

The Russian-Ukraine War and the Chinese Propaganda Machine: Evidence from “The Great Translation Movement” on Twitter

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Abstract

This article discusses the propagandized media environment in China by studying the tweets from “The Great Translation Movement” on Twitter regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. This article argues that the war not only simply spawned “The Great Translation Movement” on Twitter, but also caused more severe challenges to China’s Party-State propaganda machine from the outside world that may subvert the deep crisis of deconstruction of China’s propaganda. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda state has always wanted to establish a clear, correct and patriotic cyberspace, but if its use of means is largely only to suppress dissenting public opinion and opposition organizations at home and abroad, it will not be sustainable; after all, thousands of “Great Translation Movements” on various issues will continue to germinate and grow, becoming the nightmare of the authoritarian rule of the CCP.

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine war, Great Translation Movement, Twitter, propaganda, China*

1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, under the pretext of demilitarization and denazification, Russia launched a special military operation and a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As the conflict rises, this has become the largest war of aggression on the European continent since the Second World War. The war between Russia and Ukraine is not directly related to the People's Republic of China (PRC), but as the European Union and Western countries are much concerned about the crimes that Russia may have committed in the war of aggression, such as crimes against humanity and genocide, various severe economic and trade sanctions against Russia have been imposed. Moreover, the United Nations Security Council also voted on Russia-related resolutions of condemnation, but they were still vetoed by the permanent member Russia, while China, India, the United Arab Emirates and a few other countries abstained.

China's previous tendency to help defend Russia's security concerns in the Ukraine-Russia War can be observed from the joint statement of the two heads of state before the opening of the Beijing Olympic Winter Games on February 4 in 2022. In the joint statement, the two sides called on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to stop its eastward expansion, and declared that "the friendship between the two countries has no limits, [and] there are no forbidden areas of cooperation" (友好没有止境, 合作没有禁区).

However, since the outbreak of the war, China has not joined Western countries in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but has instead shown that she adopts a neutral position toward this conflict. Specifically, on the one hand, China does not approve of the Security Council's sanctions against Russia and sending troops to intervene in the Russia-Ukraine War, and on the other hand, it also calls for bilateral

peace negotiations to stop the war as soon as possible. What is more ironic is that China's diplomatic stance as well as its external propaganda are rather different from its domestic official and party media, as well as messages appeared on Chinese social media platforms. This has primarily given the rise of the so-called "The Great Translation Movement" (大翻译运动) on Twitter.

2. "The Great Translation Movement" on Twitter amid the Russia-Ukraine War

The rise of "The Great Translation Movement" is arguably due to the fact that Chinese at home and abroad, or any netizens who understand Chinese, were forced to close down their Chinese section of ChongLangTV (冲浪TV), the Reddit platform where they originally gathered, on the grounds of "exposing the privacy of others". These people thus moved from an originally "centralized" organization of ChongLangTV into a relatively "decentralized" Twitter as the new core social media platform, in addition to some other online mediums, such as Telegram, Discord, Facebook, Instagram, and so on.

The cyber activists have now effectively utilized the platform of "The Great Translation Movement", with "TheGreatTranslation Movement" as the hashtag of their tweets, to relay messages and information from issues relating to Russia-Ukraine War that appeared on China's mainstream media and other popular social media like Weibo (微博) or WeChat/Weixin (微信). Actually, these Chinese messages and remarks that supported Russia but demeaned Ukraine had almost received high attention, high likes, and high reprints in Chinese cyberspace. Not surprisingly, hatred remarks and/or comments with regard to the United States (US), Japan, and the West in general, were also popular among Chinese netizens, highlighting the rising atmosphere

of Chinese patriotism and nationalism. Arguably the tweets on “The Great Translation Movement” faithfully translate in a multilingual language manner, mainly in English, and explicitly expose the deep contradiction, hypocrisy, and inconsistency between China’s external and internal propaganda. In a sense, this highlights that “The Great Translation Movement” has to a larger extent deconstructed the very hard work that the Chinese propaganda machine has strived to shape the PRC’s international image through telling Chinese stories and conveying Chinese voices well. As a result, this article is to examine the Chinese propaganda machine against the backdrop of Russia-Ukraine war via analyzing empirical evidence from tweets posted in “The Great Translation Movement” platform.

3. Official Chinese Attitudes toward the Russia-Ukraine War

As soon as Russia-Ukraine War broke up on February 24, 2022, the Chinese State Councilor and former Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) expounded China’s Five-Point position the very next day on February 25, 2022. According to Wang: firstly, China maintains that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected and protected. Secondly, the Cold War mentality should be discarded completely. The legitimate security concerns of all countries should be respected. Given NATO’s five consecutive rounds of eastward expansion, Russia’s legitimate security demands ought to be taken seriously and properly addressed. Thirdly, the top priority now is for all parties to exercise the necessary restraint to prevent the current situation in Ukraine from getting worse or even getting out of control. Fourthly, China supports and encourages all diplomatic efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis. And fifthly, China believes that the United Nations (UN) Security Council should play a constructive

role in resolving the Ukraine crisis, and give priority to regional peace and stability and the universal security of all countries.¹

By and large, the Chinese authorities poise a neutral position in the Russia-Ukraine war primarily by re-affirming the importance of respective sovereignty and respect for territorial integrity of all countries. On the one hand, China considers the security of one state cannot be established at the expense of others, and on the other hand, others' sovereignty and security cannot be harmed by aggressors out of seeking their own absolute military advantage and security. The UN Security Council could and should be the only international entity that has the righteous mandate to mediate a ceasefire or even initiate a roadmap for resolution of the war. And the devastating humanitarian crisis may be resolved accordingly. Nevertheless, China also warns that the Security Council should act to help cool the conflict situation and facilitate diplomatic dialog and resolution instead of fueling tensions and causing further escalation. It thus implies that China opposes any UN Security Council resolutions to authorize the legitimate use of force and sanctions in resolving the crisis.

