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Master's Thesis

Turning Social Media into Trolls over Political Disputes:
An Analysis of User Reactions and Tone in Online Trolling

社群媒體成為政治論爭的煽動空間：
用戶的網路煽動行為與語氣分析

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Abstract

In the days of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been forced into lockdowns and restrictions that have moved important aspects of politics into online spaces. Arguments over the emergence of the virus have fused with trolls using cyber nationalistic content to attack netizens online. The PRC has taken a center stage as the origin of COVID-19, and as the country's staunch nationalists are attacking others online that criticize the political and cultural opinions of their nations, which have been worsened by the pandemic. For many international netizens, their main exposure to PRC netizens is through these trolling battles. This thesis intends to analyze the tone and motivations of trolling among netizens of the PRC and other contested nations, and how some of these examples of trolling cross from social media into real political actions. This thesis examines specific examples of online trolling across Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, and explores the international contexts of the United States and India, which offer some of the examples of PRC-based trolling. To do this, I use De Fina's proposal of tonal analysis to analyze five categories of tones (ironic, amiable, aggressive, neutral and ambiguous) in social media comments, of which there are three for Taiwan, two for Hong Kong, and two each for the United States and India. In total, there are 157 coded comments across these cases. Through the analyses of tone and multimodal communications, this thesis argues that online trolling between PRC and non-PRC netizens that is greatly motivated by claims of cultural contiguity or ideological incongruity is centered on the debates over not only nationalism and ideological difference but also shared cultural identities. Some of these trolling battles have drawn from social events and have further been generating real-world political responses. Some are the real-world responses from government, non-government officials and general public, while others have remained purely online.

Keywords: cyber nationalism, tone analysis, online trolling, multimodal communication

摘要

自 2020 年爆發的新冠疫情，人們的外出行動因封鎖管制而受到諸多限制，這也導致原本的政治論爭在網路空間益加活躍。像是在社群媒體溝通脈絡中，人們討論有關新冠病毒源頭的議題，往往與支持「線上民族主義」的網路挑釁者掛勾在一起。當中國成為新冠病毒的起源地，並散播到世界各地之後，熱衷於民族主義的中國網民，常對來自不同國家且抱持不同政治立場和社會觀點的網民進行網路攻擊和煽動行為，這樣的網路煽動行為因新冠疫情更加嚴重，其他國家的網民也往往是透過這些充滿挑釁和煽動意味的網路言論戰爭和社群媒體溝通，而有機會與中國網民有所接觸。本論文旨在探討中國與其他國家的網民間因政治立場和社會觀點的差異而引發的網路煽動行為，本論文針對社群媒體溝通脈絡中，網路煽動言論的語氣和動機進行分析，並討論網路挑釁和煽動如何從社群媒體溝通脈絡轉化為實際的政治行動。本論文首先針對來自台灣、香港和中國網民間的網路挑釁和煽動言論進行語氣分析，接著分析中國網民與其他國家網民間的網路挑釁和煽動言論，關注中國網民與美國網民和印度網民間的網路互動和煽動言論。本論文沿用 De Fina 提出的「語氣分析」研究方法，分析 157 條網路挑釁和煽動言論，針對這些社群媒體溝通中的五種語氣進行分析，包括：諷刺、和藹、咄咄逼人、中立和曖昧語氣。採用語氣分析和多模態溝通的研究方法，本論文認為中國網民和非中國網民之間的網路攻訐很大程度上受「文化鄰接」或「意識形態歧異」兩種因素所影響，這不僅顯示中國網民和非中國網民之間的網路挑釁和煽動言論很多集中在民族主義和意識形態差異的爭論上，也發生在不同國家的網民間對共同華人文化認同上的爭論。本論文也說明網路煽動言論有部分源自生活日常中的社會事件，並從網路空間的挑釁和煽動言論，進一步在現實世界中引發後續政治效應，這些效應有些是來自政府官員、非政府官員和一般社會大眾；然而，有些則停留於網路溝通層面，並沒有後續政治效應。

關鍵詞：網絡民族主義，語氣分析，在線拖釣，多模態交流

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Table of Contents 4

Table of Figures and Texts 5

1. Introduction 7
 - 1.1. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework 8
 - 1.1.1. Online Trolling Motivations 9
 - 1.1.2. Trolling and Cyber Nationalism in China and Taiwan 12
 - 1.1.3. Trolling, Video Games, and Cyber Nationalism 17
 - 1.1.4. Memes in Online Trolling and Ideological Representation 20
 - 1.1.5. Online Trolling Motivations 22
 - 1.2. Methodology 28
2. Online Trolling in the Cross-Strait Politics 32
 - 2.1. The Case of “Taiwan Stupid” 33
 - 2.2. The Case of #saysrytoTedros and #nevy 45
 - 2.3. The Case of Winnie the Pooh 64
 - 2.4. Chapter Conclusion 76
3. Online Trolling Identities in Hong Kong 80
 - 3.1. The Case of Jimmy Lai 81
 - 3.2. The Case of Apple Daily 93
 - 3.3. Chapter Conclusion 104
4. Online Trolling in International Politics 106
 - 4.1. The Case of Wuheqilin 107
 - 4.2. The Case of Tiangong and Typhoon In-fa 120
 - 4.3. Chapter Conclusion 131
5. Trolling in a Changing Global Context 134
6. References 148
7. Appendix 157

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Fuchs' Model of Social Media & Revolution	27
Figure 2.1	34
Figure 2.2	35
Text 2.1	36
Text 2.2	38
Text 2.3	39
Text 2.4	40
Figure 2.3: Taiwan/COVID Political Comic	42
Text 2.5	43
Figure 2.4: Tone of Taiwan Stupid	44
Text 2.6	45
Text 2.7	46
Text 2.8	48
Text 2.9	49
Text 2.10	51
Text 2.11	55
Text 2.12	57
Text 2.13	58
Figure 2.5: Tone of #saysrytoTedros and #nnevvy	63
Figure 2.6: Winnie the Pooh Shadow	65
Text 2.14	65
Text 2.15	68
Text 2.16	70
Text 2.17	72
Figure 2.7: Tone of Winnie the Pooh	74
Text 3.1	82
Figure 3.1: Jimmy Lai Caricature	85
Text 3.2	86
Text 3.3	87
Text 3.4	88

Text 3.5	89
Figure 3.2: Tone of Jimmy Lai	91
Figure 3.3: Denise Ho's Apple Daily Selfie	94
Text 3.6	95
Text 3.7	96
Text 3.8	98
Text 3.9	101
Figure 3.4: Tone of Apple Daily	103
Figure 4.1: Blood Cotton Initiative	107
Text 4.1	109
Text 4.2	111
Figure 4.2: Separation of Powers	114
Text 4.3	115
Text 4.4	115
Text 4.5	116
Text 4.6	117
Figure 4.3: Tone of Wuheqilin	118
Figure 4.4: Tiangong	121
Text 4.7	122
Text 4.8	123
Text 4.9	123
Text 4.10	124
Figure 4.5: Flooding of Typhoon In-fa	126
Text 4.11	127
Text 4.12	127
Text 4.13	128
Text 4.14	128
Figure 4.6: Tone of Tiangong and Typhoon In-fa	129



Chapter 1

Introduction

This research aims to explore how trolling plays a role in international politics. Trolls have been newly empowered through social media to arm themselves to make online attacks on other countries and international public figures. Through social media, trolls are fighting other netizens over issues of nationalism and national identity, which are even starting to draw reactions from governments and officials all over the world. By understanding how trolling motivates the emergence of (anti)cyber nationalism, the perspective of world politics can change. This can be seen in cases of PRC trolls interacting with Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, and the United States. This is demonstrated by the way that PRC-based trolls attack each other over claims of cultural contiguity and ideological incongruity. While many academics have started to examine trolling, by placing it in the context of international politics this research can zero in on the dangers that trolling brings on an international level, and how the tone of trolling can make political disputes more intense online. The context of trolling can shift greatly when we observe the tone of the trolls that are involved in these various cases. Tone can tell us how trolls feel about certain issues in international relations and relative positions between nations and people. Tone can determine how content is consumed and how narratives are constructed, and thereby can either sour or improve the image of a country or organization. When trolling of a certain tone is directed against important figures or subjects, it can elicit serious responses and effect real world policy and relations between nations. Trolling is an important vehicle for examining continuing developments in online aggression when discussing cross-strait issues. The increasing presence of trolls opens the door for creating online political participation in everything from social media forums, into mainstream media, and even in video games. Trolls use many different tactics and weapons online, including but not limited to memes, which rely on creating structures in the memory of users to remix or designate memes for a specific purpose (Wiggins, 2019, p. 50). Using Winnie the Pooh as a form of digital resistance, internet users can harness the discursive power of memes as a well-known trolling motif. On the one hand, the meme criticizes the

PRC and their leader, but on the flip side, for the cyber nationalists, this meme is an unacceptable attack on their national pride.

Beyond memes, trolls use other tactics such as impersonation, harassment, parody, sarcasm and satire, to undermine other countries claims of uniqueness or moral high ground. With the expanding nature of trolling behavior, disagreements between netizens are no longer being fought exclusively online between anonymous internet users. These effects of trolling are materializing into offline consequences for government and non-governmental officials. This research will challenge Fuchs' model approach (2014) to social media protests, wherein he emphasized material factors in the real world rather than online discursive influences. This research will instead advance the contention that trolling on social media can actually generate real world policy responses and change international relations and the perception of other countries by important officials.

1.1 Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

The opportunities of the Internet are seemingly endless. From connecting communities across the globe to making businesses and deals with major conglomerates, this creation of culture and content is referred to as participatory culture. Jenkins, Puroshotma, Weigel, Clinton, and Robison (2005, 5) use these five points to define participatory culture

1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. With strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Where members believe that their contributions matter
5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

The participatory culture allows users to engage or not engage with platforms or people on the internet. In a utopian sense, participatory culture would offer solutions to many of today's problems such as racial inequality or gender discrimination. Everyone that has internet access could chip in their opinions to advocate for change. However, the reality of the internet is far from a utopia. Fuchs (2014a) points out that Jenkins et. al fails to address the dimensions of participatory democracy. The notion of participatory democracy explains the "ownership of

platforms/companies, collective decision-making, profit, class and the distribution of material benefits” (Fuchs, 2014a, p. 5). In 2005, the internet operated differently than it does today. Massive corporations on the internet have wider reaches to audiences than maybe an up-and-coming Instagram influencer. Having equal access to the internet does not yield that all users will have equal power in the creation of media. Additionally, it does not preclude the internet culture from featuring participation in toxic behavior, like what is perpetrated by trolls.

1.1.1 Online Trolling Motivations

Trolling has become a hot topic in public conversation as also in the academic community. Defined as toxic behavior online to attack one’s opponents, trolling can occur in many ways. For example, some trolls gaming the up/down vote system of a social media platform, while others public attack other users all while encouraging others to join in. Still others use various types of memes to insult, denigrate or humiliate their targets. Moving beyond the interactions on social media, trolling behavior is being studied in games particularly in the types of behavior trolls participate in digital games. The behavior exhibited by trolls has been studied in the past as well as what type of messaging is created to attack specific users. In the past, online games used to be a space mostly for men. As women started joining these servers, they became new targets for attacks from trolls. With multiplayer affordances of online games, women faced harassment and offensive comments from other players (Fox & Tang, 2014, p. 315). This problematic behavior has several issues but one issue is the normalization of aggressive behavior in digital games. Trash talking in games is a common occurrence in online multiplayer games.

The tolerance of toxic behavior in games has led to the normalization and perpetuation of aggressive behavior has forced women into the outgroup to encounter different types of harassment that men run into. Studies have shown that men tend to face more harassment in-game, but women face more serious forms of harassment like stalking or sexual harassment (Hilvert-Bruce & Neill, 2019, p. 303). Often people are told not to “feed the trolls.” Interactions with a troll online is like a chemical reaction—throwing emotions, reactions, or attention to a troll triggers an explosion. Other studies have looked into the motivations behind the behavior demonstrated by these trolls. Cook, Schaafsma, & Antheunis (2017) break down trolling motivations into three broad categories: personal enjoyment, revenge, and

thrill-seeking (p. 3332). Trolling works by recruiting like-minded individuals in a networked space. With the normalization of trolling in video games, it becomes an endless cycle of enabling and perpetuating cyberbullying and bad behavior (Cook, Schaafsma, & Antheunis, 2017, p. 3337). Trolling has become a centerpiece in the content produced in some communities.

The satirical, animated television show, *South Park* frequently creates caricatures of celebrities, political figures, and major international companies. In 2019, the episode “Band in China” mocks the companies and memes that have shaped China’s image in the democratic world. The premise of the episode is that Stan, one of the main characters in the show, and his friends’ band gets picked up by a low-level Hollywood talent agent. As the agent attempts to drum up international interest, he decides the band should make a dramatic biopic with the stipulation that the film must follow PRC censorship regulations. When Stan starts the scriptwriting process, a Chinese official sits next to him rewriting the script line by line. Stan ultimately ends up letting go of fame and fortune rather than letting the CCP control his creative freedom. Running parallel to this storyline, Stan’s dad Randy has been growing marijuana on a farm and has the idea to start selling marijuana in China. Randy sets off to China and meets both well-known companies like Disney and the NBA who all have the same idea of selling their ideas or products to the citizens of the PRC. Shortly after he lands, with his briefcase full of drugs, Randy is arrested and forcibly thrown into jail where he meets Winnie the Pooh and Piglet behind bars. In this scene, Randy learns that the lovable cartoon characters are in prison because someone made a meme comparing Xi Jinping to Winnie the Pooh. After working in a forced labor camp and a conversation with Mickey Mouse, Randy sets up a plan to win over the CCP. In order to appease the Chinese government, Randy kills Winnie the Pooh and earns the trust of the CCP to sell his marijuana in the country. The reception to this episode was met with some strong criticism. American critics found the episode “both hilarious, and depressingly insightful” for its commentary on Chinese censorship laws and Hollywood’s dependence on their overseas box office (Di Placido, 2019). On the other hand, the CCP banned all traces of the show from the Chinese internet. *South Park* no longer appears on the Chinese streaming service Youku or in Baidu searches (Gstalter, 2019). Following the ban, the creators of *South Park* responded with a sarcastic apology to the CCP

“Like the NBA, we welcome the Chinese censors into our homes and into our hearts. We too love money more than freedom and democracy. Xi doesn’t look just like Winnie the Pooh at all. Tune into our 300th episode this Wednesday at 10! Long live the Great Communist Party of China! May this autumn’s sorghum harvest be bountiful! We good now China?” (South Park, 2020)

The foundation of South Park is based on mocking and ridiculing the absurdity of society. Although this trolling behavior is what South Park does best, this episode shined a light on an issue of Uyghur labor camps in the autonomous region of Xinjiang. Major brands like Nike, Adidas, and H&M have begun boycotting the use of cotton from Xinjiang because of the allegations of forced labor of Uyghurs (BBC, 2021). The backlash from this confrontation has caused some prominent Chinese celebrities to pull out of deals with these companies as well as taxi services will not even allow for drop off at H&M stores (BBC, 2021). With this online-pop culture pipeline taking shape, individuals and companies are taking a stance against the human rights violations the PRC has been committing for years.

A fabricated meme that originally circulated on Sina Weibo, a Chinese social media platform, showed a photoshopped Australian soldier holding a knife to the neck of an Afghan child holding a lamb caught the attention of international media. In recent news, special Australian forces allegedly killed 39 unarmed Afghan civilians out of “blood lust” (Packham, 2020). The deaths of these innocent civilians have scarred the nation. Just before the government was able to find ways of atoning to their mistakes, this meme of the Afghan child and the Australian soldier began to circulate. The artist responsible for the meme is an artist that goes by “Wuheqilin.” (烏合麒麟) His work ranges from the Hong Kong protests to the US Capitol riots. His artwork made international headlines when Zhao Lijian posted a tweet with the meme and the caption

“Shocked by murder of Afghan civilians & prisoners by Australian soldiers. We strongly condemn such acts, & call for holding them accountable.” (Zhao, 2020)

Australian netizens were shocked and disgusted by the behavior of a government official denouncing their country in this callous and distasteful way. Even the Australian Prime Minister said that the Chinese government should be ashamed of the post and referred to it as deeply offensive and spreads disinformation in the world’s eyes. In an interview with Sky News Australia, Carl Zha, a Chinese social media personality, expressed his opinions on the

image in question. Zha claimed that it is a political cartoon and the only fabricated part of the image is that the soldier is holding one child instead of two (CGTN, 2020). Others claim it is a double standard that people will make fun of China and their leaders, but when China utilizes memes to make a political statement, they are lambasted for it (法師阿甘, 2020). Rising cyber nationalism is growing and the consequences are becoming a reality. Often, companies and even countries are afraid of standing up to China because of its economic and political strength. When national pride is on the line, Australians have no choice but to stand united. While tensions in both countries were building over this controversy, China decides to drop a 200% tax tariff on Australian wine (Mao, 2020). The CCP's actions with the combination of the pandemic have affected hundreds of wine producers during one of the busiest seasons for wine—even forcing some businesses to close their doors forever (Mao, 2020). Cyber nationalism poses a threat to netizens all over the world. The destruction that one meme could change the entire economic structure of a country.

1.1.2 Trolling and Cyber Nationalism in China and Taiwan

Referring back to Wiggins (2019), it is understood that trolls have figured out how to use memes as a component of trolling campaigns that can have perceived power online depending on how it is interpreted. Trolls manipulate memes as tools to rally around ideas of identity or politics. When groups online contribute to a certain ideology, there can be danger in numbers. Internet users can congregate online through consensus movements. A consensus movement is a persuasive communication practice that unites certain communities to defend a specific cause (Guo & Yang, 2019, p. 75). In this case, cyber nationalists can work together to push dangerous ideas from the internet into reality.

Under Mao, China's nationalistic identity took on a new form. The Patriotic Education Campaign aimed to educate citizens on the suffering that took place under foreign imperialism (Weatherly & Zhang, 2017, p. 56). This aggressive tactic of "patriotic education" has made citizens into defenders of Chinese national interest, which has become a point of hostility to the West. Chinese citizens and even legislators are now taking these ideas to the internet. Zhao Lijian, a Chinese Deputy General of Information in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is using foreign social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook as a means to protect and defend the interests of their citizens while they are away from the motherland. Zhao has been

dubbed a troll for his outspoken political outbursts on Twitter (Smith, 2019). While voicing opinions on the internet is not new, when countries are forced to take sides on stances made by Chinese officials cyber nationalism takes on a new dimension outside of China.

In the PRC, the public sphere does not exist in Habermas's definition. China's state censorship works in three ways: through the Great Firewall, keyword blocking, and line-by-line content filtering (King, Pan, and Roberts, 2013, p. 3). China's sophisticated censorship technology is often referred to as the "Great Firewall;" this firewall blocks domestic users from using foreign social media or media sharing and instead the state pushes netizens to use Chinese alternatives (Schneider, 2018, p. 207). Keyword blocking stops users from posting banned words or phrases and content filtering is where censors manually read posts by hand (King, Pan, and Roberts, 2013, p. 3). Western audiences generally see Chinese censorship as a net that catches anything that is deemed as controversial but that is not fully the case. Although censors will flag things like pornography, what the state is looking for is collective action in the form of protests. Words like "Tiananmen" redirects users to recommendations and travel tips in the area rather than the atrocities of the event or the iconic image of "Tank Man" (Schneider, 2018, pp. 68-69). Upon first glance, it appears that the Chinese government is attempting to cover the incident when in reality it is censored because of its collective action potential. King, Pan, and Roberts (2013) define collective action potential as people that band together and express themselves collectively without the government (p. 2). One topic that is often flagged by censors is women's rights. The roots of China's internet come from a "military-industrial complex"—this is the notion that the internet was a space only for men because it was originally made for male engineers and scientists for military purposes (Han, 2018, p. 4). A feminist group in China called the Gender Watch Women's Voice (GWWV) is often the target of censorship because of the internet's ingrained misogyny. In 2017, the GWWV had their account suspended for posting an article on February 14, 2017, coinciding with the Women's March against Donald Trump (Han, 2018, p. 10). Any type of media that could be construed as collective action is quickly shut down. Although this may discourage some movements, netizens have found ways to escape the watchful eye of the censors.

Referring back to the #MeToo movement found its way to China through international Chinese students. Sexual violence is more common among Asian women because of the

cultural teachings of Confucianism including chastity and not challenging seniority (Zeng, 2019, p. 75). Because the topics of sexual assault and #MeToo were deemed as too controversial, the hashtag was blocked (Zeng, 2019, p. 76). Blocking hashtags allows the CCP to continue to prevent large assemblies of people and the potential of collective action. Supporters instead used the hashtag #MiTu as a proxy to continue to gather support online (Zeng, 2019, p. 76). #MiTu is a form of resistance in the highly guarded walls of the CCP's censorship policy.

Other forms of resistance in China are using the “limits of gender.” Wallis (2014) explains that the concept of the “limits of gender” in China is subversive messages articulated by the representations of gender (p. 224). Chinese netizens create user-generated texts disguised as female mythological characters and sexualized anime characters to protest a “vulgarity” campaign. These memes were used to resist the CCP's campaign of censorship through using women's bodies as feminine and sites of subordination and penetration while rebellion and action are seen as masculine (Wallis, 2014, p. 235). The glaring misogyny continues in the gendered conversation surrounding women in politics. Historically, Chinese women were deterred from engaging in the public sphere and barred from entering politics; this is because of many of the traditional gendered stereotypes like the concept of “yin-yang” that have pushed men to take public domain and women to take on the role of reproducers and nurturers (Peng, Cummings, & Li, 2020, pp. 4-5). In regards to politics outside of China, gender continues to play a role in the conversation about former Prime Minister Theresa May. The most defining characteristic of the discourse about May was the emphasis on her gender. “Before anything else, she was a ‘woman politician’... regardless of whether [the commenters] held positive or negative views of May (Peng, Cummings, & Li, 2020, p. 8). Chinese internet users' emphasis on the gender of politicians constructs the notion that women are unfit to lead in the political arena.

Despite these ideas about women in China, this may seem like a contradiction when examining the case of the “Little Pinks.” The Little Pinks emerged as a female-led wave of nationalist activism that focused its discourse through romance and the emotional seduction on the literature site Jinjiang; however, after Taiwan's 2016 election, the Little Pinks took on a new life as a nationalistic group (Fang & Repnikova, 2017, p. 2).

Taiwanese and Chinese identities are a complicated issue on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. For China, Taiwan is a renegade province of the country; while in Taiwan 45% of the population identify only as Taiwanese, 45% identify as both Taiwanese and Chinese and only 3% identify as only Chinese (Kádár, Haugh, and Chang, 2013, p. 3). This split opinion on national identity is often an issue of contention. Taiwanese tend to dissociate the Chinese identity and researchers have found that Taiwanese netizens tend to use more abusive language towards Chinese netizens (Kádár, Haugh, and Chang, 2013, p. 17). With China's ban of Chinese citizens entering Taiwan, the only means of interaction between the two entities is online (BBC, 2019). These online national identity disputes have brought forward cyber nationalistic issues that continue to build walls between China and Taiwan. Guo and Yang (2019) define cyber nationalism as the utilization of the internet and new technologies to push the ideas and interests of a nation (p. 75). One of the problems of cyber nationalism in China is often rooted in antagonism toward other nations (Fang & Repnikova, 2017, p. 4). An example of this is in the Diba Expedition.

The name "Diba" derives from the platform Baidu Tiba, which is a popular discussion group in China (Fang & Repnikova, 2017, p. 8). After a Taiwanese member of a Korean pop group was seen holding a Taiwanese flag, which was seen as a statement of pro-independence, she was forced to make an apology to Chinese fans and angered her Taiwanese fans (Fang & Repnikova, 2017, p. 8). What became the catalyst for the Diba Expedition was Tsai Ing-wen's election win in 2016. The Diba Expedition users utilized VPNs from their native platforms to flood foreign platforms with memes about pro-China sentiments to Taiwanese citizens (Guo & Yang, 2019, p. 77). Liberal commentators referred to the nationalistic groups involved in these events as Little Pinks because they are not red like the CCP, but a lighter red making them agents of the party (Guo, 2018, p. 2). Not realizing the Little Pink label was already used by Jinjiang users, the name took on a new life of its own as many nationalistic groups began to label themselves as Little Pinks.

Although the trolls in the Diba Expedition held pro-CCP ideas, the approach could not be fully supported by the Chinese government. The Diba Expedition worked "sideways" with the PRC's state power; while the memetic messaging was aligned with the PRC's views, the expedition was taking place on foreign social media outside of the hands of state control (Yang et al., 2017, p. 18). On the other hand, the "fifty-cent army" has been used as a way to

monitor the general public. The CCP has employed media professionals that are tasked with strategically placing state-sponsored propaganda and trolling is one of their regular duties (R. Han, 2018, pp. 305-306). Younger netizens tend to be more tech-savvy when it comes to new technologies; the state is looking to students to keep an eye on social media trends to engage with other young people online. One group that has become a state-approved group is the Communist Youth League.

Other tactics nationalistic groups are relying on digital populism to gain support. The Communist Youth League of China (CYL) is known for its use of “ideological and political training” (Guo, 2018, p. 6). What has helped the CYL attract a massive fanbase through its promotion of cultural works that repackage propaganda as entertainment with subtle nationalistic messages known as “ideotainment” (Guo, 2018, p. 3). This idea of “ideotainment” shows the conformity of Chinese actors as seen with the Leon Dai incident. Leon Dai is a Taiwanese actor and director that was attacked by the CYL after posting an essay that implied Dai’s support of Taiwanese independence (Guo, 2018, p. 8). Guo (2021) argues that Chinese celebrities who can navigate between their mainstream roles and state-sponsored organizations can accomplish their goals (p. 100). Since Dai was unable to fit into China’s neoliberal views of the entertainment industry, he was quickly removed from the production of a film in China. Although netizens can shield themselves in their political spheres when interacting with others on the internet that bubble can be quickly smashed by cyber nationalists. Launching attacks against others for disrespecting one’s country is not taken lightly especially in the case of China.

After Mao’s death, Deng Xiaoping took on the role of rebuilding China. To undo some of China’s Maoist past, Deng began the “reform and opening” of the Chinese economy into the global economy through modernizing industry, agriculture, science and technology, and defense (Wallis, 2013, p. 31). Investing in technology became a national strategy, which rapidly pushed China into the world of modern science and technology (Greenhalgh & Zhang, 2020, p. 3). Because of Deng’s leadership, China today is one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world. China’s leadership today, under Xi Jinping, has capitalized on the success of China’s technological advancements. Xi promises a brighter future in the form of the “China Dream.” “The China Dream aims to connect the party to the people through a common vision by addressing social inequalities, restoring Confucian values, and

fostering a sense of personal well-being” (Greenhalgh & Zhang, 2020, p. 4). Reviving the national pride in China has brought netizens online to embrace cyber nationalism. While cyber nationalism is a growing subject matter there are some gaps in the literature. Cyber nationalism has been studied extensively through social media, but there is only some sparse work about cyber nationalism in video games. Video games are often overlooked as a communication medium because of the nature of video games. Massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) have created new ways of communicating online. In games like World of Warcraft, players can communicate with each other through voice or an in-game “mail” style chat (Thorne & Fischer, 2012). Through video games, communities can be established as well as the introduction to other worldviews.

1.1.3 Trolling, Video Games, and Cyber Nationalism

One of the most visible environments for trolls to lurk in is in video gaming communities. Video game players develop a range of skills while playing online with others. From teamwork and collaboration to communicating and articulating strategies and ideas to one another. This research will focus on the latter. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) allows players to have physical distance from other players and their dissenting remarks. With CMC, users can exploit these technological devices to express their feelings of aggression on real people without facing the risk of being identified or be held accountable for their actions (Hardaker, 2010, p. 238). With aggressive behavior in high-stress simulated games, some extremist ideologies emerge from these player-to-player interactions (Al-Rawi, 2018). Cyber nationalism can also occur within the game design. Game developers craft games as an extension of their viewpoints, both implicit and explicit. When game developers draw inspiration from their lived experiences, players are given new worlds and perspectives to explore. These unconscious or conscious choices can even upset players. When real political issues enter the ring, there are some real consequences to bear as seen in the Devotion case study.

Applying knowledge from the literature, the research will explore a case study of cyber nationalism in video games. Red Candle Games (赤燭遊戲), a Taiwanese-based game developer, created a renowned side-scroller, horror game called “Detention” (返校). This game was set in the 1960s in Taiwan during the martial law era; players follow two high

school students, Fang Ray-shin and Wei Chung-ting, as they are trapped at school in the middle of a typhoon. While waiting out the storm, Fang and Wei encounter monsters called the “Lingered.” The monsters were based on Taiwanese and Chinese folklore. Red Candle Developers explained that “when a person died of a cruel, unnatural or unjust cause, he or she will turn into an evil spirit and linger around the place of their death, entering an endless loop of suffering until their souls are cleansed or the grudge is lifted” (Wong, 2016). Throughout the game, the player collects clues to learn about Fang’s broken family life and her relationship with Wei’s underground book club. Two teachers named Ms. Yin and Mr. Zhang were the overseers of the underground book club and ultimately Mr. Zhang’s entanglement with Fang disbanded the club. Growing paranoid of the military investigations Ms. Yin demands that Mr. Zhang break up with Fang or she will cut ties with him. Fang overhears this conversation and mistakes the two teachers to be cutting off ties with each other, not the book club. In a fit of jealous rage, Fang reports Ms. Yin to the authorities, and Fang’s actions ultimately lead to the death of her teachers and classmates. Unable to bear the shame Fang commits suicide by jumping from the top of the school building. Depending on the choices made at the end of the game, the player determines Fang’s fate: face the guilt or live in eternal purgatory. The game received great praise from reviewers from all sides of the internet. According to Metacritic (2017), Detention scored a respectable 83% for its story, controls, and art. The game was so popular that it was given a full-length film and in 2020, Detention was made into an eight-episode Netflix series. Praise was widely given for the game and the film, but more importantly, it created the separation between the Taiwanese and Chinese experience. During this period, military police played a pivotal role in maintaining the authoritarian regime. Keeping the peace in Detention meant that the law must be followed and there are no diverging paths. Taiwan’s move to democracy divides the powers of legislative representatives and those in the community; this means that communities can make their regulatory codes (Martin, 2020, p. 664). The former ideology of stark blacks and whites now operates in some shades of grey. Detention gave Taiwanese audiences more than just powerful, visual storytelling but also a way to reconcile with the past. In the film, the ending leaves audiences hopeful for the future of Taiwan. The martial law era was a dark chapter for Taiwan but is not encouraged to forget as seen with China and their historical blunders. Cultivating the Taiwanese identity for audiences to consume in mainstream media outside of

Taiwan, in many ways, poses a threat. By presenting Taiwan as a separate entity, not through the Chinese experience, the “one China” identity begins to splinter off. Red Candle Games makes this known in their second game.

Four years following the release of *Detention*, Red Candle Games announced a new game called “Devotion” (還願). Like *Detention*, *Devotion* is a horror game that draws its story from the history and culture of Taiwan. *Devotion* takes place in the 1980s in the apartment of a screenwriter named Du Feng Yu. Players for most of the gameplay as Feng Yu and explore his dilapidated apartment and are shown flashbacks of his life with his family. Feng Yu’s wife, Gong Li Feng is a retired actress and his daughter Du Mei Shin is an aspiring child star. Through this first-person narrative, the player learns about the immense pressure Mei Shin’s parents put her through to ensure her success as a singer. Players see Mei Shin at the piano as a toddler and experience her panic attacks in the middle of class. After losing a singing competition by one point, Mei Shin begins developing severe anxiety that begins to tear the family apart. Directors are no longer interested in Feng Yu’s scripts and Li Feng has become increasingly resentful towards Feng Yu’s failures as a father and a provider. Instead of seeking psychiatric help, Feng Yu seeks help from a cult leader named Mentor Hueh and the religious deity Guanyin. Hellbent on curing his daughter and her singing career, Feng Yu’s obsession with Mentor Hueh gets progressively worse to the point his wife leaves him. Mentor Hueh instructs Feng Yu to perform a dark ritual that requires him to place his daughter in the bathtub with snakes and rice wine for seven days, which causes her death. The game was released on February 19, 2019, and a week later on February 26th it was removed from the online game platform, Steam, completely (Allen, 2019). Players found a hidden “Easter egg” on one of the posters in the game. Written on a talisman in one of the rooms are the characters (習近平小熊維尼和呢嘛叭唎) meaning “Xi Jinping” and “Winnie the Pooh,” and in Hokkien “Your mom is a moron.” In this context, for Taiwanese people, Winnie the Pooh is a way of resisting or refusing to accept Xi Jinping as their leader.

On the other hand, for Chinese cyber nationalists, an attack on their leader is equal to an attack on the country, which is something netizens would not stand for. A mass number of Chinese players took to Steam and left thousands of thumbs-down reviews on the game, which led to the complete removal of the game. Red Candle Games issued an apology to players explaining the talisman was meant only to be a placeholder and was never supposed to

appear in the official release (Liao, 2019). Although Red Candle games attempted to patch the talisman from Devotion, Chinese players could not receive the patch. A Taiwanese Steam user claimed Chinese users were using pirated versions of the game (Liao, 2019). On December 16, 2020, Devotion had a new development. Red Candle Games announced that GOG, another online gaming platform, would release the game “Devotion.” However, almost six hours after Red Candle Games’ announcement, GOG released a statement with a change of heart

Earlier today, it was announced that the game Devotion is coming to GOG. After receiving many messages from gamers, we have decided not to list the game in our store. (GOG, 2020)

There are thousands of gamers highly anticipating the release of Devotion and unfortunately, the millions of Chinese voices outweigh those in the democratic world. Once again Red Candle Games have been slapped in the face by Chinese nationalistic views and Devotion may never again see the light of day. The actions of cyber nationalist gamers are becoming more and more evident. As the PRC grows economically, more and more companies and organizations grow fearful to stand up to the giant.

1.1.4 Memes in Online Trolling and Ideological Representation

As mentioned above, memes are a distinctive part of a troll’s arsenal, although not the sole tactic that they can use to attack others. Communication scholars have been researching memes for years, and although to may seem silly it is an integral part of online communication and trolling. The word meme is derived from the Greek word “mimema” and was later shortened to the word “meme” in Richard Dawkins’s book *The Selfish Gene* (Guo & Yang, 2019, p. 73). In Dawkins’s (2006) book, he defines a meme as a small unit of cultural transmission and the transmission of language, ideas, beliefs, and behavior. Although Dawkins coined the term, the process of using pictures to communicate is as old as the ancient Egyptians. Assigning meaning to our lives has come with time, culture, and the creation of accepted values. Memetic communication is how netizens communicate with one another about current trends or relatability. Often users see memes as just silly images and some funny text, but by reframing memes as a potent tool in the hands of trolls, one repeated motifs and images can form part of the mocking or satire of a target.

Wiggins (2019) argues that memes are meant to mean something through interpretation and comprehension. Content in a meme can indicate subject matter from social, cultural, political, economic, and/or related phenomena (Wiggins, 2019, p. 30). This relationship built between human users and computer systems creates the means of social interaction. As explained earlier, memes are a genre and of the many genres political memes tend to be the most salient. Political memes address political philosophy and ideology; often, political memes are responses to political issues or events (Wiggins, 2019, p. 65-66). The perceived importance of a political meme is dependent on how a country views itself, particular in terms of how that ideology interacts with other countries ideologies. This drives arguments over ideological incongruity. If a country has a heightened sense of confidence, but other international entities have differing opinions then debates and sometimes tension builds around the conversation. Memes are not the whole of a troll's weapons of choice, but they do play a role, even in this research.

