The primary method of Mao's brainwashing in Yenan was "consciousness raising," which has become, since the 1960s, the main strategy of many Western social movements, especially the radical arm of the feminist movement.

The true origin and meaning of "consciousness raising" was perhaps best described in the 1978 book *In Search of History* by Theodore White, the wartime China correspondent of *Time* magazine. He wrote about his 1941 interview with one of Mao's right-hand men, a senior CCP military commander, and detailed how Mao's "consciousness raising" percolated into American political life:

*"The men who came in from the field, he said...had to have their minds washed out, had to be remolded in ideology...a full year was necessary to 'remold the brain' before they could go on to study military matters, or economics, or heal, or administration. His interpreter and I searched for a word better than 'brain remolding' and finally the interpreter came up with the phrase 'raising the level of consciousness.' This was the first time I heard that phrase, which, over the years, moved out of China and on to the streets and fashions of America in the 1960s."*

Such has been the tale of much of the history of the Chinese Communist Party's foreign propaganda. Theodore White is dead, but the CCP is not. America is ever more vulnerable to the CCP's propaganda today than ever before.

I now look forward to your questions.

Thank you!

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