In later days on March 7, 2022, Wang Yi proposed another six initiatives on how to prevent a large-scale humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, i.e., Firstly, humanitarian action should abide by the principles of neutrality and justice, avoiding politicization of the humanitarian question. Secondly, we will be concerned for the Ukrainian diaspora, helping them get proper settlements. Thirdly, we will need to truly protect the civilians and prevent further humanitarian disasters in Ukraine. Fourthly, we will need to ensure the successful and secure conduct of the humanitarian mission, including providing quick, secure, and barrier-free humanitarian access. Fifthly, we will need to ensure the security of foreigners, allowing them securely to leave Ukraine and giving any assistance during their repatriation. And lastly, we will

support UN in the instrumental efforts to coordinate the humanitarian mission in Ukraine and support the mission of the UN coordinator for the Ukrainian crisis.²

In general, the Chinese Party State would like to see the cease of the conflict, and hopefully the end of war, as early as possible, for it is rather significant not only for strengthening regional stability and boosting global economic recovery in the post-pandemic period, but also for promoting humanitarian causes and other social well-beings across the globe as the war has already triggered a series of energy crises and inflation worldwide. While it seems to assume that China maintains a neutral and impartial position toward the conflict, but in reality, China's former Foreign Minister Wang ironically reasserts that: "No matter how abhorrent and risky the international situations are, China with Russia will keep the course of perseverance and confidence in their strategic goal, further unrelentingly advancing the comprehensive partnership of strategic coordination for a new era (新时代全面战略协同运作伙伴关系)."³ Thereby, the friendship between the people of China and Russia is to be adamant for sure. Several months later when Russia's invasions toward Ukraine got stuck, Mr. Wang reiterates and re-emphasizes the good relationship with Russia when meeting with his counterpart of new Russian ambassador to China Igor Morgulov later in November 2022. He said, "No matter how the international situation may evolve, China and Russia, as two major countries and neighbors, will constantly advance strategic mutual trust and practical cooperation, deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination between the two countries, and jointly uphold international fairness and justice."⁴

Wang's statements are absolutely corresponding to his supreme leader Xi Jinping (习近平), in which Xi highlights that "China advocates upholding international law and universally recognized norms governing international relations. China adheres to the UN Charter and

promotes the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. These are the major principles that underpin China's approach to the Ukraine crisis."⁵ Although Xi Jinping expressed that he does not want to see the situation in Ukraine to come to this current situation and he looks for the Russo-Ukraine conflict settled in the form of conversational negotiation, yet, China voted against a draft resolution for investigating the supposed war crimes committed by the Russian armies in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, and elsewhere on May 12, 2022. Besides, he also objected the US's proposal to expel Russia from the G20 group in March 2022. To be clear, it is rightly to quote what former Foreign Minister Wang Yi has explicitly reiterated at his ministry's regular press conference on March 30, 2022, proclaiming that China and Russia jointly enjoy "the unlimited cooperation, the unlimited secure maintenance, and the unlimited cause against hegemony" (和平无上限, 维护安全无上限, 反对霸权无上限).⁶

4. Russian-Ukraine War in the "Great Translations Movement" on Twitter

There are a variety of tweets posted in "The Great Translation Movement" on Twitter since the Russian invasion in Ukraine in late February 2022. In light of analytical purposes, these tweets are categorized into nine notable but interrelated subjects. These tweets are representative primarily because they receive most Like, Retweet, and Quote Tweet from Internet users. Arguably, these tweets can be garnered and further examined to reflect the actual handling and guidance of Chinese propaganda machine toward Chinese online and offline public opinions in the Russia-Ukraine war and the somehow real Chinese official attitude in this war.

4.1. Possibly Fake or Homemade Fake News Originally from Russian News Sources

(1) On April 4, 2022, the China Central Television *CCTV News* (中国中央电视台新闻频道 / 央视新闻) released a video, saying that according to Russian reports, the United States will conduct live research on Ukrainians and participate in biological experiments.⁷ Some netizens said that the Russians have previously tried to make the old Soviet biological weapons laboratory in Ukraine look like American, although all these places are attempting to deal with old chemical and biological weapons. Most of the rest are messages mocking “The Great Translation Movement”, either thanking the translator(s) or posting comments of irrelevant or even strange pictures.

(2) On April 9, 2022, China’s CCTV Network *Quick Look* (央视网快看) released a video in which the Russian Ministry of Defense said that Ukraine, with the support of Western countries, is preparing to use toxic substances on civilians.⁸ Some netizens said that in order to fool and bewitch Chinese people, CCTV did everything they could to report this kind of bluffing. CCTV’s actions have even become North Koreanized, constantly portraying foreign countries as imaginary enemies so as to better control its own people. For the sake of consolidating their power, black can be said or even defined as white.

