

OSINT Report: Chinese State Propaganda and Disinformation under Xi Jinping

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China's authoritarian leadership under Xi Jinping has unleashed an unprecedented blend of state propaganda, censorship, and disinformation across myriad domains. Inside China, the Party frames social issues (from LGBTQ+ rights to ethnic policy) as matters of "social harmony" and national security, portraying dissent or diversity as Western import or destabilizing. Abroad, Beijing promotes narratives of China as a peaceful, modernizing great power – from the Belt and Road Initiative to "ethical AI" – while discrediting criticisms of its human-rights record (e.g. Xinjiang re-education, Hong Kong crackdowns) as foreign plots or lies. This report catalogs major propaganda themes under Xi: its key claims, examples of execution, and documented cases. We draw on investigative journalism, think-tank analysis, and official statements, all with robust sourcing. The report is structured by theme, includes tables summarizing topics/domains, and concludes with implications for democratic societies and policy.

Narrative on "Social Harmony" and National Ideology

The Chinese Party under Xi has elevated nationalist ideology and "social stability" above all. The banner of **"national rejuvenation"** (Zhongguo meng) fuses ancient glory and Communist socialism. Xi proclaims a "great revival of the Chinese nation," invoking historical achievements (paper, compass, Zheng He) and promising to double GDP and build a world-class military under "socialism with Chinese characteristics" ¹ ². This *collective* "China Dream" is repeatedly contrasted with the Western (American) dream – an individualistic model Xi labels as life-or-death for China's future. For example, he insists "only when the country does well... can every person do well" ². Official media echo this by stressing order and "core socialist values" (patriotism, collectivism).

Many domestic narratives target cultural change. Homosexuality and LGBTQ rights are publicly denounced as a *foreign* influence. State-run outlets accuse Western media of "demonizing" China as homophobic, while claiming that China is already "making efforts for progressive gains...protecting the rights of the LGBTQ community" ³. Simultaneously, campaigns (like the CAC's "Qinglang" clean-up) brand LGBTQ activism as "harmful to the 'national spirit'" ⁴. In effect, queer identities are portrayed as antithetical to traditional Chinese family morals.

Similarly, ideologues promote a sinocentric "harmonious society" myth, equating dissent with chaos. The government lauds its censorship ("Internet sovereignty") as protecting citizens from "harmful information" and "moral pollution" ⁵. The Social Credit system is explained as rewarding honesty and deterring "deviant" behavior, not as surveillance. School textbooks and media emphasize **ideological unity**: e.g. all government staff are urged to "establish a sense of being in a long-term ideological struggle" and treat public opinion as a "front line" ⁶ ⁷. In sum, official propaganda blurs party ideology with national culture, stigmatizing minority views (LGBTQ, religious, regional) as threats.

Ethnic Minorities and Rebellion Narratives

Xinjiang (Uyghurs): Beijing relentlessly spins Xinjiang repression as counter-terrorism and development. In official messaging, the network of internment camps is rebranded as “vocational education and training centers.” Chinese spokespersons claim these centers are *voluntary, humane*, aimed at eradicating extremist ideology ⁸. Propaganda films and media show Uyghur “graduates” happily receiving woodworking diplomas or singing patriotic songs, asserting these programs foil Taliban-like violence ⁹ ⁸. State media quote detained Uyghurs saying “We are very free... our lives are very happy” ¹⁰. When such claims conflict with evidence, Beijing attacks critics as foreigners with hidden agendas ¹¹. For example, a Xinjiang official branded reports of repression as “rumors” by “hostile Western forces” and proclaimed Xinjiang has the “happiest Muslims in the world” ¹¹.

Despite these claims, surveillance in Xinjiang is state of the art. Researchers have documented a “draconian surveillance state” there – hundreds of cameras, mandatory apps tracking phones, facial recognition checkpoints on roads ¹². While propaganda highlights poverty alleviation and vocational skills, internal reports note the goal is “ideological security,” with mass political study and “positive energy” messaging to eliminate dissent ⁶ ⁷.