Wiggins (2019, p. 44) continues to explain that memes are not mediums of online communication, but rather genres in multimedia messages that are unaltered but possess the capability for broad distribution otherwise known as spreadable media. Spreadable media allows for content to attract attention without getting caught in all of the noise on the internet. Video games are an example of spreadable media. When video games perform well online, a following of people become invested in the narrative and gameplay. The existence of a meme cannot exist without spreadable media because it cannot be reused and replicated over and over again as seen with "viral" content. Although the words "meme" and "viral" are regularly used interchangeably, they do not hold the same meaning. Scholars have differentiated "viral" as content that stretches from all ends of the internet without much significant change whereas memes incorporate participation from the original content where it is then changed, imitated, remixed, and modified until there is a distinction from its origins (Wiggins, 2019, p. 4-5). These packets of media are shared all over the internet from Twitter to Facebook; memes have made a lasting impact in communication media.

One way companies are capitalizing on memes is by commercially incorporating the content into advertising on social media. Memes are quick to create, consume, and are easily shared through social media (Wiggins, 2019, p. 89). Using memes in strategic marketing makes sense. Creating relatable content resonates well with audiences. When internet memes

are used correctly, those memes grab the attention of users by disrupting standard marketing practices, which creates a “cooler” image of the brand for users (Wiggins, 2019, p. 92). Outside of marketing and branding strategies, memes have other abilities. Memes are multi-dimensional, and one way in which trolling campaigns gain mainstream recognition in popular culture and offline.

1.1.5 Trolling Tactics and Social Movements

Depending on the situation, a meme can be used by trolls to lead their online movements. An example of this is the Pepe the Frog meme. The legacy of Pepe the Frog started in a comic book called the Boy’s Club. What was created to entertain audiences emerged into new forms as a meme. Fans of Pepe began to remix the anthropomorphic frog into different types of “collectible” Pepe’s known as “Rare Pepes.” Although these interactions with memes are light-hearted, memes can also be a double-edged sword. Memes have what Wiggins (2019) describes as discursive power—meaning that memes can do something in the social relations of online spaces (p. 19). This power that memes hold can be used to support or antagonize others. 4chan is a site of toxic internet users and trolls; when Pepe fell into the hands of white supremacists, the meme took on a more polarizing role. For years, Pepe was an icon of hate speech and the alt-right in the US (Victor, 2019). Recently, Pepe’s image was a major symbol in the Hong Kong protests. Guo & Yang (2019) make a case that memes can empower or unify action (p. 74). Although Pepe’s former life was a universal symbol of hate, young Hong Kongers have used Pepe’s image as a symbol of youth participation in the movement (Victor, 2019). Memes advocate for participation in national politics.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, a graphic designer named Shepard Fairey created the stenciled, red, white, and blue image of Barack Obama (Cohen, 2008). The political symbolism of the image had an influence on the 2008 US election as well as in popular culture. Following the original circulation of the iconic image, users began to use this style to parody cartoons or other pop culture references and later on even opposed the Obama administration. In 2009, the image was remixed by a Palestinian-American named Firas Alkhaterrb but this time as the iconic villain from Batman (Wiggins, 2019, p. 61). The Joker Obama was a salient image that allowed political parties to criticize their current administration. The Tea Party groups used the image of Joker Obama to protest Obama’s

national healthcare plan (Wiggins, 2019, p. 61). This meme shows the power of the participatory culture and the ability to form and create discourse using memes. Although memes are inundated in today's popular culture, memes push the boundaries of trolling in online political discourse.

Political memes are connecting netizens with similar views and establishing universal values and creating new places for discussion. One of the rising issues with political memes is the polarization between groups regarding political debates. Conversations, thanks to the internet, are quick to turn sour. With the advancement in technology, it is easier than ever to silo out any dissenting voices; in turn, netizens can insulate themselves around media that supports their views (Boutyline & Willer, 2017, p. 552). In previous studies, researchers found very little connections between political polarization and social media. Americans on social media tend to be more political even in areas that are typically seen as non-political hobbies like dating or sports (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009, p. 49). With politics monopolizing most conversations, these arguments move into online spaces. From same sex-marriage to extremist groups, these topics have created divisions on forums and chatrooms. On the topic of same-sex marriage, Wojcieszak and Price (2010) found that people with strong views on subjects be rigid in their views when exposed to debate, while most people with more moderate views either remained unchanged or moved only slightly. Changing opinions online has proven to be difficult if the person in question is strongly rooted in their opinion. Another perspective is that opinions ultimately do not change, but instead strengthen. Lee (2014) found that users who spend more time on social media and the internet in general are more likely to be exposed to a wider range of viewpoints, but that users often reinforce their own prior beliefs by critically examining those of the opposition and sharpening their own ability to argue with the other side (p. 7).

One popular political meme is the comparison of Xi Jinping to the Disney cartoon character "Winnie the Pooh." In 2013, a meme popped up that compared a picture of Xi Jinping and Barack Obama to the cartoon figures Winnie the Pooh and Tigger (Fallows, 2013). Winnie the Pooh has been an emblem for mocking and ridiculing Xi Jinping for years, but what has communication scholars tuned in to are the actions taken by the Chinese government. In 2017, most images and likeness of Winnie the Pooh were banned in China after bloggers "made fun of Xi riding in a car at a parade by putting a plastic Winnie-in-a-car

next to him” (Freudenstein, 2020, p. 246). As mentioned earlier with political memes, criticizing political leaders by comparing them to pop culture icons is part of political discourse in the public sphere. Habermas (1989) defines the public sphere in four points

1. Formation of public opinion.
2. All citizens have access.
3. Conference in unrestricted fashion (freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom to expression, and publication of opinions) about matters of general interest.
4. Debate over the general rules governing relations. (Fuchs, 2014b, p. 4)

The internet is often referred to as a public sphere because almost anyone that has the infrastructure to access the internet can debate or express their opinions online. For the United States, racial discrimination has left deep scars on the country, but marginalized groups are finding the courage to use their voice in the public sphere.

With the #BlackLivesMatter movement, identity has become a major topic in the public sphere. The hashtag aimed to raise awareness about police brutality against Black people in the United States. Subverting the idea that the police force does not; in fact, protect its citizens but harms and targets specific groups can be destabilizing for the US government. The mass protests that resulted from the BLM created chain effects on the internet through hashtags. In Blevins, Lee, McCabe, and Edgerton’s (2019) study, they found that the importance of Twitter hashtags was how the hashtags were used as affective forms of expression. The hashtags that used “I” (#IfTheyGunnedMeDown or #ICantBreathe) personalizes the issue by making it a first-hand account (Blevins, et. al, 2019, p. 11). This allows Black users to share their experience of racial inequality in the US and White users to recognize their privilege. Social media has given users the space to express their deeply personal feelings, especially for Black women. Black women often face racism and sexism that the media depicts them as “crazy” or “hysterical;” Maragh-Lloyd (2020) argues that Black women are using “everyday resistance” to fight post-racialism (p. 18). Using everyday resistance women are finding more organic ways to reframe how Black women are perceived.

In Maragh-Lloyd’s study, she focused on how Black publics are sharing their ideas in seemingly “innocuous ways.” Her research showed that Black women implemented these communication strategies through educating others about the inequality of the criminal justice

system and the oppression of Black women, supporting black businesses, and using visual signifiers like pro-black social media in motherhood and beauty (Maragh-Lloyd, 2020, p. 25). Using everyday resistance empowers Black women to influence discourse in the public sphere. Although Black internet users have gained support through social media, it also has aided trolls and opposition groups (#BlueLivesMatter) to grow to attack these marginalized groups (Blevins, 2019, p. 14).

Another use of the public sphere is the hot topic of “cancel culture.” The withdrawal of support from celebrities, politicians, or artistic work that has done something unacceptable or highly problematic has been coined as cancel culture (Ng, 2020, p. 623). Cancel culture has brought justice to women through the #MeToo movement, which exposed the sexual assaults and harassment faced by high-profile celebrities in Hollywood. This support of the movement journeyed beyond Hollywood to every day, predominantly, women to take action against exploitative people in power such as politicians or professors. Using the public sphere is not a uniquely American concept.

In South Korea, young liberal advocates of President Moon are using trolling tactics to attack the mainstream media. Trolling is understood as a toxic form of attacking opponents online, but Pyo (2020) argues that trolling news journalists was a form of resistance for Moon supporters (p. 2). Young Korean liberals incite collective action against journalists’ elitism and traces of populism by using the comment sections and up and down vote systems as weapons; by gaming the algorithm, the liberals can gain higher visibility (Pyo, 2020, p. 2). The phenomenon that is trolling is a subculture that disrupts accepted debates and conversations online (Cluas, 2020, p. 49). In this case, Moon supporters use trolling as a way to express their identities online, but the issue is becoming more troublesome when trolling behavior attacks personal gender or race identities. Social media affordances also allow users to enable vitriolic attacks on others. Platforms not only allow for individual commentary on their targets to be publicly visible but also encourage others to join in malicious exchanges (Trottier, Huang, Gabdulhakov, 2020, p. 26). Trolling behavior is not uncommon online, but what has become a phenomenon is the collective trolling in China. In many East Asian countries, collectivist cultures are grounded in Confucianism, which may help explain collective trolling in China (Henning, 2014, p. 4). Trolling occurs in countries differently depending on the cultural context. Fichman (2020) conducted an experiment on trolling

behavior based on Hofstede's dimensions of power distance. Power distance explains the acceptance in an organization or institution is distributed unequally; therefore, a country with high power distance would be Asian, African, or Latin American countries while low power distance countries would be Germanic or Anglo-Saxon countries (Fichman, 2020, p. 10). In the study in question, countries with higher power distance were more likely to engage in trolling behavior than a country with lower power distance (Fichman, 2020, p. 13).

One well-known way of explaining the role of social media in shaping politics is through using Fuchs' model of social media and revolution. This research will challenge this model in light of recent developments following trolling into politics. Fuchs offers a Marxist approach to social media practice and social movement. Figure 1 shows a dialectic model of the interaction of humans and societal structures specifically in the context of protests. When there are societal problems (economic, political, cultural/ideological), a crisis can erupt in a protest; however, not all crises result in protests (Fuchs, 2014b: 24). Below are how some of the dimensions of protests interact with each other. Protests require a mass of people to agree that there are societal problems and often are triggered or intensified by certain events. An example of this can be seen in police brutality in the United States. In May of 2020, the death of George Floyd caused mass protests across the country. Fuchs (2014b) explains that emotions of outrage are not the only catalysts of protests; media and politics also play a role in influencing a protest. Once a protest has broken out, it is up to the media, both alternative and traditional, political, and cultural factors to amplify or dampen the protest (p. 25). In some cases, protests can be dampened by employing state and police violence against protests and protesters as with the Tiananmen Square incident, or the protest can be amplified and create a revolution, which reconstructs a society's political and economic structures as seen with the civil rights movement and desegregation. It is important to note here that Fuchs has taken a slightly different attitude to the problems of social media and politics in a more recent publication. In his "Public Service Media Manifesto", Fuchs and his co-authors acknowledge that social media has become a driver of political events that is often harmful to democracy (Fuchs, 2021). However, Fuchs says that neoliberalism and right wing politics have damaged the democratic potential of social media, and uses this as the explanatory factor in his new approach (Fuchs, 2021).

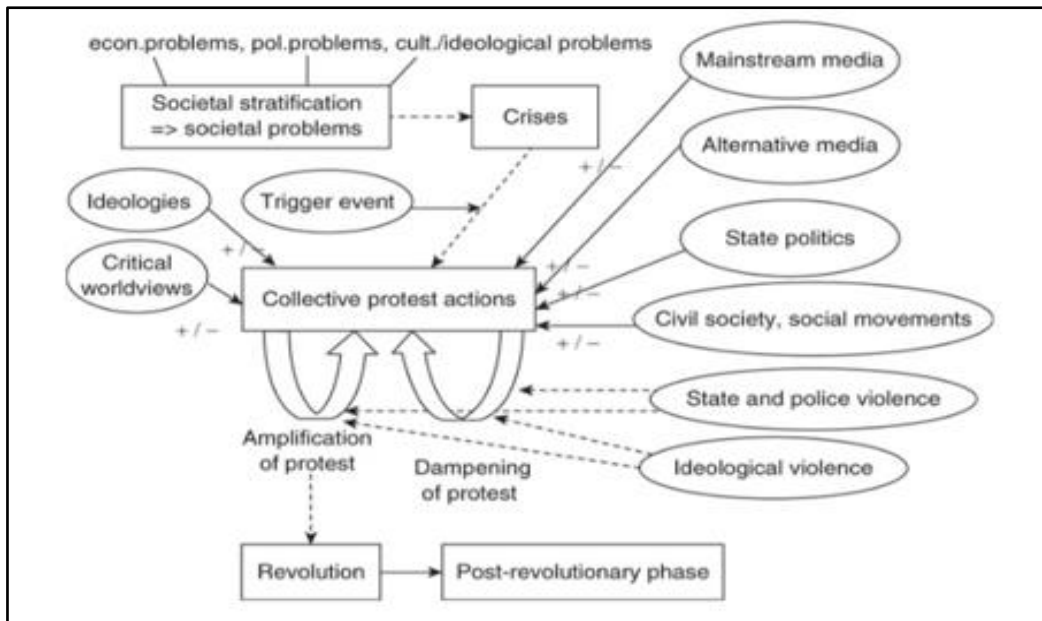


Figure 1 (Fuchs, 2014b, p. 24)

For the context of my research, I will be challenging Fuchs' model through the context of trolling. While Fuchs' argues the idea that social media does not cause collective action in real life, my critique of his model is to focus on the factor of ideologies, and the variable of tones in the contexts of online trolling. Trolls weaponize their ideas and beliefs online as a way to mobilize claims of cultural contiguity and against ideological incongruity. By cultural contiguity, I mean the ways in which shared cultural and historical factors form the basis for national identity and belonging, as in the idea of a "Greater China". On the other hand, ideological incongruity means the divergences and conflicts between fundamentally different world views and value systems, such as between liberal democracy or socialism. These arguments can be detected by examining the tones that trolls use against specific targets. Using a multimodal approach to De Fina's (2016) model, as seen in 1.2, I will analyze the tones from trolling comments to demonstrate that in some circumstances, trolling does partly change and manipulate the ideas of international perception and can draw the reactions from their targets in the real world based on the tone that the trolls use and the specific targets on which the trolls focus. Alternatively, some of the trolling in the cases below, does not create the same type of policy responses or political events in the real world. The cases examined in

this thesis offer a partial challenge to Fuchs model from 2014, while some of them accept it. The specific implementation of this analysis will be explained below.

1.2 Methodology

The analysis of tone in this research will be based on three topics of interest, trolling of Taiwan, trolling of Hong Kong, and trolling in an international context which include the United States and India. Each subject has three cases and includes both comments and threads from different social media platforms. These cases are useful for examination because these countries have seen major tensions with the PRC over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, these cases will provide examples of trolling related to the pandemic and also related to mainland China's international relations more generally. Threads have been selected on the basis of providing different perspectives and a back-and-forth between users. When two commenters have several comments back and forth between each other, the whole thread has been included to demonstrate their conversation. Standalone comments are included if they demonstrate a clear tone and in order to offer a broader sense of opinions. In Chapter Two, the Taiwan cases contain more comments due to more substantial back-and-forth between commenters. However, there is an even split between Taiwan and PRC-based netizens. The same is true for Hong Kong, but more of the comments in the Hong Kong cases are standalone with fewer back-and-forth threads. The comments in the international chapter are split between mostly English-speaking non-Americans on the US cases, and Indian on the India cases.

As mentioned above, this research will challenge some of the core assumptions in Fuchs' 2014 model. Fuchs (2014) argues that social media does not start social movements in the real world and does not carry political consequences offline (p. 25). In his recent work, *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto* (2021), Fuchs outlines how platforms on the internet have been exploited by populist movements and large corporations as a way of driving politics and shaping society. Fuchs has thus amended his earlier argument to account for social media as a tool that can be used to manipulate political outcomes. However, this research will take a different approach to demonstrate that Fuchs' argument does not hold for two different reasons. The first reason is because the ideologies of what trolls believe can shape international politics and be influential in how nations interact. The second reason is

that the tone that trolls use against certain targets can lead to a real world response from authorities, while some other tones do not. With this in mind, this argument suggests that Fuchs was too broad to dismiss the impact of social media. Fuchs' argument emphasizes other material factors outside of social media in his critical analysis, which discounts the impact of social media in generating political movements and driving political events. When Fuchs made his argument in 2014, he could not have anticipated the increasing importance of social media in shaping both domestic politics and international affairs. The impact on international relations is particularly stark where it concerns the international reputation of the PRC in relation to its neighbors and rivals. As this research will demonstrate, the same political debates and arguments that Fuchs dismissed as secondary to real material conditions have led to real responses from credible authorities in some cases, and also shaped the perception of mainland China as an emerging actor in world affairs. This is where tone is a crucial factor. The tone that trolls use in their various campaigns on social media can be clearly connected to the perception of the country as either an aggressor or a defender, and also shows ways of undermining, ridiculing, or mourning a country following certain political events. This research will argue that tone is a major sign of ideology in trolling attacks online, and that these types of ideologies as used by trolls can move politics from social media to the real world, contrary to Fuchs' argument. By the same token, not all trolling tones generate these real world responses, and it is important to consider the motivations of cultural contiguity and ideological incongruity as the driving force to the responses:

Categories of Comments

- a. Comments found on a post
 - i. Standalone comments: One comment with no replies or threads
 - ii. Threads: Comments with replies and other threads branching from them
 - iii. Date of comment: Dates may show a correlation to a significant event
- b. Medium
 - i. Text only: Comments with only Romanized/Chinese characters
 - ii. Text and Emojis: Comments that contain Romanized/Chinese characters and emojis
 - iii. Video and text: Comments with Romanized/Chinese characters and a video embedded
 - iv. Picture and text: Comments with Romanized/Chinese characters and images included
 - v. GIF and text: Comments with only Romanized/Chinese characters and images in the Graphic Interface Format
 - vi. Video only: Comments with only a video embedded
 - vii. Picture only: Comments with only an image
 - viii. GIF only: Comments with only images in the Graphic Interface Format
- c. Tone
 - i. Aggressive: (direct or indirect) Comments are negative or hostile comments. May include threats, violence, or attacks on a person's identity or idea of nationhood.
 - ii. Neutral: Comments are neither positive nor negative. These comments will give no indication of bias to either side of the argument
 - iii. Amicable: Comments are positive or friendly; these comments may praise a cause, but do not attack another cause within the reply.
 - iv. Ironic: Comments are sarcastic or have a mocking tone; this may include non-violent insults or name-calling.
 - v. Ambiguous: Comments are unclear of tone or may contain more than one tone but intention is not clear.

Using a multimodal approach to analyze the comments, the research can ascertain the dimensions of trolling behavior conveyed in messaging. From using images or emojis, the tone and intentionality of the comment can change by adding an element to troll their audience. For De Fina's (2016) analysis matrix, the tone ambiguous was added in the event comments containing more than one tone. It is important to analyze the tone of the comments because this could reveal different motivations and crossroads for trolling to begin or escalate. The specific tone can demonstrate that trolls are aiming at different pressure points and have different motivations to troll different targets or different subject matter. Further, it is important to consider the medium of a comment or tweet or thread, because the medium can complement the tone by adding more obvious visual force or mockery as modifiers for the message that the troll is portraying. Weibo is Chinese-based platforms that racks up 230 million (Weibo, 2021). In comparison, Twitter has around 186 million DAU (Twitter, 2020). Facebook being one of the largest platforms in the world holds 1.88 billion daily active users and Reddit a much smaller platform has a growing 52 million daily active users (Facebook, 2021; Patel, 2020). From these five platforms, political controversy has erupted time and time again due to aggressive forms of trolling.

The tone of trolling will be essential to the analysis of this research. By analyzing the tone of trolling in these cases, tone offers clues about the message, target, and motivation of the trolls of many different nationalities. Additionally, examining the tone will also reveal a subtext to these trolling campaigns. The tone of trolling reinforces how netizens pick their targets by focusing on those actors who oppose or are obstacles to their ideologies, such as nationalism or Chinese socialist sentiment. Additionally, the tone demonstrates how trolls use complex political messaging campaigns to delegitimize and downplay Taiwan's and Hong Kong's claims of independence and undermine Taiwanese successes to reinforce claims of cultural contiguity. Furthermore, the tone of PRC trolls also reveals the subtext to the ideological struggle between the PRC and the West broadly and the United States specifically. By adopting a tone to undermine confidence in Western moral or human rights claims, trolls are able to reinforce the ideological incongruity between two competing worldviews.

Chapter 2

Online Trolling in the Cross-Strait Politics

The extant literature review discussed Taiwan's relationships with the PRC and its many layers (Kádár et al., 2013; Fang & Repnikova, 2017; Guo and Yang, 2019). From historical conflicts to the current political climate, Chinese netizens have used the memes to collectively troll Taiwan. The linkages between memes and trolling both rely on tone. Memes and trolling are centered around humor, to whom the laughter is coming from are determined by the tone of the content. When diving deeper into the intent and tone in trolling content, it becomes evident that among PRC netizens, the intention is to manipulate and harm Taiwanese netizens. In this chapter, there are three cases this research will examine. The first case is a Weibo account called *Taiwan Stupid*, created their Weibo page for the purpose of mocking Taiwan and Taiwanese people. The second case is a collection of various hashtags that have been used by netizens on opposite sides of the Taiwan Strait and the hashtag campaigns that they have created. Additionally, this chapter will also consider the examples of the now infamous Xi Jinping/Winnie the Pooh caricature. This chapter will use these cases to explore memetic communication between Taiwanese and Chinese netizens, as well as the online confrontations from the PRC and Taiwanese users as well as the ways they utilize hashtags in signaling their intent to confront each other.

Everything changed when the pandemic began, but by a stroke of luck, Taiwan managed to thwart off lockdowns and community spread of COVID-19 for over a year. Taiwan's success in controlling the pandemic could be in part due to the country's experience during the SARS outbreak. Taiwan's preventative measures earned recognition from various countries and embarked upon a campaign of "mask diplomacy", engaging with countries who were in desperate need of protective gear. Since the early days of the pandemic, the debate around Taiwan's membership in international organizations like the World Health Organization has flared up at various points. Taiwanese participation has continually been blocked by PRC officials, in different forums like the World Health Assembly. As vaccine roll outs continue in other parts of the world and a sense of normalcy has returned to many Western countries, Taiwan's luck finally ran out.

Taiwan's exclusion from international health forums became especially difficult as the outbreak in Taiwan meant that the government was scrambling for ways to acquire vaccines. As the domestic debates about the COVID-19 response continue, some groups want to acquire vaccines from the United States, Japan, and some groups even suggest that China should be a major partner. The opportunity of working with China for vaccines has predictably been contested within Taiwanese public life, particularly as the PRC has previously been blamed for blocking Taiwan's previous attempts to acquire vaccines at various points during the pandemic. The PRC's offer to provide vaccines and epidemic experts to Taiwan was met with a flurry of protests and denunciations from the Taiwanese government, highlighting Beijing's diplomatic actions to exclude Taiwan from the WHO and mistrust of mainland-produced vaccines (Reuters, 2021a). This diplomatic spat was made worse by the domestic political divides in Taiwan between the DPP and the KMT, who take different lines on acceptable engagement with mainland China. This meant that the Chinese offer was met with fierce debate in both pro- or anti-China camps. The KMT's opposition favors a deal with China for vaccines, while the DPP continues to decline any such deals. In this way, the handling of the pandemic and relations with the PRC have led to a crisis of confidence in the Tsai administration and the governments' decisions in handling the virus. I argue this growing polarization in the Taiwanese society has been exacerbated by enacted ideological cognitive warfare from the PRC; the memetic communication and trolling are the causes of the deliberate strategy to create division in Taiwan.

The Case of "Taiwan Stupid"

What may seem like a disembodied face on a screen is one of the most important faces in Taiwan at the moment. For those living in Taiwan or keeping up with Taiwanese news, this familiar face greets television screens daily with reports on Taiwan's COVID-19 press conference. This simple face outline is of Health Minister Shih-Chung Chen (*ch. chen shizhong*; 陳時中) made by the user "Taiwan Stupid" (*ch. taiwan shashi*; 台灣傻事).



Figure 2.1 Taiwan Stupid (2021a)

Taiwan Stupid, a PRC netizen, has amassed over one million followers that join in trolling the current state of Taiwan. On average, Taiwan Stupid posts upwards of 50+ posts a day consisting of videos, memes, and news articles related to Taiwan. 95% of the content on Taiwan Stupid's page partakes in trolling to insult Taiwan for entertainment and the other 5% is sponsored advertisements. Although Taiwan Stupid's page aims to troll Taiwan to entertain followers, the user has also found ways to monetize trolling posts. Engagement on Taiwan Stupid's posts can range anywhere from 10 comments to over 500 comments per post. Although engagement is high, Taiwan Stupid rarely replies to comments. Many of the users in the comment section often will join in to attack Taiwan for its policies, economic problems, or setbacks. One of those setbacks being Taiwan's COVID-19 situation. Chinese netizens have been using the image in Figure 2.1 to troll Taiwanese for their "worship" of Chen. Two of the most popular uses were during the PRC rocket launch and Taiwan's current COVID-19 outbreak. The Chen meme has made an appearance on Weibo in memes as a god, a card shark, and a killer. For the post made by Taiwan Stupid, Chen is portrayed as a god or a microscopic coronavirus (see Figure 2.2).

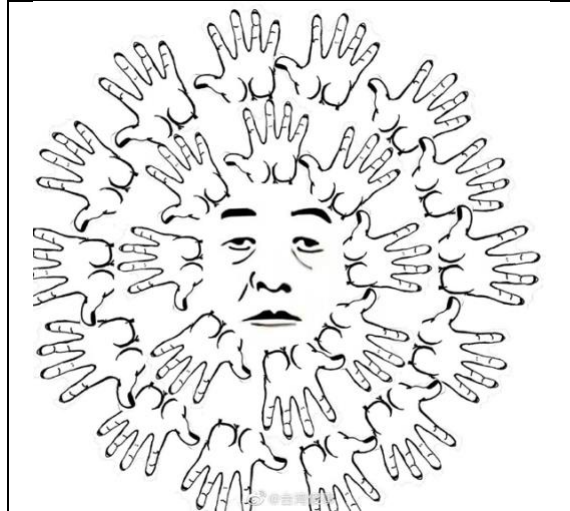


Fig 2.2 Taiwan Stupid (2021b)

In May of 2021, Taiwan reached over 100 positive domestic infections in one day, which garnered rapid media attention. The user is explaining there will be many cases the following day. Some comments from Weibo users mocked the Taiwanese Health Minister Chen and Taiwan's poor response to the COVID-19 situation.

In previous posts from Taiwan Stupid, the meme in Figure 2.2 of Chen was used to mock Taiwanese current affairs. Recently, Chen received backlash from much of the Chinese side of the internet about the rising cases in Taiwan. To further exaggerate and lambast Chen, hands were added around his face to represent the number of cases Taiwan would announce the following day. More netizens joined in and added another ring of hands outside the initial ring of hands and have even been made into a gif that could represent infinite cases for Taiwan. Below is the original comment to the meme in Figure 2.2 and any replies made to the commenter.

Text 2.1 (Date: 15 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	IvanHueESP:	<p>终极大招：万佛朝宗 🐶🐶🐶</p> <p>Translation: The ultimate move: Ten Thousand Buddhas Dynasty Sect 🐶🐶🐶</p>
2	-ellohere-:	<p>Reply to @ IvanHueESP : 千手时钟</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @ IvanHueESP : Thousand Hand Clock (literally, “shizhong”)</p>
3	来自 M78 星云的香蕉蜀黍:	<p>Reply to IvanHueESP : @ hurrythunder23 : 万佛嘲钟 🙄</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @ IvanHueESP : @hurrythunder23: Ten Thousand Buddhas laughing at the Bell 🙄</p>
4	Starkhaole:	<p>Reply to @ IvanHueESP: 这不是柱间的真数千手吗 🐶</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @ IvanHueESP : Isn't this really thousands of hands between the pillars? 🐶</p>
5	hurrythunder23:	<p>Reply to @ IvanHueESP: @ 嚙芯秋 : 万佛朝钟</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @ IvanHueESP: @Hey Xinqiu: Ten Thousand Buddhas Clock</p>
6	嚙芯私:	<p>Reply to @ IvanHueESP: 是：万佛朝中</p> <p>Translation: Baxinshi</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @ IvanHueESP: Yes, in the Ten Thousand Buddhas Dynasty</p>
7	君情茜意:	<p>Reply to @ IvanHueESP: 那真的是南波万了</p> <p>Translation: Jun Qingqianyi</p> <p>Translation: @ IvanHueESP : That’s really “Nan Bo Wan” (literally, “Number One” in a sarcastic tone)</p>

In Line 1, the Weibo user replies directly to Taiwan Stupid expressing the best use of this meme would be as the “Ten Thousand Buddhas Dynasty Sect” with three “doge” emojis. His interpretation of this image may refer to the god “Guanyin” from Buddhist religions who is the centerpiece in shrines and statues with thousands of hands around both China and

Taiwan. The addition of the doge emojis to the user's comment implies a mocking or ironic tone. Within the comments, a thread emerges as more commenters reply to Line 1.

Another user in Line 2 plays off of Line 1's original comment by using a thousand hands as a pun of Chen Shih-Chung's name. The characters “时钟” (*ch. shi; zhong*) mean “time and clock,” in a literal sense the words mean clock, but -ellohere- uses the characters to mock Chen's name and sees the meme as a “Ten Thousand Hand Clock.” Line 2's comment is coded as ironic for using Chen's name as a pun.

For user Line 3 this user continues the vitriol by tagging another user “hurrythunder23.” Line 3 restates Line 1's comment with the “Ten Thousand Buddhas” motif but adds “from I laughing at the Bell” with an emoji picking its nose. The “laughing at the Bell” indicates an ironic tone. The addition of the emoji offers some level of distaste with its downward eyebrows and the insertion of the finger into a nostril. In Line 5, the user has responded to Line 3's comment by reiterating both Line 1 and Line 2's comments by mocking the god, clock, and Chen.

Another addition to the thread is from Line 4 asking if the hands are between pillars with a doge emoji. Starkhaole's question may refer to pillars as bars as in jail, which could be coded as aggressive, but the doge emoji signifies sarcasm; for this comment, it will be coded as ambiguous. Line 6 also agrees with Line 1 and Line 2 and Line 5 about the meme's resemblance to the “Ten Thousand Buddhas Dynasty;” this comment also is coded as ironic.

The irony of Line 7's comment is in the sound of the characters “那真的是南波万了。” “That's really Nan Bo Wan” This user mocks Taiwan for its shameless proclamation of being “number one” by foreigners using the Angrypug phrase “Taiwan Number One” as a way to troll Taiwan's failure to contain the virus. In an H1Z1 live stream, Angrypug played against the Chinese team Em0 and was ambushed on a cliff. During the stream, viewers can hear the Chinese players taunting Angrypug, and in retaliation, Angrypug shouts “Taiwan Number One” in a Taiwanese accent. Almost immediately Chinese players shout “Fuck your Mom” and “Fuck you, Taiwan” (Angrypug, 2015). This phrase caused a chain reaction in other multiplayer games used to troll other Chinese players. Rather than saying the literal translation of “Taiwan Number One” “臺灣第一” the user frames this play on words from an American's point of view. “Number One” is used as an American would say it “Nanbo

Wan.” Moreover, the user trolls Taiwanese by ironically using the phrase to inverse its meaning of overconfidence to failure. This comment is coded as ironic and the majority of the conversation in this thread is coded as ironic, while one comment had an ambiguous tone that could have been ironic or aggressive.

Text 2.2 (Date: 15 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	鲨马兔:	这 tm 咋一眼看以为是冠状病毒 🤔
	Translation: Shark rabbit	Translation: At first glance, this tm thought it was a coronavirus 🤔
2	灯。等瞪等瞪:	Reply to @鲨马兔 : 你掌握了真相 🐶
	Translation: Light. Wait and wait	Translation: Reply to @ Shark rabbit: You have the truth 🐶
3	寻望 01:	Reply to @鲨马兔 : 哈哈哈哈哈我也 🤔🐶
	Translation: Looking for Hope 01	Translation: Reply to @ Shark rabbit: Hahahahahahahaha me too 🤔🐶
4	小阿喻呀	Reply to @鲨马兔 : 时台病毒淫
	Translation: Little Ayu	Translation: Reply to @ Shark rabbit: Time-Taiwan Virus (literally, <i>shitaibingdugan</i>)
5	木有新鲜事儿	Reply to @ Shark rabbit: 呆湾病毒
	Translation: Nothing new	Translation: Reply to @Shark rabbit: “Daiwan” Virus (literally, Taiwan in a sarcastic tone)

In Text 2.1, Line 1 creates a new narrative in the comment section. While in Text 2.1, users echoed that the meme looks like the “Ten Thousand Hand Buddha,” Text 2.2 mistakes the meme of Chen as a coronavirus; Line 1 begins this thread by stating at first glance, the user thought the meme was a coronavirus not Chen’s face and adds a laugh-crying emoji holding its face. The laugh-crying emoji represents laughter and embarrassment over the

mistake the user made. Although the addition of the emoji may imply an ironic tone, the action of mistaking the image implies a neutral tone. Because of the duality of the comment in Line 1, the comment is coded as ambiguous.

In Line 2, the user replies to Line 1 supporting their claim that the meme was a coronavirus, and added one doge emoji. The doge emoji is a clearer indicator of irony all while supporting the idea the meme is a coronavirus.

Line 3 laughs at the mistake that started the thread in Line 1 and adds a laugh-crying emoji and a doge emoji, taking an ironic tone. Although Line 3 does not add more to the conversation about their interpretation of the meme, the user does continue to insulate the mocking tone of this thread.

The users in both Line 4 and 5 use more wordplay as seen in Text 2.1. Line 4 also uses the character “时” to play off of Chen’s name while mocking the virus plaguing Taiwan. For Line 4, the tone is coded as ironic. In Line 5, the commenter uses the characters “呆湾,” which sounds like “Taiwan,” but said in a way that an English speaker would pronounce it “Daiwan.” Similarly in Text 2.1, the user is mocking Taiwan with the Angrypug meme. For Line 5, this comment was also coded as ironic.

Text 2.3 (Date: 15 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	再浪	每一个巴掌都扇在他脸上
	Translation: Wave Again	Translation: Every slap on his face

There is a variation of tone in Text 2.3 in comparison to Text 2.1 and 2.2. Line 1 states that each of the hands around Chen are slaps “on his face.” Line 1 does not utilize emojis in the user’s comment about Chen. Emojis can be an indicator of signs of irony. Although this comment was a single thread and received little engagement from Taiwan Stupid’s followers, it presents trolling with forms of aggression. Claiming to hit or slap someone moves the tone from sarcasm to physical assaults on a target and is coded as aggressive.

