

Chinese Manipulative Messages in the Global Information Space and in Georgia

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China is becoming an increasingly important player in the international system, a process driven by its economic, technological, and military rise. In both political and academic circles, much discussion centers on China's strategic goal of shaping a multipolar world order in which Beijing emerges as a leading power. Within this context, China actively employs information campaigns through state media, social networks, and cultural diplomacy, to disseminate its narratives. One of its most significant narratives is the portrayal of China's advantages over the United States and Europe. Georgia is no exception, and the Georgian information space is frequently exposed to such messages. This trend became especially visible after 2023, when Georgia and China issued a joint declaration on strategic partnership.²

It is therefore important to understand how China positions itself in the modern world, including in Georgia. According to Freedom House, the ruling Communist Party maintains strict control over all aspects of life and governance, including state bureaucracy, media, the online space, religious organizations, universities, businesses, and civil society. Authoritarianism and repression is growing year by year.³ At the same time, through various manipulative and propagandistic information campaigns, China seeks to influence global audiences.⁴ Thus, the Communist Party's strategy is strict information control and repression at home, coupled with manipulative information activities abroad. The European Union also highlights this challenge, relying on relevant research. Specifically, reports by the European External Action Service (EEAS) note that China aims to reshape global narratives and align them with its geopolitical interests. In doing so, it engages in information interference and manipulation, presenting itself as a reliable partner while simultaneously undermining trust in the EU and its allies.⁵ One of the main targets

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² [Civil.ge](https://civil.ge) (July 31, 2023) *Georgia and China issued a joint declaration on strategic partnership*. Via link: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/553828>

³ According to 2024 data, China is assessed as a non-free country and has been given a score of 9 out of a maximum of 100 in the relevant index. Freedom House. *Freedom in the World 2024 / China*. Via link: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2024>

⁴ Cook, S. (2020). *Beijing's Global Megaphone - The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence since 2017*. Freedom House. Via link: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone>

⁵ European Union External Action Service. (February, 2023). *1st EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats*. Via link: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EEAS-DataTeam-ThreatReport-2023..pdf>

of China's information manipulation is the United States. The dominant themes in its anti-American strategic narratives include: "the U.S. is a dangerous hegemon seeking to harm China and other countries; America suffers from a lack of moral and social values; its power and influence are weakening, leaving it increasingly unable to deal with internal and external challenges."⁶

The steps taken by the Chinese Communist Party to achieve its goals in the global information space are described in a 2020 special report by Freedom House. The report opens with a quote from a 2016 speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping: "Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend its tentacles."⁷ The report, based on multiple sources, notes that as early as 2009, the Chinese government allocated around six billion USD for the global expansion of state media. Furthermore, by various estimates, China spends about 10 billion USD annually to spread its "soft power", of which information activities are a significant part. All major Chinese state media outlets have access to international audiences. These include China Global Television Network (CGTN), the international arm of China Central Television (CCTV); the English-language newspaper China Daily; People's Daily; China Radio International (CRI); and the news agencies Xinhua and China News Service. In addition, the Chinese government makes active use of foreign media outlets, influential individuals, and social media influencers to disseminate its narratives. Beijing cultivates "friendly" relations with journalists and media owners, offering benefits and urging them to produce content favorable to the Communist Party. Furthermore, it regularly funds journalists and academic delegations to visit China to promote CCP ideology more widely.⁸

These efforts and resources yield tangible results. For example, a 2023 study confirmed the strong effect of CCP narratives on target audiences. Political researchers from Harvard, Yale, and the University of Groningen surveyed about 6,000 citizens across 19 countries. Participants were divided into four groups: one exposed to Chinese propaganda, another to U.S. government messaging, a third to both sides, and a fourth placebo group. Before and after exposure, participants were asked about U.S. and Chinese economic and political models. Support for China's model significantly increased among those who had watched Chinese state media. By the end of the study, most of those exposed to Chinese narratives said they preferred China's system of governance over the American one. Even in the mixed group, most

⁶ Carothers, C. (2024). *Understanding the Chinese Government's Growing Use of Anti-American Propaganda*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Via link: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/understanding-chinese-governments-growing-use-anti-american-propaganda>

⁷ Cook, S. (2020). *Beijing's Global Megaphone - The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence since 2017*. Freedom House. Via link: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone>

⁸ Ibid.

leaned toward China's economic model. Notably, the Chinese narrative does not seek to convince audiences that China is a democracy. Instead, it emphasizes that the CCP ensures development, stability, and competent leadership - a message researchers describe as both powerful and dangerous in this era of democratic backsliding.⁹

This central characteristic of Chinese information manipulation - portrayal of China's superiority compared to Western democratic systems - is confirmed by other studies as well. In this way, it differs somewhat from the "classic" disinformation machinery built by Russia in the 21st century. Russian propaganda, as is well known, tends to focus less on persuasion and more on sowing fear, doubt, division, and chaos to achieve its strategic goals.¹⁰ The difference between Russian and Chinese narratives is also highlighted in comparative studies of their international propaganda outlets, RT and CGTN. According to researchers, Russia's main goals focus on destabilizing and delegitimizing other political systems, while China primarily seeks to highlight the advantages of its own system. At the same time, some scholars argue that in recent years there have been signs of a partial "Russification" of Chinese propaganda methods, making them more similar to the Russian model.¹¹ Whether this theory can be confirmed or rejected is a matter for further research.