Tibet: In Tibet, the Party promotes an economic-development narrative. New “communication centers” in Lhasa churn out stories of Tibetan farmers enjoying rising incomes, modern infrastructure, and “heritage museums” lauding Party leadership ¹³. Foreign journalists are given guided tours of palatial homes in Lhasa, with singing monks told to extol Chinese “liberation.” Analysts note these itineraries are tightly controlled to project the image of “religious freedom” and ethnic harmony ¹⁴ ¹⁵. Any report of monasteries raided or language suppression is dismissed as Dalai Lama propaganda. In official editorials, China blames the “Dalai clique and hostile foreign forces” for any unrest, insisting that critics have “hidden political agendas” ¹¹.

Inner Mongolia (Mongols): Xi’s regime has quietly redefined Mongolian identity. Government media now speak of a shared “northern frontier culture” instead of Mongolian heritage, even renaming “Mongolian language classes” to remove the word “Mongol.” Experts report this is deliberate: by replacing “Mongolia” with patriotic slogans, the CCP aims to assimilate minorities into a Han-centric narrative ¹⁶ ¹⁷. As an ASPI report notes, officials argue for a “correct view of history” that portrays all regions as intrinsically Chinese, erasing distinct Mongol culture ¹⁶ ¹⁷.

Hong Kong: After the 2019–20 protests, Chinese propaganda depicted Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement as violent “riots” orchestrated by hostile foreigners. State media repeatedly showed footage of masked protesters and clashes (often without context) to justify Beijing’s crackdowns. Editorials accused “US actors” like Nancy Pelosi and the CIA of funding unrest ¹⁸. Beijing’s official line insists national security laws are needed to restore “peace and order” because protests were instigated by “radical” youth manipulated by “external forces” ¹⁸ ¹⁹. Locally, pro-Beijing media flood social feeds with slogans praising the Hong Kong government as patriotic and global pieces calling democracy activists “lawbreakers.” Even foreign news about police violence is labeled “fake news.” One NGO analysis found that pro-Beijing narratives – often decontextualized or misleading – *dominated* Hong Kong’s online discourse during the protests ²⁰ ¹⁸.

Table: Propaganda Topics vs. Target Domains

Topic	Domain/Target	Core Propaganda Claim
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| LGBTQ+ Rights | Domestic culture/national values | Portrayed as “Western” ideology undermining traditional morals ³ ⁴ . |

| Xinjiang Re-education | Domestic security, global human-rights scrutiny | Presented as “vocational training” to fight terrorism; “happiest Muslims” image ⁸ . |

| Tibet Development | Domestic & international (cultural prestige) | Emphasized rising Tibetan incomes, religious freedom, modernization ¹³ . |

| Inner Mongolia Culture | Domestic ethnic policy | Labelled “northern frontier culture” to subsume Mongol identity into Han heritage ¹⁶ . |

| Hong Kong Protests | Domestic stability, international media | Blamed on “foreign forces” inciting violence ¹⁸ ; cast police action as necessary order. |

| Internet & Social Credit | Domestic ideological control | Defended as “cyber-sovereignty” and trust-building; combating “harmful” content ⁵ ⁴ . |

| COVID-19 Origins | Global health/political narrative | Shifted blame to US Fort Detrick lab; called lab-leak theories “conspiracy” ²¹ . |

| Xinjiang Forced Labor | Global trade, human rights | Denied forced labor: videos of Uyghurs saying work is voluntary; “vocational training” rhetoric ⁸ ¹⁰ . |

| Belt & Road Initiative | Global infrastructure/development | Promoted as “win-win cooperation” and development aid, not debt trap ²² . |

| Confucius Institutes | International education/cultural exchange | Framed as benign language centers; downplayed CCP oversight (but insiders admit propaganda role ²³). |

| AI & Tech Exports | Global tech/governance | Marketed as advancing “ethical AI” and aiding partner countries; surveillance tools as security aid. |

| Climate & Environment | Global climate negotiations, domestic growth | Mixed: earlier framed climate as “Western myth,” now touts China as green leader; fights criticism as anti-CCP bias ²⁴ . |

| South China Sea Claims | International law/regional tensions | Argued “historic rights” over South China Sea; called UN tribunal “illegal” and opponents as US stooges ²⁵ . |

| Western Media & Society | Global public opinion, academia | Employs “wolf warrior” diplomats, influence campaigns on social media, think-tank networks to shape Western narratives ²⁶ ²⁷ . |