(3) On June 8, 2022, some of the Chinese state media published a report writing that Ukraine officially collapsed and four states announced their accession to Russia.⁹ Netizens argue that this (Twitter) is a self-media, not an official media, and there is no need to put this information on it. However, some netizens believe that this fake news is repeating Russia’s lies and helping Russia to carry out propaganda, but the most important

thing is that Chinese authorities are very cautious internationally and pretend to remain relatively neutral. That is why the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) works so hard to prevent their citizens from browsing overseas websites that would otherwise find the world different from the inner walls.

4.2. Articles or News Published by Prominent Members of the Public, Politicians, or the Media

(1) On March 29, 2022, a tweet shows that a well-known Chinese journalist and the former editor-in-chief of *Global Times* (环球时报), Hu Xijin (胡锡进), who is also affiliated with the CCP, published a video ridiculed the prediction of date of Russia's precise attack on Ukraine as another lie told by the West.¹⁰ Many netizens discussed that Hu Xijin himself had lied a lot, and they all called him obscene and disgusting, showing that he had the face of a slave eunuch, and then the dim King of China [Xi Jinping] liked to listen to it, and the little pink (小粉红) also listened with relish. It is good to have Internet firewall, and raised people as pigs. Hu Xijin then took his children to what he claimed to be the most evil country, the United States, where he is actually demonstrating that "to make anti-American statements is work, but to come to the United States is to live." (反美是工作去美国是生活) Netizens also expressed that because Hu Xijin and some other like-minded people think foreigners will not understand the language they speak, plus the film will not be circulated to the outside world, they are therefore so loud in making these comments in the video.

(2) On March 29, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *CCTV News* (央视新闻) criticized the content of the NATO special summit on March 24. For instance, some country leaders claimed that China spread false information about Russia, and it was they who spread the false

information. It is also said that NATO itself is a product of the Cold War, but it has survived to this day, and the concept has long been old and rusty. Chinese netizens agreed at the bottom comments section, and talked that NATO is a burly puppet and human trafficker of the United States. In particular, on the 23rd anniversary of NATO's bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, did these righteous people change their avatars to mourn for the people killed by NATO? A few other netizens commented that it is impossible for China to admit that she is spreading disinformation, but if NATO is really a product of the Cold War, then is Ukraine considered part of Russia (the Soviet Union), and is not it also an outdated concept?

(3) On March 30, 2022, a tweet shows that the *People's Daily* (人民日报) published a video about Russian specialty goods and souvenir being snapped up by China on the Internet, and even the person in charge had to call on Chinese rational shopping. Chinese netizens left messages at the bottom, supporting Russia.¹¹ Many netizens thanked "The Great Translation Movement" for translating these things to show them, and they shared and forwarded to more people to know. In addition, there are netizens arguing over the selection of comments, one side believes that only picking the selection is clearly distorting the facts, smearing the Chinese, and increasing the antagonistic hatred, while the opposite side believes that because it is selected by bloggers or the most popular, it should be of course translated.

(4) On April 4, 2022, a tweet shows that the *People's Daily* published a post accusing the United States, as the initiator of the Ukrainian crisis, not only did the U.S. not reflect on the responsibility for the war, but also she shirked it. Chinese netizens left messages at the bottom, adding fuel to the fire in the United States, just like to reap the benefits of the

fisherman.¹² Many netizens in the message area congratulated the resurrection of “The Great Translation Movement” account, and suggested how they should let the foreign media relay and/or report their tweets are the main things. Besides, many other netizens thought that the United States is China’s imaginary enemy, and in the meantime, in order to divert the dissatisfaction of the Chinese people under the domestic Zero-Covid policy, the Chinese state media distract people’s attention and deliberately vent their anger on the United States.

(5) On April 4, 2022, a tweet shows that a blogger posted a post about the mass genocide of pro-Russian civilians and Russians by the Ukrainian Nazis on the outskirts of Kyiv.¹³ There are some netizens remarked that everyone is no longer surprised by Chinese’s comments, and some even said that Chinese is very competent to be a filial son of Russia. A few netizens also believed that China is too much and should be sanctioned as a result. China would only use distorted words to match pictures and videos, reverse right and wrong, and use its own “truth” to explain “evidence”. At the same time, some people felt that PRC’s official media do not dare to directly slander, thereby they exercise the so-called online “water army” (水軍) instead, to publish articles in order to guide public opinion and brainwash the people.

(6) On April 6, 2022, a tweet shows that China’s CCTV Network *Quick Look* (央视网快看) released a video, showing Russia shot down a Ukrainian army helicopter with captured missiles, and the Chinese netizens commented, “Well done Russia. Bless Russia with victory in the war.”¹⁴ Some netizens said that Chinese are too evil, but some replied that Chinese characters are made by the CCP and are lackeys of the CCP. These evil remarks belong to the CCP, and have nothing to do with Chinese; they are simply used by the CCP to slander and isolate

Chinese. Consequently, the CCP is not equal to China, and Chinese civilians are misled, which is why they say such unobjective content.

(7) On May 4, 2022, a tweet shows that while China's *CCTV News* (央视新闻) is broadcasting news content about the Russia-Ukraine War, there are writings on the bottom column that the United States has been igniting the flames from the Ukrainian crisis, fanning the fire, adding fuel to the fire, and eventually has taken advantage of the fire to commit national robbery.¹⁵ Some netizens said that this is very in line with the characteristics of the Chinese media; the attention of the Chinese media to the United States is far more important than what they eat every day, and some people even joked that there is no media in China, only propaganda agencies, and calling them media is a humiliation for the media. More netizens pointed out that the news should only present the facts, without their personal opinions, but this is propaganda to spread the official position of the CCP.