Text 2.4 (Date: 15 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	怎么喜欢上足球:	这不够, 我数了一下才 20 个手掌, 一共才 100 个太少了
	Translation: How to like football	Translation: This is not enough, I counted only 20 palms, and a total of only 100 are too few.
2	Terryliu2003:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 22 个手掌
		Translation: Reply to @How to like football: 22 palms
3	想去南极看极光:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 22 个, 有点少呀
	Translation: Want to go to Antarctica to see the aurora	Translation: Reply to @How to like football: 22, a bit less
4	张二娃 6666:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 22 个, 我数了, 但还是不够啊
	Translation: Zhang Erwa 6666	Translation: Reply to @How to like football: I counted 22, but it is still not enough!
5	BCIYS:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 一张图 100 其他的用 0-99 的扑克牌代替
		Translation: Reply to @How to like football: One picture is 100 and the others are replaced with 0-99 playing cards
6	底呀他:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 22 个
	Translation: Bottom He	Translation: Reply to @How to like football: 22
7	臭脚丫呀:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: @台蛙 qnmd: 数的人都闲的, 哎, 我也数了 22
	Translation: Smelly Feet	Translation: Reply to @ How to like football: @台 frog qnmd: Everyone who counts is idle, hey, I also counted 22
8	没有一个春天不会到来:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球: 图一图二图 N
	Translation: No spring will not come	Translation: Reply to @How to like football: Picture 1 Picture 2 Picture N

Text 2.4 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
9	肖筱 123:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球 : 我数的也是 22 哈哈哈哈哈
	Translation: Xiao Xiao123	Translation: Reply to @How to like football: I also count 22 hahahaha
10	台蛙 qnmd:	Reply to @怎么喜欢上足球 : 我怎么数了 22 个? 🤔
	Translation: Taiwan frog qnmd	Translation: Reply to @How to like football : How did I count 22? 🤔

For Text 2.4, the user in Line 1 starts the thread stating that there were only 20 hands around Chen’s face, which would not be enough hands in the meme. The user believes the current number of hands on the meme is 100 short of where it should be, a clear expression of irony. Surrounding Chen’s face, there are two rings of hands and Line 1’s interpretation of the meme was the number of cases that Chen would announce the following day during the press conference. Line 1 incorporates the meme itself into the announcement of cases for Taiwan creating a sarcastic tone to mock the number of cases.

In Line 2, the user did not agree with the original commenter in Line 1 and even corrected their mistake. The commenter in Line 2 started by replying “22 palms” referring to the actual number of hands in the meme. In Line 1, the commenter stated they only saw “20 palms,” but in reality, there are 22 hands in the meme. Line 2 is merely correcting Line 1’s mistake but the intention of correcting the mistake is unclear. Correcting someone’s mistake could be seen as helpful or even neutral since it does not side negatively or positively, but in a comment forum like Weibo in front of millions of users, one could argue that the tone could even be ironic. Since there is not enough text to show, either way, the tone of Line 2’s comments is coded as ambiguous.

Not long after Lines 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 also joined in correcting Line 1’s miscount of hands in the meme. Since there is no clear tone for the comments in these Lines: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 all have ambiguous tones.

Lines 5 and 8 take a step back from the number of hands and comment about the picture. Line 5’s meaning is unclear; the user replied to Line 1 about pictures and playing cards. In

Line 8, the user comments 1 picture, 2 picture, N picture. Both the tone of these comments have unclear messages and intent; for these reasons both comments are coded as ambiguous.



Figure 2.3 Taiwan Stupid (2021c)

Caption: The chairman of the Taiwan Anti-epidemic Society submitted an article in the newspaper, urging [people] to learn more about how others do it and stop being a frog in the bottom of a well.

In this political comic, there is a structure that is breaking down. From inside that structure there is an anthropomorphic coronavirus kicking down, a man from a throne labeled God Shih Chung. The other person in this political comic states "...people want to help..." to an alarmed group of people outside the window. The door that was once hanging in the doorway says "guard against." The caption posted by Taiwan Stupid refers to an article written by Chen Shih Chung to help other countries reach Taiwan's success with handling the pandemic; however, it also calls Chen a frog in the bottom of a well. The idea that Taiwan wants to continue to aid is important, but if they cannot help themselves, there is no way that people will reach out to Taiwan for help.

One of the international taglines for Taiwan used throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was the discourse of "Taiwan Can Help." Taiwan Stupid is mocking Taiwan's current virus situation. On May 12, 2021, this image was posted in response to the spike in local COVID-19 cases. First, the caption requires some unpacking. On Taiwan Stupid's page, the user and followers often refer to the Taiwanese people as frogs. One reason could be the well-known Chinese fairytale called "The Frog of the Well." The tale is about a frog that lives in the

bottom of a well; when a sea turtle invites the frog to join him in the sea, the frog refuses because it believes there is no place better than the well. This comparison may refer to Taiwan as the well and the people as frogs on a small island that only sees the world through a narrow point of view while China is the sea and the people are the sea turtles. Second, the meme itself is also filled with meaning. For over a year, Health Minister Chen has been applauded internationally for his efforts in combating the pandemic in Taiwan; however, on May 15, 2021, Taiwan launched its first lockdown after a year of the virus ravaging through other parts of the world. The personification of the virus knocks Chen off of his throne and kicks down the door to the rest of the world. As the virus has been destroying the interior walls, the structure is cracking as Premier Su Tseng-Chang (ch. 蘇貞昌) is continuing to speak to terrified-looking audiences about Taiwan wanting to help in international spaces such as the World Health Organization. Comments mock Taiwan’s struggle to combat the virus.

Text 2.5 (Date: 12 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	平良臣	数据不会说谎，台湾没有社区感染，疫情排名没有降，国民党在跟阿共里应外合 😏😏
	Translation: Hiraomi	Translation: The data does not lie, there is no community infection in Taiwan, and the ranking of the epidemic has not dropped. The KMT is cooperating with the Communist Party 😏😏

Text 2.5 shows Line 1 replying directly to Taiwan Stupid. In Line 1, “平良臣” comments that there is no community infection in Taiwan and even goes as far as to say that the KMT is working with the CCP. 平良臣’s profile states that the user is from Beijing and the profile background is decorated with the celebration of the 100 years of the CCP. Using this information, one can ascertain that the user is from the PRC. Line 1’s addition of two mischievous “side-eye” emojis point out some implication of irony. The usage of this emoji

shows a form of satisfaction from the user's comment about Taiwan's involvement with the CCP and is clearly an ironic tone. Although the comment clearly states some form of irony, the target of intent is what becomes ambiguous. If Line 1 is trolling Taiwan, the user may be claiming Taiwan as a part of the PRC. Currently, the PRC claims that there are no COVID-19 infections in the country and if Taiwan is a part of the PRC, then there are also no infections in Taiwan. On the other hand, if the user in Line 1 is trolling China, the user is sarcastically echoing the CCP's message of the nation having community transmission under control when in reality there has been another outbreak in Guanzhou (Reuters, 2021b). Although the target of the comment is vague, the comment's messaging mocks the COVID-19 situation in Taiwan.

Analysis of Taiwan Stupid

No tones were coded as amiable or neutral. As seen in Figure 2.4, all comments in this case came from PRC netizens and the majority of comments had an ironic tone. Looking at a snapshot of the data, 54% of comments were ironic, 4% were aggressive and 42% were ambiguous. For clarity, the ironic tone means anything that mocks, belittles, or uses sarcasm about the subject in general, or against a specific person or group, without turning into aggressive or serious accusations and attacks. In this text, the spike in ambiguous tone can be explained by the replies in Text 2.4. In Text 2.4, nine comments replied to the original commenter to correct the user's miscount of hands in Figure 2.2. Since the users had no clear tone in their replies, all nine had to be coded as ambiguous.

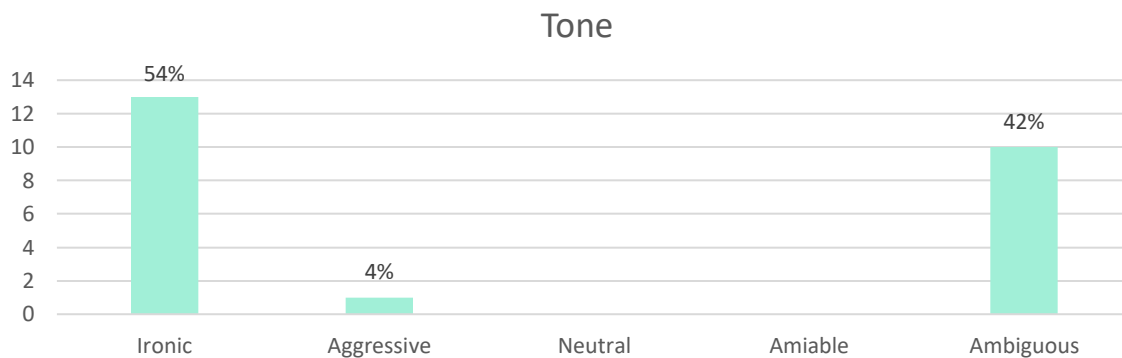


Figure 2.4

Taiwan plays a unique role in international politics especially in terms of its relationship with the PRC. Broadly, there is a sense of familiarity with the PRC and Taiwan. Both Taiwan and China share ethnic backgrounds, culture, and language, but the political debate over Taiwan divides the two nations. For the PRC, there is an entitlement to take Taiwan back and a longstanding desire to reunify following the Chinese Civil War. From the perspective of Taiwan, it has an increasing ambition for its destiny and to be seen as a separate entity from China as the two cultures grow more divided as time passes by. The strongly ironic tone from the Taiwan Stupid case derives from the mockery that mainland Chinese trolls shower on the Taiwanese government, belittling the Taiwan government's failures to manage COVID-19 and attempts to earn international recognition as a success story.

While neighboring countries can joke with one another in a friendly manner, a political dispute in the middle of the conversation turns trolling more vicious. Even if the PRC netizens aren't being openly aggressive, the way they are using the COVID-19 situation to belittle Taiwan as useless and powerless shows a deeper meaning than just a neighborly joke. This is proven in the following cases by the fact that these mocking remarks are met with Taiwanese resistance and counterattacks from trolls by asserting their distinct socio-political structure and national identity from the PRC.

Overall, the majority of the comments on the topic of Taiwan Stupid had an ironic tone. Even though Taiwan poses some threats to the CCP's stated goals for national reunification, aggressive attacks are not the weapons of choice for PRC-based trolls, when mockery and belittling will suit their goals of embarrassing and delegitimizing Taiwan's government. Put simply, trolls in the PRC use sarcasm to undermine Taiwanese claims of success and distinction which form the basis of the desire for recognition. As the PRC continues to push the narrative of Taiwanese incompetence with the COVID-19 pandemic, the more that Taiwanese netizens are finding themselves pulled into online debates and conflicts.

The Case of #saysrytoTedros and #nnevvy

At the start of the pandemic, many countries rallied around the WHO for international guidance and support as COVID-19 spread around the globe. Some countries questioned whether or not Taiwan should be allowed to join in as well. As the WHO danced around the official status of Taiwan, trolls from "Taiwan" began volleying insults at the Director of the

WHO Tedros Adhanom. In a press interview on April 9, 2020, Tedros claimed he received death threats and insults from Taiwanese people.

“I can tell you personal attacks that have been going on for more than two, three months. Abuses, or racist comments, giving me names, black or Negro. I’m proud of being black, proud of being Negro,” he told reporters on a conference call from the organization’s Geneva headquarters on Wednesday. I don’t care, to be honest ... even death threats. I don’t give a damn. Three months ago, this attack came from Taiwan. We need to be honest. I will be straight today. From Taiwan,” he said. “And Taiwan, the Foreign Ministry also, they know the campaign. They didn’t disassociate themselves. They even started criticizing me in the middle of all that insult and slur, but I didn’t care.”
(Feuer, 2020)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROC (2020) addressed Tedros’s claims on their Twitter account; the MOFA reiterated Tedros’s statement that the virus should not be politicized and his claims of racism and death threats from Taiwanese were “baseless and without merit” and do not condone personal attacks on Tedros. Although Tedros claimed that the virus should not be a political issue, dragging Taiwan’s name through the mud is the opposite of what he wanted other countries to do. Tedros’s comments lit a fire between PRC and Taiwanese netizens. The hashtag #saysrytoTedros was inspired by more “Taiwanese” netizens wanting to apologize to Tedros for the racist insults. After some investigation from the Taiwanese Ministry of Justice found that the tweets were traced back to PRC accounts not Taiwanese (Formosa News, 2020). The apology tweets groveled for the forgiveness of Tedros in a way that was demeaning to Taiwanese that both Taiwanese and western netizens called out PRC netizens attempting to disguise themselves as Taiwanese.

This brings into question, why use deception to attack WHO leaders? Taiwan has built a strong reputation abroad. Namely in its openness; Taiwan has been named one of the happiest countries in East Asia, the best country for foreigners to live in, the first Asian country to legalize gay marriage, and the list goes on (Liu, 2021). By tainting the image of Taiwan, trolls from the PRC are attempting to cut off any avenues for cultural recognition. These attacks made by trolls change how Taiwan is perceived as racist and desperate by

other countries, which makes it more difficult to reach out and; in turn, makes Taiwan more dependent on China. Although the PRC would welcome Taiwan back, the relationship would have caveats to Taiwan's identity and autonomy.

Text 2.6 (Date 10 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	GIjWhfOKCvPDQK Q:	I am a Chinese living in Taiwan. I am ashamed of what we did to Dr Tedros. Sorry #WeStandWithDrTedros #saysrytoTedros to support @DrTedros
2	bassman_zone:	Reply to @ GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ: im glad to see you admit that Taiwan is a country ! 🥰 do not say you didn't, becoz you did 🥰 people will never say that "im a chinese living in beijing" im a TAIWANESE who love you CHINESE YO THANK YOU
3	bassman_zone:	Reply to @ GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ: and plz, don't be so easy to say sor, not even enough 😊 有骨氣一點 謝謝 ~ ~ ~ Translation: Reply to @ GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ: and plz, don't be so easy to say sor, not even enough 😊 Be a bit stronger, thank you~~~
4	Abcv2002:	Reply to @ GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ : 笑死人，住台灣的中國人？ ？喔？是中國共產黨人才對吧？ Translation: Reply to @ GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ: Laughing to death, a Chinese who lives in Taiwan? Oh? It's a talent of the

Text 2.6 begins with Line 1 of a PRC netizen living in Taiwan. The user in Line 1 apologizes and claims they are ashamed of what “they” did to Tedros. Although the literal text of Line 1 is claiming to apologize to Tedros there is a hidden meaning in the fine print. Line 1 refers to Taiwan and themselves as “we” implying that China and Taiwan are of the same nationhood. There are no signs of sarcasm, only a negative tone in the user’s comment, meaning that Line 1 is coded as aggressive.

The user in Line 2 and 3 came from the same user who is located in Taiwan and both are coded as ironic. Because of the affordances of Twitter, the platform only allows for 280

characters per tweet. Line 2 and 3 respond directly to Line 1 by thanking the user for calling Taiwan a country. The addition of the emoji with the three hearts may try to downplay the sarcasm in their tweet. Line 2 takes further jabs at the person saying no one would say “I’m Chinese living in Beijing,” someone would just say that they are from the PRC. Line 3 tells Line 1 there is no need to be sorry and tells the user to be stronger.

Line 4 is a Taiwanese user that mocks the user in Line 1 by laughing at the idea of a PRC netizen living in Taiwan, which means that the tone is coded as ironic. The user in Line 4 even assumes that the user in Line 1 is working for the CCP. Working for the CCP could range from someone in the “fifty-cent army” or the “Little Pinks” (Guo, 2018). Both groups attack their enemies with aggressive memes and trolling for the CCP.

Text 2.7 (Date: 10 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	Tong15978442	As a Chinese, I deeply apologize for the insults made by those despicable Chinese people in Taiwan. #saysrytoTedros
2	Jhouse8787	Reply to @Tong15978442: You don't get to present Taiwan CCP bot #CCPVirus
3	gggggggggelo	Reply to @Tong15978442: Chiang Kai-Shek wants to shove his fist up your arse

(13 April 2020)



Text 2.7 starts with another PRC user apologizing for the “despicable Chinese people in Taiwan.” The user in Line 1 continues with the apologetic tone echoed in this hashtag but

removes any distinction of Taiwanese identity by calling people living in Taiwan Chinese. With the combination of calling Taiwanese people despicable and “Chinese,” Line 1 is coded as aggressive.

Replying to Line 1, the user in Line 2 attacks by continuing the name-calling and is also coded as aggressive. Line 2 calls Line 1 a CCP bot and uses the hashtag #CCPVirus to insult the original poster. The name “CCP Virus” places blame on the CCP for the coverup and spread of COVID-19. Adding more vitriol to the conversation, Line 2 calls Line 1 a “CCP bot.” Claiming Line 1 is a bot undermines the user’s existence. Bots are often used in video games to do menial tasks (collect items, shoot guns, etc.) and in this case, this “bot’s” menial task is to post pro-CCP tweets on foreign social media.

Closing up this thread, Line 3 adds violence to the conversation and is coded as aggressive. Line 3 states “Chiang Kai-Shek wants to shove his fist up your arse” and adds a GIF of Chiang Kai-Shek with his fist in the air. The GIF brings a sense of action to the back and forth; it shows a more visceral feeling of how Line 3 feels to Line 1’s comment.

Text 2.8 (Date: 10 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	IloveCNPanda	Reply to @ USA_China_Talk: I am a Taiwanese, and I am extremely ashamed that the Taiwanese have attacked Tedros in such a vicious manner. On behalf of the Taiwanese, I apologize to Tedros and beg for his forgiveness. #saysrytoTedros @WHO
2	Littlehua28	Reply to @ IloveCNPanda: SORRY. Taiwanese wouldn't use simplified Chinese.
3	lz1999022	Reply to @ IloveCNPanda : 麻烦，直接骂他傻逼就完了 Translation: Reply to @ IloveCNPanda: Trouble, just call him stupid and it's over

For Text 2.8, Line 1 claims that they are a Taiwanese person and they are ashamed of the other Taiwanese attacks on Tedros. Although Line 1 claims to be Taiwanese, there is a sneaking suspicion from other users that this user is a PRC netizen. The clue is in the account that the user is replying to; Line 1 replies to a tweet from the US Embassy in China about

Americans receiving passports. Since Line 1 is not Taiwanese and is joining in the meta mocking joke of this hashtag, this comment is coded as ironic.

Line 2 calls Line 1 out for not being Taiwanese. In Taiwan, the written language uses traditional Chinese while in the PRC simplified Chinese is the standard. Since Line 1 was responding to a tweet that was in simplified Chinese and Line 1’s bio contained simplified Chinese, Line 2 states “SORRY. Taiwanese wouldn't use simplified Chinese.” The capitalization of “sorry” implies that Line 2 is not sorry but rather pointing out a flaw in Line 1’s alibi. Because Line 2 uses sarcasm in their tweet, this reply is coded as ironic.

In Line 3, the commenter just wants Line 1 to call Tedros stupid and stop having this conversation and takes on an aggressive tone. The user in Line 3 might be tired of seeing this hashtag on their feed and wants the conversation to end.

Text 2.9 (Date: 10 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	suo_niu_zi:	I'm from Taiwan Province, and I'm very ashamed that people in Taiwan Province have so maliciously attacked 譚德賽. On behalf of the people of Taiwan Province, I apologize to 譚德賽 and beg his forgiveness. #saysrytoTedros @WHO Translation: 譚德賽: Tedros
2	Wang_Maximus:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi: I think you come from WEST Taiwan,
3	Likiwn:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi: Hi fake Taiwanese! Let me tell you The word you use is not the way we used. ==
4	Hugo01172002:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi: No you are not from Taiwan,fucking Chinese.
5	JerryWu68691138:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi: You can't represent Taiwan if your not from Taiwan. And by the way no Taiwanese will call Taiwan a province of China. Taiwan is a legit country that is recognized by the world.

Text 2.9 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
6	formYHom:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi : 竊據中華民國領土的中共反賊 骨灰罈夠用嗎? 中華民國可以幫你~ Translation: Reply to @suo_niu_zi: Is the ashes of the CCP's anti-thief stealing the territory of the Republic of China enough? The Republic of China can help you~
7	suo_niu_zi:	Reply to @suo_niu_zi : 跟你们说话头都疼, 我只是单纯地试试英文水平, 看看谷歌翻译能不能翻译的八九不离十, 一个个说我假装台湾人, 我有病吗? Translation: Reply to @suo_niu_zi: Talking to you all have a headache. I just simply try my English proficiency and see if Google Translate can translate it. One by one, I pretend to be Taiwanese. Am I sick?

In Text 2.9, Line 1 also claims to be a Taiwanese netizen similar to Line 1 in 2.8. Line 1 apologizes on behalf of Taiwan and is ashamed that the Taiwanese people in the “Taiwan Province” have attacked Tedros. Using context from Text 2.8, simplified Chinese characters are mostly used by Chinese speakers in the PRC. Line 1 writes Tedros (譚德賽) in simplified characters, which implies that Line 1 is from the PRC. Taiwan is also referred to as a province in the PRC, further proving the user “suo_niu_zi” is not Taiwanese. Since this user is pretending to be Taiwanese to apologize to Tedros, Line 1 is coded as ironic. The thread is quick to fire back at Line 1.

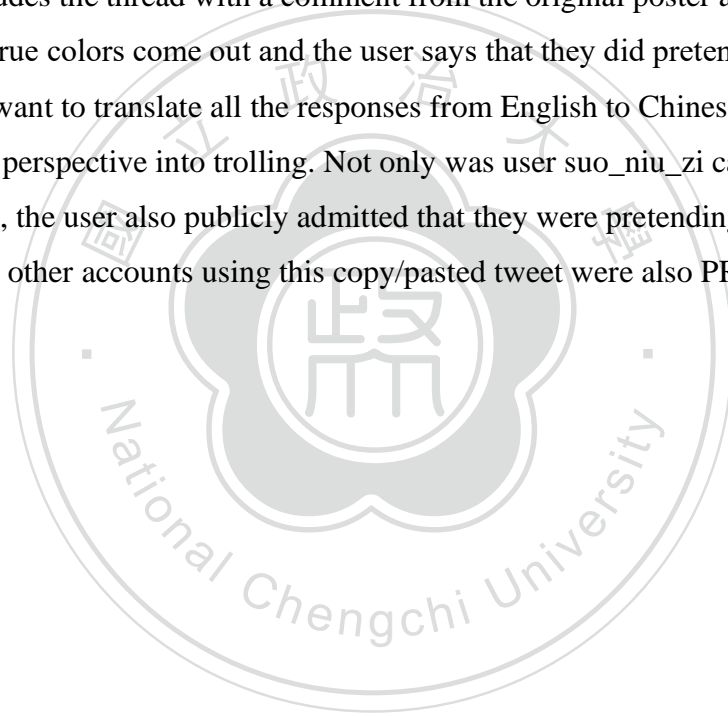
One insult launched at China is calling the country “West Taiwan.” Line 2 makes this joke at the expense of Line 1. The user in Line 2 takes an ironic tone by combating Line 1’s insult of calling Taiwan a province by calling China West Taiwan.

Line 3, 4, and 5 calls out the user in Line 1 for falsifying their nationality. The reasoning for Line 3 was because “Tedros” in traditional Chinese would be written “譚德塞” not “譚德賽.” Since the user in Line 3 quickly deduced that Line 1 was a PRC netizen, Line 3 went straight into calling the user in Line 1 out for being fake. Line 3 is coded as aggressive. Line 4 added curse words to emphasize their disdain for Line 1 for pretending to be Taiwanese. Because of this, Line 4 was also coded as aggressive. Similar to Line 3 and 4, Line 5 also

recognizes that Line 1 is not a Taiwanese netizen. Although there were no name-calling or curse words, Line 5 addressed Line 1's reference to Taiwan as a province. Line 5 makes the point that a Taiwanese person would never call Taiwan a province. Since there was no intonation of sarcasm or mocking, this comment is coded as aggressive due to the tone of disapproval in the comment.

Line 6 asks a rhetorical question to Line 1. This question asks when the CCP will stop stealing territories; from Xinjiang to Taiwan, Beijing stakes claims in disputed lands in Asia. Line 6 is accusing the CCP of being domineering other countries through greed, which means that this comment is coded as aggressive.

Line 7 concludes the thread with a comment from the original poster and is coded as ironic. Line 1's true colors come out and the user says that they did pretend to be Taiwanese and they do not want to translate all the responses from English to Chinese. This thread offered a unique perspective into trolling. Not only was user suo_niu_zi called out for not being Taiwanese, the user also publicly admitted that they were pretending all along, which shows that many other accounts using this copy/pasted tweet were also PRC netizens.



Text 2.10 (Date: 10 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	WilliamYang120:	A day after @DrTedros accused #Taiwan of launching racist attacks against him, a bunch of accounts in simplified Chinese started tweeting out a passage in traditional characters to claim they are Taiwanese and they want to apologize to Tedros under the hashtag #saysrytoTedros.

Screenshot 1:



Translation:
Screenshot 1

Username: Purple Country Player
topNepgear (simplified)

Bio: Recreation (simplified)

Location: Shuntian Mansion (simplified)

Tweet: I am Taiwanese, and I am extremely ashamed of Taiwanese attacking Tedros in such a vicious manner. On behalf of the Taiwanese, I apologize to Tedros and beg for his forgiveness #saysrytoTedros @WHO (traditional)

Screenshot 2:

wong_doctor: copied, liuhaizhu258: copied, bluestar0611: copied

Text 2.10 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
2	Shiroihamusan:	Reply to @WilliamYang120: These are wumao, CCP is the world's biggest racist, and is now using the information warfare to distract people and escape responsibility



3	MamamooWinnie:	Reply to @WilliamYang120: Fake! Fake! They are CHINA PEOPLE! Not Taiwanese people! All of us think Dr.Tedros should apologize that he insults Taiwan without any proofs! I'm native Taiwanese people.
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4	EdgarLne:	Reply to @WilliamYang120: There's nothing to apologize about. Taiwan isn't racist and celebrates diversity
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5	TedrosAdhanom6:	Reply to @WilliamYang120: Bah, too easy. Any one with a brain would know no self-respecting Taiwanese would ever write in simplified Chinese. Oh wait, @DrTedros has no brain...well that is a conundrum.
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Text 2.10 begins with Line 1, a Taiwanese reporter addressing the #saysrtoTedros hashtag. Line 1 screenshots two images that are tweets from accounts pretending to be Taiwanese. In the first screenshot, one account named “topNepgear” lists in simplified characters their location and bio, which are giveaways that a user is from the PRC. The tweet claims that they are Taiwanese and beg Tedros for his forgiveness. In the second screenshot, the first two tweets appear to be copied/pasted exactly from the first screenshot and after further examination Text 2.8 also has been copy/pasted from the screenshot but only in English. The third tweet similarly follows the begging for forgiveness route, but has some tones of aggression by calling Taiwanese stupid and ignorant. Although the tone of Line 1 is neutral for the report, the screenshots predominately are ironic.

Line 2 replies to Line 1 with a meme of a Pepe playing with two puppet Pepes. The large Pepe represents the PRC and the Pepe on the left is a PRC puppet with a cowboy hat on holding a gun calling the Tedros Pepe the “N word;” the Tedros puppet has its hands up saying “Oh no Taiwan is racist.” In Line 2’s tweet, the user is calling out the wumao for their racism and information warfare in this hashtag campaign. This user is highlighting the cognitive takeover happening between China and the rest of the world. If a doctor like Tedros is unable to tell the difference between Taiwanese and those in the PRC, it is unlikely that everyday people will be able to tell the difference. Although the meme may appear to be aggressive because of the puppet holding a gun and using the N word; however, because the meme is a parody of the actions of PRC trolls, who are manipulating perceptions of Taiwanese making racist attacks, the meme still has an ironic tone.

Line 3 self-identifies as a native Taiwanese person. The user replies to Line 1 claiming that the “Taiwanese” people in the screenshots are fake and asserts that they are actually PRC. Line 3 also states the opposite of what the PRC netizens have been posting in this hashtag and it is that Tedros should be apologizing to Taiwanese people. Calling the users fake and demanding an apology from Tedros has coded Line 3 as ironic.

In Line 4, the user’s bio claims to be Taiwanese, French, and British. Additionally, Line 4 takes an ironic tone, stating that Taiwanese have nothing to apologize for with an iteration of the meme “Pressing a Boot on Your Own Head” (KnowYourMeme, 2021) with Tedros as the crying child wearing the PRC flag on his tie and Taiwan as the boot being pressed into

Tedros's head. The meme mocks Tedros's claims of Taiwan's racism but in reality, it is Tedros's uninformed choice to place the blame on Taiwan.

Line 5 also mock's Tedros's rationale for blaming Taiwan for the racist attacks against him and overall takes an ironic tone despite saying Tedros has no brain. Looking at traditional and simplified characters, one can easily differentiate the two, but someone with no familiarity with the region might not be able to tell the difference. The user in Line 5 mocks Tedros for not being able to see who is pretending to be Taiwanese and those who are actually Taiwanese.

One way netizens have pushed back or resisted PRC attacks online is by reappropriating the hashtag #nnevy/#nevy. After a popular Thai actor Vachirawit Chivaaree liked a post that called Hong Kong a country, his PRC fans flooded to his Twitter and Instagram correcting him. Despite issuing an apology, his fans dug around online and found out that his girlfriend who goes by Nnevy was a supporter of Taiwanese independence (Griffiths, 2020). The hashtag #nnevy was picked up by the nationalist trolls and hurled insults at the Thai government for controversies; however, the Thais were unbothered by the attacks because they constantly criticize their government. Soon Hong Kongers and Taiwanese joined in the conversation and now #nnevy/#nevy is filled with anti-China posts from all sides of the internet.

Text 2.11 (Date: 12 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	RJSHMVKB:	A present to wumao #chinazi #Chinese #ChinaVirus #nevyv



2	fbgootw:	Reply to @RJSHMVKB : Poohrrrr wumao
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3	i14369488:	Reply to @RJSHMVKB : 不尊重别的国家，不尊重别的人，会有报应的。 Translation: Reply to @RJSHMVKB: People who don't respect other countries, and people who don't respect other countries will have retribution.
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4	pepe_hat:	Reply to @i14369488: #GoBackToWeibo Chinese people don't deserve freedom in twitter
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Translation: Watch me shoot your VPN

To get the full picture of the competing sides of trolling, it is necessary to examine what Taiwanese netizens and foreign supporters of Taiwan are saying and doing to push back against trolling from PRC sources. A well-known example of a counter-trolling narrative comes from the “#nnevvy” campaign on Twitter.

The shift of topic matter from #saysrytoTedros to #nnevvy is displayed here in Text 2.11, Line 1 presents a gift to “wumao” with an image of a 50 cent note with Xi Jinping’s face on it. The bill is decorated with ancient emperors and the words “Hell Bank Note” at the bottom of the note. In each of the top corners of the bill are the characters “伍毛錢” (ch: *wumaoqian*) or “fifty-cent bill.” Customarily, gifts are pleasant items to receive from but this gift is an insult. Calling a person from the PRC a “Wumao” directly translates to “fifty-cents” and as described in the literature review (R. Han, 2018, pp. 305-306), the fifty-cent army carries out state-sponsored trolling for the party. With the multimodality of the 50-cent bill, the insulting nature of the word “wumao” codes Line 1 as ironic.

Line 2 adds another element of trolling to the thread and also has an ironic tone. Using Xi Jinping’s moniker of “Winnie the Pooh” in a double entendre, Line 2 calls “wumao” poor literally and insultingly. The word poor is replaced with “Poohrrr” to mock Xi Jinping and calls wumao poor since they only received fifty cents per post.

Line 3 is a response from a PRC netizen. The simplified characters imply that Line 3 is from the PRC and states that countries that are not respectful will receive retribution. Respect must be earned, not given; the user in Line 3 is demanding that China should be respected, but as seen in the case of #saysrytoTedros and Taiwan Stupid, there is no respect for Taiwan at all. If China is to be respected, the country also must respect other countries. Line 3’s hypocritical response is coded as ironic for the user’s lack of awareness.

Line 4 ends this thread with a change in tone, to an aggressive tone, because the user replies to Line 3 stating “#GoBacktoWeibo” and “Chinese people don’t deserve freedom” with a meme of Xi Jinping on the computer that says “Watch me shoot your VPN.” The user in Line 4 attacks Line 3 for using a VPN to use Twitter and furthers the bludgeoning by saying the user does not deserve freedom.

Text 2.12 (Date: 12 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	NoppadonNaHee:	Taiwan is a real China, you dumb bitch CN 🦠 #China #Taiwan #TaiwanIsNotChina #Nevvy
		
2	ariel1898:	Reply to @NoppadonNaHee : ระวังหน้าอกคนไต้หวัน ✘ ไม่ชอบเรียกจีน ✘ Translation: @NoppadonNaHee: Be careful Taiwanese ✘ are not like the Chinese ✘
3	Paikenaaraja:	Reply to @NoppadonNaHee : Taiwan is Taiwanค่ะ
4	yynyynyn1:	Reply to @NoppadonNaHee : 妒归忌，为人莫作狗，其后毁有意？ Translation: Reply to @NoppadonNaHee : Be jealous, don't be a dog, and then destroy your intentions?

Line 1 in Text 2.12 is coded as aggressive, because it blames China for the COVID-19 pandemic and claims Taiwan as the “real China.” With these memes, Line 1 also adds insult

to injury to users by calling them a “bitch.” Although the tone is overall more positive towards Taiwan, the user is continuing to perpetuate that Taiwan is China.

Line 2 replies in Thai to not conflate Taiwan and the PRC. Although Line 1 is trying to make Taiwan appear more legitimate as “the real China,” Line 2 points out that PRC citizens and Taiwanese citizen are not the same. Line 2 is coded as amiable, because the user in Line 2 attempts to correct this mistake and defend the separate identity of Taiwan.

Echoing Line 2’s statement, Line 3 replies directly to Line 1 and also takes an amiable tone, by stating that Taiwan is Taiwan. Taiwan is not the real China but rather its own independent country with cultural ties and historical links to China.

There is a tone shift in Line 4, to an aggressive tone. The user in Line 4 appears to be a PRC netizen and tells Line 1 to be jealous and not be a dog. Calling a person an animal and telling the user that they are jealous of China shows tones of aggression.

Text 2.13 (Date: 12 April 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	I17NT1:	Taiwan is not Chinese #Taiwan #China #nevvv
2	Janet53292567:	Reply to @I17NT1: Hong Kong is not Chinese! #nevvv
3	AKKITO2:	Reply to @I17NT1: #Taiwan has her independent government system, Taiwanese can vote in the election of Resident Tasi Ing-wen is Resident of #Taiwan. You can search her in twitter TaiWan is the independent country. It’s true.
4	smile31017085:	Reply to @I17NT1: Taiwan has been Chinese territory since ancient times
5	fujisasuke:	Reply to @smile31017085: Oh, wow, but why they are not controlled by PRC? Um 🤔 🤔
6	chengch73970660:	Reply to @I17NT1: Taiwan is a country!
(14 April 2020)		
7	CHENQINGQING9:	Reply to @I17NT1: If we say Bangkok is a country, not a part of Thailand, are you happy
8	I17NT1:	Reply to @CHENQINGQING9: But Bangkok people think that they are in Thailand haha

Line 1 in Text 2.13 appears to be a Thai netizen, and they claim that Taiwan is not Chinese or belonging to the PRC. This statement is coded as ambiguous because it is unclear

if the commenter is intending to take a negative tone or to be ironic. Because this line takes a position on the pro-independence side, it cannot be considered to be neutral.

