A Narrative Approach to Studying Chinese Online Influence Campaigns: Comparing Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia Cases

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Overview

1. What? China Influence Ops
2. How? Culturally Resonant Narratives
3. Where? 3 Country Comparison
4. Why? Policy Implications

What? China Influence Operations

- **Russia ops are well-known**
- **China ops less so**
- **We study China from a narrative approach**

How? Culturally Resonant Narratives

- **State of the art**
- **Need?**
  - **Cultural knowledge**
  - **Narrative principles**

State of the Art: Cognitive Psychology

- ***Universal*** solutions to disinfo and influence ops
- Focuses on ***individual*** cognition
- Ignores the ***cultural group*** to which individuals belong

Need: Cultural Knowledge

What *is* culture?

- Shared
- Patterns
- Behavior
- ***Perception***
- Socially learned

HOW?

STORY!

Need: Narrative Principles

- Narratives construct **reality** for their audiences (Bruner, 1991).

- All **decisions** are based on narrative rationality

- **Cognitive schema** that structures information about the world (Branigan, 1992).

The imperative?

To address influence operations…

Identify localized, culture-specific narratives

Where? 3 Country Comparison

Localizing influence ops in:
- **Philippines**
- **Malaysia**
- **Indonesia**

Philippines

Main priority: nationalism

 - Erode U.S.-Philippine alliance

Narratives: U.S. neo-colonialism and warmongers.

e.g. EDCA, fear of Taiwan conflict

Malaysia

Main priority: race relations

- Ethnic-Chinese Malays (~25% of pop.)

Narratives: friendship, benevolence, prosperity, development

e.g. Covert political influence and BRI

Indonesia

Main priority: "Islamic diplomacy"

- Religious orgs. hold political power.

Narratives: promote CCP as Islam-ally and the US as an adversary.

e.g.
Cheng Ho, War on Terror

Why? Security and Policy Implications

- Understand China's approach
- Respond to it
- Replicate cultural narrative approach in other global contexts, e.g., Oceania

Thank you!

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Q to Scott about navy application

His answer: —I think a gap exists in US policy making and strategic communication between understanding/knowing the TOPICs of influence (economic benefit, security guarantees, etc) and the NARRATIVES/TROPES/THEMES that can cement or accelerate the influence power of the topic.

—are there patterns to Chinese online influence, if so what are they AND what do they mean (in terms of the subect influence audience like PH or Indonesia, or in terms of global audience—the connection to the global stage is a point of connection to ZigZag); one way to do this is monitor Chinese reaction to US cooperative activities in the region; Rebecca really wants to teach Navy and USMC PAOs to be better.
—measures of impact / effectiveness of any Chinese influence (a place to start could be ZigZag)
—what narratives actually might undermine US interests in region.
More to follow as I think more about it

GUIDELINES for PODIUM POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

Please provide your POWERPOINT Presentation to the HFM Office
By 29th October 2023

1. The most common mistake that authors make is one of putting too much into their papers so that they have to speak quickly at the beginning and, when they realize or are reminded that time is running short, the flood gates open and words come out in torrents.

3. Many authors are aware of the need to speak slowly at the beginning of their presentation, but tend to forget about it once they are well under way. Please try to remind yourself of the need to keep the pace of your presentation low. Remember, your audience will be multinational; therefore, many members of the audience are less fluent in English then you.

4. The time allowed for presentation of your paper will be between 20 minutes for the Keynote Speakers and 25 minutes for other speakers.
   The meeting programme is based on the premise that authors will not overrun, and the Session Chairperson are instructed to keep tightly to the schedule.

5. Try to keep your sound level reasonably high. When using a fixed position microphone, speak directly into it and do not turn your back while discussing a slide!

6. And now some **DO**'s and **DON'T**s:

   DO prepare a set of cue words, which will bring out the highlights of your presentation;
   DO try out your presentation on a tape recorder to ensure that the timing is right; you
   can also correct any tendency to whisper or shout;
   DO try out your presentation on a colleague before coming to the meeting;
   DON'T use obscure terms, slang, abbreviations or nicknames and especially do not use
   groups of initials if they are not internationally recognized – the meaning will be lost in the
   translated version;

7. **SLIDES and VUGRAPHS: Please do not use more than 10-12 slides or vugraphs for your presentation.** **For PowerPoint presentation use 22 Font size as a minimum if you wish that the auditorium is be able to read the information. Remember the last row is much further from the screen than you are!**

1. **Russian threats:** our research on Chinese efforts on information and cognitive warfare is related to Russian threats.
2. **Why is Southeast Asia important?** a region vulnerable to Chinese influence efforts and characterized by developing economies and historical, cultural and political traditions dramatically different from those shared by Western states.
3. **China in Southeast Asia:** China has already launched its cognitive warfare in Southeast Asia via the localization of its information campaigns.
4. **Culture/Nuanced narratives:** China leverages understanding of cultural nuances to carry out its information campaigns, resulting in different prioritizations of narratives across the region.
5. **Comparative cases:** Narratives that resonate in the Philippines may not necessarily be effective in Malaysia, or Indonesia and vice versa.