(8) On September 15, 2022, a tweet shows that a well-known Weibo blogger in China argued that “why support Russia”? It is because that there are not only many interests such as oil and gas, but also the ability to compete with the Western world. If Russia falls, China may become the next country in the United States to attack with all its might.¹⁶ After reading the six listed reasons for supporting Russia by this blogger, many netizens commented that China is such a mercenary and so short-sighted that only cares about its own interests.

(9) On October 3, 2022, a tweet shows that a Chinese blogger named Sima Pingbang (司马平邦), who is with 7 million followers, posted a message on Weibo inviting North Korea, India, Pakistan and other countries to drop nuclear bombs on pro-American NATO countries. He

continues to preach nuclear war and attempt to destroy the world, a result of China's long-held belief that sovereignty is above human rights.¹⁷ Some commentators mention that Chinese nationalists believe nuclear weapons should fall on NATO members so that mankind can have hope of survival, and these fanatical patriots seem to have a very high enthusiasm for nuclear weapons. Some netizens remarked that Russia has so far been unable to win Ukraine or invade its smaller and weaker neighbors. North Korea cannot even feed its own people, and Pakistan has its own worries; everyone is still concerned about the situation in their own country, how can it rush to launch nuclear war?

4.3. Official Chinese “Education” Curriculum

On March 25, 2022, a tweet shows that a letter from the Shandong Provincial Education Department with the title “Notice on holding the “Russia-Ukraine Situation” collective lesson preparation activity” (关于转发《关于举办“俄乌局势”集体备课活动的通知》的通知).¹⁸ This notice is in essence to accurately grasp the principled China's position of the “Russia-Ukraine situation” from the top down, and effectively do a good job in guiding students' thoughts. Some netizens comments that China's official propaganda is to help Russia start a war in Ukraine, and the West should hold China accountable for war crimes in Ukraine and enforce sanctions accordingly. Those of us who translate this notice want to make these contents public so that more people know about China's policies toward this war.

4.4. Statements and Comments on War and Nuclear War

(1) On March 30, 2022, a tweet shows that Chinese netizens cheered online for Russia's missile launch at Ukraine.¹⁹ Some netizens argued that decades of a single source of information dissemination have led to

today's situation, and Chinese people have suffered fundamental cognitive problems. Some people think that this is just a few people's remarks, and it does not mean that Chinese all of them think this way. Yet, other netizens think that this is not a minority; much of the speech within China's Internet Great Wall is so belligerent. Although a small number of Chinese people are actually anti-war, nevertheless the Chinese government banned and deleted articles and messages, and would only allow such pro-war comments and messages, which actually and fully reflects the Chinese government's attitude toward the Russia-Ukraine War. In addition, many thanked "The Great Translation Movement" for demonstrating the world the real China and letting the world see what the Communist Party was doing. At the same time, some netizens commented that "The Great Translation Movement" only translates some of the radical remarks, which is a big smear movement, and the comments on Twitter are probably written by their own people of translators.

(2) On April 20, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *Global Times* Network (环球网) released a video in which Ukraine refused an ultimatum and the Russian army resumed its offensive. Chinese netizens have turned into military masters to guide and cheer for Russia.²⁰ A few netizens believe that because Chinese people have been bullied by their government for a long time, as they want to release their emotions. Accordingly, Chinese citizens often hope that the abuse they have suffered applies to others as well. Some netizens even claimed that Chinese are more like demons than humans, because they turn a blind eye to war and strongly support such war and massacre.

(3) On May 1, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *Global Times* Network (环球网) posted a video on TikTok/Douyin (抖音) about

the destruction of weapons received by Ukraine from the United States and Europe, and Chinese netizens praised Russia's military strength underneath.²¹ Some netizens replied that it would be funny if Chinese really thought that a few cruise missiles could stop the powerful US military industry. It seems that they need a similar scenario every day, imagining that the Chinese military will also have a chance to confront the United States.

(4) On May 15, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *CCTV News* (央视新闻) released a video suggesting Russia's actions may have suddenly changed, the use of nuclear weapons has resounded internationally, and the time has come to clean up NATO. Chinese netizens left messages at the bottom, and it is best to give a few nuclear mushrooms to the United States and Japan.²² Some netizens commented Chinese are too vicious, not only because they are inhumane but also they abandon their head in order to achieve political goals. But what is really sad is that these commentators do not seem to realize that China will definitely be targeted, and then think that the CCP has some magical non-nuclear blanket to wrap China in and save it from the aftermath of war or nuclear weapons.

(5) On June 19, 2022, a tweet shows that one piece of news on TikTok/Douyin (抖音) talking about Russia wiped out 300 Ukrainian troops and destroyed 4 American-made howitzer shells in one day, and Ukraine demanded enough heavy weapons from the West. Chinese netizens left messages hoping that Putin could be ruthless and end the war quickly. When Chinese netizens heard that the Ukrainian army suffered heavy losses, they felt very safe.²³ A few netizens claimed that the reason why Chinese frantically chasing Russia's victory is that they hate people who are not richer than them but insist on pride and

independence, and they are just effectively brainwashed by the CCP's hateful education. However, a few netizens also expressed why these translators only put such violent messages in an attempt to smear the Chinese? In Chinese cyberspace, most of the comments posted are officially censored or recognized in accordance with their political correctness. As a result, those who oppose the official viewpoints and gestures toward the war are either surrounded or blocked and silenced.