Line 2 enters the conversation to respond by sharing their opinion about Hong Kong also does not belong to the PRC. This comment steers the conversation somewhat off-topic because line 1 is talking about Taiwan, but this commenter broadens the conversation to include Hong Kong being in a similar position. Line 2 is also coded as ambiguous, although the exclamation mark could suggest a more aggressive tone, the comment is too short to draw any broader conclusion. Line 3 replies to Line 1 with an amiable tone, because the commenter agrees with the initial comment and reinforces that Tsai Ing-wen has the elected position of President and that any online search will say that Taiwan is its own country with its own government.

Line 4 takes a counter position, replying to Line 1 that Taiwan has belonged to the PRC since “ancient times.” The commenter in Line 4 seems to be a PRC netizen but also is a dead account with minimal posts or content, and directly rebukes the comments above. This line is coded as aggressive because the tone is negative towards Taiwan’s distinct existence. This person wants to use a historical argument for justifying Taiwan’s belonging to China, however, this ignores all of the histories since the “ancient times,” and the many territorial changes that have taken place since then not only for China but many countries around the world.

Line 5 replies to Line 4 responding sarcastically as to why Taiwan is not controlled by the PRC. The use of the two thinking emojis signifies wondering sarcastically, as the commenter already knows the answer to this rhetorical question. This means that line 5 is coded as ironic because it replied to Line 4 with obvious sarcasm. Line 6 picks up the conversation once again several days after the original tweet, replying to Line 1 and acknowledging that Taiwan is a country. Line 6 is coded as amiable because it specifically supports the notion that Taiwan is a nation of its own, in contrast to Text 2.9 where a user referred to Taiwan as a province or region of China.

In Line 7, the commenter replies to Line 1, comparing the way that Taiwan calls itself a country to a hypothetical situation where Bangkok decided to break off from the rest of Thailand. This comment is coded as aggressive, because not only does the commenter

dismiss the idea of Taiwan being separate, but also makes a remark asking if the initial poster would be happy if other people used this hypothetical idea.

In Line 8, the commenter makes a rebuttal, explaining that these two comparisons are not the same; Bangkok wants to be a part of Thailand whereas Taiwan does not want to be a part of China. Line 8 is coded as ironic because they dismiss the idea of Bangkok separating from Thailand with laughter. It seems that Line 8 thinks the idea is silly to even have to make this rebuttal because obviously, people in Bangkok think that they are in Thailand.

Analysis of #saysrytoTedros and #nnevvy/#nevvy

For both #saysrytoTedros and #nnevvy/#nevvy, commenters used trolling and ironic tones to attack their opponents online. As seen in Figure 2.5, 47% of the coded comments used irony in their posts as a means to convey their message while 42% used aggressive tones, and only 11% used amiable tones. Irony is an indirect way to exacerbate hot political issues. Users tend to post their opinions on Weibo and receive a lauding audience when on social media like Twitter, more users are willing to disagree and fight back. Not only are tones ironic as seen in the Taiwan Stupid case, but also aggressive because many Taiwanese can be found on the non-PRC internet. This surge in aggression comes from the frustration Taiwanese feel for being blamed for racist attacks all while PRC netizens are trolling them for their misfortunes. While #saysrytoTedros was filled with PRC netizens, #nnevvy/#nevvy garnered supporters from Taiwanese, Thai, and Hong Kong users. In both cases, users attack one another in the comments section as seen in the tables above. In comparison to the Taiwan Stupid case, these two hashtags both feature more aggression and less ambiguity in terms of the tone of the trolling. This is because these two campaigns have a more direct focus, with #nnevvy being specifically used as an anti-China and anti-CCP protest signal, while the Tedros hashtag is all about pretending to be Taiwanese so as to embarrass the nation of Taiwan in public. In comparison, Taiwan Stupid is a more general page that often makes fun of Taiwanese people but also mixes other tones running the range from aggression to claims of cultural similarity, and so can send more mixed messages than a more specific intention behind these hashtag campaigns. From these two examples, one can see that PRC trolls use irony as a way of belittling Taiwanese successes and mocking the idea of a separate and successful nation, while Taiwanese netizens respond angrily by refuting these claims and

rejecting the ideology of the PRC, as a way of emphasizing their differences and expressing their anger at PRC trolls defaming their country.

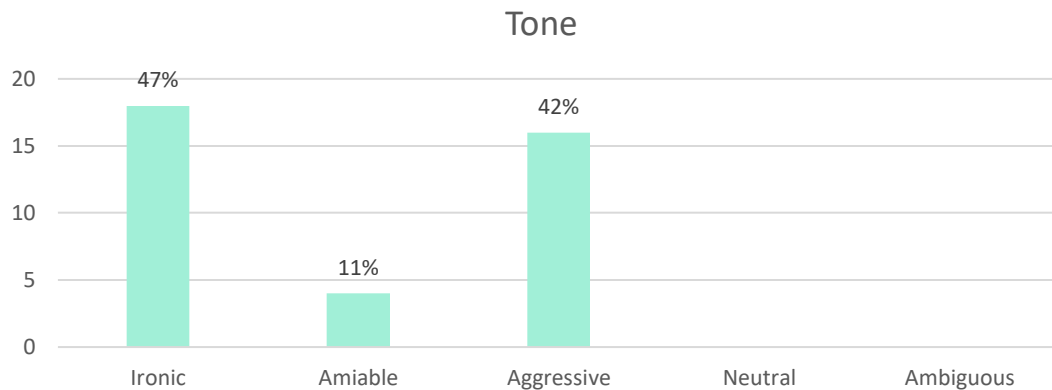


Figure 2.5

In contrast with the echo chamber of Weibo, Twitter allows voices for all sides of the internet to enter into discussion about anything from fandoms to politics. No comments in either hashtag were coded as neutral or ambiguous and the overwhelming majority were coded as ironic. Since the entire campaign of #saysrytoTedros was to make Taiwanese look pathetic, Texts 2.8 and 2.9 were users that self-identified themselves as Taiwanese. Although the comments appear negative, the multimodal communication happens in the bait and switch. The irony does not lie in the words themselves but more so in the actions the PRC netizens are doing by posing as Taiwanese. By groveling for Tedros's mercy, it mocks the attempts of Taiwan to gain entrance into the WHO.

Not only the tone of this text needs to be addressed but also the subtext is highly ironic. One possible reason is that it is part of a campaign to close off outside sympathy for Taiwan or any sort of path to recognition. As PRC netizens attempt to do this, they are ironically adopting an online guise as Taiwanese people. There is some discomfort here, as the mainland-based trolls are having to think about passing themselves off as if they were Taiwanese and not Chinese. In trying to convince other people that they are Taiwanese, they admit to themselves that Taiwanese are distinct from Chinese people and Chinese attitudes. If there was not such a distinction between Taiwanese and Chinese, they could simply behave normally, because naturally, a Taiwanese person would be the same as a Chinese.

Whereas the #saysrytoTedros campaign gets its irony from its cognitive dissonance, with PRC netizens adopting the guise of Taiwanese, the #nnevvy campaign also has an ironic meta-narrative. This is because the hashtag was originally made by mainland Chinese netizens as a weapon to troll Thai and Taiwanese people, but has now been reclaimed by those same people against China. This weapon of irony has instead become a signal of defiance towards its original creators. These two hashtags have overwhelmingly ironic tones because they share ironic subtexts or origins.

The Case of Winnie the Pooh

Winnie the Pooh has had a controversial time in China, often being used as a mocking comparison to Xi Jinping. Although Winnie the Pooh has a chubby and silly exterior appearance, this beloved children's character has been banned in China at the present time. This is because of how international trolls have weaponized Winnie the Pooh to launch attacks on Xi Jinping. Using a live broadcast and a video game, Winnie the Pooh has riled up trolls on the internet.

A popular Taiwanese television network called Formosa Television or 民間全民電視公司 (ch: *mingjianquanmindianshigongshi*) features around the clock news and even newscasts presented in Taiwanese. FTV has commitment to Taiwan's native culture and the future of Taiwan's democracy (FTV, n.d.). The FTV website claims to be "neutral and impartial" in their role in delivering the news; however, other news outlets have reported that FTV tends to lean more to the DPP (Focus Taiwan, 2010). This can be seen in a news segment that was aired over a year ago in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first glance, this news segment takes the typical approach of projecting the images of leaders on the screen, but if one looks closely highlighted behind Xi Jinping are the ears of Winnie the Pooh.



Figure 2.6 (民視新聞, 2020)

Text 2.14 (Date: 15 February 2020)

Line	Username	Comment
1	民視新聞: Translation: FTV News:	<p>小編嘴角微微上揚 習近平果然是小熊維尼 民視電視台背板竟出現這個! 詳全文：https://www.ftvnews.com.tw/news/detail/2020215W0031 #習近平 #小熊維尼 #快新聞 隨時 LINE 一下新聞不漏接 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> https://goo.gl/hze3Wv</p> <p>Translation: The corner of the editor's mouth rises slightly Xi Jinping really is Winnie the Pooh. This is actually on the back panel of the TV station! Full text: https://www.ftvnews.com.tw/news/detail/2020215W0031 #Xijinping #WinniethePooh #fast news LINE at any time to check the news and not miss the news <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> https://goo.gl/hze3Wv</p>

Text 2.14 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
2	陶斯:	Reply to 民視新聞: 習維尼肺炎.武漢說要改名改新冠省

Translation:
Taos:



Reply to 民視新聞: Xi Winnie pneumonia. Wuhan said it would change its name to the new crown province

Left hand text: Basically insulting Pooh

Middle text: “Xi Wei Ni”
(literally, Xi Winnie)

3	韓森:	Reply to 民視新聞: 聽說武漢肺炎改名成近平肺炎了
	Translation: Han Sen:	Translation: Reply to 民視新聞: I heard that Wuhan Pneumonia has been renamed Jinping Pneumonia

4	李堃異:	Reply to 民視新聞:
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Translation:
Li Kunyi:

(17
February
2020)

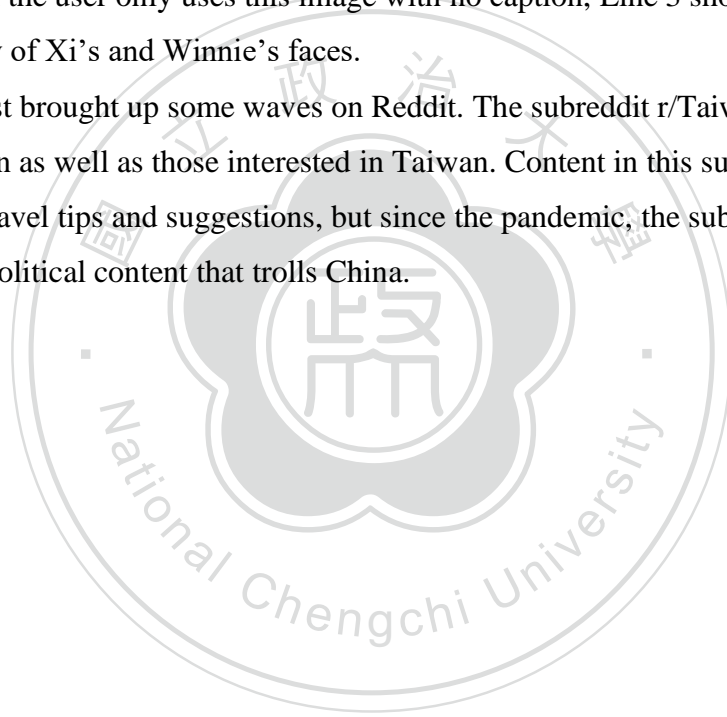


In Line 1 of Text 2.14, Formosa News has posted this video of a live news broadcast to their Facebook page where Winnie the Pooh’s shadow is seen behind Xi Jinping’s face. This line obviously has an ironic tone, as the comment is pointing out the way that the news channel mocked Xi Jinping on a live broadcast, and mockingly stating that the CCP chairman is truly Winnie the Pooh.

In Line 2, this commenter shares an image with Winnie the Pooh and Xi Jinping side-by-side, continuing the comparisons between the two. This line is ironic, even making a remark about how the comparisons between them are insulting to Pooh Bear, rather than to Xi Jinping. The commenter additionally mocks the emergence of COVID-19 under Xi's administration, talking about "Xi Winnie pneumonia."

Line 3 also jumps on the COVID-19 subject, joking that "Wuhan pneumonia" has been renamed "Jinping pneumonia", and is once again an ironic tone. Lastly, in Line 4, the commenter shares an image where Winnie the Pooh has been photoshopped into Xi Jinping's spot and vice versa, so that Xi's shadow is now behind Winnie. This is also another ironic tone, even though the user only uses this image with no caption, Line 3 shows the interchangeability of Xi's and Winnie's faces.

This newscast brought up some waves on Reddit. The subreddit r/Taiwan contains Reddit users from Taiwan as well as those interested in Taiwan. Content in this subreddit can range from politics to travel tips and suggestions, but since the pandemic, the subreddit has been overblown with political content that trolls China.



Line	Username	Comment
1	JustinYogaChen:	FTV News Channel put the correct shadow behind Xi Jinping



2	Gregonar:	Reply to JustinYogaChen: Taiwan needs to bombard the mainland with satire and shatter the CCP's glass hearts.
3	S4t0FJWRA:	Reply to JustinYogaChen: Now we wait for China to complain that it "hurts the feelings of the Chinese people"
4	konigsjagdpanther:	Reply to S4t0FJWRA: CEO of Racism called!
5	Johari82:	Reply to JustinYogaChen: Oh no 😊, FTV has hurt the feelings of Winnie 🐻❤️

In Line 1 of Text 2.15, the Reddit user most likely captured the image from FTV's broadcast and highlights the news broadcast with Winnie the Pooh's shadow behind Xi Jinping, circling the relevant part of the image. The commenter says that this news channel put the "correct" shadow behind Xi, making this line have an ironic tone, because he has explicitly endorsed the mockery.

In Line 2, the commenter responds to the original poster, saying that Taiwanese should continue to provoke Chinese audiences through satire, specifically to attack the sensitivities of the ruling CCP. Because of the way that this commenter talks about "glass hearts," this line is also coded as ironic, because it mocks mainland Chinese as being figuratively fragile. Because of this comment, Line 3 also coded as ironic, because this commenter is sarcastically referring

to the common CCP diplomatic complaint about the actions of foreign governments being offensive to the feelings of China's public.

In Line 4, the commenter responds directly to line 3, mockingly saying that the “CEO of racism” was getting involved. This throwaway remark is likely a reference to a typical response from PRC trolls that foreign criticism is racist towards Chinese people, and so is also coded as an ironic tone. Lastly, in line 5, the commenter makes another sarcastic remark about how Formosa TV upset Xi Jinping's feelings, also including a smiley emoji, a broken heart emoji, and a bear emoji. This clearly sarcastic remark is also coded as ironic, because clearly the commenter does not actually care about Xi Jinping's feelings.

Referring back to the literature review, the removal of the game Devotion was largely due to the overwhelming number of downvotes launched onto the game's Steam page for a talisman that mocked Xi Jinping as Winnie the Pooh. In the previous case, many users fought mainland Chinese trolls calling the PRC leader “Xi Winnie” or using Winnie the Pooh related puns. Although this comparison has been around since 2013, it remains a go-to attack from netizens outside of the PRC. For the gaming platform, Steam, users cannot respond to one another, but users can write reviews to voice their opinions, good or bad. While the game is still unavailable on Steam, the game's DLC soundtrack remains in the store with over 200 positive comments and 186 negative comments. Steam users can signify a thumbs up or a thumbs down to recommend or not recommend a game and add a review for their reasoning for their vote.

Text 2.16

Line	Username	Thumbs Down Comments
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1	隔壁村泰罗: Translation: Tyro, the village next door (Date: 23 February 2019)	我是傻逼 Translation: I am an idiot
2	胖子晏天天天胡: Translation: Fat Yu Yan every day Hu (Date: 24 February 2019)	将恶意的政治隐喻掺杂到游戏中,V社就是这样让政治掺杂在游戏里吗? -10星差评 不退款永远不买游戏 Translation: Incorporating malicious political metaphors into the game, is this how the V agency allows politics to be mixed into the game? -10 star bad review No refund Never buy this game
3	DRANGONHEART: (Date: 24 February 2019)	很让人恶心的做法。湾湾自己一个人嗨去吧。 Translation: Very disgusting practice. Wan Wan, go alone.
4	544659465: (Date: 23 February 2019)	前三天有多喜欢还愿今天就有多心寒,我现在只希望我能顺利拿到退款。既然贵公司不想赚我们大陆人的钱为何不一开始就说出来?觉得大陆销量低吗?看看现在游戏是如何从90%推荐掉到45%推荐的,我们钱三天都在疯狂安利游戏,担心销量不佳多努力在劝说云玩家补票,现在呢?被赤烛打脸,被fb上叫好的人打脸。赤烛无论你们立场如何,你终究是深深伤害了我们大陆玩家的心。以后的作品不用考虑来中国区了,再见吧您! Translation: How much I liked and wished in the first three days, I was so sad today, I just hope that I can get the refund smoothly. Since your company doesn't want to make money from our mainlanders, why didn't you just say it at the beginning? Do you think the mainland sales are low? Take a look at how the game has dropped from 90% recommendation to 45% recommendation. We spent three days in crazy Amway games, worrying about poor sales, and trying hard to persuade cloud players to make up tickets. What about now? Was slapped in the face by Red Candle, and slapped in the face by a person applauded by fb. No matter what your position is, you have deeply hurt the hearts of our mainland players. You don't need to consider coming to China for future works. Goodbye!

Text 2.16 (Continued)

Line	Username	Thumbs Down Comments
5	洛渊隐雪: Luo Yuan Yinxue (Date: 23 February 2019)	游戏是好游戏 恐怖和解密都做的很巧妙 衔接的部分都做的 较好 但是 为什么要做那么多多余的事情 何必呢 Translation: The game is a good game. The horror and decryption are all done very cleverly, and the connection parts are all done well. But why do you need to do such a superfluous thing?

In Line 1 of Text 2.16, the commenter makes an ironic statement simply saying that they are an idiot, which at face value offers nothing in the way of feedback or add to any discussion. The only reason that this commenter says such a pointless statement is because to make a review for an item on Steam, a commenter has to have some text to their review. Line 1 exists solely to be able to downvote the game soundtrack and is only a way to get around the text requirement to continue to review bomb the OST.

Line 2 is a standalone review comment on the soundtrack, making very aggressive statements attacking “malicious political metaphors” and saying that the commenter would give negative points to the game if they could. Line 3 is another aggressive review, calling the game a disgusting practice and mocking the use of the term “Wan Wan,” which many users mockingly call Taiwan. In Chinese, many nicknames are given by doubling the second character in a name especially to children. This commenter shames Taiwan like a child for an attempt at mocking their “parents.”

Continuing the trend of aggressive comments, Line 4 mocks the company for the drastic drop in-game rating after finding the talisman and even goes as far as to say no Chinese person would ever purchase a game from this company ever again. At first, this line starts out seemingly positive, saying that they liked the game for the first three days and then sadly changed their mind after finding out about the controversy. From that point, this commenter was deeply upset and offended like other PRC netizens, leaving an aggressive tone to their review. Lastly, Line 5 is also aggressive, even though initially the commenter made positive comments about the game design itself. However, a sense of disappointed outrage comes out from the last sentence, where the commenter seemingly asks why the developers would ruin such a mechanically good game with a stupid, pointless political statement.

Text 2.17

Line	Username	Thumbs Up Comment
1	Fkltwosm: (Date: 24 February 2019)	<p>我不會恐怖遊戲也不會去玩，但看到習維尼符咒就是要買下來，發現前說是"國產遊戲"，發現後就變"台獨遊戲"，還什麼買下來 2 小時內破關秒退款?不然就是一堆盜版下載，符咒出現之後盜版就不見了，果然是邪教黨呢，全世界都應該為了防止你們中國人盜版在自己的作品上貼一張習維尼符咒防身。</p> <p>Translation: I don't know how to play horror games, but when I see Xi Winnie's talisman, I had to buy it. I said it was a "domestic game" before I found it. After I found it, it became a "Taiwan independence game". What else can I buy within 2 hours? Refund in seconds? Otherwise, it's just a bunch of pirated downloads. After the spell appears, the pirated version disappears. Sure enough, it is a cult party. The whole world should prevent you Chinese from pirating a piece of Xi Winnie's talisman on your own work to protect yourself.</p>
2	Ivywang: (Date: 25 February 2019)	<p>支持赤燭~無關政治立場單純喜愛他們的遊戲期待赤燭下一款遊戲!</p> <p>Translation: Support Red Candle~ Irrelevant to political stance Simply love their games Looking forward to the next game from Red Candle!</p>
3	LESS GOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOO O: (Date: 23 February 2019)	<p>我要在我喪禮的時候放這個</p> <p>Translation: I want to play this at my funeral</p>
4	PeLiaS: (Date: 24 February 2019)	<p>看到最近的情況，不得不買來支持請不要濫用評分系統，想給負評，麻煩請至少玩過遊戲 赤燭加油</p> <p>Translation: Seeing the recent situation, I had to buy to support. Please do not abuse the scoring system. If you want to give negative reviews, please at least play the game. Go Red Candle!</p>

In Line 1 of Text 2.17, the commenter displays two different tones, being amiable towards Red Candle Games and then aggressive towards mainland Chinese. This comment says positive things about the inclusion of the talisman that mocked Xi Jinping, and also that Devotion's evolution into a symbol of Taiwanese defiance made them want to support the

company more, even though they state that they do not typically play horror games. In the latter part of their review this commenter then calls the CCP a “cult party” and says that including the mockery of Xi Jinping is good protection from PRC-based pirates. This comment is therefore coded as ambiguous because of taking the opposite tones to the two opposing groups.

Line 2 is more overtly amiable, expressing support for Red Candle on the basis of their good games. However, this line does attempt to reason with both sides of the debate, saying that users should set aside their political stances and feelings about Taiwan, and play it for being a good game.

In Line 3, the commenter says that they wanted the Devotion soundtrack played at their funeral. This commenter is being sarcastic but tries to convey that the soundtrack is meaningful for this user. Therefore this comment is coded as ironic.

Finally, in Line 4, the commenter takes an enthusiastically amiable tone towards Red Candle Games, saying that they had to buy the soundtrack to support the studio after hearing about the controversial situation. They also ask negative reviewers to stop abusing the review system and urge them to play the game before leaving a bad review. This statement of support for the developers is another attempt to reason with the trolls in the comment section.

Analysis of Winnie the Pooh

While Winnie the Pooh is an insult that is aimed at Xi Jinping, this specific case concerns the use of the motif in a Taiwan-developed video game and on Taiwanese television to mock the PRC leadership. As this example is flowing back in the other direction, it demonstrates the tone changes that are shown by Taiwanese netizens against a PRC subject. Unlike the other example of social media comments that are critical of the PRC, Figure 2.8 shows the topic of Winnie the Pooh was predominately ironic, with comparatively low aggression. 69.6% of comments were ironic, 8.7% were aggressive, another 8.7% was amiable and the last 13% was ambiguous. The larger levels of ambiguity come from the occasional mixture of aggressive and ironic statements that are conveyed within some of the same responses, which means that they cannot be clearly categorized in either way, but certainly do not qualify as neutral. Additionally, the blip of amiable tones were expressed for the company Red Candle more than for Winnie the Pooh or Xi Jinping. For almost eight

years now, Winnie the Pooh has been the caricature used to mock Xi Jinping and this data reflects that even today this comparison continues to be a valuable device for trolling in cross strait politics. It is worth noting the distribution of tone, with irony being once again dominant, because of the subject matter. Winnie the Pooh is a joking comparison to Xi Jinping, and it is perhaps more difficult to use such a loveable character in an aggressive way. The aggression in this case comes from those Steam users who review bombed the game, while the amiable tone comes from the small number of defenders.

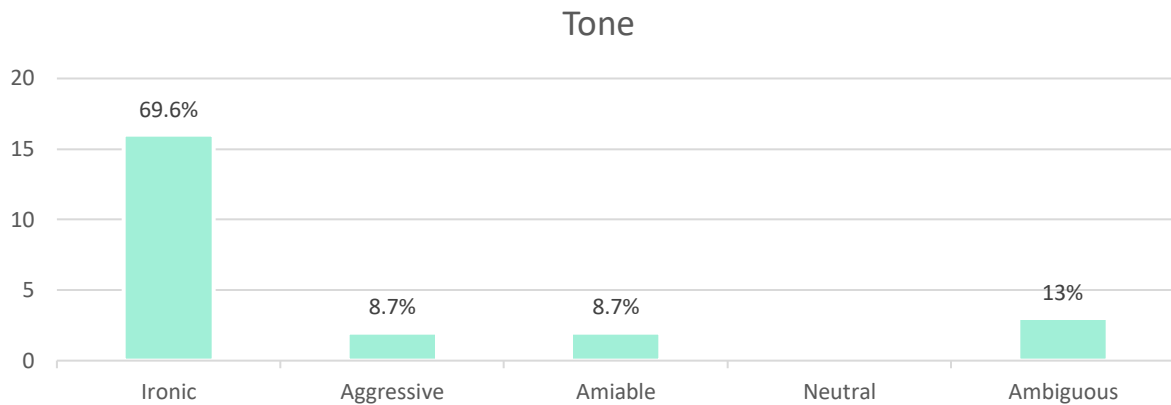


Figure 2.7

Winnie the Pooh’s hold on Xi Jinping’s cult of personality remains strong. As the CCP attempts to scrub the lovable character from the internet, the trolls of the internet use the vitriol as fuel to the fire. FTV still has the Winnie Shadow segment proudly displayed in one a news playlist on their Facebook page. Trolling from Facebook users mostly mocked Xi for the pandemic and his likeness to the cartoon bear by combining their names to make “習維尼” (ch: xiweini). Although Reddit and Weibo both get similar reputations for being echo chambers, Reddit users often fight other users to defend their opinions. Reddit users were similar to the Taiwanese Facebook users but instead of mocking the pandemic, Redditors continued to mock the CCP for its fragile ego.

For some, mocking Xi Jinping is just for enjoyment and the thrill of trolling, but profiting from the trolling adds a new dimension to the mix. Although in the Taiwan Stupid case, the account promoted ads on their page, this storefront has customers willingly buying products to troll Xi Jinping. As there are many Taiwanese supporters of the brand Which Toys, the Angry Pooh toy remains one of the store’s best sellers. Many Taiwanese netizens

comment on the product with deep sarcasm and the store is quick to jump in the conversation to troll with potential shoppers.

Unlike other social media like Facebook, Reddit, Twitter or Weibo, Steam reviews don't allow for interaction between reviewers and other commenters. This means that by nature there is no way to directly push back against nor bandwagon with negative commenters. Additionally, it also could be that commenters are finding out immediately about the controversy and going directly to the Steam page and jumping in quickly without seeing any back and forth or bandwagoning on other people's ironic or sarcastic threads. With less of a collaborative narrative, the knee-jerk reaction to aggressively attack the developers comes through instead. This possibility is also backed up by the dates that these reviews were made, all occurring between the 23rd and 25th of February. The mocking talisman was found and publicized on the 23rd and then the game was taken down on the 24th. Being ahead of the curve on the controversy would leave less time to develop a crafted ironic narrative, and instead would encourage raw outrage.

Before the removal of the game, Devotion had thousands of negative comments from commenters from the PRC but also had many supporters from Taiwan. No comments had neutral tones. Although the original game's Steam page is unavailable, there were a handful of users that took to the DLC's page to voice their outrage or support of the game and game developers. Reviewing the comment dates, many of the comments started flooding in on the 23-24 of February 2019 when the Winnie the Pooh talisman was found. From both sides, cyber nationalism plays a role in the comments section. Mainland Chinese netizens downvote the game to punish the Taiwanese game developer as well as defend their country and leader while Taiwanese and Western users are upvoting to support and resist the attacks from PRC netizens. Ultimately, the controversy led to the game being pulled from internet libraries. In March of 2021, Red Candle Games launched Devotion on its storefront, which allowed fans to purchase the game directly from the company.

Chapter Conclusion

The case of Taiwan offers potent examples of how political trolling can be used to delegitimize and undermine a rival country. Trolling is a major factor in conversations on social media involving Taiwan and the PRC, and COVID-19 gave mainland trolls additional ammunition. From the Taiwanese perspective, Winnie the Pooh is used as the most powerful counterattack. Using nationalistic content to troll netizens is a way to mock these rival sides of the debate, even to the extent of embracing the ironic position of pretending to be Taiwanese and thus admitting that there is a difference. The constant cyber nationalist attacks from PRC netizens rebuke the assumption of Taiwanese separateness from China, while the Taiwanese nationalists and foreign supporters also reject the pan-Chinese ideology of the PRC. Both sides not only reject each other's claims but also try to discredit one another. All of the cases examined in this Chapter feature high levels of irony in the content, with aggression peaking particularly highly in the cases of the #saysrytoTedros and #nnevvy campaigns. The Taiwan Stupid case offers a clear majority of ironic tone, because PRC netizens are joking about Taiwan's failures to control an outbreak of COVID-19, despite Taiwan's world-renowned initial success with the virus. The irony here is clearly motivated by a contrast between Taiwan's claims of success and superior crisis management compared to the rest of the world, which was an important point of pride for Taiwan's government, and a demonstration of Taiwan's separation from "Greater China." This is because while the PRC earned mockery and disdain from international audiences for causing the pandemic, while Taiwan handled it almost perfectly in the first months. Taiwan's success was a contrast with China's disaster, but mainland netizens are overjoyed at the chance to deflate Taiwan's self-esteem. In contrast, the aggressive tone is highest in the Tedros and nnevvy examples because Taiwanese netizens are so angrily fighting back against the misrepresentation campaign by trolls from the mainland. These misrepresentations became so serious that not only did Director-General Tedros himself respond to the attacks, but the Taiwanese government presented evidence to show that they were faked. This is a clear example of Taiwanese government policy responding to events on social media, and also explains why netizens responded so angrily to the #saysrytoTedros campaign, because it was a direct attack against Taiwan's reputation and more broadly against the desire of Taiwan to earn its own positive recognition. However, even in this case, there is a great deal of irony from netizens

who are portraying the PRC trolls as desperate or stupid in their attempts to embarrass Taiwan. Meanwhile, in the case of Winnie the Pooh, there is more irony because the motif of portraying Xi Jinping with Winnie the Pooh's face is designed to make him into a soft bumbling cartoon character, rather than a powerful world leader. Even in this case, Taiwanese organizations are shaming the PRC government by mocking the highest leader of the country. The primary motivation for this intense debate in all of the cases is the long-running battle over Taiwanese identity, and both the tones of irony and aggression play into this dispute. Irony serves the role of belittling the idea of Taiwan as a successful and separate entity from China, while cutting back the other way, irony undermines the idea of PRC leadership being serious and competent. The claims of cultural contiguity which are made by the PRC government are echoed by PRC netizens, and so serve as the main point of contention between mainland trolls and their Taiwanese targets of mockery. To the extent that there is an ideological conflict rather than a cultural one, it is more in the background and concerned with liberal democracy against socialism with Chinese characteristic as defined by the CCP today. The main expression of their feelings on the matter are what the PRC-based trolls use as the subject of the attempts to delegitimize Taiwanese success and separateness. With Twitter and Steam, the affordances of hashtags and rating systems were weaponized against Taiwanese netizens; however, the Taiwanese fought back in every instance on non-Chinese social media. On Weibo, speaking out against the loudest voices could put a user at risk of harassment because of the herd mentality trolling takes on in a visible place like a forum. Weibo's insulation breeds this toxic and aggressive trolling within the confines of mainland Chinese social media. In the Taiwan Stupid case, many of the users joined in to troll Taiwan on their rising COVID-19 cases and the Taiwanese health minister by using memes and political comics. Additionally, there was no back and forth as seen in the hashtag campaigns, Facebook, Reddit, and on Steam.

On the other side of the wall, Twitter's ironic subtext plays a role in the "#saysrytoTedros" and "#nnevvy" campaigns, both hashtags were used as weapon against the targets of trolls, but also in unintended ways. With the Tedros-centred trolling, trolls operating from the PRC ironically took on the personas of Taiwanese to frame Taiwan as a racist country. In doing so they not only made sarcastic or mocking attacks but also highlight the differences between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, changing their writing from

simplified characters to traditional, and trying to display humility on behalf of Taiwan as a separate entity. With the “#nnevvy” hashtag, Thai, Hong Kong and Taiwanese netizens inverted the use of a hashtag used by mainland Chinese trolls against people who supported Taiwan, and used it to rally and highlight counterattacks intended to attack the official CCP line on Taiwanese independence. This specific purpose to the #nnevvy hashtag is also what gives it such an aggressive edge. It is specifically appropriated as a signal to anti-PRC netizens to join the bandwagon and highlight their attacks or protests by joining onto a popular hashtag.

Similar to this is how the popular Winnie the Pooh meme has moved from purely online contexts into mainstream public broadcasts, as demonstrated by the reference to “Xi Winnie” on the Formosa Television news broadcast. This use of the Winnie the Pooh reference to Xi was then recycled back into the online trolling context, as people pointed it out on Reddit and made more comments mocking the PRC leader. The FTV newscast with the Winnie the Pooh shadow would also probably have been watched by older audiences, meaning that memes created by young people on social media can now reach mainstream political discourse of older generations. While Steam is not a traditional social media site, users used the Winnie the Pooh Talisman as fuel to the cross strait fire. Users bombarded the reviews with both negative and positive reviews in a way to troll and fight one another. This constant back and forth for a few days eventually forced Steam to take action and remove the game from their platform. Although the game is now available directly through Red Candle Games, the game still has not made its way back to Steam.

Foreign social media allows more voices to fight back the many trolls hopping the Great Firewall; there is an arising issue with mainland Chinese netizens escaping from behind its stronghold, which is the advancement of cognitive warfare. Modern information warfare can be traced back to the Cold War era. With social media, the flow of information is endless and has begun to alter how users think about the media they consume. According to Johns Hopkins University and Imperial College London (2021), cognitive warfare can have different outcomes. One the one hand, cognitive warfare increases polarization and division inside a society and also between that society and other groups. The cognitive warfare online drives more and more confrontations between Taiwanese netizens and PRC netizens, encouraging both groups to become more and more hardline and widen the divide across the

Taiwan Strait. In another way cognitive warfare can influence individuals or groups to favor an aggressor's views and in some cases can chip away at societies until its collective will has waned; thereby, leaving an adversary an opening to take over society without force. In a democracy like Taiwan, filtering cognitive attacks proves to be difficult when there is a free flow of information entering and leaving cyberspace. The combination of COVID-19, economic threats, and a constant flow of military planes flying over the island has created a cocktail of false information that is deepening the political and social divide of Taiwan. These methods contrast with the legalistic methods that the PRC has used to enforce its dominance over Hong Kong.