State of the Art: Theory of everything

- National defense agencies have scrambled to research **psychological defense,** disinformation resilience, and cognitive warfare
- The imperative? Find **universal solutions** that are scalable and replicable–a one-size fits all.
- The limitation? The sociocultural context within which the individual lives is ignored
  - must be met with an equal attention to socio-cultural nuance

From Steve's section in the paper

Dautenhahn (2001) claims that storytelling is the very reason humans developed communication and language in the first place

How do narratives influence the way we think and behave? We like to think of ourselves as logical beings, making choices based on carefully considered and rational calculations of costs and benefits. **Fisher** (1984, 1989) questions this. He argues that **all our decisions are really based on narrative rationality,**

Narrative functions as a type of cognitive schema that structures incoming information about the world (Branigan, 1992).

Narratives construct reality for their audiences (Bruner, 1991).

Influence Ops must consider cultural differences adapt narratives accordingly

We are interested in understanding how agents might engage in cognitive influence to manipulate how we know what we know

Illustration of China Approach

- **China's influence is culturally adapted.**
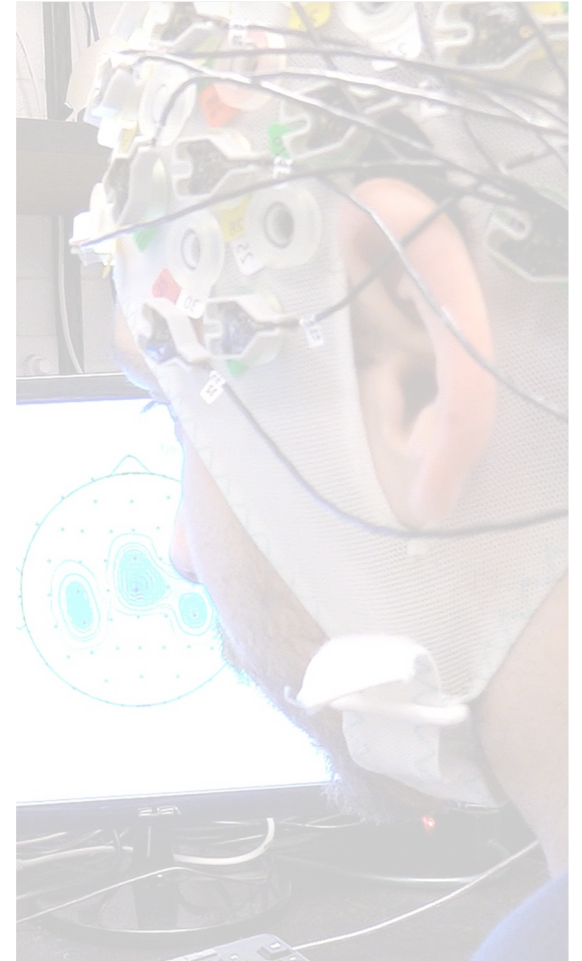- **Chinese Influence Operation Examples**

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Template

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- Text
- Text
- Text

GSI research units

Center for Accelerating Operational Efficiency (CAOE)

- Data analytics
- Operations research and systems analysis
- Economic analysis
- Homeland security risk sciences
- *Current portfolio: $40M*

Center for Cybersecurity and Trusted Foundations (CTF)

- Human-auto malware detection
- Dark Web market behaviors
- Cyber-resilient energy delivery systems
- Capture the Flag competitions
- *Current portfolio: $30M+*

Center for Human, AI, and Robot Teaming (CHART)

- Designing human/machine teams for mission success
- Distributed team training with virtual teammates
- Autonomous and remotely piloted vehicles
- *Current portfolio: $12M+*

Center on Narrative, Disinformation, and Strategic Influence (NDSI)

- Adversarial narratives and manipulated media
- Education journalists and news consumers
- Tracking and mitigating the spread of disinformation on social media