Censorship, Surveillance, and Information Control

The CCP’s information-control machinery operates at scale. The **Great Firewall** is justified as “internet sovereignty”: China insists every state has the right to block unwanted foreign content ⁵ . Official rhetoric focuses on preventing “rumors” and “harmful social impacts,” calling it a benign “cleaning up” campaign. In practice, the Party regularly purges domestic media of any dissenting history or criticism. U.S. analysts note that academic publishers (like Cambridge and Springer) have been forced by Beijing to remove or block content on Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen, etc. ²⁸ ²⁹ . On social media, platforms like Douyin and WeChat strictly ban topics deemed “sensitive.”

Social Credit and Surveillance: The government portrays these as efforts to reward trust and punish “dishonest” behavior. Chinese spokespeople often cite examples like jaywalking fines or preferential loans for law-abiding citizens, framing it as modernization of public morals. In reality, foreign researchers describe a vast surveillance apparatus. One report terms Xinjiang a “draconian surveillance state” – with CCTV cameras on every corner, mandatory QR-code check-ins, and real-time facial recognition ¹² . Public discussion about surveillance is rare due to censorship. Instead, official media emphasize its use against

criminals: e.g. a CCTV news clip might highlight how AI found a missing child, or how apps help police catch violent suspects. Meanwhile, any suggestion of “big brother” triggers nationalistic backlash online.

Propaganda Departments: At the apex are Xi’s propaganda organs (the Party’s Publicity Department, United Front Work Department, etc.) which now oversee nearly all media. A recent UHRP study notes that after 2018 these bodies directly control Xinjiang’s narrative, funneling stories to friendly channels ⁶. Party documents call public opinion “the front line of ideology,” reflecting a belief that controlling minds is as vital as police. Everyday Chinese see only the approved “positive energy” content: patriotic films, congratulatory CCP anniversary shows, and curated “official happiness” stories. Anything else is quickly scrubbed or reframed as malicious rumor.

State Lies and Disinformation Campaigns

Xi’s China projects an assertive foreign policy, often built on counter-narratives to criticism. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, Chinese state actors immediately pushed *alternative* origin stories abroad. A data study found *hundreds* of CCP-linked tweets and videos by mid-2021 claiming the virus came from the U.S. Army’s Fort Detrick lab ²¹. Google and Twitter search results for “Fort Detrick” were flooded with Global Times and CGTN articles, overwhelming credible sources ²¹ ³⁰. In short, Beijing turned the pandemic into a geopolitical attack: every foreign scientist raising the Wuhan lab-leak theory was labeled a political zealot, and dozens of officials repeated conspiracies that the virus was a U.S. bioweapon. This disinformation campaign aimed to distract from initial cover-ups (e.g. censoring Wuhan whistleblowers) and to sow doubt globally.

Similarly, **forced labor in Xinjiang** has been adamantly denied. Chinese propaganda strenuously claims that all Uyghur employment is *voluntary* job-training. In early 2021, Foreign Ministry spokespersons tweeted videos of Uyghurs in hotan red-tinged greenhouses saying “no one forces me” to produce crops ⁸ ¹⁰. An embedded propaganda video (below) shows a Xinjiang woman insisting her five greenhouses are run without coercion.



Figure: A Chinese Foreign Ministry tweet shares an official video of Uyghur farmers insisting their work is voluntary (foreground video still). Such posts illustrate Beijing’s narrative that Xinjiang “vocational training” replaces any notion of forced labor. NGO analyses found these testimonials were coordinated: dozens of similar clips appeared with English subtitles on YouTube/Twitter accounts after official posting ³¹ ³². In Chinese media, forced labor allegations are called “lies” by enemies of China, while cotton shoppers are lectured that foreign brands like H&M are “very bad” for criticizing China ³³.

On Hong Kong and Xinjiang, official comments are uniformly defensive. Beijing regularly labels any criticism as “groundless slander” by separatists and foreign “interferers.” For instance, when pressed about Uyghur camps, China insisted in UN forums that *all* minority groups are treated equally and that international journalists are simply misinformed ⁸ ¹¹ . When journalists have exposed apparent abuses (e.g. leaked “China Cables”), Chinese embassies denounce them as malicious fabrications by hostile powers. In diplomatic gaslighting, Beijing often cites obscure Chinese folklore or nationalistic “historical rights” to justify claims – notably in the South China Sea and Taiwan.