Chapter 3

Online Trolling Identities in Hong Kong

Hong Kong's tug-of-war for power with China has been building for years, but in 2019 this intensified by the extradition bill introduced by the PRC. The bill would have allowed criminals and political activists in Hong Kong to be detained and tried in Mainland China where judges would follow orders from the CCP (Ives, 2019). After mass protests for months, the extradition bill was suspended. However, unrest continues because of a controversial security law (The National Security Law, NSL) passed by the PRC government to push for stronger consequences for those that undermine the government's authority on June 30, 2020. This controversial law not only reduces Hong Kong's judicial autonomy but also creates new avenues to punish demonstrators and activists. This, in turn, stops Hong Kongers from openly provoking or attacking the PRC government. It also includes any acts of secession, subversion, terrorism, or collusion with foreign or external forces (BBC, 2020). Following the enactment of this law, many prominent figureheads for the pro-democracy movement have been arrested. One of the wealthiest activists arrested in December of 2020 is Jimmy Lai. Lai is best known as an entrepreneur and the founder of the news outlet Apple Daily. Of all of the activists arrested for their involvement in the Hong Kong protests, Lai's arrest holds the most implications. With Lai's empire of investments, Hong Kong officials enacted the National Security Law to freeze Lai's assets. In this chapter, I examine the cases of Jimmy Lai and the closure of Apple Daily. In the first case, a freelance journalist from Hong Kong breaks the news of Jimmy Lai's frozen assets. On Weibo, the People's Daily, a state-funded news Weibo account in the PRC, aggressively condemns Jimmy Lai's actions over the Hong Kong mass protests. This subsequent action has caused Apple Daily to shutter its physical operations on June 24, 2021, which leads to the second case. One prominent activist named Denise Ho (ch: *Ho Yunshi* 何韻詩) has been outspoken about the attacks on Hong Kong's democracy at the hands of the CCP and poses with the final edition of the Apple Daily.

In 2019, the PRC's extradition law set into motion the destruction of Hong Kong's democracy. Under the terms of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed by the PRC and the

United Kingdom in 1997, the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong to mainland China was subject to certain limitations. Put simply, the agreement granted Hong Kong's capitalist system and way of life would be left alone by the Communist Party government, for at least fifty years after the date of surrender. These stipulations were written in the Hong Kong Basic Law, and in theory, preserves civil liberties for Hong Kong's residents. While not fully democratic even under the British rule, Hong Kongers were able to participate in some elections. As well as electing some candidates in certain divisions, Hong Kong had a free press, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and a respected police force, all of which were established under the rule of law that evolved during the British colonial era (1841-1997). These practices were also supposed to be left untouched by PRC lawmakers. While the limited franchise meant that pro-Beijing parties were able to win more seats in the Legislative Council since the handover, pro-democracy and localist parties have historically remained a strong voice in the chamber. Other aspects of Hong Kong's autonomy have also been quickly disappearing, including the Hong Kong Police Force. Beijing's challenge to Hong Kong's autonomy came to a head with the introduction of the extradition bill and the crackdown on protesters. Since then, Beijing's grip has tightened, with school children being taught the benefits of the National Security Law and attacks on the formerly free press, such as Apple Daily. Jimmy Lai's position as the founder of Apple Daily put him right in the firing line of the press crackdown.

The Case of Jimmy Lai

Journalists play a significant role in Jimmy Lai's history. Lai's work in creating and founding the Apple Daily has paved the way for fair journalism in Hong Kong. This section starts with a tweet from a freelance Hong Kong journalist named Ezra Cheung. Cheung's Twitter account is filled with tweets that start with the hashtag #BREAKING meaning he is one of the first reporting first on news in Hong Kong (Text 3.1). Currently, Cheung has a little over 28,000 followers and over 4,000 tweets. He was one of the first reporters that broke the news that Jimmy Lai had his assets frozen, from which chaos began on the internet with speculation and panic about what would happen next. As Cheung explains in his tweet, Hong Kong authorities froze Jimmy Lai's assets via the National Security Law. According to Article 43 of the National Security Law, any threat that endangers Hong Kong's national

security can face up to seven types of penalties, one being the freezing/confiscation of property (The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2020).

Text 3.1 (Date: 14 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	ezracheungtoto:	#BREAKING: Hong Kong Security Bureau has frozen Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai's personal assets and his share in Next Digital, evoking Article 43 of the Beijing-imposed national security law, reported local media. It is said to involve a minimum of HK\$300 million (US\$39 million).
2	Miiockm:	Reply to @ezracheungtoto: Have to pay for their new building somehow.
3	linjack88:	Reply to @ezracheungtoto and @frances_sit: nice way of taking money with an excuse of nsl
4	RC_hongkong:	Reply to @ezracheungtoto: that's the 'safety' of personal asset under the new #HongKong
5	captainsacks:	Reply to @ezracheungtoto: Good to see, these funds were used to encourage violence, terrorism, burnings, attacking women and elderly
6	GuPoints: (16 May 2021)	Reply to @ezracheungtoto: 1 country, 2systems ,no future #StandWithHongKong #JimmyLai
7	570mph: (15 May 2021)	Reply to @ezracheungtoto: #NationalSecurity bureau needs the money no more unlicensed massage parlours now.

Line 1 of Text 3.1 starts with Ezra Cheung's tweet breaking the news of the freezing of Jimmy Lai's assets under the National Security Law. This line obviously has a neutral tone, as it is a journalistic detail of the event happening with Lai and Hong Kong authorities. Cheung's tweet is reporting the facts and does not engage in any sort of emotional language.

In Line 2, the reply introduces irony into the discussion, with the user sarcastically suggesting that the Hong Kong police need to seize Jimmy Lai's assets to fund their new police building. The user knows that public buildings are paid for through taxation and public spending, but they bring the reputation of Hong Kong police into question by slyly saying that they are running an extortionate scheme.

This ironic tone is continued in Line 3, where the reply makes a similar suggestion that the National Security Law is being used as an excuse to make money by seizing assets. This line is ironic because the user sarcastically says that this is a “nice” use of the legislation.

Line 4 adds more to the irony, pointing out that this is how “safe” people’s assets are in Hong Kong under the new law. This comment highlights one of the important ingredients of Hong Kong’s success, this being the protection of private properties under the British colonial rule. This reply uses irony to point out that something so important to Hong Kong’s prosperous past is no longer true today.

Line 5 presents a sarcastic response to Cheung’s report. This user starts out following the ironic tone, sarcastically saying that it is “good to see” that Lai’s assets would be used by Hong Kong Police. However, by the end of their reply, the tone has become more aggressive, accusing the police of committing acts of terrorism and violence against women and elderly people. Because these two tones are displayed within the same sentence, this line is coded as ambiguous.

Line 6 is similar to the multimodality of the tone in Line 5. On the one hand, the reply displays an aggressive tone by arguing that there is no future under the “One Country, Two Systems” framework, and thereby suggesting that the PRC has destroyed Hong Kong’s future. On the other hand, the reply ends by using the hashtag of #StandWithHongKong, demonstrating an amiable tone towards the city and people of Hong Kong, just not the authorities. Because of this duality of tone, this line is also coded as ambiguous.

Line 7 uses an ironic tone once again, also suggesting that the National Security Bureau was using the new law to make money. However, Line 7 also makes an additional ironic jab saying that the agency could no longer use unlicensed massage parlors to make money. This remark is a reference to a recent controversy in Hong Kong where a high-ranking member of the National Security Bureau was caught in a raid on an illegal massage parlor. Line 7 once again mocks the reputation of Hong Kong authorities as being akin to gangsters and running extortion schemes. The replies on this Twitter thread generally see Jimmy Lai as being the scapegoat of greedy and corrupt law enforcement. Although Lai seems to have become an image of the law’s far reach, on the other side of the debate, there is a distinct tone shift.

State-funded news outlets run rampant in the PRC. In contrast to freelance journalists in Hong Kong, the People's Daily or 人民日報 (ch: *renminribao*) shows clear bias when reporting the news. Nearly around the clock news coverage can be found on the People's Daily Weibo page; the account posts videos, news articles, and even political comics. With over 132 million followers, People's Daily is the largest newspaper in the PRC even going as far as mocking the freeze of Jimmy Lai's assets. Following the judgement of Lai's assets, the People's Daily Weibo account posted the image in Figure 3.1 showing the charges that face Jimmy Lai.





Figure 3.1 (人民日報, 2021)

Left-hand side text: Beware of capital flying Jimmy Lai. Be reasonable and beware of capital flying

Right-hand side text:

[Concluded Sentence]

August 19, 2019: Organized and participated in an unapproved assembly

August 31, 2019: Participated in an unapproved assembly

[Awaiting Sentence]

October 1, 2019: Organized and participated in an unapproved assembly

July 1, 2020, to December 1: Collusion with foreign or foreign forces to endanger national security

June 27, 2016, to May 22, 2020: Conspiracy of fraud

June 4, 2020: Incited others to participate in an unapproved assembly

June 4, 2017: Criminal intimidation

July 1 to February 15, 2021: Conspiracy to collude with foreign or foreign forces to endanger national security.

July 2020 to August 23, 2020: Conspiracy to obstruct justice

Jimmy Lai involved in 9 cases and 11 crimes

This political comic depicts a scared Lai attached to a physical restraint device while backing up as a judge with a gavel pushes him to the edge of the cliff. The left-hand text says to be aware of Lai’s capital flight. On the right-hand side of the comic, the first two sentences are the charges Lai has been convicted of and the other seven are awaiting trial. This comic poses some contextual similarities to an old American Western wanted poster. It makes an attempt to show Lai is guilty and wanted by the Hong Kong government for endangering national security by “capital flying.” Capital flight occurs when there is political instability or a change to the economic outlook that could scare investors from remaining in a given country. The right-hand text has figuratively pushed Lai into a corner where he has to face the iron fist of the CCP. While Lai awaits his next sentence, many Weibo users have taken the time to mock and ridicule Lai on the platform.

Text 3.2 (Date: 17 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	weiweiy-	冻结你的财产 让你做丧家犬 😄 Translation: Freeze your assets and be a miserable dog 😄

Line 1 of Text 3.2 was taken from a standalone comment on Weibo. This comment takes an aggressive tone. The commenter calls Lai a miserable dog and urges the authorities to freeze his assets, implying an attitude of deserved punishment and disdain for Jimmy Lai as a person. The addition of the smiling emoji uses multimodal communication to imply irony but instead offers a feeling of justice being served to Lai’s assets.

Text 3.3 (Date: 17 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	自律一级: Translation: Self-discipline Level 1	这枚“烂苹果”在祸害香港 20 多年之后，末日终于到了，它再也无法继续躲在“新闻自由”的保护伞下面干着煽惑、洗脑的肮脏勾当。 对于香港社会这一主要乱源，早应该依法将之彻底铲除，早日还香港以朗朗乾坤。让更多的港人特别是港青，早日摆脱反中乱港主张的“洗脑”，回归理智和正常，轻装前行，追寻梦想 Translation: This "rotten apple" has finally come to the end after scouring Hong Kong for more than 20 years. It can no longer hide under the umbrella of "press freedom" and engage in dirty activities of incitement and brainwashing. As for the main source of chaos in Hong Kong society, it should have been completely eradicated in accordance with the law, and Hong Kong should be returned to China as soon as possible. Let more Hong Kong people, especially the youth of Hong Kong, get rid of the "brainwashing" advocated by anti-China and chaotic Hong Kong as soon as possible, return to reason and normalcy, move forward lightly, and pursue their dreams.

Line 1 in Text 3.3 is also a singular comment on Weibo, and another example of an aggressive tone, this time towards Apple Daily rather than Jimmy Lai as an individual. There are several underlying meanings found in this comment. The user calls Apple Daily a “rotten apple,” which serves as a pun for both Lai and the Apple Daily. The user also alleges that Lai and the Apple Daily have been responsible for spreading inciting materials and being the main source of instability in Hong Kong. This comment says that Apple Daily should have been “eradicated” a long time ago, and argues that Hong Kong can only move forward to peace and stability if anti-China groups like Apple Daily are shut down. In the last sentence, the user wants to return to normalcy in Hong Kong and one way of reaching that goal is through “young Hong Kongers” using a political rhetoric of 港青 (ch: *gangqing*). Re-educating the youth has been a rhetorical language for communist governments to enable the ideological indoctrination as seen in the patriotic education during the Mao era. Purging the ideas of democracy from the youth allows the PRC government to start over with a new generation with patriotic intelligence and post socialist dream.

Text 3.4 (Date: 17 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	小蒲 199702: Translation: Xiaopu 199702:	判国乱港都是境外支持 财产不是好来的， 必须没收，人直接枪毙 Translation: The condemnation of the country's chaos in Hong Kong is supported by overseas, the property is not good and must be confiscated, and the person should be shot directly.
2	Anael 糖宝: Translation: Anael sugar treasure:	Reply to @小蒲 199702: 该出手时就出手 Translation: Reply to @小蒲 199702: Go when it's time to go

Text 3.4 comes from a separate thread found in the comments section of Figure 3.1. Line 1 starts with the commenter taking an aggressive tone, saying that people around the world support the Hong Kong authorities in cracking down on Jimmy Lai and those organizations responsible for “chaos” in the city. Even more aggressively, the commenter says that not only should Lai’s property be confiscated, but he should also be shot. Line 2 directly replies to Line 1 and follows with the aggressive tone. In this line, the commenter is saying that they will “go when it's time to go” in direct response to the call for Jimmy Lai to be punished under the NSL. In this way, the commenter is saying that they will directly join in shooting Lai when the time comes.

Text 3.5 (Date: 17 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	林之迷 650: Translation: Lin Zhi Mi 650:	希望不要给查收了，毕竟是个人财产，如果要判死刑，请把财产给他的亲属 Translation: I hope it will not be confiscated. After all, it is personal property. If the death penalty is to be imposed, please give the property to his relatives
2	你也在看星星看月亮吗: Translation: Are you also looking at the stars and the moon:	Reply to @林之迷 650: 你是这个渣渣的亲属吧，这种钱你也要 😊 Translation: Reply @林之迷 650 : Are you a relative of this scum, you also want this kind of money 😊
3	明道子曰: Translation Ming Dao Zi Day:	Reply to @林之迷 650: 理清资产的合法性，违法资产必须罚没！归港府所有！ Translation: Reply to @林之迷 650: Sort out the legality of assets, illegal assets must be punished! Owned by the Hong Kong Government!
4	羊叔大魔王: Translation: Uncle Sheep	Reply to @林之迷 650: 这要是没有十年脑血栓就不会说出这等屁话 Translation: Reply to @林之迷 650: If you haven't had a cerebral thrombosis for ten years, you won't be able to tell such nonsense
5	不知所以哎呀呀: Translation: I don't know so oops:	Reply @林之迷 650: 到处刷的，滚回岛内 Translation: Reply to @林之迷 650: Scrub everywhere, go back to the island

Further in the comments section of Figure 3.1, there is a comment that takes a different approach to Lai's assets. Line 1 in Text 3.5 goes against the grain in most Weibo discussions about Jimmy Lai. In fact, the commenter even says that they hope for the best, at least as far as the property is concerned. Additionally, they say that if Lai is sentenced to death that his property should be given to his family, as this is only fair given that it is his personal

property. Overall, Line 1 has a neutral tone, since they do not defend Jimmy Lai nor engage in any trolling against him, merely making a point about what would be just and fair in case of his execution.

The commenter in Line 2 starts an aggressive pile-on against the initial commenter, asking if the poster was a relative of Lai's and stood to inherit something from the "scum." Not only does this comment aggressively call Lai scum, they also use a smile emoji but in a perceptibly threatening manner, as if to warn the initial commenter that they should correct their position, which further insinuates irony.

Line 3 continues using the aggressive tone seen in previous comments, calling for any and all illegal assets to go to the government rather than family, as part of the punishment of Lai. Line 4 is also aggressive, telling the initial commenter that they must have a brain injury in order to hold such a ridiculous opinion.

Line 5, is also aggressive, saying that the initial commenter should go back to Hong Kong and scrub the place clean. In the previous chapter of All of these aggressive comments demonstrate a noticeable trend with trolling on Weibo, namely that if a commenter goes against the grain, even to make a balanced or neutral point, a huge number of trolls and negative commenters pile onto that commenter and write whole threads of aggressive, demeaning, and threatening replies. This is a case in point. Because Jimmy Lai's publication had stood opposed to Hong Kong's Pro-Beijing administration for so long, he obviously made himself a popular target for Chinese nationalist trolls or those netizens who wish to see a crackdown in Hong Kong against the protesters. Lai and his paper were one of the leading voices, and so it is almost the default position among these nationalist trolls to hate him and encourage the government to punish him. Within these trolling groups, or within the ecosystem of Weibo forums, it is taken for granted that everyone hates Lai, and the only variation that most of these trolls have is in the degree of their hatred for him. Some of the trolls seem to try to one-up each other by making more violent and rude comments, creating a culture where popularity comes from being more radical in expressing their disdain. On the rare occasion that someone enters the forum to say something of a different tone or express a different opinion, they undercut the aggressive culture and make themselves into the target, either as a proxy or as a way for other commenters to impress others through forceful denunciation.

Analysis of Jimmy Lai

For those living in the PRC, Lai is a criminal; however, in Hong Kong, Lai is praised as a hero to democracy and free press. This is seen in the tone used by netizens about Lai's assets being frozen. No comments were amiable while 50% comments had an aggressive tone, 25% was ironic, 12.5% was ambiguous, and 12.5% was neutral. Of the individual commenters, seven were Hong Kongers and eight were from the PRC. All but one of the Hong Kong commenters made remarks at the expense of the Hong Kong authorities, and all but one of the PRC netizens were openly opposed to the protests. The comparative length of the threads is because of the substantial aggressive back-and-forth replies and argumentation. The aggressive tones led the discussion about Lai and some neutral tones were coded in the text. The two comments that were coded as neutral were in Text 3.1 and 3.5. Most journalists use neutral tones when breaking the news and aim to have little to no bias and one comment took a neutral approach to how Lai's assets should be handled. Compared to the Taiwanese cases, the discussion on Jimmy Lai has a much harsher edge. Whereas the PRC-trolls in the Taiwan examples were making fun of the perceived smallness or inferiority of Taiwan, these trolls are acting out statements of vengeance to chastise someone who is perceived as a criminal and an agent of chaos. Jimmy Lai is like a lightning rod for trolls to aggressively attack and go after, whereas the question of Taiwanese identity is less direct and less immediately offensive compared to a supposed subversive agent.

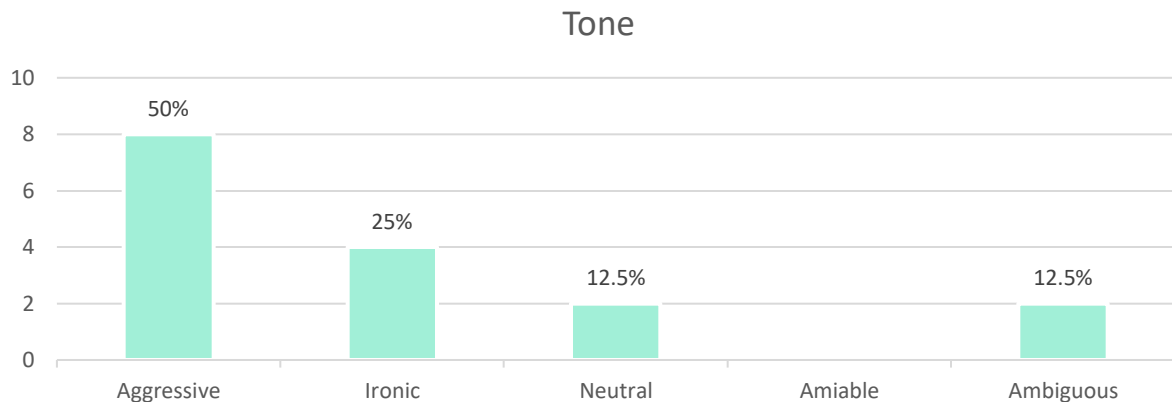


Figure 3.2

The data collected coding the tones of comments on posts about Jimmy Lai reveals much about the current state of Hong Kong. When selecting these posts, this research has used the following process. When there is a thread that contains substantial back-and-forth conversations, the thread offers different perspectives, the whole thread is included in the analysis. For standalone comments, these are selected based on the criteria of providing contrasting remarks or alternative parts of the debate. This necessarily means that some posts have longer threads with more arguing or back-and-forth discussion, while others will have smaller standalone remarks. The Hong Kong debate is well suited to finding different perspectives and netizens arguing about the problem. Generally, Hong Kong has been a topic of hot debate between different sides on the issue. Whereas Taiwan remains an important factor in the CCP's claims to be the legitimate government of China and its territorial claims, Hong Kong has instead become a demonstration of the PRC's attempt to assert its power and to restore its place in the international arena after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drawn open criticism from other countries around the world. Whereas in Chapter 2, Taiwan is a passive and inactive factor which CCP officials use to stoke nationalism from time-to-time, Hong Kong is already within the PRC's grasp. With the context of the protests in Hong Kong and the embarrassment of starting the COVID-19 pandemic, cracking down on Hong Kong has become a demonstration of the PRC's capabilities. Achieving a victory over Taiwan would be difficult and costly, whereas accelerating the timetable for absorbing Hong Kong properly into Chinese administration would be much easier. Hong Kong serves as a pawn for the CCP's efforts to mobilize nationalism in its favor. This ultimately leads to more aggressive trolling from PRC netizens on the Hong Kong issue, because they are responding to signaling from PRC authorities that Hong Kong is to be brought to heel and criminals and those who are causing the chaos are to be punished.

The majority of comments were coded as aggressive due to the perspective of Jimmy Lai as a criminal. For PRC trolls, Jimmy Lai is an object of defiance and an agent of chaos, and therefore can be attacked as a bad criminal. However, Text 3.1 is different, presenting more irony and more voices from Hong Kongers, rather than PRC netizens as shown on Weibo in Text 3.2-3.5. The kind of irony that Hong Kongers use has some similarities and some differences from that in the Taiwan Stupid case. In Taiwan Stupid, the trolls were mocking the failures of Taiwan's government to handle COVID-19, and were joyful at the potential

for Taiwan to continue failing. While the Hong Kongers use irony against the authorities and the police, they do so with a sense of bitterness about Hong Kong's decline. The irony displayed by Hong Kongers is displayed by the losing side, whereas the PRC trolls on Taiwan Stupid believe that they have the upper hand. A larger amount of irony may also be because of the dominant narrative being different on the social media platforms, with Twitter having a more international or Western-influenced audience, and Weibo being a closed environment for the mainland Chinese comments. From the PRC perspective, Lai is not only a criminal according to the law, but also a catalyst for chaos and disruption in Hong Kong. It is easy for comments to take an aggressive attitude towards him because many people believe that his actions are counter to the values of Chinese society, these being stability and public order. In this way, one can compare the attitude of many PRC netizens to those expressed in other countries towards people who have committed moral crimes against the general values of that particular society. This would suggest that Chinese commenters genuinely despise Jimmy Lai, as he runs a tabloid news agency that is in their view responsible for opposing law and order and inflaming protests and instability.

The Case of Apple Daily

One of Jimmy Lai's capital investments was the creation of the newspaper Apple Daily. Apple Daily's tabloid style of news reporting became popular among other newspapers in Hong Kong. Since 1995, Apple Daily has printed over 86,000 copies a day with 9.6 million online visitors a month (Yu, 2021). Apple Daily played a major role in delivering pro-democracy news; after the news broke that Jimmy Lai's assets were frozen, this also included his claims to Apple Daily. Unable to pay reporters, utility bills, and rent of the building, Apple Daily was given no choice but to shutter its doors. Apple Daily announced that they would print the final copy of the newspaper on June 24, 2021 and cease all business activity in Hong Kong.

Denise Ho, a Cantopop singer from Hong Kong, was once one of the most popular singers in China. Ho's Twitter account has over 364,000 followers and tweets regularly about issues relating to Hong Kong by retweeting and supporting grassroots activists and their fight for democracy. After showing her support for Hong Kong's independence, she was quickly blacklisted by the PRC government. Many Hong Kong based artists find themselves in this

difficult situation. If artists take a stand on the Hong Kong issue, they may face the same fate as Ho. Some artists may find taking no stand at all is easier than fighting with the CCP. Despite the flak Ho has received from the PRC, her fanbase remains strong. In late June of 2021, Ho tweeted a selfie with the last printed edition of the Apple Daily.



24th June, 2021. Final edition of @appledaily_hk . Thank you for 26 brave years.
#AppleDaily #HongKong

Figure 3.3 (Ho, 2021)

Ho's tweet thanks Apple Daily for its 26 years of service to Hong Kong as it is the last copy that will be made for the foreseeable future. Purchasing the final copy shows Ho's undying support not only for free press, but also for the future of Hong Kong's democracy. Despite these setbacks, Ho continues to support Hong Kong through her social media. Many of the replies to this tweet were met with hostility from the PRC. Within Ho's Twitter feed, she has a combination of fans of her music, Hong Kong independence supporters, and a filtered section of PRC netizens. Twitter will filter replies on unwanted tweets as they are either offensive or have been flagged by other users as abusive content. Many of Ho's tweets have aggressive PRC netizens undermining or attempting to strike down what she says; many users in her replies aim to delegitimize her personal claim to Hong Kong or any separation or autonomy Hong Kong.


Text 3.6 (Date: 24 June 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	stevz17	今天是个好日子 Translation: Today is a good day
2	PreofRHD	Reply to @stevz17 是啊，離後清滅亡更近一步了。可喜可賀。一切盡在輪迴之中。魔鬼的後人，你好。 Translation: Yes, one step closer to the demise of the Hou Qing. congratulations. Everything is in reincarnation. Hello, descendants of the devil.

Line 1 of Text 3.6 responds to the image of the last print edition of Apple Daily Hong Kong with a short mocking statement stating “today is a good day.” The ironic tone of this comment stems from the way in which the commenter replies to the emotional nature of the post, turning this dark day for Hong Kong into a joyous occasion.

Line 2 makes a quite unusual comment about the closure of Apple Daily being a step towards the demise of “Hou Qing”. Examining the user “PreofRHD” profile bio, this account seems to support a strange idea of regionalism or separatism around an area or group called “Jinland,” which appears to be a fringe movement centered around separatism for Shanxi province and speakers of the Jin Chinese language. Online evidence for this movement appears to be only in small Facebook groups or Twitter pages. These small pages offer some evidence for fringe separatist movements within China, which cannot be found on Weibo; thereby, pushing these groups to foreign social media like Twitter. This comment in Line 2 is a believer in at least one of these separatist causes, and seems to believe that the end of Apple Daily in Hong Kong is a good thing because it is leading to some sort of reincarnation or has some religious or prophetic significance. Although the meaning of most of the text is quite obscure, the comment does conclude by calling the comment in Line 1 a descendant of the devil, meaning that this comment is coded as aggressive.

Text 3.7 (Date: 24 June 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	JimbooStein	 <p>Translation: Was it unexpected? Are you surprised?</p>
2	C1s2Z2xOFTx5i Rk	Reply to @JimbooStein: 粉蛆的做假圖有何用 <p>Translation: Reply to @JimbooStein: What is the use of fake pictures of powder maggots</p>
3	C1s2Z2xOFTx5i Rk	Reply to @JimbooStein: 笑了, 你根本不是台灣人, 再裝也沒用 呀粉蛆 <p>Translation: Reply to @JimbooStein: Smile, you are not Taiwanese at all, it's useless to pretend to be a fan maggot</p>
4	C1s2Z2xOFTx5i Rk	Reply to @JimbooStein: 支蛆說完自己弱智後還封鎖人了, 真好 笑 <p>Translation: Reply to @JimbooStein: It's funny that Zhi Zhu blocked people after saying that he was mentally retarded</p>

Text 3.6 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
5	JimbooStein	Reply to @C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk: 不跟你們單細胞生物說啦，智慧不在一個層面妳自娛自樂啦 Translation: Reply to @C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk: I won't tell you single-celled organisms, wisdom is not on the same level, you entertain yourself
6	C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk	Reply to @JimbooStein: 一直自娛自樂，只發個笑臉的精神勝利智障是你哦支支 Translation: I am always entertaining myself, and I only make a smiley face. The mental victory is you and the mentally retarded.

Line 1 of Text 3.7 shares an image of a girl who can be presumed to be a Hong Kong protester. In the first panel of the image, the girl sports a bloody bandage over one eye, reminiscent of the news images of the police firing rubber bullets at the protesters and blinding those unlucky enough to be struck in the eyes. However, in the second panel, the girl has lifted the bandage to show that her eye is perfectly fine, and she is also poking out her tongue jokingly. The text in the image reads “Was it unexpected? Are you surprised?” suggesting inside knowledge that everybody knows that the protesters who claimed to be wounded were just pretending. The tone of this image is ambiguous, for two reasons. On one hand, the image mocks the protesters who claimed to be wounded in action and portrays them as pranksters, which would be ironic. However, on the other hand, there is an aggressive subtext to the image. This is because the image can be interpreted as saying that the protesters who caused the chaos were lying the whole time and that their whole campaign was based on a dishonest basis. This attacks the core of the protest movement as being fundamentally full of liars and deception.

The next three Lines of Text 3.7 all come from the same user as the comments in between have since been deleted. This user types in Traditional characters and is likely a Hong Konger, based on the characters and appearing in Denise Ho’s comments. Their account calls China a fascist country and says that Xi Jinping would hate his account. Their profile picture is a Facebook logo photoshopped on a PRC flag, and they appear to be very

critical of the PRC’s government. This anti-CCP stance is reflected in their comments in text 3.7, as all of them are aggressive. The commenter in these lines accuses the initial commenter of being a fake and a “powder maggot” and a “fan maggot,” terms used to signify the nationalistic online fandoms like the Little Pinks and their supporters. The term “maggot” is used because maggots are brainless bottom feeding worms, implying that supporters of the CCP are similar to maggots. As Lines 2, 3, and 4 are all made by the same user trying to evoke the commenter in Line 1 to respond to these Lines are coded as aggressive.

In Line 5, the initial poster replies to these attacks. Line 5 displays a more ironic tone, because the initial commenter uses petty name calling and cry-laugh emojis to dismiss the angry messages, essentially saying that they are smarter than the angry commenter, and that they should go and entertain themselves.

In Line 6, the angry commenter attempts one more angry comment and says they will entertain themselves and that they are entertained, but only because of the mental victory that the initial poster could claim is one for the “mentally retarded.”

Text 3.8 (Date: 26 June 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	shuangziXD	你個仆街加拿大人死去一邊啦 Translation: You Canadian slave can go die
2	KenNg68852879	Reply to @shuangziXD: 五毛收皮啦。共匪勾結外國蘇俄勢力，分裂中華民國，屠殺萬千中華同胞。支持共匪的都是漢奸走狗賣國賊。 Translation: Wumao (means fifty cents, which is a person used to relay the PRC government’s propaganda on the Internet) shut up. The Communist bandits colluded with foreign Soviet and Russian forces to split the Republic of China and massacred thousands of Chinese compatriots. Those who support the Communist bandits are traitors, running dogs and traitors.

Text 3.8 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
3	shuangziXD	<p>Reply to @KenNg68852879: 学好历史没啊？蒋中正杀咁多共产党人你没学到？正一废青</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @KenNg68852879: Have you learned history well? Chiang Kai-shek killed so many communists you didn't learn? Positive one, decadent youth.</p>
4	KenNg68852879	<p>Reply to @shuangziXD: 你連正體中文字都不會寫，還學人說歷史？中共殺了多少中華人民？共產黨是什麼國家的勢力？認賊作父的漢奸。</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @shuangziXD: You can't even write traditional Chinese characters, and you still learn about history from others? How many Chinese people did the CCP kill? What kind of power is the Communist Party? Traitors who recognize the thief as the father.</p>
5	shuangziXD	<p>Reply to @KenNg68852879: 正你条铁乜，求你查下简体字历史啦废青</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @KenNg68852879: You are right, please check the history of simplified Chinese characters, decadent youth</p>
6	KenNg68852879	<p>Reply to @shuangziXD: 簡體字是共匪給文盲用的。正體中文你不會，中國歷史你不懂。中共勾結外國勢力你認賊作父，中共屠殺中華人民你卻擁護。你是漢奸走狗賣國賊！</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @shuangziXD: Simplified characters are used by the Communist bandits for the illiterate. You can't speak Traditional Chinese, but you don't understand Chinese history. When the CCP colludes with foreign forces, you recognize the thief as your father, but you support the CCP's massacre of the Chinese people. You are a traitor and a traitor!</p>
7	shuangziXD	<p>Reply to @KenNg68852879: 你個傻閩信埋信埋啲勾結美國政府的垃圾組織，黃之鋒一個越南狗你跟佢？你快喇醒下啦廢青</p> <p>Translation: Reply to @KenNg68852879: You silly letter burying your letter and colluding with the garbage organization of the U.S. government, Joshua Wong, a Vietnamese dog, do you talk to him? You woke up soon, decadent youth</p>

Text 3.8 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
8	KenNg68852879	Reply to @shuangziXD: 共匪勾結蘇俄勢力，屠殺中華人民，正一漢奸走狗賣國賊 Translation: Reply to @shuangziXD: Communist bandits colluded with Soviet Russia, massacred the Chinese people, and acted as traitors and traitors

In Line 1 of Text 3.8, the commenter refers to Denise Ho when they call her a “Canadian.” Calling Ho a Canadian dismisses her as a foreign commentator and not really a native Hong Konger with a legitimate voice in the country. This commenter also tells Ho to go die, which is coded as aggressive stating that Ho is not a real Hong Konger and should not be alive.

In Line 2, a Hong Kong netizen enters the conversation saying that it is a shame that the CCP worked with Soviet Russian support to outmaneuver the KMT government and kill Chinese people. The commenter overall regards the CCP and their supporters as traitors, and the aggressive way in which this commenter talks about the historic actions of the Communist party and their supporters means that this line is also coded as aggressive.

The initial poster replies in Line 3, aggressively calling the reply “decadent youth,” a term meaning a spoiled brat, or one who is dependent on society and yet blames that society despite the benefits derived from it. Line 3 also combats Line 2’s claims by firing back that Chiang Kai-shek was responsible for many deaths of communists. The back-and-forth continues in Line 4, where the Hong Konger attacks the initial poster as being functionally illiterate in traditional characters and also in the historical record of China. Line 4 is also aggressive, because the commenter again attacks supporters of the CCP as traitors.

Line 5 shows another reply featuring the phrase “decadent youth,” while the Hong Kong netizen fires back in Line 6 with another attack on illiteracy. In Lines 7 and 8, the argument carries on, with the initial poster calling Joshua Wong a Vietnamese dog and accusing the protesters of colluding with the American government, while the Hong Konger repeats his insult of Communist traitors. Importantly, the comment in line 7 is using Cantonese, a clear sign of Hong Kong identity and point of pride for local language and Hong Kong’s

distinctiveness. These Lines are clearly also aggressive, because of the heated back and forth between these two commenters.

