

Prólogo

"Post-truth", in the stupefying aftermath of both Brexit and *anno Dominus Trumpini*, was chosen as the word of the year by *Oxford Dictionaries* in 2016. According to the established online dictionary, post-truth "relates to or denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Nonetheless, the word post-truth is not a novel innovation, not by a longshot. It was coined by a Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich in his essay in *The Nation* 1992, in which the author claimed that the (uncovered) American political cover-ups, complots and military conflicts have ushered in a "post-truth world".

Be that it as it may, it was in year 2016 when the word truly caught wind under its wings in the Anglosphere, simultaneously emerging into a globally shared household meme. Ever since then, traditional Western gatekeepers of knowledge (i.e., political institutions and organizations, media outlets and academia) seem to have spared no effort to defend

their roles as the authorized creators and distributors of commonly shared knowledge. The rumors of the death ("post") of truth have been greatly exaggerated, we have been informed by the very same gushing gatekeepers. In the same panting breath, however, one has been illuminated of "fake news", "alternative facts", "hoaxes" and "conspiracy theories" that spread on social media like a troll-spilled poison in the village well with well-known Manichean consequences: society divides into a toxicated community of antagonistic tribes, and a shattering fear of losing fixed meanings in the minds of the believers of the objectivist truth. No more Truth with a capital T, merely tons of tiny t-truths, or even ltruths: bespoke, solipistic beliefs to the alienated individuals of the first "truly" postmodern era. Oh, the horror!

Speaking of the devil (of the modern), i.e., postmodernism, let alone any cynically inclined school of thought or ism preceding it in human history, there is nothing new about the idea of the contingent role of facts and truths or their (plausible) implicit subordination to the realities of political power relations and structures, let alone (explicit) blatant manipulation of (social) facts by political actors. Sure enough, to my experience, this seemed like the core message a great wealth scholarly work dedicated to themes of post-truth and post-factual politics, in their similarly-named academic conferences, wanted to convey. Machiavelli (the art of politically expedient ruling), Nietzsche

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(genealogy), Weber (subjectivism), Marx (false consciousness), Gramsci (hegemony), Gadamer (hermeneutics), Lyotard (the postmodern condition), Derrida (deconstruction), Foucault (the relation of power and knowledge), Baudrillard (hyperreality), were name-dropped again and again, *ad nauseam*, as a scholar after another hurried from a panel to another to claim, some in a most hipster-like complacency—at least I did—that “we have seen this already, and we were interested in this topic before anyone else was interested in it. Post-truth is so last season.”

Another reason why the theme year of post-truth (politics) made me like a full-blown Faustian balloon had to do with my academic orientation in China. As anyone who has ever bothered to turn a page or two of a book on Chinese political history well understands, the clearly Anglospherical concept of “post-truth” does not “travel” neatly—to use the language of comparative studies—and translate neatly into a Chinese political language. Since the establishment of People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Communist Party of China (CCP) alone has wielded the ultimate veto right of deciding over the facts and fiction, over the (T-)truth and false. And as there is no political competition in Middle Kingdom in which average Chinese have a say to say, there is no need to garner their support by providing any other political narratives than the One(/s) that support the grand story of the CCP and its messianic mission in fulfilling the Chinese Dream.

Admittedly, instead of looking at traditional top-down dynamics of Chinese society through the conceptual prism of post-truth, one might find more analytic value in analyzing belief systems and power dynamics of the Chinese party-state and party elites. Would it not be fascinating to discover that the party big cats, or even parts of the CCP apparatus itself, exhibit occasional or even holistic tendency of neglecting (“hard”) numerical and statistical facts along with (“hardcore”) established historical facts and interpretations and fall gladly into temptations of Trumpian manoeuvres and rhetoric: i.e., endless displays of pompous showmanship conjoined with declarations of “alternative facts” and rants of conspiracy theories. Imagine if this kind of populist (post-truth) practice would truly enjoy the status of a *modus operandi*—or even a considerable role—inside the CCP party organ. Certainly, I acknowledge that this assertion might sound somewhat speculative and counterintuitive when one thinks of the (seemingly) serenely-looking facade of bureaucrat-politicians of the CCP. But then again, what do we really know about the ways and woes of the world’s biggest political organization? For the most part, its black-boxish inner remains sealed for political scientists.

Fair enough, even if my prototheoretical speculation on the possible “post-truth” aspects of the CCP party and its leadership might turn out to be a bit difficult to reveal in any research project, at least for the time being, one should, however, consider that in every human group/organization there are countless numbers of informal ideologies that prevail simultaneously with the formal ideology (aka the Big Truth). It is not a striking surprise that more or less everybody possess a great many beliefs that one might not be willing to articulate due to the socializing effects of peer-group and organizational pressure. That is to say, one might state that she believes in socially established “facts” even if deep down her thoughts (in the respective question) are based upon unstructured, even esoteric and conspiratorial, premises. In some cases, individuals might not even be aware of the co-existence of their “counterfactual” beliefs. And, in the same vein, as the mere act of accepting facts requires accepting narratives, explanation systems that make facts understandable, and as the endorsement of those narratives (scientific, political, religious, etc.) is to a great extent a process of life-long socialization in which parents, educators, home country, religion, among others,

have exerted influence on the development of the individual cognition, it leaves scanty room for a Lockean fantasy of *Tabula rasa*, i.e., picking facts without any intellectual apriori commitments. Emotional appeal over the facts? Nothing new there.

All in all, it follows that I, as a budding, hipsterite social scientist with a background in Asian studies, cannot help but frown upon the most Anglospherical fuzz about post-truth politics. How about resuming to discuss “pre-truth” politics, anyone?