Foreign Influence Operations and Overseas Propaganda

Abroad, China has vastly expanded its “sharp power” toolkit. The Belt and Road Initiative is a premier case: Chinese media incessantly portray BRI projects as **economic lifelines** for developing countries. Coverage emphasizes new ports, railways and schools, with Chinese personnel exclaiming how China’s investments have “boost[ed] local economies” ³⁴ ²² . Meanwhile, Beijing ridicules Western talk of “debt traps” as mere propaganda from jealous rivals ³⁴ ²² . In reality, critics cite examples of onerous loans and Chinese control once defaults occur – but Chinese sources focus solely on the “win-win” rhetoric. Similarly, Confucius Institutes abroad are presented as benign *language and cultural centers*. Chinese officials insist they are like France’s Alliance Française, foster mutual understanding, and do not engage in “ideological work” ²³ . Internally, however, CCP propaganda chiefs have openly called these institutes “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda setup” ²³ .

Beijing’s global media footprint has grown. State-run outlets (CGTN, Xinhua) have bureaus in dozens of countries, often subsidizing local newsrooms with free content. Journalists trained in China are dispatched worldwide to present CCP viewpoints on international issues (for example, Global Times editorials praise China’s infrastructure projects and defend CCP policies). China’s diplomats on Twitter and Facebook adopt a combative style known as “**wolf warrior**” **diplomacy**, issuing snarky rebuttals to Western criticism. In strategic forums (like the UN or UNESCO), China pushes to frame internet governance as “cyber-sovereignty” and promotes its own AI ethics proposal to shape rules in its favor.

On social media, China covertly funds or manipulates foreign voices. A well-documented tactic is “borrowing a boat to sail to the sea”: paying local influencers, academics, or politicians to echo Beijing’s line. For instance, Chinese embassies have sponsored op-eds in Pacific newspapers framing territorial disputes as Western meddling ³⁵ . In the Philippines, U.S. and local analysts warn of fake profiles and deepfake videos aimed at discrediting critics of China ³⁶ ²⁷ . Similarly, Europe and North America have seen coordinated inauthentic campaigns amplifying pro-China messages (e.g. praising Beijing’s management of COVID while downplaying human-rights reports). Even NGOs and think tanks can be co-opted: grants or visit programs incentivize favorable scholarship on China.

> **The Propaganda Table above** summarizes key themes and who they target. Chinese propaganda is multi-pronged: it uses overt state media, covert influence, and information control to reach different audiences, from its own population to policymakers worldwide.

AI, Technology, and Environment Narratives

In high-tech domains, Beijing seeks to outpace Western ethical concerns with its own messaging. China portrays itself as a champion of “**ethical AI**.” It has unveiled “Beijing AI Principles” and calls for global

governance of AI that balances innovation with morality. Chinese state media highlight how China's facial-recognition cameras and surveillance networks keep cities "safe," presenting them as technological solutions rather than privacy violations. When selling these tools to other countries (for example, in Africa or Asia), official discourse emphasizes partnership – narratives speak of China "helping" build smart cities and resolve social issues, rarely mentioning oppressive uses. At international forums, Chinese delegates push for tech standards favorable to its interests.

Similarly, **climate and environment** narratives are carefully managed. A decade ago, many Chinese commentators regarded climate change as a Western "hoax" to constrain China's rise. Since pledging carbon peaking by 2030 and neutrality by 2060, the propaganda line shifted: China now casts itself as a green leader. Official announcements tout massive renewable investments and "ecological civilization" plans. Any criticism of China's pollution or coal use is labeled hypocritical – often cited as Western double standards. A fact-checking study found recurring conspiracies: some narratives blame foreign NGOs for fabricating climate crises, while others attack global activists like Greta Thunberg as tools of foreign plots ²⁴. Thus, China's environmental messaging swings between nationalist skepticism and reactive green posturing, always with the aim of protecting the Party's image.