Text 3.9 (Date: 24 June 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	Zhenhua75848980:	She's Canadian, pretends a native citizen of HK, charges Motherland's interfering on HK's so-called freedom, democracy & human rights, for the most important, plots, provokes & organizes riots that's mainly participated by young students, to service Western geographic politics.
2	PreofRHD:	最失敗的是沒有送內地中國青年學生去送死，太他媽的失敗了！等著，下一步就輪到你們這些支那豬。 Translation: Reply to @Zhenhua75848980: The biggest failure is not sending young Chinese students from the mainland to die. It's a fucking failure! Wait, the next step is your turn.
3	Zhenhua75848980:	Reply to @PreofRHD: 你这头猪啊 被外国人利用都不知道 当今世界 只有你的母国 有能力挑战昂格鲁萨克逊人的世界地位 却被他们用所谓自由民主骗得团团转 自宫都愿意 港英时期得港督是民选的吗 傻逼 还不去撞墙 滚 Translation: Reply to @PreofRHD: You pig is used by foreigners and you don't know that in today's world, only your mother country has the ability to challenge the Anglo-Saxon's status in the world. Is the governor of Hong Kong elected by the people during the British era?
4	PreofRHD:	Reply to @Zhenhua75848980: 冥頑不化的狗東西，賤貨。 Translation: Reply to @Zhenhua75848980: Stubborn dog stuff, bitch.

Continuing through the filtered reply section of Figure 3.3, a PRC netizen replies to Ho's tweet in Line 1 of Text 3.9. Line 1 is written in English first then later on the user switches to Chinese. The commenter is criticizing Denise Ho as not being a true Hong Konger, and actually being a Canadian outsider interfering in Hong Kong's internal affairs, and that she is

a Western puppet. Line 1 is aggressive because it is a direct attack on Denise Ho's nationality and her belonging to Hong Kong.

In Line 2, one of the commenters from Text 3.6 reappears. This commenter makes an inflammatory remark about how it would have been better for young men from mainland China to be sent to die, and that the initial commenter will be next. Clearly, this line has an aggressive tone also.

In Line 3, the initial commenter accuses Line 2 as being used by foreigners against the PRC, and that only the PRC (the mother country) can challenge the "Anglo-Saxons" dominant position in the world. This is an interesting sort of aggressive tone, as it also urges the commenter in Line 2 to rally behind China as an opposition to the Anglo-American world order. It also features an explicitly racial tone to the nationalist viewpoint, as it makes the tensions between the PRC and the West into a struggle between Chinese and Anglo-Saxon racial or ethnic groups. In Line 4, the commenter replies succinctly but aggressively, calling the initial poster a "dog" and other insults.

Analysis of Apple Daily

Overwhelmingly, the tone of comments on Apple Daily were aggressive. No comments were neutral or amiable. 90% were aggressive, 5% were ironic, 5% were ambiguous. Of these commenters, four were from the PRC, one was Taiwanese and two Hong Kongers. The Taiwanese commenter is opposed to the Hong Kong protesters and one of the PRC netizens is critical of the CCP because of their apparent fringe separatist ideology. Otherwise the Hong Kongers are opposed to the PRC and the other mainland Chinese netizen supports the authorities. Apple Daily has been a thorn in the PRC's side for its 26 years of existence. From its attacks on the CCP to aiding the renegade Hong Kong protesters, many PRC netizens rejoice in the closing of Apple Daily's doors. By putting a cap on Apple Daily, the CCP can begin to cleanse Hong Kong of the dangerous ideas democracy brings. Even more than the case of Jimmy Lai, the Apple Daily example is overwhelmingly aggressive in tone. This is again because Apple Daily is perceived as a major agent of disruption and chaos in Hong Kong and an enabler of defiance towards the pro-Beijing authorities in Hong Kong. Whereas Jimmy Lai is only one individual criminal, Apple Daily represents a collection of years of defiant articles and opposition. Additionally, a large proportion of the aggressive

tone comes from the direct personal attacks that many of the trolls make against either each other or against Denise Ho, with the online debate turning into insults and vulgar remarks and attempts to discredit other voices by saying that they either lack intelligence to join the conversation or that they aren't from Hong Kong and so have no right to have an opinion. The anger displayed by the trolls is therefore both against Apple Daily and their supporters in general, and against other netizens who have shared their perspective.

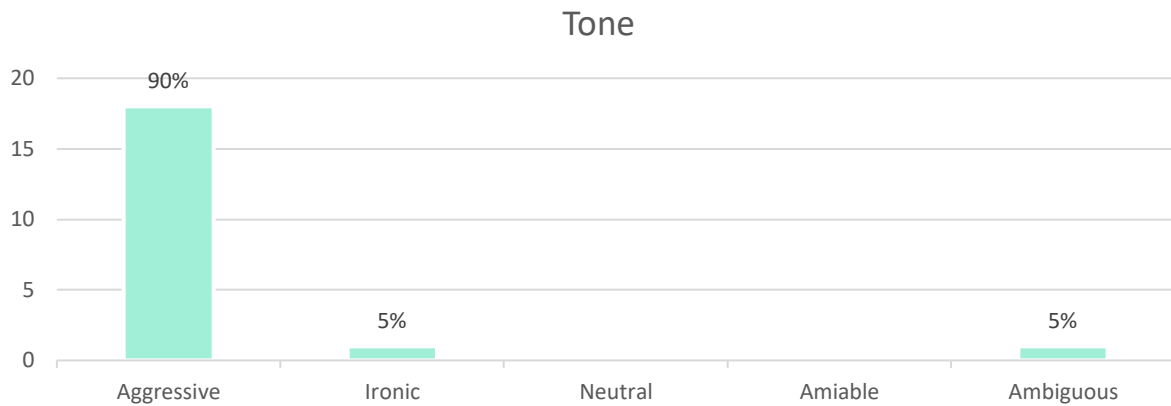


Figure 3.4

There are some guaranteed freedoms promised in liberal democracies, things like freedom of the press, speech, and assembly. In liberal democracies, and often from a Western-centric viewpoint, these rights are human rights that every person is entitled to. From the outside perspective, the democratic countries of the world have been slowly watching as these freedoms disappear from life in Hong Kong. Freedom of the press has clearly been eroded by the campaign against Apple Daily, while freedom of assembly has similarly been curtailed by the banning of the Tiananmen Square memorial vigil (Wang, 2021).

From the perspective of PRC netizens, commenters are aggressively shutting down any chance of Apple Daily ever opening again. From their point of view, Jimmy Lai and Apple Daily have been destabilizing Hong Kong's civil society and politics. Through the eyes of a PRC netizen, Lai and Apple Daily have been spreading disinformation to the world. This could explain the very strong aggressive emotions that are expressed by PRC netizens in reaction to Lai's legal woes and the closing of the newspaper. In a way, seeing Lai be

punished and his paper shut down is like seeing an old enemy and consistent thorn in the side be removed, and so the aggressive comments are driven by joy, relief, and a sense of vengeance.

Chapter Conclusion

The first section of this chapter examined the recent events surrounding Jimmy Lai, where netizens were reacting to Lai's assets being frozen by Hong Kong authorities, a discussion which highlights the troll-or-be-trolled dynamic at play on some social media platforms. This in turn led to the events of the second section of this chapter, when Apple Daily's Hong Kong branch was closed, where Denise Ho's Twitter page became a lightning rod for trolls on both sides of the debate to seek out and attack each other. These events were set the Hong Kong protests into motion over the extradition bill, which Hong Kong authorities responded by introducing the National Security Law. It is under the provisions of the national security law that Jimmy Lai's assets were frozen, demonstrating a clear chain of events. One consequence of the crackdown and the passing of the national security law is the degree to which it has disrupted the ideal of "One Country, Two Systems," from a government point of view. However, from a "nationalism-centered" perspective, one can see that there is no longer a division between what netizens see as their country into two systems. PRC netizens believe wholeheartedly that Hong Kong is not only already part of their country but must also be absorbed into the PRC's system as well. The justification of restoring order and ending the destabilizing influence of dishonest media is deployed over and over again by Chinese trolls, who show the act of cyber nationalism and are all enforcing the clear idea that "two systems" are not only undesirable, but no longer even existent. These two cases demonstrate other unique aspects of trolling in the online cultures of Chinese users and social media platforms. The discussion around Jimmy Lai on Weibo shows how users that share the same background and same opinion on a social media forum can develop and reinforce a popular opinion about a well-known public figure. Additionally, when the comments about that person are shared among people of the same background and opinion, online trolling can become more and more aggressive over time. Once the opinion of Jimmy Lai became one-dimensional, the only way to differentiate one's own perspective was by being more aggressive than other people. This race to be the stand out troll also means that if

anyone deviates from the popular opinion, they make themselves the target for all of the other trolls to attack, either to show to others that they are more radical than others, or as a stand-in for the hated public figure in question. This also shows how the dominant tone of trolling can snowball quickly, even without an opposing viewpoint, because those trolls who are locked in an echo chamber are incentivized to make statements that are increasingly strong in that dominant tone. This also offers an explanation as to why Hong Kongers respond to events with more irony, because they cannot break into the echo chamber without being immediately subjected to aggression. The ironic tone in the Hong Kong example serves as an evasive form of coping, with only especially brave public figures defying PRC-based trolls.

The closed environment of Weibo stands in contrast to that of Twitter, which is obviously more open in terms of being an international website, but also not as strictly moderated as Weibo. The conversational style on Twitter, as demonstrated in the texts above, is often more ironic than it is on Weibo. Weibo commenters seem tactless compared to the sarcasm of Twitter users. People on Twitter often express their sadness or disappointment through irony or sarcasm, whereas on Weibo, users are very direct and aggressive when something angers or upsets them. The overall culture of these social media platforms also plays a role in shaping the tone of comments and what is acceptable or standard ways of trolling or discussing issues.

Chapter 4

Online Trolling in International Politics

The two previous chapters have explored the relationship between the PRC and other countries in this idea of “Greater China,” these being the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and Taiwan. Recent political flare ups have increased trolling between the netizens of these countries and driving online discussion about these issues which sits at the core of the PRC’s stated aim of reunification and the motivating ideology of Chinese nationalism. However, one can also see other examples of China-related trolling motivated by competing nationalisms in recent events outside of the “Greater China” area. Two important examples are between the PRC and the United States and India. Tensions between the PRC and the US have increased dramatically in the last few years, catalyzed by the Trump administration’s trade war but also carried on in other continuing aspects of American policy, such as criticism over Chinese human rights abuses, support for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and American military presence in both South Korea and Japan (Hyon, 2014, p. 97). These specific issues have led to trolling and counter-trolling online, driven by aggressive anti-American trolls. In a broader context, the world is coming to see the competition between China and the US in terms of a struggle for hegemony or superpower status, and even being compared to a new Cold War. Opinion of the other country is very low among both PRC citizens and Americans, meaning that the trolling environment is preloaded with general animosity and specific grievances.

Similar to this dynamic of animosity and competition is the Sino-Indian relationship. China and India also have territorial disputes and a history of war, and to make matters worse China has a close relationship with Pakistan, India’s mortal enemy. Recent flare ups between the two Asian giants have been over the borders in the Himalayas, but other trolls have emphasized China’s successes and growing prosperity compared to India’s continuing poverty and backwardness. In these ways, PRC-based trolls have mobilized nationalism in celebration of China’s accomplishments and a sense of superiority over their poorer neighbor. With a history of conflict and a sense of competition and struggle for supremacy over the region, India and the US are both examples of a more distant target for PRC trolls

and their nationalistic ideologies. While the trolling wars between PRC netizens and Hong Kongers and between Taiwanese and PRC netizens represent today's conflicts, the growing trolling between Chinese and Americans and Indians could represent problems of tomorrow.

The Case of Wuheqilin

The PRC is one of the main challengers to the legitimacy of the American hegemony. To make matters worse, the China/US trade war has driven a wedge between international cooperation. While both China and the US respectively have their problems, one online troll known as “烏合麒麟” or “Wuheqilin” is a “wolf warrior” graphic artist that is known for creating Chinese propaganda artwork (Woo, 2020). Wuheqilin's work caught the attention of western audiences with his disturbing image of an Australian soldier with a knife to the neck of an Afghan child holding a lamb back in December of 2020 (Packham, 2020). With the critical media attention from his work, he has gained over two million followers on Weibo. Through Wuheqilin's art, he uses it as a way to display his anti-western views. Some of his images have migrated beyond Weibo onto social media platforms like Reddit. Two memes surrounding the US are a piece called “Blood Cotton Initiative” in Figure 4.1 and “Separation of Powers” in Figure 4.2.



Figure 4.1 (烏合麒麟, 2020)

Although Wuhequlin's pieces critique many aspects of western society, his works regarding the USA mentioned in the literature review (Blevins, Lee, McCabe, and Edgerton's 2019), racial tensions and political divisions have given Wuheqilin some inspiration for some of his recent work. In his "Blood Cotton Initiative" piece in Figure 4.1, there are black slaves in a cottonfield while KKK wizards are interviewing a Uyghur scarecrow. Next to the scarecrow is a word bubble sign that says "I have been sexually assaulted and abused."

The title of this piece "Blood Cotton Initiative" is a play on words of the "Better Cotton Initiative," which is a non-profit organization that claims to promote better standards for cotton farming around the world. At one point, the BCI openly condemned the PRC for their labor practices of farming; however, that statement has since been retracted from the website's statement. One of the most striking images in this meme are the KKK wizards and slaves picking cotton in the background. The allegory of cotton picking and the KKK refers back to the US's painful history with slavery; however, the addition of the Uyghur woman scarecrow brings a different perspective into focus. Claims of Uyghur human rights abuses have ranged from forced sterilization of women to slave labor in re-education camps. Wuheqilin displays the glaring issue of the US ignoring problems at home while trying to push into the issues in the PRC. This image has floated around the internet and found its way to subreddits r/China and r/ModernPropaganda.

Text 4.1 analyzes comments from the subreddit r/China and Text 4.2 takes comments from r/ModernPropaganda. The first subreddit, r/China, features posts around all things relating to the PRC, from political news to travel pictures, discussion about learning Chinese language or historical events or living advice. Because Reddit is an American-based company the userbase tends to predominately lean American or internationals communicating in English, and so r/China's users are likely expats or people who have visited or lived in China or who take an interest in the PRC. Of the commenters that are involved in Texts 4.1 and 4.2, two are Canadian, one is Australian, one is British, one is from mainland China, and one is Indian. Because r/China is a very broad subreddit, only a small amount of the discussion turns into trolling, and usually trolling only starts on threads about current events. However, there are a small but consistently vocal number of trolls who surface to talk negatively about the PRC in various news threads. In contrast, r/ModernPropaganda is an explicitly political subreddit, where users share examples of

political propaganda or PR materials in the modern world. The discussion inevitably turns into political arguments between critics and supporters of given ideologies, and so is much more likely to have controversy and trolling.

Text 4.1 (Date: 29 March 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	sphinctasniffa:	The Uighur situation disturbs me, but what disturbs me even more is that almost every Chinese person you come across has no desire to find information other than that that is force fed to them on weibo.
2	QyMbEr:	Reply to @sphinctasniffa: Isn't that exactly what you are doing right now? No desire to find out the truth besides reading fake stuff on Reddit and CNN. Buy yourself a ticket and fly to Xinjiang and see with your eyes.
3	sphinctasniffa:	Reply to @QyMbEr: I see where you coming from, but no. I am very familiar with the views of Chinese people on this issue from wechat. Can't go to xinjiang. Borders closed.
4	QyMbEr:	Reply to @sphinctasniffa: I have a dozen of friends, colleagues, and classmates from Xinjiang, they are extremely pissed off about western lies about Xinjiang. It's amazing to see how repeating a lie thousands times could make everyone believe it is a truth. Again, when the border is open, buy yourself a ticket and go to Xinjiang, you will find how ignorant you were when manipulated by the fake news.
5	sphinctasniffa:	Reply to @QyMbEr: I also have a Uighur friend in xinjiang who seems to be living a normal life. The problem is, none of my Chinese friends or I can actually ask him on wechat if any of it is true.
6	Accomplished_One_640:	Reply to @sphinctasniffa: Think first please. Xinjiang is like long into automated cotton production, and hand-picking is just simply against economic logic. That "forced labor" and "boarding school" is what American and Canadians did to their native people. They just base their stories on their histories.

Text 4.1 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
7	sphinctasniffa:	Reply @Accomplished_One_640: This cotton aspect is not what concerns me about treatment of the Uighurs, it's their inability to speak freely and inability to get passports and travel that concerns me. Have you noticed since all this xinjiang news has come out, there are no Uighurs freely saying it's all lies. It's either people on cctv clearly being forced to say things or random doiyin videos of uighurs cooking or whatever and Han people saying, look they're fine!

Line 1 of Text 4.1 comes from an Australian Reddit user named “sphinctasniffa,” who talks about the disturbing situation in Xinjiang being made worse by their impression that Chinese people only believe in what the government puts on Weibo. Because this comment is dismissive of Chinese only learning things that are “spoon fed” to them from an approved source, this line is coded as aggressive.

In Line 2, a Chinese user named “QyMbEr” accuses the initial commenter of doing exactly what he alleges that Chinese people do, only getting news from Reddit and CNN; thereby, absorbing and spreading fake news. The user in Line 2 concludes his aggressive remarks by telling Line 1 to get some plane tickets to Xinjiang and go and see it for themselves.

In Line 3, sphinctasniffa returns and replies by acknowledging the comment in Line 2 but simply saying that the borders are closed and that they are aware of the Chinese perspective from WeChat posts. Because this comment is fairly calm and is stating the fact that average foreigners cannot enter Xinjiang, this comment is coded as neutral.

In Line 4, QyMbEr rebukes sphinctasniffa once again, claiming that they have many classmates and colleagues from Xinjiang and that all of those people are upset by Western disinformation about the treatment of Uyghur people. QyMbEr says that the allegations are fake news and that sphinctasniffa is ignorant and should go and see for themselves. Line 4 is coded as aggressive because of the continued claims of ignorance and being misinformed by fake news.

Sphinctasniffa responds again in Line 5, conceding that he also has a Uyghur friend in Xinjiang who seems to be living an ordinary life, but that he cannot check whether this is true

because of the restrictions on what topics can be discussed on WeChat. Because this line calmly responds to QyMbEr, this line is coded as neutral.

A new Reddit user enters the thread in Line 6, a Canadian user named “Accomplished_One_64,” condescendingly says that the allegations of forced cotton labor are false due to the “economic logic” of automation being more efficient. Accomplished_One_640 also adds that the forced labor and reeducation camp allegations are untrue because these things happened to native peoples in American and Canadian history. Therefore, the allegations against China are a sort of projection based on the crimes of North American settlers. Line 6 is coded as aggressive because they are making a comparison between modern day allegations of genocide with recognized historical tragedies.

In Line 7, sphinctasniffa responds that his concern isn’t based on the allegations of forced labor picking cotton, but instead of the silencing of free Uighur voices who can independently confirm the narrative being presented by Han Chinese. This line is coded as aggressive.

Text 4.2 (Date: 29 March 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	BlueInq:	<p>“Can you tell us what unfair treatment you have suffered, Miss scarecrow?” a reporter in a Ku Klux Klan hood asks a scarecrow wearing a Uyghur outfit. A sign reads: “I’ve been sexually assaulted and abused.” In the background, black Americans are picking cotton.</p> <p>This cartoon is supporting the Chinese government's position that the Western boycott of Xinjiang is hypocritical. It highlights America's history of slave labor in the cotton industry whilst also suggesting that the claims of Uyghurs being abused are mere fabrications.</p> <p>Overall, I think this poster is perhaps a bit too on the nose. I don't think the KKK hoods are needed to make the point.</p> <p>According to the Chinese government mouthpiece Global Times, this cartoon has been widely shared on Chinese social media.</p>
2	fartsforpresident:	<p>Reply to @BlueInq: China doesn't understand that slavery has been outlawed for a century and a half I guess. This is basically "you guys did it too forever ago, so it's okay if we do it now". Pretty shit fucking argument.</p>

Text 4.2 (Continued)

Line	Username	Comment
3	ShankaraChandra:	Reply to @fartsforpresident: There not saying it's okay because the US did it, its saying the US is projecting
4	fartsforpresident:	Reply @ShankaraChandra: Except it's not. The US is not currently engaged in genocide for fucks sake.
5	ShankaraChandra:	Reply @fartsforpresident: How many muslims have been killed by america in the last 10 years? How many muslims have been killed by china in the last 10 years? Nothing but projection, as always
6	Fartsforpresident:	Reply @ShankaraChandra: So going to war is the same as committing genocide then? That's your argument? What China is doing isn't so bad because the U.S invaded Iraq and Afghanistan? Fucking commie apologist.
7	ShankaraChandra:	Reply @fartsforpresident: They aren't committing genocide, even the US state department havent accused them of killing a single person in this "genocide" Meanwhile the US kills millions of people in a foreign country over lies following a global disinformation campaign by the US gov All they do is project
8	fartsforpresident:	Reply @ShankaraChandra: So they're just off at summer camp?
9	ShankaraChandra:	Reply @fartsforpresident: Not even the US is accused them of killing a single person. The facilities you see talked about are schools, training faculties, reeducation, secondary education, and prisons. Although the western media likes to pretend these are all one thing

Line 1 of Text 4.2 explained the content depicted in the cartoon, with the only point of criticism from this user being that the KKK hoods were “a bit on the nose” to get the point across. Line 1 is coded as neutral because the commenter calls into question the necessity of

including the KKK elements but otherwise makes no judgement either way on the artist's point.

A Canadian commenter named "fartsforpresident" enters the conversation in Line 2, angrily saying that China's argument is bad because slavery has been outlawed in the United States since the Civil War a century and a half ago. This user clearly demonstrates their anger by swearing about how bad the argument is, meaning that Line 2 is coded as aggressive.

In Line 3, another commenter who is of some Indian descent named "ShankaraChandra" replies to fartsforpresident in Line 2. ShankaraChandra is a PRC supporter and is not justifying China's actions based on the historical actions of the US, but rather pointing out that Americans are projecting the events from their past onto the current allegations coming out of China. Line 3 is coded as aggressive because it dismisses the allegations and instead points the finger back at those making the claims.

In Line 4, fartsforpresident angrily fires back that the US is not currently engaged in genocide; this line being coded as aggressive. The ShankaraChandra rebuts Line 4 in Line 5, rhetorically asking how many Muslims have been killed in the Middle East in America's wars in that part of the world, and then comparing that to the number killed by China in the same amount of time. Line 5 is aggressive once again, and the user concludes their comment by reiterating his point that all of the allegations are American projection.

In Line 6, fartsforpresident angrily says that going to war and deliberately committing genocide are not the same thing and that Line 5 is essentially saying that China's actions are acceptable because of American actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most strikingly, the user in Line 6 calls the Indian user a "fucking commie apologist" being an aggressive statement.

In Line 7, ShankaraChandra disputes the allegation that China is committing genocide by arguing that no one in the US State Department has proven the death of a single person. They again argue that America has killed millions of people on the pretext of a disinformation campaign, which proves their argument about Americans projecting. Line 7 is also coded as aggressive because it again argues that Americans are the ones committing genocide.

In Line 8, fartsforpresident rhetorically asks if the Uyghurs are just away on a summer camp, being a rare example of irony in this back-and-forth argument. ShankaraChandra replies to Line 8 in Line 9, denying that a single person has been killed and arguing that the "camps" in Xinjiang are actually a combination of schools, vocational schools and training

facilities and regular prisons, and blames Western media for sensationalizing the Uyghur issue. This argumentative reply in Line 9 is coded as aggressive because it once again dismisses the claims about what is going on in Xinjiang and blames Western media for making up the story. In Line 10, fartsforpresident makes one last aggressive remark, calling the ShankaraChandra a “China shill” who is loyal to the Chinese state and Xi Jinping, who they refer to as “Xi Jing Pooh”, in another reference to the motif that compares Xi Jinping to Winnie. At the beginning, the discussion seemed like a balanced discussion of whether the cartoon is accurate or missing the point, and then degenerates into angry arguments between two users, one of whom accuses the other of apologizing for communism, while the other completely dismisses the complaints as being fabricated. One of the trolls is trying to muddy the waters around the allegations, while the other is directly attacking them as a Communist.

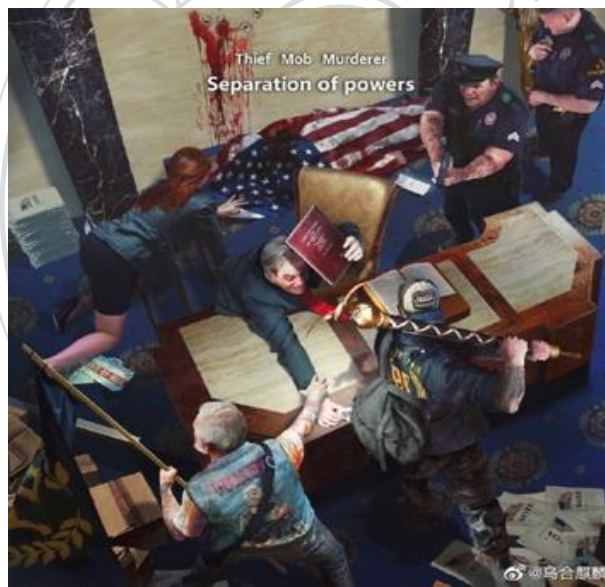


Figure 4.2 (乌合麒麟, 2020)

This image depicts Americans as racist and are quick to address other countries’ human rights violations while ignoring the racism happening in the US. The second meme in Figure 4.2 is from the January 2021 attack on the capital called “Separation of Powers.” Following Trump’s loss over his second term, many of his supporters stormed the US Capitol with intent to kill or harm Congress. The follow up comments below were found in the ethno-nationalist subreddit r/Sino. Many of the users support the ideas of the CCP and the supremacy of ethnic Chinese. This subreddit was the only other place on Reddit to discuss

this image, as the crossposting feature onto other China-relevant subreddits like r/China did not feature any comments. The subreddit in question often gets pulled into fights with other subreddits, and is notorious for starting toxic fights, which makes it particularly relevant for evaluating trolling, particularly given the topic at hand.

Text 4.3 (Date: 10 January 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	RespublicaCuriae:	Wait.... using the ceremonial mace of the House of Representative as a literal weapon? Most Americans don't know the symbols in the Congress.

Text 4.3 is a standalone comment that is coded as ironic, because it makes a sarcastically confused point that Americans are unfamiliar with the various symbols of Congress, as well as being generally ignorant about the high politics of their nation. Recently the US has been in the news more so for uprisings and violence rather than as a leader for democracy. Line 1 mocks the US for using weapons as symbols of justice.

Text 4.4 (Date: 10 January 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	wakeup2019:	The three branches of the US government: Thief, Mob and Murderer!
2	lurker4lyfe6969:	Reply to @wakeup2019: That's gives a new meaning to Check and Balances
3	orewabakadesu:	Reply to @lurker4lyfe6969: Me at ten: Checks and Balances are banking words, what do they have to do with politics? Me at fourteen: Ah, so that's what that means Me at eighteen: Nevermind

Line 1 of Text 4.4, the commenter angrily states that the three branches of the US government are correctly identified as that of thief, mob, and murderer. Although this is

referring to the constitutional separation of powers in the American political system, the seriousness of the words used makes this line aggressive in tone.

In Line 2, the user ironically joins in saying that this gives new meaning to the idea of checks and balances, which is also a reference to the particularities of America's constitutional structure, but more of a tongue-in-cheek reference than an accusation of crime.

Line 3 continues the irony, with the user joking that as they got older they realized that what they learned in school about the constitution and government no longer matter because the rules clearly did not apply to the rioters.

Text 4.5 (Date: 10 January 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	King-Sassafrass:	In before The Aussies throw a hissy fit
2	FourLastSongs:	Reply to @King-Sassafrass: Doctored image!!! Doctored image!!!

Line 1 of Text 4.5 is coded as aggressive, because the user is mocking Australians for the outrage expressed from Wuheqilin's earlier work and commented they are joining the conversation before the Australians do. Line 2 is coded as ironic, because the user is adding fuel to the fire by objecting as Australians did to that earlier image when they protested that it was an offensive and doctored picture.

Text 4.6 (Date: 10 January 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	svsm:	Thief: Politician shielding himself with the "Constitutional Law". In his other hand, he's literally trying to steal a 'Vote' from the 'Mob'. His colleague or secretary is stealing a 'Vote' from the dead body behind him. Mob: Trump Supporters wielding the Mace of the United States House of Representatives. Murderer: Police holding a gun over a body draped in the American flag. The amazing amount of symbolism in this picture...
2	wakeup2019:	Reply to @svsm: This guy is incredible! Hope art galleries and museums in China sponsor and promote him
3	NvMe_24:	Reply to @wakeup2019: Western Media: Commies sponsor propaganda artist by showing all of his works to the citizens to influence them

Line 1 of Text 4.6 is coded as ambiguous. On the one hand the user is describing what they see; however, they do also give praise to the artist and also approve of the way in which the artist is antagonizing American politics. In Line 2, the user expresses strong approval for the artist's work and says that Chinese art galleries and museums should sponsor his work. This means that Line 2 is coded as amiable. Finally Line 3 is coded as ironic, because it mocks the Western media response to the second comment's suggestion.

Analysis of Wuheqilin

The art of Wuheqilin has received praise on Weibo; however, the response from Reddit users was largely antagonistic. 58% of comments were aggressive, 23% were ironic, 12% were neutral, 4% were amiable, and 4% were ambiguous. From the comments on figure 4.2, three were Australian, two were Canadian, one was mainland Chinese, one British, and finally, one German. The kinds of aggression that are displayed in this text are direct attacks and allegations against Americans and the US government and the immoral acts that they commit, such as murder, thievery, and rioting. The ironic comments are distinct from those

of the earlier Taiwan and Hong Kong cases. In those cases, trolls had either belittled another country or made resigned comments with sad humor about the situation. In this case, the irony is mocking again, but this time in a satirical sense of portraying the stereotypical responses of Western media and governments. The art, for better or for worse, is open for interpretation. What one person values or considers meaningful can vary from person to person. Wuheqilin's anti-American sentiments have been his inspiration for Figure 4.1 and 4.2 and Western audiences have shown their dissatisfaction for his work on Reddit. Compared to the previous cases, this trolling is outside of the Greater China cultural sphere and starts to take on more ideological aspects of fundamental disagreement. There is a sense that commenters are fighting for their political beliefs and preferred organization of society, rather than poking fun, the stakes simply are higher.

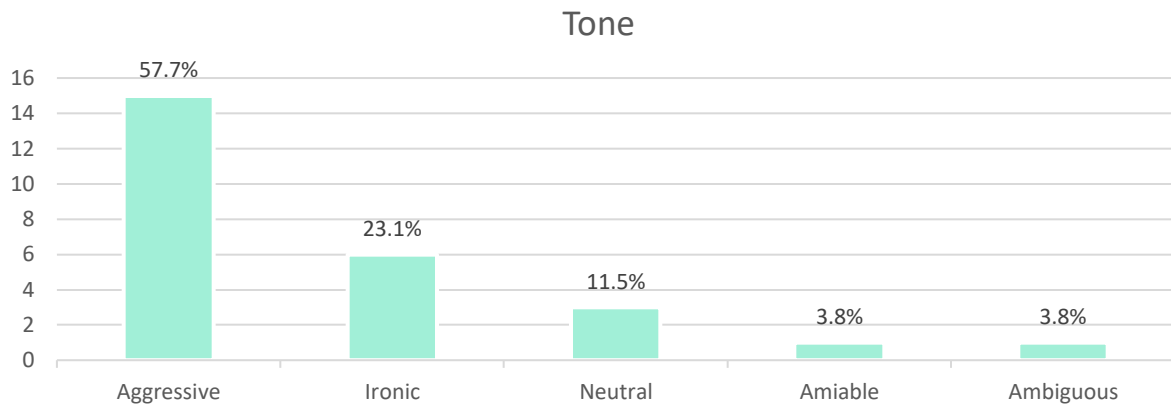


Figure 4.3

With the push and pull over international power, the PRC and the US have countries divided on what side to stand on. In an international context, there are clearly many tensions and points of conflict between China and the United States. How Wuheqilin's role comes to the fore is in the way that his art and trolling makes spaces online where netizens are waging these otherwise high-level battles on a more person to person basis.

His trolling also makes clear some major differences in social and political attitudes between American and Chinese contexts. For example, in an American context, freedom of speech and expression are highly valued and enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution, and so Americans often strongly believe that individuals have the right to

express their opinion and to debate their ideas, regardless of the opinion in question. Such attitudes and legal constructs are obviously not shared in a Chinese context, inflaming the differences between American and Chinese cultural expectations online as well.

Although in the past the US depended on slave labor to provide cotton and it has yet to resolve the many issues facing racism towards Black Americans, China's entire supply chain is currently dependent on cheap/slave labor. The difference between the US and China is that the US acknowledges its past on slavery, but China refuses to own up to the Uyghur genocide in Xinjiang. It is also important to consider that whereas slavery was ended during the Civil War more than one hundred and fifty years ago, the events in Xinjiang are taking place in the present day, with modern international norms and institutions and explicit commitments to human rights and freedoms since the end of the Second World War.

In the second piece of Wuheqilin's art, the Chinese trolls see this as a perfect demonstration of the dangers of democracy and the inherent instability of the democratic process. The argument advanced by anti-American trolls is that these riots are the natural conclusion of having two angry teams of people who will either win or lose the election. When the losing team realizes that they have lost, they riot and attack the otherwise sacred foundations of the democratic system and in the nation itself. Democracy understood in this way is a threat to stability and the national character, rather than a process by which individuals together participate in shaping the direction of their country. In some regards, Wuheqilin's work is an aggressive response to the mocking of Xi Jinping as Winnie the Pooh by international audiences. This is a powerful response because it attacks the moral reputation of other countries like the United States by specifically dragging up their worst moments and acts in history. Whereas the main way in which China is belittled as having a leader that cannot be taken seriously and mocked, Wuheqilin is retaliating by smearing the ethical foundation of foreign nations.

Despite this clash of attitudes and political values, it is important to note that many of the online discussions of Wuheqilin's art lack American netizen's voices. In the examples highlighted above, there are commenters from Australia, Canada, India, China and others, but none from the United States. It seems that in many ways, those netizens who are drawn into fights about the conduct of the United States are foreign admirers or critics, rather than Americans themselves. Ironically, one can visit any other forum online and find Americans

debating any and every issue, but they seem to be comparatively unbothered by the provocative attacks of PRC-based or pro-China trolls. It is because American politics and society are so divided over recent events that the heated debates there are a major distraction from international affairs and relations with Asian nations. For examples, the front page of Reddit is generally absorbed with posts about political news from Washington, with arguments about the Congressional agenda or Presidential acts. This self-absorption has been particularly strong since Donald Trump's election in 2016, when highly upvoted posts denouncing the President continued for his full term. Meanwhile on Twitter, the trending hashtags in the United States are often dominated by political topics, and pulled into the ideological debates within Congress or internal political party debates. Put simply, there are plenty of Americans trolling or engaging in political debate online, but they are typically found arguing about domestic politics and personalities. If one looks across social media, the American voices most likely to be engaging in fights with Chinese or Communist trolls are conservatives, not liberals or progressives, who seem to be prioritizing the fight for current domestic priorities.

In the United States, the domestic fights have become more typical debates about policy, rather than around the COVID-19 pandemic, which has started to recede following mass vaccinations. However, as at the time of writing many countries are still wrestling with the deadly virus, including China's largest neighbor, India. As we shall see, the failures of the Indian government to handle the virus became the centerpiece of trolling and antagonism, which is reinforced by the long history of tensions on the PRC-Indian borders.