Chinese Information Messages in Georgia

With regard to Georgia, the first major Chinese information manipulation campaign was connected to the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) in Tbilisi, often referred to as the "Lugar Laboratory." In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading worldwide, Western media circulated unverified but noteworthy reports suggesting the virus may have first emerged from a laboratory in Wuhan, China.¹² In response, using methods similar to Russian propaganda (refusing investigation, shifting

⁹ *The Economist* (February 16, 2023). *Chinese propaganda is surprisingly effective abroad*. Via link: <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/02/16/chinese-propaganda-is-surprisingly-effective-abroad>

¹⁰ Kutidze, D. (2024). Government of Georgia's Public Rhetoric – Minuscule Model of Russian Propaganda. *Central European Journal of Communication*. Volume 16 Number 2 (34) Fall 2023 ISSN 1899-5101. DOI: 10.51480/1899-5101.16.2(34).485

¹¹ Martin Moore & Thomas Colley (2024) Two International Propaganda Models: Comparing RT and CGTN's 2020 US Election Coverage, *Journalism Practice*, 18:5, 1306-1328, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2022.2086157. Via link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2022.2086157>

¹² *The Economist*. (August 21, 2021). *The world needs a proper investigation into how covid-19 started*. Via link: <https://www.economist.com/international/2021/08/21/the-world-needs-a-proper-investigation-into-how-covid-19-started>

blame onto others, and spreading disinformation), and with the help of Kremlin-linked sources, China launched an information campaign claiming that dangerous experiments were being conducted in the U.S.-funded biological laboratories abroad, including in Georgia. It even suggested these experiments could have caused the epidemic. China's state media actively circulated such disinformation videos.¹³

According to research conducted by ForSet in January 2024, dozens of Facebook pages and personal accounts were identified in Georgia that spread not only pro-Chinese but also anti-Western messages. The study highlighted four main narratives: 1. "China will help us to regain the occupied territories": propaganda suggested that China could influence Russia and assist Georgia in reunification, whereas the West only makes verbal statements recognizing Georgia's territorial integrity but avoids confrontation with Russia, providing no real help. 2. "America's wars vs. China's peace": this narrative claims that China has not invaded or bombed sovereign countries, unlike the U.S. It portrays the U.S. as "on the road to hell," and only a strong leader like China's president can save it. It also falsely asserts that America, with 5% of the world's population, consumes 80% of the world's drugs, making American culture harmful. 3. "Pro-Chinese and pro-Russian": China, together with Russia, is portrayed as a balancing force against Anglo-Saxon geopolitics. The narrative suggests that together, they will defeat the dollar and end U.S. dollar hegemony. 4. "Georgia's government aligning with China is presented as political know-how": propagandists claim that by signing a partnership with China, Georgia's government has abandoned feudal relations with the West and refuses to bow down to anyone.¹⁴

In April 2024, parallel to the reintroduction of the so-called "foreign agents law" in Georgia, the Chinese Embassy in Tbilisi published a lengthy article portraying U.S. foreign aid in a negative light, using manipulative and propagandistic methods. The article concluded that "The U.S. views foreign aid as an instrument to maintain hegemonic power and engage in geopolitical games. Under the name of aid, the U.S. has acted recklessly, committed numerous mistakes and crimes, and repeatedly revealed its hypocritical nature, which has brought deep catastrophe to the world." By contrast, the article stated that the "gold standard" of Chinese foreign aid is non-interference in beneficiaries' internal affairs, the social and economic well-being of partner countries, and the satisfaction of the international community.¹⁵

¹³ Ratiani, M. (July 29, 2021). *Chinese propaganda movie is used against the Lugar Lab by Kremlin media outlets*. Myth Detector. Via link: <https://mythdetector.com/ka/chinur-propagandistul-philms-kremlisturi-mediebi-lugaris-laboratoriis-tsinaaghmddeg-igheneben/>

¹⁴ ForSet (January 11, 2024). *What does propaganda say about China*. Via link: <https://bit.ly/435z6hi>

¹⁵ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Georgia. (April, 2024). *The Hypocrisy and Facts of the United States Foreign Aid*. Via link: http://ge.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/202404/t20240420_11285495.htm

On the website of China's Embassy in Georgia, another similar propagandistic article was published concerning the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). It claimed that "under the banner of democracy, freedom, and human rights, the United States used NED for infiltration, interference, and subversion against other countries. This grossly violated their sovereignty, security, and development interests, international law, and the basic norms of international relations, as well as global peace and stability. The international community firmly opposes such unpopular and despicable actions."¹⁶ This publication was widely covered by propaganda sources of the ruling party, Georgian Dream.¹⁷

One of the most interesting sources of Chinese information messages in Georgia is the TV program "Chinese Panorama" on the Obiektivi channel.¹⁸ The show has been on air since 2023, hosted by conflictologist Badri Nachkebia, an invited expert-consultant at Xinjiang University in China. The first guest was China's Ambassador to Georgia, Zhou Qian, who expressed hope that the program would allow Georgians to learn more about China's development and the "Belt and Road Initiative," thereby strengthening trust and support for Sino-Georgian relations.¹⁹ Over time, the show has hosted various academics and journalists who visited China at the invitation of Chinese institutions, working on research projects or media products.