(6) On September 28, 2022, a tweet shows that Biden publicly told Putin, "If nuclear weapons are used, it will return Russia to the era of 'pariahs'." Chinese netizens commented that they could not be reasonable with NATO, which had no bottom line. Absolutely the Chinese support Russia and let the United States completely disappear from the face of the earth.²⁴ In fact, not only nuclear weapons, some Chinese always want to eliminate the Americans in any way. This clearly exposes the deep inner struggle of some Chinese thugs over the anxiety and fear of self-inflicted inferiority. A few netizens then mocked China as Chinese nationalists chanted online, "We want to destroy America!" But in reality, the PRC nationalists are ironically saying "I got a US green card!"

(7) On October 10, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *CCTV International News* (CCTV 国际时讯) released a news report alleging that Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, was hit by missiles on the morning of October 10, on the street where the Security Service of Ukraine is located, and not far from the presidential office of Ukraine. Chinese netizens then applauded, but regretted that Russia did not just bomb the presidential palace.²⁵ Some netizens have argued that, unfortunately, Chinese traditional concept is the same as that of Russians, which regards life as a mustard.

4.5. Humiliating Remarks

(1) On April 11, 2022, a tweet shows that Ukrainian female soldiers fighting for the country are called military prostitutes by Chinese netizens.²⁶ Netizens left messages saying that China is shameless and that they should be ashamed. They have scolded China, thinking that they are well-dressed beasts, and showing that this kind of remark is really disgusting. What evil nations and peoples are this, and is this their attitude towards the suffering?

(2) On May 7, 2022, a tweet shows that China's news outlet *The Paper* (澎湃新闻) released a video in which the Ukrainian President creates a global fundraising platform to help Ukraine win the war and rebuild its infrastructure. Chinese netizens have ridiculed the Ukrainian President not only as a competent actor, but also as a beggar, and even a gang leader.²⁷ But the Netizens on Twitter instead praised Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as a hero, as it was no problem for the leader of a country to beg other countries to join them in fighting the devil and save his people and motherland. Netizens on Twitter also admired his courage to do whatever he could to help him take office. In fact, some netizens believe that Russia should surrender unconditionally as soon as possible, respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and take full responsibility for all those killed in the war and the economic losses caused to the world. Even some netizens claimed that if Xi Jinping is also a beggar according to the logic of the Chinese people, those of them who comment seem to forget all the help China received during and after World War II.

(3) On July 26, 2022, a tweet shows that photos of the first lady of Ukraine attending a meeting at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) building in Washington, D.C., were

painted by a Chinese cartoonist to humiliate her.²⁸ And on September 27, 2022, another Chinese blogger posted a message on Weibo that again openly humiliated Mrs. Zelensky.²⁹ Yet, comments on Twitter accuse China of being too disrespectful. Some netizens even argued that the quality of Chinese netizens is simply worrying; there is really no lower limit to Chinese communities or speeches, and only slaves (China) will follow the villain (Russia). Still, there are also people who feel that in China, there are always people who say something, but they are not paying attention to the real social problems in China. Anyhow, publishing such articles only disparages Chinese, although they themselves could mean nothing else.

4.6. Supporting Russia

(1) On April 6, 2022, a tweet shows that Chinese netizens in Russia's film barrage brushed a wave of "Z" to show support for Russia.³⁰ Some Twitter users leave comments saying "Were these Chinese netizens Nazis?" "How is it so crazy?" Some tweeters further denounced Chinese netizens as a group of incurable "Z Nazis Chinese".

(2) On April 16, 2022, a tweet shows that China's *Reference News* (参考消息) publishes an article that says China supports Putin and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.³¹ Twitter netizens commented that China and Russia are indeed complicit. Chinese social media has been completely controlled by their government, and all speech and support has been done by the so-called "Fifty Cent" army (五毛黨). The Chinese regime supports Putin's invasion of Ukraine, which has nothing to do with ordinary Chinese. However, some people do believe that many netizens in China do follow the trend a little blindly, but netizens continue to ask, who deliberately provoked the Russia-Ukraine war?

Who wants Russia and Ukraine to fight the most, and who benefits the most in the end? Zelensky is just a pawn cannon fodder, shouldn't we reflect?

(3) On May 19, 2022, a tweet shows that Russia consumed 6.1 billion yuan a day in the Russia-Ukraine war, and used up a year's military spending in two and a half months. Chinese netizens have left messages at the bottom to express that they would donate to Russia.³² Netizens in Twitter said why Chinese can be so brain-dead, even if they are in debt, they are willing to donate money to Russia. According to Titter netizens, this behavior is really the same as filial piety. They were even surprised that Chinese citizens wanted to donate to a dictatorial regime. But the saddest thing is that Chinese citizens do not even know what true freedom looks like. They have been oppressed all their lives, and even the money they donate will only go into the pockets of high-ranking Russian officials. Some netizens even commented that they should post the accounts of Ukrainian officials, trick them into being the accounts of Russian officials, and take all these fools' money.

(4) On July 13, 2022, a tweet shows that the Chairman of the Russian Duma hinted on July 6, 2022, that Alaska in the United States is Russian territory and that Russia can demand recovery if it does not comply with the agreement. The report was published on July 7, 2022, and Chinese netizens agreed with Russia and bluntly said that it had done a good job.³³ The messages below the tweet tell of Chinese collective amnesia, forgetting that their land was also taken by Russia, and did not dare to protest, but now they support Russia to take back their own land. Then they still dreamed of recovering Taiwan, discriminated against and hated what Japan did to Chinese, such as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (七七事變).