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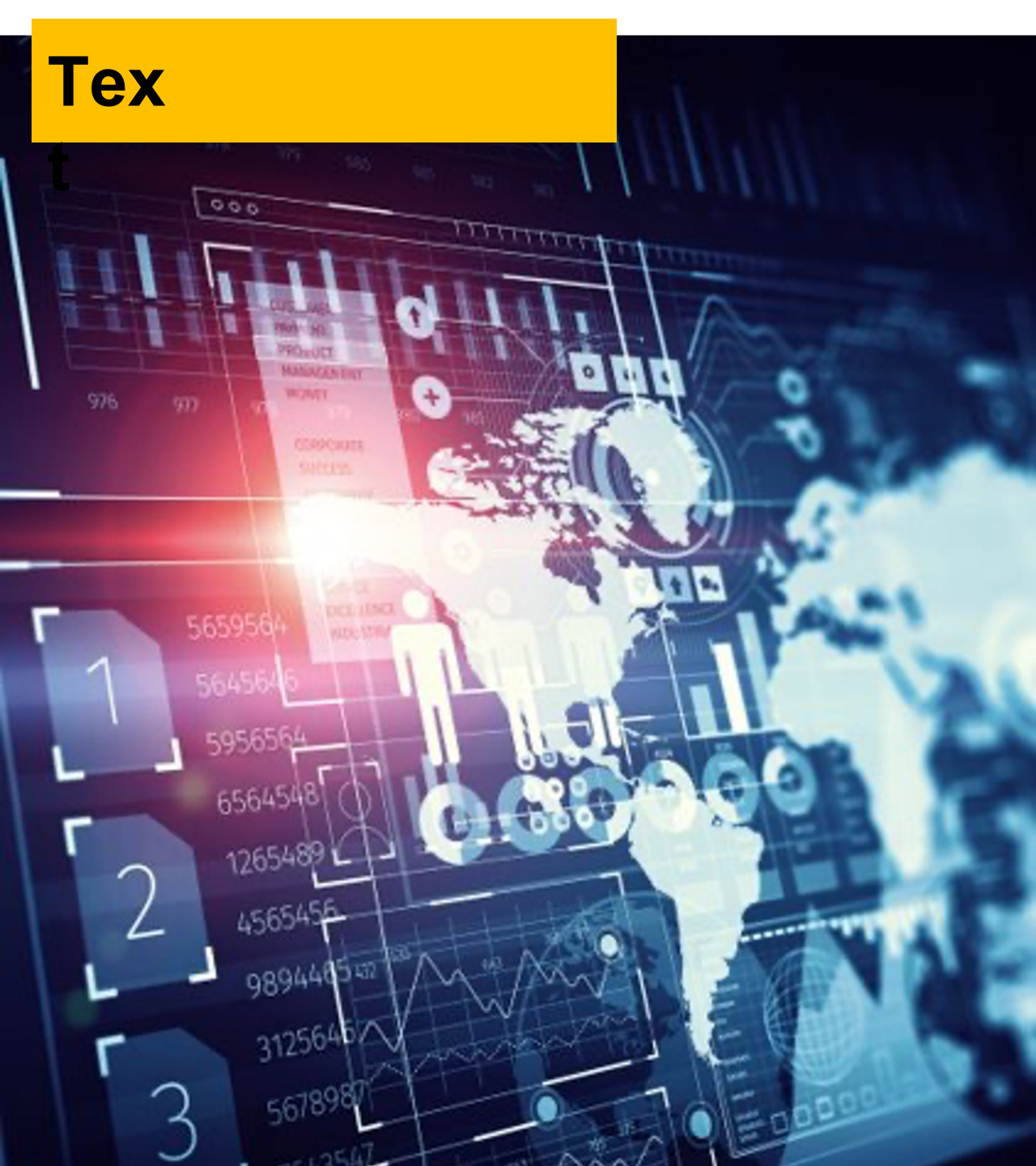
$7.3+ Million in grants awarded since founding of pillar in 2018
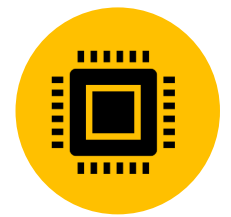
47% win rate since the founding

12 universities and 5 industry partners on current or completed grants

20 active members of the Disinformation Working Group

4 projects currently in execution

Four priority nodes on **ASU Sol High Performance Computing cluster** (16 GPUs & 256 cores each)