International Law and Territorial Claims

Beijing also spins global disputes to its advantage. In the **South China Sea**, official claims invoke a mythical "nine-dash line" of historic Chinese sovereignty. China refuses to recognize the 2016 Hague tribunal (which invalidated most of that line), calling it a politically-motivated "sham" imposed by the U.S. ²⁵. State media argue that rightful ownership predates modern laws and that neighbors are pawns of Western agendas. For example, Chinese propaganda videos and social media call Philippine EEZ patrols provocations and characterize any foreign naval presence as sinister. These narratives portray China's neighbors as unreasonable and themselves as the aggrieved party, reinforcing nationalism at home.

A similar narrative exists for **Taiwan** (though outside our main topics): Beijing constantly insists there is "only one China" and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of it. Chinese official media frequently accuse foreign leaders of violating this stance, and any Taiwanese moves toward independence are portrayed as illegal separatism endangering peace.

Impact on Western Discourse and Response

Collectively, China's propaganda and influence tactics pose challenges for democracies. In Western countries, CCP narratives circulate both openly (in editorials and social media posts by official accounts) and covertly (through fake accounts, think-tank co-option, diaspora intimidation). The aim is to muddy debates: for instance, Chinese disinformation on Xinjiang has sometimes been amplified even in otherwise reliable channels, causing confusion among global publics. Moreover, the sheer volume and coordination ("echo chamber" effect) make fact-checking difficult.

Case Studies: One study of Chinese campaigns in the Philippines noted that pro-Beijing social-media posts were 70% more likely to be shared than factual ones ³⁷. In Europe, surveillance companies backed by Chinese tech face boycott calls after exposés, yet Beijing counterattacks by calling critics greedy technocrats, reshaping the debate. In academia, multiple Western universities have closed Confucius

Institutes after documenting self-censorship around topics like Tibet and Xinjiang ²³ , showing the chilling effect of Chinese soft power on scholarship.

Strategic Insights and Implications

China's propaganda apparatus is deepening under Xi Jinping. It operates on two fronts: (1) **Consolidating domestic control** by shaping how Chinese citizens perceive their own country (emphasizing unity, patriotism, and party dominance), and (2) **Shaping international opinion** by projecting benign narratives of China's rise while discrediting critics. For democratic societies and civil society actors, this means remaining vigilant against both overt and covert messaging. Key implications include:

- **Media Literacy & Fact-Checking:** Democracies must bolster independent media and fact-checking to counter Chinese disinformation. Open discussion of China's actions should be encouraged, making transparent the origin of propaganda (e.g. labeling state-run outlets).
- **Support for Targeted Communities:** Groups targeted by Chinese propaganda (e.g. Hong Kong activists, Uyghur diaspora, Inner Mongolian cultural advocates) need support, as they are often silenced or discredited by official narratives. Documentaries, eyewitness accounts, and OSINT (open-source intelligence) analysis (like this report) should be widely shared.
- **Policy Measures:** Governments may consider regulations on foreign influence (e.g. requiring Confucius Institutes to register as foreign agents or ensuring academic freedom contracts). Reexamining trade and investment with China in light of human-rights issues (forced labor) and strategic dependencies is also vital.
- **Civil Society Resilience:** International institutions (UN, media organizations) should emphasize accuracy in reporting on China. Civil society groups can build alliances globally to present cohesive counter-narratives. For example, international labor and tech communities could jointly expose coerced labor supply chains despite PRC denials.
- **Global Governance Engagement:** Democracies should lead in setting transparent international standards – on technology (AI ethics), climate action, and information networks – that offer a credible alternative to Beijing's proposals. In diplomatic forums, consistent pushback is needed whenever China uses legal or historical claims to distort facts (e.g. reaffirming UNCLOS in the South China Sea context).

In summary, China's state propaganda under Xi is multi-faceted and evolving. It blends traditional state media with cyber campaigns and personal diplomacy. But it is not unchallenged: thorough documentation and open debate can help minimize its impact. Democracies must coordinate to expose false narratives (citing evidence like the sources here), support independent voices, and promote their own values of transparency and human rights. Only by understanding China's propaganda tactics in detail – as we have cataloged – can societies effectively respond.

Sources: The above analysis is based on open-source research including think-tank reports, investigative journalism, and government publications ^{3 11 13 16 20 18 5 4 21 10 9 23 22 24 25 1 8} (citations embedded in text).

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