4.7. Bucha Massacre

(1) On April 6, 2022, a tweet shows that a post from Mr. Shen Yi (沈毅), a lecturer at Fudan University and a Weibo certified blogger, the Bucha massacre was a Ukrainian show. A few netizens in Twitter commented instead that in China's eyes, any tragedy is not a tragedy, but a means for them to distort the facts and use it to deceive or fool the people in order to achieve the political ends they want.

(2) On April 13, 2022, a tweet shows that an article from a “little pink” in China, in which s/he claims that the Euro-American media exaggerate the death toll in Bucha. According to this “little pink”, although there must be someone dead in Bucha, yet, out of propaganda purpose, it is only an exaggeration for some politically righteous causes just like the Nanking Massacre (南京大屠殺) in China where there were only 30 thousand deaths, not 300 thousand.³⁴ A few netizens in Twitter replied said that the exaggeration of the death toll of the Nanking Massacre by the Chinese authorities does not mean that the Bucha Massacre was fabricated or exaggerated, and they also wondered whether the “little pink” was anti-stringent, because it is stupid and unlikely to make such statements questioning China.

4.8. PRC Officially and Openly Supports Russia

(1) On April 8, 2022, a tweet shows that former Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made a statement in December 2021 that both China and Russia boycotted the West, so until now, the Chinese government has approved all current trends in pro-Russian speech on social media.³⁵ Some netizens in Twitter have said that China and Russia stink the same, and then use China-Russia hegemonism to fight the US hegemonism?! To Twitter netizens, this is simply a logical death statement, really

brain-dead. However, some netizens jokingly replied that what Wang Yi really wanted to express was that as long as China and Russia stood together, the international order would be chaotic. And justice in the world will never be upheld.

(2) On September 14, 2022, a tweet shows that Li Zhanshu (栗战书), a former member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC Central Committee, publicly expressed China's understanding and support for Russia.³⁶ Netizens in Twitter replied that China and Russia are really complicit.

(3) On September 17, 2022, a tweet shows that the *People's Daily* reported that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, led by China and Russia, held a summit in the ancient city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on September 16. At the summit, clips of Xi Jinping's meeting and shaking hands with Putin were made into reels and short videos by *People's Daily* and placed on TikTok/Douyin (抖音). The messages left below this TikTok/Douyin posting tell that the most handsome leaders of these two major countries are exhibiting strong cooperation, invincibility in the world, and win-win for each other, and for world peace; they are to bring positive energy and create a better future. These messages are peaceful and joyful.³⁷ Some netizens in Twitter, however, posted photos of Xi Jinping kissing Putin, mocking Chinese people for thinking that Xi Jinping is the most handsome, and then questioning the definition of positive energy by Chinese netizens and what contributions they have made for world peace. Besides, a few people say that Weibo is only full of good speech, not negative remarks that criticize, and they are all comments of cyber water army (水军) washing. As a consequence, those bad remarks have no reference value if they are not put up by "The Great Translation Movement".

4.9. Miscellaneous

(1) On March 10, 2022, a tweet shows that on the *People's Daily* Weibo, the Ukrainian President signed a law to forcibly confiscate the property of Russia and its residents in Ukraine. Chinese netizens laughed that Ukraine had changed its profession to a robbery, and the sanctity of private property became a joke.³⁸ Some netizens in Twitter responded that as early as in 2021, the CCP emphasized the need for implementing “common prosperity” and “triple distribution” of social wealth, and would openly seize private assets. Moreover, in the past two years, various measures and regulations on e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba have caused China’s Tencent (腾讯) to lose more than US\$30 billion in these six months. Consequently, Chinese live in places where their personal assets could be confiscated by the state at any time, but instead lament Ukraine’s confiscation of the property of rival countries during war. This is very ignorant. Even in July of this year (2022), netizens argued that village banks in Henan province, China, confiscated all the depositor’s money, which is more heinous than the actions of the Ukrainian government. But the Chinese did not dare to openly resist China, and had to turn to the US Embassy. Netizens argues, does such behavior represent that the Chinese people have been completely domesticated?

(2) On March 17, 2022, a tweet shows that China’s *Global Times* has singled out “The Great Translation Movement” as an unknown foreign force, indicating that they are translating negative foreign news and even fake news in China, instilling the militaristic ideology of aggressive war in China, and even stifling the voices of conscientious people such as pacifists within the Internet walls.³⁹ Yet, many netizens in Twitter expressed their support and thanks to “The Great Translation

Movement”, saying that the direction is correct, and China cannot hide it, thereby there is no way to lead the wind to fool the people. They also argue that China does not have freedom of expression online, and it is difficult to see the opinions of pacifists who have the ability to think independently and gather and judge information. However, there are still many netizens who criticize and curse “The Great Translation Movement”, and claim that the United States has done something unconscionable but no one has reported it. These have no effect other than causing more harm to the Chinese, and incidents of hatred of ethnic Chinese have accordingly increased.

(3) On March 18, 2022, a tweet shows that Chinese students warned against a pro-Ukrainian university teacher who believed Russia was turning Ukraine into a new colony.⁴⁰ Some netizens in Twitter said those who held openly opposed views would now be criticized, a return to the Cultural Revolution (文化大革命). They also argue that this is not yet being rounded up in the online world, but being reported in the real world.