The Case of Tiangong

The growing tension between India and China starts in the 1900s. During British colonial rule of India, the British Indian officials drew the McMahon Line as the official boundary between China and India (Devereux, 2009, p. 72). While the Chinese Republic has never officially accepted the border claim, the dispute started after the annexation of Tibet. Although India recognized Tibet as a Chinese territory, the McMahon Line still claimed 5,000 square mile of land, which later led to the Sino-Indian War in 1962. In 2020, there was once again another flare-up over the disputed land. The US Institute of Peace (2020) claims India's decision to revoke Article 370 in the Indian constitution, which allowed the central

government to have greater control and weaken the power of local authorities in Kashmir and Jammu (p. 34). Chinese authorities opposed this decision and increased the number of patrols on the Indian side of the border as well as military exercises (US Institute of Peace, 2020, pg. 36). Amid border disputes with China, COVID-19 has plagued the world and created a new variant in India. India's death toll is growing and has begun to spread to other edges of the world. On the other side of the border, the PRC launched 天和 or "Heavenly Harmony" to begin establishing a permanent human presence in space (Guardian Staff and Agencies, 2021).



Figure 4.4 (China Digital Times, 2021)

This Weibo account 中国长安网 (ch: *zhongguochanganwang*) or the China Changan Network is the official account for China's Political & Legal Affairs Commission. An image of a rocket launch is juxtaposed to three medical workers lighting funeral pyres. Both in the title and in the comment in the original meme use some wordplay in Chinese. The China

Changan Network makes the comparison of the launch of Tiangong to funeral pyres in the caption 中国点火 VS 印度点火 (ch: *zhongguodianhuo* VS *yindudianhuo*) or a fire in the PRC vs a fire in India. This opens up the field for other netizens to join in collective trolling as seen in the first comment on Weibo. Although the characters are the same 中国：送人上天 vs. 印度：送人上天 (ch: *zhongguo: songrenshangtian* vs. *yindu: songrenshangtian*) serves as a double entendre. Although the characters appear the same, the meaning may get lost in translation. The PRC sends people into the sky and India sends people to heaven is a callous way to applaud the PRC's success all while ridiculing the condition of India during the pandemic. This image caused major controversy because of its insensitivity to India. Three days after the image was posted, Chinese censors removed the image from Weibo. The retraction of the image received attention on the r/China subreddit.

Text 4.7 (Date: 2 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	Hungrydano:	Imagine starting a pandemic and then having the gall to mock others for how they respond to it.

Line 1 in Text 4.7 is a standalone comment on the post from r/China. From the commenter's previous posts in other subreddits, this user is from the UK and seems to be engaged in international politics. His posts range from commentary on the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan to the British parliament's approach to handling COVID-19. The commenter strikes an angry and aggressive tone on the PRC government. They attack the PRC for starting the COVID-19 pandemic and then its netizens for carrying out a series of mocking trolling campaigns across social media.

Text 4.8 (Date: 2 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	JasonTLBC:	The damage has already been done. The post spread across the world like Covid-19. People won't forgot. This will make the world hate China even more. don't interrupt your enemy when he's making mistakes. Good work China.
2	CertifiedMainlander:	Reply to @JasonTLBC: Chinese still think the world won't care about this post lol.

For Line 1 in Text 4.8, the comment has an ambiguous tone, with the user comparing the spread of the image to the spread of the virus itself. The commenter in Line 1 is an American electrician and once lived in a rural village in the PRC in 2016. When commenting about the PRC, the user in other posts on r/China denounces the PRC government, but here does not make the distinction. The commenter further makes an aggressive statement that the rest of the world will hate the PRC even more and that this is part of a series of mistakes that PRC is making in the struggle with the rest of the world. In closing this commenter ironically states the PRC has done “good work” handling the virus and mocking India. Line 2 makes an ironic point in reply, sarcastically saying that PRC audiences still think that the rest of the world does not care, implying that the rest of the world is in fact watching the PRC’s actions closely.

Text 4.9 (Date: 2 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	Codydodd:	This post was comparing the "successful launch" of their rocket to the pyres, yet, wasn't this the same rocket that failed to disengage and is descending towards earth in an uncontrolled re-entry which may crash somewhere in the Americas? Not exactly a good thing to brag about. https://gizmodo.com/100-foot-tall-booster-from-chinese-rocket-will-likely-m-1846797068
2	Training-Parsnip:	Reply to @codydodd: It's sad that they can be proud of it. India are well ahead of China in space exploration, they've also reached Mars well before china.

In Text 4.9 the first Line points out that the rocket launch that the image is celebrating is the same rocket that then fell to Earth in an uncontrolled reentry, and then saying in a matter-of-fact manner that this isn't really something to brag about. Line 1 is coded as aggressive because it attacks the premise of Chinese achievements being something to be proud of and saying that the PRC has nothing to brag about. Line 2 takes a similar tone, agreeing that it is actually sad that the PRC are proud of their rocket launch, because the Indian space program is also more advanced than the PRC's. With these negative comments Line 2 is coded as aggressive. Both of these comments undermine the accomplishments of China's rocket engineering and space technology.

Text 4.10 (Date: 2 May 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	nekopanchi	doesn't mention any apology, did they apologize?
2	[deleted]	<p>Reply to @nekopanchi: Chinese government doesn't even apologize to its own citizens regarding the Great Leap Forward, Culture Revolution, Tiananmen Square, and every other nonsensical and disastrous events, do you expect it to apologize to a foreign country and its people to "lose face"?</p> <p>The CCP is like a big baby with a huge ego but no confidence beneath all the pretenses; it doesn't just refuse to admit its mistakes, it also lashes out to people who dare to mention it actually has done any wrong or criticize it.</p>
3	nme00	<p>Reply to @[deleted]: Let me rephrase that for you.</p> <p>Hopefully Chinese will wake up to what a shithole their country is when doctors trying to warn others about about a novel coronavirus spreading through Wuhan are silenced and threatened leading to COVID spreading and killing millions worldwide.</p>

Line 1 of Text 4.10 in the comments is a fairly straightforward and neutral tone, simply pointing out that there is no mention of an apology anywhere and asking if there had in fact been an apology issued. With Line 2, the tone switches into a more hostile attitude, saying that the CCP government has never apologized to its own citizens for their disastrous policies of the Great Leap Forward or Cultural Revolution eras, so this suggests that they are unlikely

to apologize to a foreign country and thereby lose face. This commenter also continues in the same vein, saying that the CCP is like a big baby and also has an inflated ego with deep insecurity. These attacks on the character of the CCP and the previous crimes of the regime means that this line is coded as aggressive. In Line 3, the text continues the aggression, carrying on the point of the previous line. They escalate things into saying that China is a “shithole country” because COVID-19 started there and the warnings of doctors were covered up by authorities. Because of the way that this commenter describes China and also how they blame the CCP for the spread of COVID-19 and the deaths of millions of people worldwide. This text provides another example of a discussion that starts out in a fairly civil manner, but quickly turns into aggressive denunciations of historical actions taken by the CCP offered as an explanation for the Party’s actions today. The trolling becomes increasingly rude and includes swearing, eventuating in very aggressive comments.

The Case of Typhoon In-fa

While the world is still battling with the COVID-19 pandemic, flash flooding struck Mainland China in late-July of 2021. Heavy rain left behind from Typhoon In-fa stopped subway cars on its tracks and left cars stranded in the middle of the streets as seen in the tweet. In the wake of the storm, the PRC government is faced with millions of dollars of damages from the floods. The PRC received pouring support from netizens all over the world for the damage and lives lost in the flood. One Indian Twitter user posted about the floods on his personal account in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5 (Lost_human19, 2021)

Aftermath of heavy rainfall in China...

Unlike some of the other Twitter users seen in Chapter 3, this user is not a famous singer, a verified journalist or government official's account. This user is an Indian netizen with the username "Lost_human19" that has a little over 7,000 followers on Twitter. Although this user's Twitter feed is mostly filled with tweets about Indian culture and politics, this user does tweet about other topics like nature or pop music. Oftentimes, these verified accounts tend to have to keep an image. News accounts may try to remain neutral about their stances or a musician like Denise Ho mostly tweeted updates on the status of Hong Kong. The user in Figure 4.5 has the freedom of posting without pressure to post a specific type of content. In his tweet about the flooding, he expresses his general shock at the destruction of the flood. The image has hundreds of cars floating in flood water in the middle of a city. While the tweet itself is neutral, many Indian users chime in with a different tune.

Text 4.11 (Date: 22 July 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	XLNC	People are giving wrong picture to the international media. China has created large swimming pools for cars so that even they can entertain themselves. The cars flowing away were escaping abusive owners

This standalone comment in Text 4.11 makes an ironic joke about the flooding situation. The commenter is an Indian Twitter user that supports the BJP and tends to be critical on the PRC government. The user mockingly suggests that the international media has the wrong idea and that what is really going on is that the PRC government has built swimming pools for cars to escape from abusive owners, a clearly absurd remark but making fun of the situation.

Text 4.12 (Date: 22 July 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	rw_nationalist:	Aapda mein Awasar..Now chenne will find their food in the form of new insects from this water Translation: Opportunity in disaster...Now chenne (China) will find their food in the form of new insects from this water
2	CobblePriya:	Reply to @rw_nationalist: Tum na idea mat do baba unko. They eat anything that moves. Translation: Reply to @rw_nationalistDon't give them any ideas. They eat anything that moves.

Line 1 in Text 4.12 is also ironic. The user is Indian and their bio describes themselves as a right-wing nationalist and a BJP supporter. From their comments in Line 1, they make a joke stating that PRC people will find an opportunity to find new food in the form of water-dwelling insects, clearly mocking stereotypes of the culinary choices of PRC people. In the reply in Line 2, the user also a BJP supporter, follows this train of thought, saying that the first comment will give PRC people ideas because they will eat anything that moves. This

line is also coded as ironic because it also pokes fun at the stereotypical diet of a person from the PRC.

Text 4.13 (Date: 22 July 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	smile_maggi:	Karma hits back...
2	berozgarKisan:	Reply to @smile_maggi: Ye to mujhe bat soup jaisa hi dikh raa consistency mein Translation: Reply to @smile_maggi: The consistency looks like bat soup to me.
3	smile_maggi:	Reply to @berozgarKisan: itta sara jo failaya... Translation: Reply to @berozgarKisan: it's spreading...

Line 1 of Text 4.13 takes an aggressive tone, saying simply that karma is hitting back at the PRC, which suggests that Chinese people deserve the disaster of the floods and that it is just compensation for the disaster that the PRC unleashed on the world in the form of COVID-19. The second line says that the consistency of the water looks like bat soup, an ironic tone again poking fun at the stereotypes of Chinese food and also connecting this to the transmission vector of COVID as coming from bats to humans through food. In Line 3, the user says that “it’s spreading” by referring to both the virus and the floods happening around the world. Since it is not clearly stating what is being spread, this comment is coded as ambiguous.

Text 4.14 (Date: 22 July 2021)

Line	Username	Comment
1	Niladriguha15	They talk about there development, management and superiority over others.

Another standalone comment in Text 4.14. This user comments the image in Figure 4.5 is highly ironic. The user sarcastically points out how people in the PRC like to portray their nation as being developed and superior to others, which contrasts with the image of the severe flooding. While the PRC claims their country is better than others, the floods have shown the cracks in the PRC’s foundation.

Analysis of Tiangong and Typhoon In-fa

Comments about India present a near neck-in-neck split between aggressive and ironic tones. Aggressive tones led the conversation with 47% of comments, while trailing behind was ironic tones with 40%, and finally both neutral and ambiguous tones reached 6%. In previous chapters, there was a clear lead in tone whether it was ironic or aggressive, but India is split almost down the middle. More of the aggressive comments came from Reddit and most of the ironic comments came from Twitter. The outliers in this case came from a neutral question posed on Reddit in Text 4.9 and the ambiguous comment was not clear about the intention of “spread” in Text 4.13. In comparison to the cases in earlier chapters, there are some similarities between the Indian examples and that of #saysrytotedros, because the level of aggression and irony is more evenly split. This is perhaps because Indian trolls have responded to the mockery coming from China about the death toll in India. It is a natural response to the kinds of displays of arrogance coming from PRC netizens for the Indian commenters to laugh at the misfortune of Chinese people.

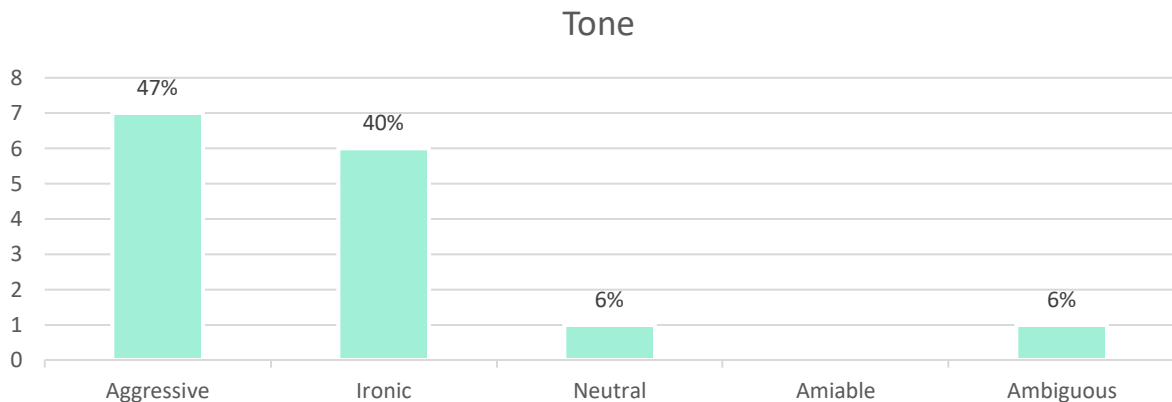


Figure 4.6

For the case of India, there are some distinct differences in tone when compared with Taiwan or Hong Kong. In the previous case for Taiwan, there is a trend towards sarcasm and there is aggression towards the defiance of controversial Hong Kongers, however, PRC trolls do not exhibit as strong an attitude towards India, in contrast to how Indian trolls are extremely aggressive towards China. This is perhaps because India is seen as a weaker country that does not threaten the PRC despite the long running border disputes and rivalry between them. For example, consider the attitude of pity that some commenters displayed towards Indian people on the rocket launch image, where many people said it was inappropriate to mock Indians for the failings of their government in handling the virus. India seems to register differently on PRC trolls radars, and there is a more inconsistent attitude on display. It is worth reinforcing the point that India is perceived as a weaker and poorer country, compared with wealthy and threatening countries like the United States, or a core part of the PRC that needs to be reined in, as in the cases of Taiwan and Hong Kong. In a similar manner to how Westerners emphasize the need to avoid conflating the PRC government and people living in the PRC, PRC netizens urge each other to focus on the failures of the Modi government rather than the unfortunate victims in poor parts of the country. This is perhaps reflective of the recent development of the PRC, it was not so long ago that families in the PRC were poor victims of international circumstances, and the ideals of Third World solidarity are still expressed by the PRC government and may still be an important value for Chinese commenters as well.

Karma is an important concept that was mentioned in the trolling back and forth, and is perhaps worth considering the motivation and reason for using the term in the comments of the trolls. Karma of course means that when you commit a bad action you will get bad actions done to you in turn, and vice versa. For many Indian-based trolls, they believe the flooding in the PRC is due to karma, pointing out that it was a deserved form of divine retribution on the PRC for starting COVID-19 which has killed so many abroad, and also for the arrogance of PRC netizens who bragged about the successes of the PRC at the expense of India in the earlier image. The remark about nature cleansing the filth from the Earth illustrates the idea that nature is rebalancing against people who did wrong.

From the perspective of the Indian trolls, they demonstrate a great deal of ironic trolling towards the PRC; for example, the recent flooding. It is interesting to see the tone here being

cohesively towards irony, and it perhaps reflects India's self-perception in relation to the PRC. From India's perspective, the PRC is a larger, richer, and more successful neighbor and rival. Whereas the PRC is becoming more assertive and taken more seriously in the international arena, India remains comparatively poor and ignored. In the context of the rivalry between these two nations, the PRC seems to have the upper hand. Given the self-perception of being an underdog, Indian trolls cannot brag about their own superiority or greatness compared to the PRC, but they can still delight in the failures and trouble that the stronger nation is experiencing. In a similar way that Hong Kong-based trolls mock their authorities with irony, Indians derive pleasure from seeing the PRC struggle, in contrast to the expectations that the PRC is powerful and doing well.

Chapter Conclusion

International politics plays a major role in creating vitriol for trolls to attack netizens in online spaces like Reddit or Twitter. For the first section in this chapter, explored some of the infamous work of the self-proclaimed wolf warrior artist Wuheqilin. The first piece is a criticism of racial issues in the US all while attacking the PRC on the issue of Uyghur politics. In his second piece, Wuheqilin mocks the riots at the US Capitol, with both of these pieces serving as attacks on the ideological and moral claims of American liberalism. Although all the pieces depicted US politics, many netizens in the comment section were not even American users. They ranged from Canadian to Australian but never American. One reason for this could be the increased amount of internal conflict in US domestic politics. As Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) stated, American forums are often political to some degree even if they are not intended to be made for political discussions. Additionally, those Americans who are especially set in their opinions about domestic politics issues do not moderate and even set out to argue with their ideological opponents (Wojcieszak and Price, 2010). As American politics has become even more controversial since these articles were written, it stands to reason that Americans are spending more and more time fighting each other in a battle of endless polarization over domestic problems. With less American keyboard warriors fighting PRC netizens and supporters, it leaves other countries to fight on behalf of the country. Despite the fact Americans are not dealing the blows to PRC netizens, other western countries quickly go up to bat for them.

It is also important to note the topics that PRC trolls use as their targets or weapons with which to hit the US and Americans. As mentioned in the earlier discussion, mainland PRC trolls attack the legitimacy of core American values like democracy, the constitutional separation of powers, and free speech. They do so in such a way as to undermine the appeal or validity of these ideals, by highlighting the chaos and failures of recent American politics and the dark past of early American society, before the civil war with slavery, and afterwards with Jim Crow and the KKK. Trolling between the PRC and the US shows the marks of a struggle of values and ideas, and echoes infamous propaganda lines from the Soviet Union, such as “and you are lynching Negroes” as a rebuttal to American criticism of human rights abuses. Wolf warrior trolls like Wuheqilin have not themselves created the feeling of a Cold War-style competition between China and the US, but their points of attack are shaped along those lines, possibly in response to the rhetoric of political leaders across the Pacific. This kind of value judgement language and trolling is unique to the relationship between China and the West, in particular America. The kinds of trolling demonstrated elsewhere do not run along the fault lines of political philosophy, but more as a display of wealth and success, as displayed in the cases of earlier chapters, and also in the second half of this chapter. This is because the United States is upheld as an exemplar and champion of liberal democracy in the world, a role that it has played since the start of the Cold War. Therefore America’s narrative to the world is shaped by this explicitly ideological story of protecting liberal democracy. Other countries do not make the same claims, and so trolls focus on other factors such as poverty or prosperity as the basis on which to attack other nations or political entities.

In the second half of this chapter, India became the second target for trolling in the political ring, with the trolling here revealing a mentality of what-goes-around-comes-around. While reaching alarming death rates in India, the PRC launched its first rocket into space and at the same time decided to showboat their great victories at the expense of their suffering neighbor. This disturbing side-by-side comparison of mass funeral pyres being lit next to the launch of Tiangong brought out aggressive trolling of the PRC. Some claimed that the launch was a massive failure and criticized the PRC government for its past failures in the Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, and at Tiananmen Square. When tragedy turned on the PRC with the floods from Typhoon In-fa, Indian netizens returned to the comments section with little to no sympathy. In Indian culture, karma dictates how one’s actions always

have consequences. When PRC netizens rejoiced over India's misfortune, Indian netizens also relished in the destruction from the tremendous flood.



Chapter 5

Trolling in a Changing Global Context

In both my undergraduate and professional career, communication has always been an integral part of my life. Nowadays, social media can be both a curse and a gift especially in these COVID-19 times. What the conundrum seems to be is how we can be so connected with our loved ones yet so disconnected from the rest of the world. The start of this thesis was jumpstarted by the failed revival of the Taiwanese horror game “Devotion.” After watching the debates of trolls on the game, I started the quest to understand why.

Explaining identity to others can be difficult. For me, Taiwanese American was just part of how I could succinctly describe my ethnicity to a nosy American who had never met a non-white person before. Where I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, not many people knew the difference between a Vietnamese person and a Korean person, let alone a Taiwanese person, so I lived with that. The first time I started to reconcile the latter part of my identity was in 2014 when my grandmother was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease. From that point on, Taiwan stopped being a place on a map to the key to all of my family’s history. When I started this journey, I never realized how complicated Taiwanese identity is in Taiwan itself. The historic significance of the PRC’s claim to Taiwan causes the debate over the distinction of Taiwanese and Chinese identity. While Taiwanese self-identification is at an all-time high, the decision on reunification or independence has not come to a decisive break from the PRC (Election Study Center, National Chengchi University, 2021). The entirety of Taiwanese politics is overshadowed by the identity question. In the US, we have all kinds of debates on identity, but for us our nationhood is not tied to our ethnicity. In a way, I understand that can be difficult to self-define one’s roots and heritage when another group or nation is making claims on your identity.

The PRC’s looming power has given Taiwan a warning through the National Security Law in Hong Kong. Doing the research for this thesis, I have the greatest respect for Hong Kong for fighting for its own autonomy and democracy. In some ways, I envy Jimmy Lai and Joshua Wong—they believe so deeply in Hong Kong’s cause that they sit behind bars for the future of other Hong Kongers. This research has shown me what the US often takes for

granted like freedom of speech, press, and assembly. Meanwhile, citizens in the US are more interested in fighting each other instead of uniting and working together.

Before coming to Taiwan, I was ignorant of the importance of the Asia-Pacific region. Most of my concerns were about the social issues in the US and anything outside was just noise. Even in the research on the US, many Americans are not interested fighting outside battles or defending the reputation of America because they do not believe the US's causes. There are two fears that worry me about these attitudes: the US will accept that the world needs to fend for itself or worse the PRC's ideas begin to chip away at the democracy in the US. During my research on Taiwan for this thesis, I stumbled upon an American's communist meme account. I found myself agreeing with many of the ideas that the account preached about, but found myself understanding how people find themselves subscribing to these ideas. Their subtle ways of baiting progressives with the idea of gender equality disguised other threatening ways of thinking. This subtext of seeking to undermine confidence in the legitimacy of American liberal democracy was clearly similar to how PRC trolls argue against democracy and the free press as agents of chaos and social disruption. This demoralization of online audiences is made even more disturbing by the lack of American voices found in this research.

Meanwhile, in the Indian cases, many netizens still have pride in their country, but still can disagree about the policies freely. The examples of Indian trolling are a stark contrast to those of Americans, because while Indians also have internal disagreements over how their country is governed, they are able to fight back against PRC trolls rather than totally ignoring the ideological challenge posed by them, and surrendering or even agreeing. Many Americans are unable to see what is happening in the world beyond internal disputes, but the Indian presence on social media is capable of creating resistance, which is quite different to the attitudes of young Americans. As the divides between Taiwan and the PRC, and liberal democracy and the Chinese model become more and more stark, it seems clear that social media will be another important element to understanding the outlook of public opinion and shaping the contestation of ideas.

During the Cold War, propaganda could never reach the world as it does today through social media. In the past, the Soviet Union utilized academics, journalism, and even government infiltration to push ideologies to subvert popular opinion. Today, these ideas take

on a new identity through cyber nationalist trolling and facetious sarcasm. With the endless channels of communication that the internet provides, users can craft a less domineering approach to changing political values.

Since Donald Trump's entrance into the political arena in 2016, Twitter has become a minefield of political ideologies. In fact the Trump presidency is an example of political polarization and trolling increasing in the American context. As Wojcieszak et al. (2009) explained American social media and forums have often been politicized even on non-political discussion boards (p. 41). The more that Americans interact with other political perspectives, the more intensely political or extreme they become (Wojcieszak, 2010, p. 11). Very few people change their views, which is especially highlighted in a trolling environment where everyone is hostile to everyone else (Wojcieszak and Price, 2010, p. 328). Although Fuchs' (2014) critical analysis of social media claims that social media does not cause revolutions or protests could not have predicted the whirlwind 2020 brought to the world's stage (p. 22), from a politically inflated pandemic to the aftermath of the Hong Kong protests sent the world into mass hysteria. Fittingly, at the center of it all is the cyber nationalism of the PRC. Trolling on the PRC's social media has largely gone unchecked. Because many of these wolf warriors work sideways with the CCP's propaganda and ideologies, trolling appears to be a patriotic action to support the government and simultaneously attack those who oppose it.

During a briefing to the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, Xi Jinping stated one of his long-term goals is to improve the PRC's image internationally (Xinhuanet, 2021). This would include silencing some of his loudest supporters on the internet. As an opponent to the American hegemony, the PRC must prove itself as a serious opponent in the international arena. With Xi's aggressive cheerleaders picking fights with democracies on the internet, that seat in the international arena could be quickly taken from the PRC. In this balancing act, the CCP must find a way to rally support of its citizens and reel them in when they are disrupting their carefully crafted image. Young jingoistic Chinese nationalists and socialists on the internet (e.g. Little Pinks) either commented on posts that are anti-PRC with fierce aggression or spiteful sarcasm or involve themselves in pro-Chinese content to boost the PRC's image.

One of the most essential parts of these trolling campaigns is how it shapes the online perception of the countries involved in other audiences. As Xi Jinping himself reportedly emphasized, wolf warriors and trolls have negatively impacted the international opinion of the PRC, meaning that trolling and cyberbullying are now understood as being reflective of a state's strategy and position in international society. The case studies above show many different aspects of trolling between PRC trolls and netizens of other nationalities. It is interesting to note how tones and targets differ between the various cases, and also how some trolls counter the attacks made from those more assertive than themselves.

This brings new light to multimodality can change the meaning and intention of trolling or can make arguments online worse because conversations could be misconstrued or even deliberately obscured or hidden. For example, PRC trolls, who are attacking the US for various controversies in history, understand that they are asserting the superior values of their own nation, but outside observers see it merely as an attack on the US, without necessarily latching on to a specific alternative system. Those netizens who are unfamiliar with the arguments made by these trolls are being baited to unknowingly to lose their faith in the American system, while the trolls are advancing their own claim to have a better way of organizing society and politics. Multimodality offers an explanation of different levels of these interactions, particularly those who are in-the-know versus those who don't have a deep understanding, but who may be persuadable. This is because trolls use different forms of medium to troll, more than just text based insults or insinuations. With new and different forms of media, trolls are able to hide their intent and mask a deeper meaning that has many levels and implications. Many of these new media aspects of trolling are also deliberately intended to be visceral and offensive than text, which can be subject to interpretation.

There seems to be some variations in the perceptions of targeted countries of the PRC trolls. Overall, the perception of whether PRC trolls are worth fighting can lead to responses such as countering with negative or aggressive trolling, being disengaged from the arguments at all, or bitter or passive-aggressive complaints that are not worth strong resistance. The cases discussed in earlier chapters reveal that different targeted countries engage with trolling in different ways. For the case of Taiwan, in Chapter 2, PRC netizens used irony to belittle Taiwanese netizens. Taiwan's success as a separate country is mocked as part of a

delegitimizing of Taiwanese identity. In Chapter 3, Hong Kongers display a sense of bitter irony at the situation in their city, often making sarcastic but defeated comments about the events. This is in contrast to the aggressive gloating displayed by PRC-based trolls. In contrast, Indian netizens retaliate at the PRC, being aggressive towards the fate of PRC citizens during the severe flooding in parts of the PRC. Another difference is displayed in the trolling arguments around America. In Chapter 4, many Americans are not engaging in counter-attacks on PRC trolls. These dynamics of perception suggest that Americans have many major domestic divides between politics and society, and are not overly engaged with foreign trolling or mockery. In contrast, Indians are very engaged, and even more invested in these external battles than are Americans, who have seemingly turned inwards, and many of those that may be worried about the state of their country more than the state of a city across the Pacific.

Cultural Contiguity and Ideological Incongruity

This poses the question of how and why do trolls pick the targets on which they choose to focus. While previous literature (Lee, et al., 2014) has argued that trolls are incentivized to battle each other in order to sharpen their rhetoric and the skills of their argumentation, this research diverges from this finding in one important way. While trolls on Reddit or Twitter do confront each other from different ideological perspectives, such as Hong Kong netizens or foreign socialists, trolling on Weibo does not demonstrate the features of competing to improve arguments against an opposing perspective.

For the most part, PRC trolls exist within their own ecosystem where disagreement is shut down and trolling escalates even though everyone on the forum is arguing from the same perspective. In fact, PRC trolls do not seem to be radicalized by their opponents, but rather by their peers. Instead of competing arguments, there seems to be an important aspect of proximity in the trolling imagination, where trolls are drawn to issues of close proximity, meaning in terms of culture, geography, and power structure and international relations. Claims of cultural contiguity play an important role in shaping these questions of identity and belonging, meaning that cultural contiguity can also draw the attention of trolls. Hong Kong and Taiwan are perfect examples of this, as both countries are held to be part of a “Greater China” as well as share the ethnicity, culture, and language of PRC trolls. This motivates

these trolls to viciously undermine any attempt to break away from this sense of cultural belonging, and explains why Jimmy Lai was such a target as an agent of opposition to pro-Beijing governance in Hong Kong. Similarly, PRC trolls undermine and delegitimize Taiwan based on the historical belonging and perceived inferiority based on cultural justifications, such as the big brother role as illustrated in a Confucian family/authority structure.

Geography also plays a role in provoking the attention of trolls, as the PRC's neighboring countries are often party to territorial disputes and historical conflicts, as in the case of India. These neighbors have a history of fighting wars, from full-scale to smaller border conflicts, and so the trolling is shaped by competition and rivalry. Although some netizens on Weibo felt that the rocket meme was inappropriate, the motivation for posting such an image in the first place derives from the rivalry of next door neighbors, the desire to demonstrate the PRC's technological advancement and prosperity compared to India's poverty and backwardness. Of course, there are many countries that are poorer than those living in the PRC, but the geographic proximity of the PRC to India has led to the historical tensions that makes it more enjoyable for trolls to make the comparison.

The proximity factor is not limited to geographical boundaries or cultural familiarity, but also affected by the power hierarchies between the given countries, as in the American examples. In Chapter 4, the PRC and the US are understood in the context of competing great powers with different political systems and different values, such as between social stability and liberal democracy. For PRC trolls, the targets are examples that highlight America's structural flaws and ill-deserved position as a great and powerful country. Perhaps similarly to the Taiwan examples, PRC trolls have an interest in undermining and delegitimizing the reputation and confidence of America. However, this is for different reasons, and related to competing values rather than questions of identity and belonging.

These claims of ideological incongruity have had some implications for the global context of trolling. The most severe trolling back and forth is found in countries with close proximity and a historical rivalry, while trolling between more distant countries can also be severe but more one-sided. The relative social divisions within countries are also perhaps relevant, as America today is strongly divided, but obviously the PRC's public objections are strictly controlled. Instead it may be simpler to express anger about external divisions and frustrations than internal divisions in the PRC, which could explain PRC trolls' highly

aggressive sorts of trolling. This overall suggests that societies that are internally divided by social and political conflicts are less likely to engage in trolling than those with seemingly less divisions, or at least with fewer ways of expressing these divisions. In the American case, the internal divisions perhaps reflect how Americans feel about their country, as more strongly patriotic conservatives see America's values as being greater than any other country, while liberals and progressives are more and more critical of America's unique claims to greatness (Kalmoe & Gross, 2016). Externally, this means that liberal Americans are not as offended by the PRC trolls, because they do not necessarily disagree that American democracy is deeply flawed. In any case, from the perspective of PRC trolls, the United States is the main rival and alternative option for global governance and values, which highlights the ideological nature of their trolling. For various reasons, Americans do not seem to buy into this struggle of values in the same way as those trolls based in mainland China.

On the other hand, in a clear example of claims of cultural contiguity, those countries that fall into the similar cultural and historic sphere as mainland China, the trolls make claims to refute the idea that Hong Kong or Taiwan can justifiably be regarded as separate from the PRC. In a broader context, one can assume that countries with similar sorts of cultural connection and history would also face the same sorts of trolling. For example, if this suggestion is correct, countries that have faced similar struggles to independence may see similar forms of trolling as seen in this research. This ideological motivation clearly derives from ethnic nationalism, that claims Taiwan and Hong Kong as irrefutably a part of the nation of the PRC, much as nationalists would be expected to claim former historical parts of their country as so on.

This research has presented two important types of motivations for trolling, that of a rivalry of values and international position, and that of ethnic nationalism. These types of trolling are met with retaliation specifically in the case of India but ignored in the American example, suggesting that the trolling is more likely to become two ways when there is direct proximity and historical conflict between the relevant countries. Conversely, it suggests that lack of proximity on the part of one of the countries or major internal divisions will make the trolling more one-sided. These two competing and opposite factors of cultural contiguity and ideological incongruity explain many of the motivating factors for trolls based in the PRC.

As demonstrated in the cases of Taiwan and Hong Kong, the claims of cultural contiguity manifest in ways that encourage PRC trolls to comment on the internal affairs of Taiwan and Hong Kong, because from their point of view these affairs are actually also issues facing their own country, as part of their beliefs in “Greater China”. In the same way, the claims of cultural contiguity also direct the anger of PRC trolls towards those actors in Hong Kong or Taiwanese society that oppose this worldview, such as Jimmy Lai or members of a DPP administration. This leads to an overall trolling attitude of undermining or delegitimizing the political independence of Hong Kong and Taiwan, because the trolls are pushing the angle of cultural contiguity and dragging these entities back towards the Chinese core. In contrast to cultural contiguity, ideological incongruity focuses on the factors that divide rather than unite. These divisions are highlighted by the contrasting values between the PRC and the US, as already explained above. These distinctions are obviously made worse by the current-day tensions between the two countries, but they are fundamental concerns with how societies and politics are organized.

In the case of the United States, trolls from the PRC latch onto controversial or chaotic moments in American politics, or the various struggles in American society, as a way to advance an argument of ideological divergence, and perhaps implicitly to highlight the PRC’s ideological superiority over the liberal democratic model of America. To an outside observer, this part of the argument is only implicit, because the trolls are not openly saying that the chaos in American would not happen under the specific political model of the PRC or a lead party, but this is taken for granted among the mainland Chinese audience on Weibo. The audience of these trolls are essentially being prompted to reject the values of the American model because of all of the negative events.

To an outside audience, the comparison with China’s ideological underpinnings may not be considered, and so the trolling instead purely undermines American values and claims to moral superiority. Such a point of attack also helps to call into question American moral priorities like human rights, by highlighting moral failures in Western history. This further muddies the water around allegations of the PRC’s own abuses, and discourages the audience from crediting uniquely negative morals to mainland China. Consider the cartoons of Wuheqilin, wherein he references infamous parts of American history, such as slavery and the lynching of black Americans by the KKK. These parts of American history are well-

known around the world, and so bringing them up embarrasses and undermines the United States without necessarily endorsing an alternative or superior ideological or political model. In a way, it is only those netizens who are already in the know who understand the way that PRC trolls imply that China has more of a moral or ideological superiority. For most outside observers, making America look bad is the main purpose. Perhaps if an outsider went further down the rabbit hole, they could be brought around to endorsing the PRC's values as well, and so highlighting the ideological incongruity can be the first step towards bringing an online audience over to the PRC trolls' position.

