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China Information Operations Newsletter 1 February 2022

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The China Information Operations Newsletter is edited by Hannah Bailey, a researcher at the [Programme on Democracy and Technology](#) (DemTech) at Oxford University. This newsletter is **a 7 minute read**.

Surveilling the World

China's sophisticated domestic surveillance tools are being used to track foreign populations and silence Chinese nationals living overseas. A [report](#) by the Washington Post reveals China's state media, police force, and military are mining Western social media platforms, such

as Facebook and Twitter. These agencies are tracking “anti-China personnel,” including foreign academics and journalists. The New York Times [describes](#) how police officers are using information from Western social media platforms to pursue Chinese people living overseas who criticise Beijing.

Chinese state actors aren’t just surveilling international social media platforms; they are also attempting to alter the content on these websites. An eleven-month [investigation](#) by Miburo Solutions unpacks China’s multifaceted disinformation campaigns on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. A separate [report](#) by the China Media project reveals Chinese state media journalists often disguise their affiliation with the Chinese state on social media platforms in an attempt to attract foreign audiences.

Only 5-star reviews allowed for Xi’s speeches. [Reuters](#) describes how Amazon complies with Chinese state censorship on its Chinese website. Amazon was instructed to remove any negative review of Xi Jinping’s published speeches, in addition to other books favourable to the Communist Party.

China’s globalised censorship efforts are alarming intelligence officials. Canada’s spy agency has [called](#) for a tougher approach to China’s interference with Canadian media, which it claims has become “normalised.” An [article](#) in The Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies argues that the Chinese Communist Party’s international surveillance infrastructure is already inducing self-censorship among Western academics.

Silencing Hong Kong

Two of the last remaining independent media outlets in Hong Kong have shut down. Stand News [announced](#) its closure hours following a raid by 200 national security police officers. A week later, Citizen News ceased operations, citing “drastic changes in society and the worsening of the media environment.” Reporters Without Borders [describes](#) the media environment in China as a “great leap backwards.”

As pro-Beijing candidates [claimed victory](#) in the recent Hong Kong Legislative Council elections, Chinese authorities issued arrest warrants for activists based abroad calling for an election boycott. The Wall Street Journal editorial board [denounced](#) Chinese authorities for the move, which appears to be an attempt by Beijing to enforce a recent law that outlaws any election boycott movements.

The AI Revolution: Automated Justice and Weaponry

Researchers in China claim to have developed an algorithm that can charge people with crimes. The researchers [say](#) the AI tool can identify eight common crimes, including dangerous driving and ‘picking quarrels’ with 97% accuracy. But would such systems be accepted by the public? An [article](#) in the Journal of Politics finds considerable public support for the China’s social credit system, which uses automation and big data for digital surveillance and repression.

Washington has sanctioned eight Chinese technology firms for supporting repressive surveillance of ethnic minorities. The US Treasury [states](#) that these eight entities conducted biometric surveillance of ethnic minorities, focussing on the Uyghur minority, and as such, US companies and individuals are banned from trading publicly traded securities associated with these companies. Meanwhile, the US also [claims](#) China is developing biotechnologies for various military applications, including “brain machine interfaces.”

China's Tech Environment

The Chinese government is continuing to take so-called "golden shares," that is, minority stakes in private technology companies. While previously the focus had been on companies that produced online content, the practice is [expanding](#) to include a platform arranging trucking services and potentially ride-hailing business, Didi. Bloomberg [reported](#) that Alibaba is seeking to sell its 30% share in Weibo, China's equivalent to Twitter, to the Chinese state. The New York Times [writes](#) that China's continued regulatory crackdown and state takeovers are dampening entrepreneurship in China.

China's data security laws are making it harder for investors to get information. The Wall Street Journal [reports](#) that in an attempt to limit the transfer of politically sensitive data, Chinese authorities have restricted information on healthcare, public transportation, and infrastructure.

Amidst regulatory crackdowns on the mainland and new restrictions from the US, Chinese tech companies are looking to expand to other markets. [Protocol](#) maps the outward expansion of Chinese technology companies to Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America in 2021.

Problems with China's COVID Lockdowns

As Xi'an entered COVID-19 lockdown, residents [complained](#) online about the lack of food supplies. Social media videos [revealed](#) locals swapping technology gadgets for food, despite authorities claiming all households were receiving free food.

QR codes are failing in Xi'an. Amidst Xi'an's COVID-19 lockdown, the New York Times [reports](#) the city-operated QR system has suffered multiple breakdowns. Residents rely on the codes to prove their negative covid status.

The Nationalist Youth on Social Media

Nationalist bloggers in China are becoming more aggressive in their attacks against groups and individuals who voice concerns about China's impact on the world. The Economist [details](#) how these groups, often supported by Chinese state-backed media outlets, attack individuals who criticise China's impact on the environment and accuse them of being foreign spies. But are all online youth nationalist? An [article](#) in the Journal of Contemporary China finds attitudes among China's youth are more divergent than we might think.

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