(4) On March 18, 2022, a tweet says that China’s CCTV has begun to cite more official sources from Ukraine to let Chinese understand the achievements of Ukrainians in resisting the aggression of the Russian army. It says that “we, The Great Translation Movement, encourage CCTV to further repent and report truthful news fairly”, and advise the stubborn mouthpieces led by the *Global Times* to go astray as soon as possible and immediately stop glorifying propaganda that beautifies and supports the war of aggression.⁴¹ Some netizens in Twitter have also shown that the Chinese government is just an opportunist who sees the situation wrong and keeps changing faces. All their actions are motivated by interests, and the true attitude is unrepentant. It is

recommended that “The Great Translation Movement” should not have optimistic expectations for CCTV’s words, and the Chinese government will change the direction of the wind at any time. Moreover, many netizens said that the Chinese government should not step on the brakes on the current policy, so that they can see the Chinese government’s sanctioned appearance and more ugly faces.

(5) On March 27, 2022, a tweet says that a female Russian netizen posted a video saying that economic sanctions imposed by Europe and the United States on Russia are harmless at all. She urges Chinese manufacturers can wait until after the coronavirus epidemic to enter the Russian market, because by then European and American manufacturers have already left. She then guarantees that Chinese manufacturers will definitely make money.⁴² Some netizens in Twitter says that the woman has sold a country for her wallet, showing her ignorance and commenting that her appearance was also pretend. Twitter netizens shows that Russia lost markets, imports, and technology to the Western world because of the war, something that China may not be able to make up for now. What’s more, China may also suffer sanctions as a result. Others think Chinese companies will not do that because the Russian currency, the rupee, has been depreciating and will eventually be worthless. Then everyone knows the open “secret” of the Chinese government’s friendship with Russia

(6) On May 2, 2022, a tweet says that China’s *Small CCTV Channel* (小央视频) released a video about Japan and Germany enforcing tough sanctions against Russia and strengthening support for Ukraine. Chinese netizens left messages one after another, claiming, “did the fascist axis of World War II reappear and reorganize?”⁴³ Some netizens in Twitter replied that when other countries impose sanctions on Russia,

the Chinese will fight for the Russians and satirize the countries that impose sanctions. But when Russia sanctions other countries, the Chinese applaud again. This kind of behavior is similar to allowing only state officials to set fires and people not to light lamps (只許州官放火，不許百姓點燈).

(7) On June 9, 2022, a tweet says that Chinese were hunting down those Chinese who opposed Russia on Chinese social media and wanted the Russians to catch them. They also said that the Russian State Duma Committee had approved the first reading, indicating that a public call against Russia would be sentenced.⁴⁴ Some netizens in Twitter replied that those who hold open opposition will now be criticized, as if returning to the Cultural Revolution. Netizens comment, it is not even being clawed in the online world, but is being reported in the real world. According to their comment, they also invoke Russian laws and even want Russians to judge their fellow citizens, which is very puzzling to me.

5. The Implications of “Great Translations Movement” for Chinese Propaganda in the Russia-Ukraine War

The aforementioned section has presented a wide array of official and public opinion in the context of China’s propaganda in the Russia-Ukraine war. To be sure, “The Great Translation Movement” which is based in Twitter is effectively twittering news, heated comments, official policies and positions in relation to the war via their worldwide volunteer translators. In so doing, foreigners who do not understand and/or speak Chinese language may now have the chances to understand the world of Chinese within the walls of the Great Wall of the Internet through their original translations from Chinese into English and some

other widely spoken languages. But such a truthful translation of the message and information inside the Chinese Wall angered the Chinese Communist government, which started out as a propagandist. Without a doubt, Chinese officials issued solemn statements in response, denouncing “The Great Translation Movement” as an anti-China force abroad (境外反华势力), attempting to incite foreign netizens against China, deepen their hatred of Chinese Communist China, and even Chinese people by translating a small number of extreme remarks on Chinese websites, and convey and prove to foreign audiences that the Chinese are not as friendly as imagined. China’s *Global Times*, in particular, claimed that foreign anti-China forces use the superposition and chemical reaction of relevant public opinion to achieve the shady purpose of hijacking Chinese government diplomacy under the guise of public diplomacy.⁴⁵

Notably, the Chinese government has also used cyber warriors to maliciously report the tweets from “The Great Translation Movement” FanPage, making it go from being “blocked” by Twitter to being “frozen”. From time to time, those cyber warriors began to lash out, insult, and place strange pictures in the comment section that did not match the article, in an attempt to reduce the enthusiasm of the readers and fans for “The Great Translation Movement”. Allegedly, there are even people inside “The Great Translation Movement” who were arrested by the Chinese police, and the police used his or her identity to blend into the group in order to further control anti-Communist accounts, and severely sabotage when necessary.