Monitoring of "Chinese Panorama" shows that it largely follows the information strategy described above - emphasizing the advantages of China and communist governance compared to Western democracies. The program promotes messages about the harmfulness of "wild capitalism" while highlighting China's economic successes under communism, portraying it as the best governance model for ordinary people. It frequently claims that poverty has been completely eradicated in China, ignoring the fact that this only applies to extreme poverty (defined as living on \$2.15/day, assuming government data is accurate), while as of 2021, about 17% of China's population still lived in general poverty (\$6.85/day).²⁰ The program also asserts that China's economic welfare surpasses that of the United States, yet it omits the fact that China's nominal GDP per capita is about \$13,000 (75th in the world), compared to over \$80,000 in the U.S.²¹

¹⁶ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Georgia. (August, 2024). *The National Endowment for Democracy: What It Is and What It Does*. Via link:

http://ge.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/202408/t20240809_11468652.htm

¹⁷ See the links accordingly:

<https://www.facebook.com/imedinevsge/videos/430395212690859/>; <https://bit.ly/3ZkqoKr>

¹⁸ TV "Obiektivi" YouTube channel. Via link: <https://bit.ly/4ie1Vwf>

¹⁹ ForSet (January 11, 2024). *What does propaganda say about China*. Via link: <https://bit.ly/435z6hi>

²⁰ Poverty and Inequality Platform. (2021). Country Profile – China. The World Bank. Via link: <https://pip.worldbank.org/country-profiles/CHN>

²¹ Worldometer. GDP per capita rankings. (2023). Via link: <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-per-capita/>

Moreover, the reliability of China's economic data is questionable. Foreign Affairs has referred to China as a "Potemkin economy," arguing that Xi Jinping's government's published figures do not reflect reality.²²

Moreover, the program "Chinese Panorama" emphasizes China's advantages in historical and cultural contexts, contrasting ancient Chinese civilization with America's few-century-long history. Key messages include: *Beijing supports mutual trust, pragmatic approaches, peaceful coexistence, and respect between states - values supposedly ignored and abandoned by Western countries; the U.S. promotes double standards and global destabilization, while China fosters peace and stability.*

As for China-Georgia relations, the following narratives are promoted: *the West dictates conditions from above, while China respects Georgian traditions and does not interfere in internal affairs; China could solve Georgia's territorial integrity problem; Georgia enjoys visa-free travel with China but not with the U.S.; China opposes "aggressive globalization," which is said to destroy small countries' cultures; instead, China protects multiculturalism and offers hope for small nations, including Georgia.*

In addition, much emphasis is placed on the "similarities between Georgian and Chinese family traditions." Ultimately, for the audience of "Chinese Panorama," China is presented as a stable, orderly, and prosperous country. Naturally, there is no mention of the Communist Party's totalitarian rule, universal control over information and free speech, or widespread human rights abuses.²³ On the contrary, some guests on the program claim that reports of China's totalitarian system is a myth.

To sum up, China uses information manipulation to portray Western democracies negatively while presenting its own authoritarian system as an effective model of governance. Beijing employs state media, social networks, and cultural diplomacy to build a positive image and strengthen its geopolitical interests. The narratives directed against the West are particularly anti-American, depicting the U.S. as a declining

²² Stephen G. Brooks and Ben A. Vagle. (February 20, 2025). The Real China Trump Card. *Foreign Affairs*. Via link: <https://bit.ly/4bd0rjl>

²³ Freedom House. *Freedom in the World 2024 / China*. Via link: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2024>

hegemonic power. Globally, China actively cooperates with journalists, academics, and political elites to expand its influence and amplify propagandistic messages.

In Georgia, most of China's messages focus on discrediting the West and presenting China as a reliable partner. The main narrative claims that Beijing could play a key role in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity, while the West offers only verbal support. Other narratives describe the U.S. as aggressive while portraying China as a purveyor of peace. To emphasize China's appeal, propagandists highlight the harmfulness of Western "wild capitalism" and selectively reference the economic achievements of the Chinese Communist Party. Propagandists also promote multiple false dilemmas and comparisons, such as the idea that the West dictates conditions from above, whereas China respects Georgian traditions and does not interfere in internal affairs. Another false comparison is that China opposes "aggressive globalization," which threatens the cultures of small countries, while China defends multiculturalism. Ultimately, in Georgia, pro-Chinese messages follow a broader information strategy: they don't try to convince audiences that China is a democracy. Instead, they reinforce the idea that the Communist Party ensures development, stability, and peace, suggesting that everything else is secondary.