Multimodality in Tone & Medium

In analyzing the tone of trolling in these cases, tone has proven crucial to understanding the message, target, and motivation of the trolls of all nationalities. Additionally, examining the tone also reveals the subtext to these trolling campaigns and forums. This research has used tone to demonstrate how PRC netizens pick their targets in Hong Kong by focusing on those actors who have positioned themselves in defiance of the pro-Beijing authorities. Additionally, the tone demonstrates how mainland trolls delegitimize and downplay Taiwan's claim of separateness and undermine Taiwanese successes to reinforce claims of cultural contiguity. Furthermore, the tone of PRC trolls also reveals the subtext to the ideological struggle between mainland China and the West broadly and the United States specifically. Understanding the irony and subtext behind the trolling of wolf warriors like Wuheqilin allows observers to grasp that such trolls are not only rejecting Western norms of political and social organization, but also promoting their own alternative method of governance. Simple irony does not just belittle American moral claims, but also tries to expose it as hollow or hypocritical. By bringing the audience to these conclusions, trolls are able to reinforce the ideological incongruity between the two great powers.

Medium as well as multimodal communication play a role in how users communicate their vitriol at other trolls. This research has broken down comments into eight categories as seen in Figure 5.1. Weibo, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Steam have different affordances that allow for variations of messaging. For example, Steam and Reddit allow for text only comments while Twitter, Facebook, Twitter, and Weibo allow comments to have images, gifs, or videos. As far as the cases are concerned, the platforms on which the trolling takes

place strongly affects the media that trolls can utilize. For the Taiwan case, the trolling examples are sourced from Weibo, Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, and Steam, due to the debate around Devotion. This means that trolls were able to take advantage of all of these platforms as far as using a variety of media. Having said this, the overwhelming majority of the trolls still utilize text instead of the other media available. For the Hong Kong examples, the trolling is drawn from Weibo and Twitter, which could encourage trolls to use images or gifs. However, even when the trolling is taking place on platforms that allow more variety, the overwhelming majority of replies in the thread are text only. The cases of India and the United States are based on trolling on Reddit and Twitter, which means that the platforms are mixed in terms of how other media can be used. Even so, the comments are still heavily weighted towards text only. In the American example, this is perhaps because of the ideological nature of the discussion, which is maybe harder to debate with images or gifs and lends itself to more long-form comments and criticism. Multimodality offers users more context into the intentionality of the comment in question. An image or gif can change the tone of a comment by supporting the textual messaging or contradict it. De Fina’s model brings to light the tone at face value, but by incorporating multimodality, the research can dig deeper into the true meaning of the comments.

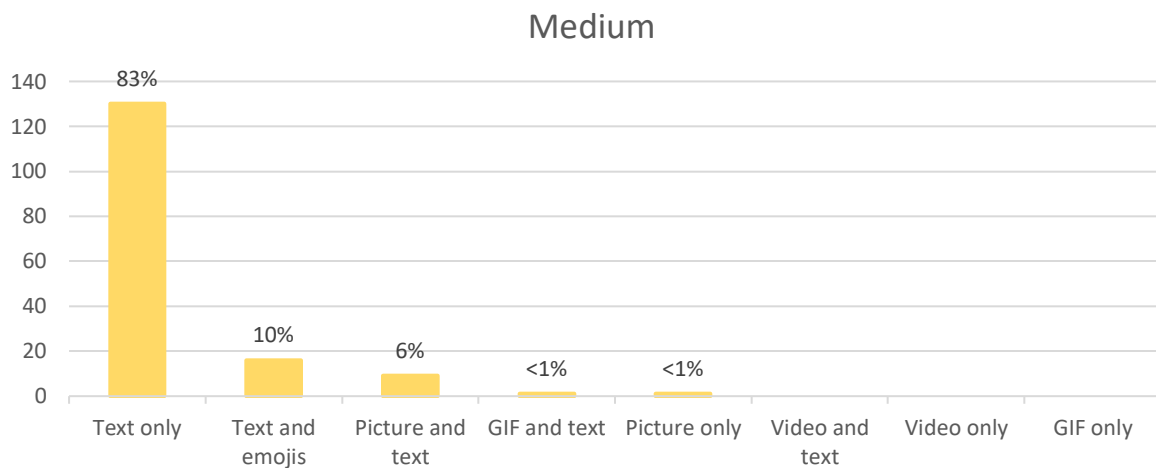


Figure 5.1

Assessing the medium of comments, 83% of comments were text only, 10% of comments were text with emojis, 6% of comments had an image posted with text, <1% of comments

contained a gif with text, and <1% only had an image. The majority of comments in this research were text-based. No comments were only videos or videos with text or only gifs. As mentioned earlier, two platforms only allowed text comments, which may explain the large shift towards text only comments. Another explanation could be the simplicity of just typing a comment rather than taking the time to look up a video or image for a reply to a post. In the same vein of text-based responses, text with emojis was the second highest type of medium. Emojis can be playful in softening meaning or convey feeling or emotion more clearly. In some responses users added “laugh crying” emojis to emphasize their laughter at a country’s situation or at the stupidity of other users. Following the text posts, images with text were popular on Twitter. Visual images supplement the tone of replies in the comment section, which helps improve the classification of types of tone. Image only and gifs with text posts trailed behind the other types of mediums. Posting only an image may only offer enough context to those aware of the topic at hand and without text some context may be lost.

Although medium plays a role in determining tone, platform may have also played a role in how trolling attacks were delivered. In terms of tone, Twitter and Facebook had a tendency to be more ironic while Reddit and Weibo leaned more on the aggressive side. There are a couple of plausible explanations for this general trend of tone. First is the relative degree of anonymity that the platforms themselves give to their users. For example, Twitter and Facebook leave behind paper trails of personal information like pictures and long feeds of opinions. This may well mean that there is likely to be more of a social cost to anyone who is excessively aggressive or in poor taste on Facebook or Twitter. If someone can be traced back to a controversial or aggressive comment it can impact their private or professional lives, perhaps incentivizing more indirect and circumspect ways of criticizing or confronting people or events online.

In contrast, Reddit has a more difficult interface to navigate and is much easier to remain anonymous online. Many Reddit users make use of “throwaway accounts” deliberately intended to obscure any biographical details, meaning that the platform’s user base is more encouraged to stay anonymous and difficult to track. This in turn means that there is less potential social cost to making aggressive or confrontational comments. Additionally, these platforms are international and so are comparatively more open access than Weibo, which is mainly available to only those who can read Chinese characters. Also important with Weibo

as a platform is the way in which it is a closed discussion system that functions like an echo chamber. As seen in Chapter 3, this may encourage commenters to put on an aggressive front to protect themselves from becoming a troll's next target. The many implications trolling and social media bring together begins to pose threats on the international stage.

Conclusion

Fuchs' argument in 2014 was that social media does not start social movements in the real world and does not carry political consequences offline (p. 25). This paper challenges some of his assessments of that time. Fuchs' argument is not persuasive because the ideologies of what trolls believe can shape international politics and be influential in how nations interact. While Fuchs emphasizes other factors in his critical analysis of social media, he discounts the potential impact of social media going forward. When Fuchs made his argument in 2014, he could not have anticipated the increasing importance of social media in propelling Donald Trump to the American presidency, nor could he have anticipated the drastic changes in politics in the Western world at large. Similarly, Fuchs wrote this analysis before Xi Jinping decided to take a more assertive approach in the international arena. These two key pieces of context suggest that there are gaps in Fuchs' analysis for which he could not and did not account for. Since then of course, Fuchs' publication of a manifesto for "Public Service Media" online suggests that he believes that social media has become more actively damaging and a driver of political events (Fuchs, 2021). However, in this work he and his coauthors argue that neoliberal economics and right-wing populism have undermined the positive potential of online democracy, which is a different explanation than that offered in this thesis (Fuchs, 2021).

There are some important examples of how online trolling has recently drawn responses from important figures in the real world. The posting of images by Wuheqilin or various PRC state agencies have generated real world responses from governments, which have issued protests and have driven discussion even among foreign governments about the tone of the images and the accusations made within them (Packham, 2020). Additionally, the #saysrytotedros campaign in Chapter 2 also became an aspect of the battle for legitimacy between the Taiwanese government and the WHO. The actions of PRC trolls led to the WHO Director-General issuing a fierce response and became part of the attempts by the WHO to

justify Taiwan's exclusion. These two instances clearly demonstrate how trolling has shaped bilateral relations between the PRC and other countries, as well as its broader reputation. Additionally, the #saysrytotedros hashtag was an important part of the controversies with the WHO and its international legitimacy in the tense early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that trolling has proven to be influential in two different aspects of international relations. In these ways, the fact that political debates are being brought online has given a great deal of ammunition to trolls, such that just about every political topic is being fought over somewhere on the internet. International politics has become a wedge with which trolls attack a much broader range of people. These sorts of trolling attacks can draw attention in the real world, as exemplified by government responses to online campaigns, meaning that there is an appeal in online trolling that comes from the empowerment of netizens through ideologically fueled online campaigns. Conversely, these online campaigns disempower those netizens who dare to go against the opinion of these groups, because they will also get attacked as a proxy for a hated figure, as seen in the Jimmy Lai case. The growing power of these trolls on many major forums also likely drives political polarization on the topics that are debated, as people who are more exposed to radical politics online are likely to become more deeply entrenched in their views or even more radical themselves. As previous studies have indicated, political discussions emerge even in totally unrelated areas (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009, p. 49). Similar studies have found that most people are not moderated by exposure to other sides of the debate, either clinging more strongly to their opinions or not changing at all (Wojcieszak and Price, 2010). Additionally, it has also been demonstrated that users who spend more time on social media reinforce their own prior beliefs by critically examining those of the opposition and sharpening their own ability to argue with the other side (Lee, et al., 2014, p. 7). Overall, polarization means that those users who interact with trolls often get pulled into the arguments and made more radical in response, and that this dynamic of increasingly intense arguments can filter into all parts of social media and all topics of discussion.

These examples also reinforce an important aspect of the PRC's government that is the tension between censorship and visibility in the PRC. As the wolf warriors and trolls have an impact on the PRC's diplomatic reputation and public face to the world, they have drawn too much attention. Xi Jinping himself has categorized the wolf warriors as needing to be toned

down in order to change the image and impression that the PRC has on other countries. While it may be hard to determine Xi's true motivations, his stated goals suggest that the CCP takes trolls and social media seriously and gives serious consequences to the actions of those trolls in the realm of international affairs. It is important to note that some of the cases in this thesis did not elicit real world policy responses. For example, Jimmy Lai and Denise Ho may have been targeted by the trolls but the causes are different, in that the trolls only emerged to attack them following the legal punishments handed down to Jimmy Lai, and the subsequent closure of Apple Daily. The trolling in these cases only took place because the authorities had already begun the chain of events. In a different way, the mocking of mainland Chinese as a result of Typhoon In-fa did not result in a policy response, being a battleground into which only other trolls ventured. However, it seems fair to say that the ways that trolling can affect politics in the real world are much more serious nowadays than when Fuchs made his argument originally, in the arena of both international and domestic politics.

Overall, as trolls begin to have more influence on reputations and the way that a nation presents itself, trolling will become more important in the ways that countries make friends or enemies. As the battlelines between the PRC and the US continue to harden, one can expect that trolls will continue to confront each other over ideological differences and the battle to persuade international netizens of their cause.

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Appendix

Chapter 2

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Taiwan Stupid	台湾傻事. [@台湾傻事]. (2021a). Taiwan Stupid's Chen Meme. Pro-PRC account on Weibo. 台湾傻事. [@台湾傻事]. (2021b). Taiwan Stupid's Chen "Hands" Meme. Pro-PRC account on Weibo. 台湾傻事. [@台湾傻事]. (2021c). Taiwan Stupid's COVID Comic. Pro-PRC account on Weibo.	PRC	Pro-PRC
IvanHueESP	IvanHueESP. [@IvanHueESP]. (2021). PRC netizen comment on Taiwan Stupid's Chen "Hands" meme.	PRC	Pro-PRC
-ellohere-	-ellohere-. [@-ellohere-]. (2021). PRC netizen responding and building off of @IvanHueESP.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Banana mullet from the M78 Nebula	Banana mullet from the M78 Nebula. [@Banana mullet from the M78 Nebula]. (2021). PRC netizen responding to @IvanESP and tags @hurrythunder23.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Starkhaole	Starkhaole. [@Starkhaole]. (2021). PRC netizen replying to @IvanHueESP.	PRC	Pro-PRC
hurrythunder23	hurrythunder23. [@hurrythunder23]. (2021). PRC netizen that was tagged early and tags another PRC user @Baxinshi	PRC	Pro-PRC
Baxinshi	Baxinshi. [@Baxinshi]. (2021). PRC netizen replies to @IvanHueESP and reaffirms the comment.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Jun Qingqianyi	Jun Qingqianyi. [@Jun Qingqianyi]. (2021). PRC netizen using the "Taiwan Number 1" reference.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Angrypug	Angrypug. [@angrypug] (2015). A video game streamer that coined the term/meme "Taiwan Number 1."	USA	Pro-Taiwan
Shark rabbit	Shark rabbit. [@Shark rabbit] (2021). PRC netizen assumes the meme is a coronavirus.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Light. Wait and wait	Light. Wait and wait. [@Light. Wait and wait]. (2021). PRC netizen agreeing with @Shark rabbit.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Looking for Hope 01	Looking for Hope 01. [@Looking for Hope 01]. (2021). PRC netizen laughing at @Shark rabbit's comment.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Little Ayu	Little Ayu [@Little Ayu]. (2021). PRC netizen replies to @Shark rabbit and adds their own perspective on the meme.	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Nothing new	Nothing new. [@Nothing new]. (2021). PRC netizen replies to @Shark rabbit and uses the “Taiwan Number 1” meme.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Wave Again	Wave Again. [Wave Again]. (2021). Standalone comment from a PRC netizen calling every hand is a slap on Chen’s face.	PRC	Pro-PRC
How to like football	How to like football. [@How to like football]. (2021). PRC netizen counting the number of palms on the Taiwan stupid meme.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Terryliu2003	Terryliu2003. [@Terryliu2003]. (2021). PRC netizen responding to @ How to like football and correcting him on the number of palms on the meme.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Want to go to Antarctica to see the aurora	Want to go to Antarctica to see the aurora. [@Want to go to Antarctica to see the aurora]. (2021). PRC netizen also commenting that @How to like football miscounted.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Zhang Erwa 6666	Zhang Erwa 6666. [@Zhang Erwa 6666]. (2021). PRC netizen corrects @How to like football and agreed there are not enough hands.	PRC	Pro-PRC
BCIYS	BCIYS. [BCIYS]. (2021). PRC netizen replied to @How to like football about playing cards.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Bottom He	Bottom He. [@Bottom He]. (2021). PRC netizen correcting @How to like football that there are 22 hands.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Smelly Feet	Smelly Feet. [@Smelly Feet]. Another PRC netizen replying to @How to like football counting 22 hands.	PRC	Pro-PRC
No spring will not come	No spring will not come. [@No spring will not come]. (2021). PRC netizen replies to @How to like football about pictures.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Xiao Xiao123	Xiao Xiao123. [Xiao Xiao123]. (2021). Another PRC netizen correcting @How to like football that they counted 22 hands	PRC	Pro-PRC
Taiwan frog qnmd	Taiwan frog qnmd. [@Taiwan frog qnmd]. (2021). PRC netizen unsure of how they counted 22 hands.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Hiraomi	Hiraomi. [@Hiraomi]. (2021). A standalone comment from a PRC netizen commenting on Taiwan’s role with the CCP.	PRC	Pro-PRC
GIjWhfOKCvPD QKQ	GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ [GIjWhfOKCvPDQKQ]. (2020). A PRC netizen apologizing to Tedros and pretended to be Taiwanese on Twitter.	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
bassman_zone	bassman_zone [@bassman_zone]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen calls out @GjWhfOKCvPDQKQ for their Taiwanese façade.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Abcv2002	Abcv2002. [@Abcv2002]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen replying to @GjWhfOKCvPDQKQ laughing at the thought of a Chinese netizen living in Taiwan.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Tong15978442	Tong15978442. [@Tong15978442]. (2020). PRC netizen apologizing for the “Chinese” people in Taiwan.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Jhouse8787	Jhouse8787. [@Jhouse8787]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen responding to @Tong15978442 by calling the user a “bot.”	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
ggggggggggelo	ggggggggggelo. [@ggggggggggelo]. (2020). Thai netizen claiming that Chiang Kai-Shek would fight @Tong15978442.	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
ILoveCNPanda	ILoveCNPanda. [@ILoveCNPanda]. (2020). A PRC netizen posing as a Taiwanese netizen by begging for Tedros’s forgiveness.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Littlehua28	Littlehua28. [@Littlehua28]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen calls out @ILoveCNPanda for using simplified characters.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
lz1999022	lz1999022. [@lz1999022]. (2020). A PRC netizen replies to @ILoveCNPanda about Tedros.	PRC	Pro-PRC
MOFA_Taiwan	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ROC. [@MOFA_Taiwan]. (2020). Following Tedros’s addressing the trolling issue, MOFA tweeted a response to Tedros’s reasoning for continuing to exclude Taiwan from the WHO.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
shiroihamusan	A Hong Kong Twitter user tweeted a meme at Tedros of a PRC Pepe controlling a Taiwan and Tedros doll.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
suo_niu_zi	Suo_niu_zi. [@suo_niu_zi]. (2020). A PRC netizen disguising themselves as a Taiwanese netizen and begs Tedros for forgiveness.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Wang_Maximus	Wang_Maximus. [@Wang_Maximus]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen calls @suo_niu_zi a person from “West Taiwan.”	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Likiwn	Likiwn. [@Likiwn]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen calls out @suo_niu_zi for being a fake Taiwanese.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Hugo01172002	Hugo01172002. [@Hugo01172002]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen uses vulgarity to call out @suo_niu_zi for pretending to be Taiwanese.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
JerryWu68691138	JerryWu68691138. [@JerryWu68691138]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen claiming that a real Taiwanese would never call the country a “province of China.”	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
formYHom	formYHom. [@formYHom]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen asks @suo_niu_zi when the PRC will stop stealing territories.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
suo_niu_zi	suo_niu_zi. [@suo_niu_zi]. (2020). The PRC netizen of the original post admits to pretending to be Taiwanese.	PRC	Pro-PRC
WilliamYang120	WilliamYang120. [@WilliamYang120]. (2020). Freelance reporter from Taiwan that broke the news of PRC netizens posing as Taiwanese after Tedros claimed he was trolled by racists.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Shiroihamusan	Shiroihamusan. [@Shiroihamusan]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen responds to @WilliamYang120 with a Pepe meme of the PRC and Tedros dolls.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
MamamooWinnie	MamamooWinnie. [@MamamooWinnie]. (2020). Taiwanese netizen responds to @WilliamYang120 exclaiming that the netizens are PRC netizens not Taiwanese.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
EdgarLne	EdgarLne. [@EdgarLne]. (2020). French and Taiwanese netizen responds to @WilliamYang120 with a meme of Tedros with him holding a boot to his head.	France	Pro-Taiwan
TedrosAdhanom6	TedrosAdhanom6. [@TedrosAdhanom6]. (2020). A Taiwanese netizen created a Tedros parody account to respond to @WilliamYang120 and laugh at Tedros’ inability to distinguish difference between simplified and traditional characters.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
RJSHMVKB	RJSHMVKB. [@RJSHMVKB]. (2020). Hong Kong netizen posts an image of a bill with Xi Jinping worth 50 cents for the wumao on Twitter.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
fbgootw	Fbgootw. [@fbgootw]. (2020). Hong Kong netizen responds to @RJSHMVKB by calling PRC netizens wumao and using a pun for Pooh.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
i14369488	i14369488. [i14369488]. (2020). PRC netizen responds to @RJSHMVKB saying that countries that cannot respect others do not deserve respect.	PRC	Pro-PRC
pepe_hat	pepe_hat [pepe_hat] (2020). Hong Kong netizen replies to @i14369488 explaining PRC netizens don't deserve Twitter with a meme of Xi Jinping on a computer.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
NoppadonNaHee	NoppadonNaHee. [NoppadonNaHee]. (2020). Thai netizen posted a meme of COVID, Taiwan, and the PRC with a claim that Taiwan is the "real China" on Twitter.	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
ariel1898	ariel1898. [ariel1898]. (2020). Thai netizen replies to @NoppadonNaHee to say Taiwan is not China.	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
Paikeenaja	Paikeenaja. [Paikeenaja] (2020). Thai netizen also replies to @NoppadonNaHee to say Taiwan is Taiwan	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
yynyynyyn1	yynyynyyn1. [yynyynyyn1]. PRC netizen replies to @NoppadonNaHee to tell the user not to be jealous of the PRC.	PRC	Pro-PRC
I17NT1	I17NT1. [I17NT1]. (2020). Thai netizen tweets "Taiwan is not Chinese."	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
Janet53292567	Janet53292567. [Janet53292567] (2020). Hong Kong netizen replies to @I17NT1 to also claim Hong Kong is not Chinese.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
AKKITO2	AKKITO2. [AKKITO2]. (2020). Hong Kong netizen replies to @I17NT1 and says Taiwan is independent country.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
smile31017085	smile31017085. [smile31017085]. (2020). PRC netizen replies to @I17NT1 and claims Taiwan has been a territory since ancient times.	PRC	Pro-PRC
fujisasuke	fujisasuke. [fujisasuke] (2020). Hong Kong netizen replies to @smile31017085 to refute the PRC's claim to Taiwan.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
chengch73970660	chengch73970660. [@chengch73970660]. (2020). Hong Kong netizen also replies to @I17NT1 to say Taiwan is a country.	Hong Kong	Pro-Taiwan
CHENQINGQING9	CHENQINGQING9. [@CHENQINGQING9]. PRC netizen replies to @I17NT1 to try and compare Bangkok to Taiwan.	PRC	Pro-PRC
I17NT1	I17NT1. [@I17NT1]. (2020) The original poster replies to @CHENQINGQING9 to refute the user's claim that Bangkok and Taiwan's situation are not the same.	Thailand	Pro-Taiwan
FTV News	民間全民電視公. (2020). Taiwanese news network that hid a Winnie the Pooh Shadow behind Xi Jinping.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Taos	陶斯. (2020). Taiwanese netizen replies to FTV's video with a side-by-side image of Winnie the Pooh and Xi Jinping.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Han Sen	韓森. (2020). Taiwanese netizen remarks on FTV's video claiming that COVID was renamed to Jinping Pneumonia.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Li Kunyi	李堃異. (2020). Taiwanese netizen comments on FTV's video with a meme of Xi's shadow and Winnie the Pooh as the main image.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
JustinYogaChen	JustinYogaChen. [u/JustinYogaChen]. (2020). A Taiwanese Reddit user reposting FTV News' Pooh Shadow	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Gregonar	Gregonar. [u/ Gregonar]. (2020). Canadian Reddit user replies to u/JustinYogaChen and says Taiwan needs to break the "glass hearts" of the CCP.	Canada	Pro-Taiwan
S4t0FJWRA	S4t0FJWRA. [u/ S4t0FJWRA]. (2020). Vietnamese Reddit user replies to u/JustinYogaChen sarcastically repeats the sentiment that the feelings of the people of the PRC are hurt.	Vietnam	Pro-Taiwan
konigsjagdpanther	Konigsjagdpanther. [u/ konigsjagdpanther]. (2020). Malaysian Australian user responds to u/S4t0FJWRA saying the CEO of racism called.	Australia	Pro-Taiwan
Johari82	Johari82 [u/ Johari82]. (2020). Australian Reddit user laughs at hurting the feelings of Winnie/Xi Jinping	Australia	Pro-Taiwan
Tyro, the village next door	Tyro, the village next door. (2020). PRC Steam user downvoted Devotion and states they are an idiot.	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 2 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Fat Yu Yan every day Hu	Fat Yu Yan every day Hu. (2020). PRC Steam user down votes Devotion and gives the game a -10 star review.	PRC	Pro-PRC
DRANGONHEART	DRANGONHEART (2020). PRC Steam user also down votes Devotion calling it disgusting.	PRC	Pro-PRC
544659465	544659465 (2020). PRC Steam user down votes Devotion and points out how no mainlanders will support this game developer.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Luo Yuan Yinxue	Luo Yuan Yinxue. (2020). PRC Steam user thinks the game is good but still down votes because of the talisman.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Fktlwosm	Fktlwosm. (2020). Taiwanese Steam user that up votes Devotion as well as recommends all games have a Winnie talisman to keep mainlanders away.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
Ivywang	Ivywang. (2020). Taiwanese Steam user that up votes Devotion and wants to support Red Candle Games.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
LESS GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO	LESS GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. (2020). Taiwanese Steam user that up voted the game and wants the Devotion soundtrack played at their funeral	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan
PeLiaS	PeLiaS. (2020). Taiwanese Steam user that up votes the game and asks everyone to stop abusing the up/down vote system.	Taiwan	Pro-Taiwan

Chapter 3

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
ezracheungtoto	ezracheungtoto. [@ezracheungtoto]. (2021). Hong Kong freelance reporter broke the news of Jimmy Lai's arrest and the freezing of his assets due to the NSL on Twitter.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
Miiockm	Miiockm. [@Miiockm]. (2021). Hong Kong netizen replying to @ezracheungtoto implies that the Hong Kong government is using Lai's assets to pay for their new building.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
linjack88	linjack88. [@linjack88]. (2021). Hong Kong netizen that replies to @ezracheungtoto and their friend to claim the Hong Kong government is using NSL as a way to take money from Lai.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
GuPoints	GuPoints. [@GuPoints]. (2021). Hong Kong netizen replies to @ezracheungtoto stating that there is no future for one country, two systems.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
570mph	570mph. [@570mph]. (2021). Hong Kong netizen replies to @ezracheungtoto that the government needs the money to continue to use unlicensed massage parlors.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
weiweiy-	weiweiy- [@weiweiy-]. (2021). PRC Weibo user replies to the People's Daily's cartoon and calls Lai a dog and that his assets need to be frozen.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Self-discipline Level 1	Self-discipline Level 1. [@Self-discipline Level 1]. (2021). PRC netizen replying to People's Daily and expressing their satisfaction with Jimmy Lai's arrest.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Xiaopu 199702	Xiaopu 199702. [@Xiaopu 199702]. (2021). PRC netizen replies to People's Daily cartoon by saying anyone that joins in the chaos in Hong Kong should be shot.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Anael sugar treasure	Anael sugar treasure. [@Anael sugar treasure]. (2021). PRC netizen replying to @Xiaopu 199702 that they would join in with them in shooting.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Lin Zhi Mi 650	Lin Zhi Mi 650. [@Lin Zhi Mi 650]. (2021). PRC netizen suggests in the comments that the assets should go to his family not the Hong Kong government.	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 3 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Are you also looking at the stars and the moon	Are you also looking at the stars and the moon. [@Are you also looking at the stars and the moon]. (2021). A PRC netizen replies directly to @Lin Zhi Mi 650 to ask if they are related to Lai, so that they can have the money too.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Ming Dao Zi Day	Ming Dao Zi Day. [@Ming Dao Zi Day]. (2021). Another PRC netizen tells @Lin Zhi Mi 650 that the money belongs to the Hong Kong government.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Uncle Sheep	Uncle Sheep. [@Uncle Sheep]. (2021). PRC netizen tells @Lin Zhi Mi 650 that the user must have a brain injury to think that way.	PRC	Pro-PRC
I don't know so oops	I don't know so oops. [@I don't know so oops]. (2021). PRC netizen tells @Lin Zhi Mi 650 to go back to the island.	PRC	Pro-PRC
stevz17	stevz17 [@stevz17]. (2021). A PRC Twitter user who responds to Denise Ho's selfie that it is a good day that Apple Daily has closed down.	PRC	Pro-PRC
PreofRHD	PreofRHD. [@PreofRHD]. (2021). A PRC netizen responds to @stevz17 who follows fringe separatist groups and believes that closing Apple Daily brings the PRC closer to collapse.	PRC	Anti-CCP (fringe separatist)
JimbooStein	JimbooStein. [@JimbooStein]. (2021). A PRC citizen who lives in Taiwan, and shared a cartoon of a Hong Kong protester faking her injuries.	PRC	Pro-PRC
C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk	C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk. [@C1s2Z2xOFTx5iRk]. (2021). A Hong Kong Twitter user who attacks @JimbooStein for being a "powder maggot" and not Taiwanese.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
shuangziXD	shuangziXD [@shuangziXD]. (2021). A PRC Twitter user who attacks Denise Ho as a "Canadian slave."	PRC	Pro-PRC
KenNg68852879	KenNg68852879 [@KenNg68852879]. (2021). A Hong Kong Twitter user replies @shuangziXD to who attacks the above user as a wumao and a Communist bandit.	Hong Kong	Pro-Hong Kong
Zhenhua75848980	Zhenhua75848980 [@Zhenhua75848980]. (2021). A PRC Twitter user who attacks Denise Ho as a foreign asset conspiring against the PRC.	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 4

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Wuheqilin	乌合麒麟. [@乌合麒麟]. (2020). Wolf warrior artist.	PRC	Pro-PRC
CGTN	CGTN. [@CCTVBEJING]. (2020). Main news station in the PRC.	PRC	Pro-PRC
zlj517	Zhao, L. [@zlj517]. (2020). Spokesperson for the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Trorez	Trorez. [u/trorez]. (2021). A Croatian Reddit user in r/ModernPropaganda that reposted Wuheqilin's work.	PRC	Pro-PRC
QyMbEr	QyMbEr (2021). [u/QyMbEr]. (2021). PRC Reddit user from r/China that admires Wuheqilin's work.	PRC	Pro-PRC
sphinctasniffa	Sphinctasniffa. [u/sphinctasniffa]. (2021). Australian Reddit user replies to u/QyMbEr that they are disturbed by the Xinjiang situation and the misinformation spread by PRC netizens.	Australia	Pro-US
Accomplished_One_640	Accomplished_One_640. [u/Accomplished_One_640]. (2021). Canadian Reddit user that replies to u/sphinctasniffa that the allegations of camps in Xinjiang are projection based on Native boarding schools in North America.	Canada	Pro-PRC
BlueInq	BlueInq. [u/BlueInq]. (2021). British Reddit user who explains what is going on in Wuheqilin's picture.	UK	Pro-US
fartsforpresident	fartsforpresident. [u/fartsforpresident]. (2021). Canadian Reddit user replies to u/BlueInq who argues that the slavery argument is a false equivalence.	Canada	Pro-US
ShankaraChandra	ShankaraChandra. [u/ShankaraChandra]. (2021). Indian Reddit user who replies to u/fartsforpresident says that the allegations of human rights abuses are projections based on historic American crimes.	India	Pro-PRC
Temstar	Temstar. [u/temstar]. (2021). PRC Reddit user from r/Sino reposting Wuheqilin's work.	PRC	Pro-PRC
RespublicaCuriae	RespublicaCuriae. [u/RespublicaCuriae]. (2021). Korean-Canadian Reddit user comments on the u/temstar's post and laugh at Americans for not understanding the symbolism of their republic.	Canada	Pro-PRC
wakeup2019	wakeup2019. [u/wakeup2019]. (2021). A PRC Reddit user also comments u/temstar's post explaining the parody of the separation of powers as being into "thief, mob, and murderer."	PRC	Pro-PRC

Chapter 4 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
lurker4lyfe6969	lurker4lyfe6969. [u/lurker4lyfe6969]. (2021). A Canadian Redditor who sarcastically remarks on u/wakeup2019's comment about the concept of checks and balances.	Canada	Pro-PRC
orewabakadesu	orewabakadesu. [u/orewabakadesu]. (2021). A German Reddit user responding to u/lurker4lyfe6969 who says that when he turned eighteen he realized that the separation of powers and checks and balances is meaningless.	Germany	Pro-PRC
King-Sassafrass	King-Sassafrass. [u/King-Sassafrass]. (2021). A Canadian Reddit user responds to u/temstar's post mockingly suggests that the Australians will angrily respond to Wuheqilin's art like they did to the previous piece.	Canada	Pro-PRC
FourLastSongs	FourLastSongs. [u/FourLastSongs]. (2021). An Australian Redditor replies to u/King-Sassafrass and mocks the Australian government's response to the Wuheqilin piece as a "doctored image."	Australia	Pro-PRC
svsm	svsm. [u/svsm]. (2021). An Australian Reddit user who explains all the symbolism in the picture.	Australia	Pro-PRC
NvMe_24	NvMe_24. [u/NvMe_24]. (2021). An Australian Reddit user responds to u/svsm about Western media response to galleries featuring Wuheqilin's art.	Australia	Pro-PRC
Zhughe Wolong	Zhughe Wolong [@Zhughe Wolong]. (2021). The PRC's Political & Legal Affairs Commission that posted the controversial meme of India on Weibo.	PRC	Pro-PRC
Hungrydano	Hungrydano. [u/Hungrydano]. (2021). A British Reddit user responds to the who attacks the PRC for starting the COVID-19 pandemic.	UK	Pro-India
JasonTLBC	JasonTLBC. [u/JasonTLBC]. (2021). An American Redditor who comments on the image that the PRC has damaged its reputation so badly that the rest of the world hates them.	US	Pro-India
CertifiedMainlander	CertifiedMainlander. [u/CertifiedMainlander]. (2021). A PRC Reddit user replies to u/JasonTLBC who is critical of the CCP and points out that most Chinese think the world doesn't care about their attitude to other countries.	PRC	Pro-India

Chapter 4 (Continued)

User Name	Source	Nationality	Political Orientation
Codydodd	Codydodd. [u/Codydodd]. (2021). A Canadian Reddit user who points out that the rocket in question was projected to crash to Earth somewhere in the Americas.	Canada	Pro-India
Training-Parsnip	Training-Parsnip. [u/Training-Parsnip]. (2021). An Australia Redditor who claims that India is actually ahead of China in terms of space exploration.	Australia	Pro-India
nekopanchi	nekopanchi. [u/nekopanchi]. (2021). A Taiwanese Reddit user who asks if the original poster had apologized for posting the image.	Taiwanese	Pro-India
[deleted]	[deleted]. (2021). A deleted Reddit user who angrily says that the CCP will never apologize for anything. Replying to above.	User deleted	Pro-India
nme00	nme00. [u/nme00]. (2021). An American Redditor responds to the deleted user says he hopes that PRC citizens will realize how terrible their country is.	US	Pro-India
Lost_human19	Lost_human19. [@Lost_human19] (2021). Indian Twitter user that posted the flooding in the PRC.	India	Pro-India
XLNC	XLNC. [@XLNC]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who sarcastically explains that the cars are running away from their owners.	India	Pro-India
rw_nationalist	rw_nationalist. [@rw_nationalist]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who attacks Chinese people for eating bugs in dirty water.	India	Pro-India
CobblePriya	CobblePriya. [@CobblePriya]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who says that Chinese people will eat anything that moves. Replying to above.	India	Pro-India
smile_maggi	smile_maggi. [@smile_maggi]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who says that the floods are karma hitting back.	India	Pro-India
berozgarKisan	berozgarKisan. [@berozgarKisan]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who compares the water to bat soup. Replying to above.	India	Pro-India
smile_maggi	smile_maggi. [@smile_maggi]. (2021). An Indian Twitter user who says that the floods are spreading, just like COVID. Replying to above.	India	Pro-India
Niladriguha15	Niladriguha15. [@Niladriguha15]. (2021). Another Indian Twitter user who mocks the PRC for always talking about their superior management and development.	India	Pro-India