Apart from issuing solemn statements and deployment of cyber warriors, the CCP propaganda government is also striving to create a unified and correct understanding and attitude toward the Russia-Ukraine war for all citizens, including all school students. For that reason, universities and high schools in some provinces, such as

Shandong, Shaanxi, Liaoning, Zhejiang, and a number of cities in China had previously received notice letter asking teachers to correctly guide students about the situation in Ukraine through “hand-in-hand online group lesson preparation activities” (手拉手在线集体备课活动). Digging deeper into the content of these collective online lesson preparations, it is not difficult to find that the Chinese authorities have attempted to instill in students with the politically constructed perceptions that Russia’s military action against Ukraine is unquestionably legitimate.⁴⁶

Partly because this notice letter was translated and exposed on Twitter by “The Great Translation Movement”, and even the classroom content and examination scoring standards were also revealed, the CCP propaganda department had to suspend educating correct spirit of the situation in Russia and Ukraine. Seeing that the public opinion emerged and further developed due to the efforts of “The Great Translation Movement” could not be stopped, the propaganda government had to delete some extreme remarks and moderately open up Western news media coverage of Ukraine in China. At the same time, any news and comments relating to “The Great Translation Movement” were almost completely eliminated for social and political stability. Meanwhile, it is also alarming to note that, as the Twitter’s operation is absolutely outside the jurisdiction of the Chinese propaganda government, it is consequently impossible to stop the posting of “The Great Translation Movement” online. Yet the Chinese government official are not given in; they have instead updated and implement a new tactic which is called “blind watermark” (盲水印), for example, in Zhihu (知乎)—Chinese version of Quora—and then expanded it to some other social software in Chinese cyberspace. As long as a screenshot of Chinese pages is taken in any Chinese social software, the user’s personal details will be marked for subsequent tracking by the Chinese officials and cyber police. As a

result, this will cause some fear among Chinese netizens who want to send screenshots to Twitter or the Western world. In other words, China's Internet walls will become higher and tighter.

One of the main reasons why China's Internet walls are getting higher and tighter is that the Chinese propaganda state strongly believe that there are foreign forces (境外势力) behind "The Great Translation Movement". There are full of malicious and one-sided translations from politically selective domestic Chinese reports, video clips, and opinions, which are arguably waging cognitive warfare against the PRC by Western hostile forces, primarily the United States, and rivalries such as Taiwan and Japan. To Beijing, these foreign forces are per se virus that deliberately humiliates, vilifies, and smears China as well as her people.

In this context, "The Great Translation Movement" refutes the slanderous and defamatory accusations of the Chinese government, arguing that the staff and volunteers in the Movement are not anti-China, but wish to expose the CCP's hypocrisy and brainwashing of its people, so as to restore freedom and goodness as a witness of this era. Although "The Great Translation Movement" has agenda settings in selecting topics for translation, they claim that they will try to remain neutral, do not make too many comments, but only translate Chinese mainland news or commentary into multiple languages, so that readers do not have to rely on their own country's news media to know China's internal information and the words of the Chinese people. Besides, the staff and volunteers in "The Great Translation Movement" not only hope that the vast number of foreign netizens will come and read tweets, but also that they will respond to and participate in this "Great Translation Movement".

As a matter of fact, it is well known that China has the world's most stringent news and information control, and any articles critical of the Communist Party and government either cannot be published online because of the sophisticated filtering systems, or are swiftly deleted by the Internet surveillance systems, including the Great Firewall and cyber police, prior to or soon after their posting/publication. Articles and remarks that still remain and/or survive in China's mainstream media or social media platform can be deemed as politically correct views and reports, which are already checked and censored by various propaganda departments and related cyberspace administration of China (中国国家互联网信息办公室) at all levels. In other words, those news and comments appeared online are either officially sanctioned, or at least tacitly approved, somehow reflecting the official position and attitude in the Chinese propagandized mediaspace.

Notwithstanding one of the most restrictive and regulated media and speech environment, "The Great Translation Movement" like some other social media platforms seek freedom from China's harsh controls. They hope that more viewers at home and abroad can further understand China, especially China's position and actions in the Russian-Ukrainian war. For this reason, for the issue of blind watermark, for instance, that I have previously mentioned, the screenshot of each submission is also processed by "The Great Translation Movement", and the blind watermark is skillfully removed without affecting the reading, so as to ensure that the Chinese official cannot restore the blind watermark, and therefore, protect the freedom of expression and safety of the contributors to "The Great Translation Movement". This can be said to be a race between cat and mouse, a battle between good and evil, a confrontation between truth and propaganda.

6. Conclusions

“The Great Translation Movement” highlights that under the CCP’s party-state propaganda machine, not only the internal and external propaganda contents are widely different, but their narrative manipulation and speech control methods are also manifest. Thanks to the multilingual translation tweets via “The Great Translations Movement,” this has largely contributed to the distorted Chinese world view and international outlook under the ideological education of the Chinese Party-State. Fundamentally, this highlights the manipulation of speech, the orientation of guided public opinion, and ultimately, resulting in the distorted political and social space within China’s new “Great Walls”. Because of such a distorted Chinese speech space, birdcage media freedom, and all kinds of social control mechanisms that strengthen tight censorship and surveillance, coupled with patriotic education with Party-State ideology as the core, ordinary people’s foreign understanding and opinions are consequently constructed.

The Russia-Ukraine war not only simply spawned “The Great Translation Movement” on Twitter, but also caused more severe challenges to China’s Party-State propaganda machine from the outside world that may subvert the deep crisis of deconstruction of China’s propaganda. After all, this politically correct atmosphere of speech and information control is the legitimacy on which the Chinese Communist Party relies deeply. Undoubtedly, the CCP propaganda state has always wanted to establish a clear, correct and patriotic cyberspace, but if its use of means is largely only to suppress dissenting public opinion and opposition organizations at home and abroad, it will not be sustainable; after all, thousands of “Great Translation Movements” on various issues will continue to germinate and grow, becoming the nightmare of the authoritarian rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

Notes

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