

## ISPP Virtual Seminar Series – Asia-Pacific Region October 2022

Organizers: Ying-yi Hong, Diwa Malaya Quinones, Peter Beattie, Idhamsyah Eka Putra

21 October (Friday) 2022, at 2-4pm (Hong Kong time)

Speaker: **Dr. Peter Beattie**, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Title: **Knowledge Matters: Comparing Russians' and U.S. Americans' Bias and Knowledge of the Background to the War in Ukraine**

Host/Moderator: **Dr. Ying-yi Hong**, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

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### Abstract

Modern information warfare includes attempts to manipulate the information mass publics use to form political opinions, thereby influencing voting decisions, support for foreign policies, and other forms of political behavior. And in some versions of democratic theory, public knowledge is essential for effective self-government. From both perspectives, what mass publics know and do not know about political issues powerfully influences their opinions, affecting public support for, or opposition to, political policies. Hence it is important to know what U.S. and Russian publics know about the background to the war in Ukraine: knowledge and ignorance delimit the range of opinions people form about the war, influencing public support for different policy options. Knowledge (in)accuracy does not *determine* opinions, but it does affect the likelihood of arriving at some opinions over others – and engaging in political (in)action accordingly. In July 2020, we collected data from quota samples in Russia and the U.S., using a technique from signal detection theory (SDT) to generate measures of accuracy and bias in knowledge of the background to the war. Our SDT measures test the accuracy of, and bias in, knowledge of U.S. and Russian narratives explaining the war, using a battery of true and false items that comprise parts of the dominant narratives featured in mass media outlets in the two countries. As hypothesized, the data reveal that Russians and U.S. Americans look like mirror images of each other: Russians demonstrating greater knowledge accuracy relating to the dominant U.S. narrative but knowledge bias in favor of the Russian narrative, and U.S. Americans demonstrating greater knowledge accuracy relating to the dominant Russian narrative but knowledge bias in favor of the U.S. narrative.

### Speaker Bio

Peter Beattie's research focuses on the role of ideas and information in political economy. This interest was sparked during law school, when he was first introduced to the American school of legal realism. After practicing law for six years, he entered a PhD program to

explore the relationship between psychology and political economy, particularly how the news media affects the functioning of contemporary democracies, focusing on the U.S. His first book, *Social Evolution, Political Psychology, and the Media in Democracy: The Invisible Hand in the U.S. Marketplace of Ideas*, describes the role the news media currently plays, contrasting it with the role it is supposed to play within democratic theory. Influences from the demand side – political psychological biases that affect how users of news media interpret information – and from the supply side – political economic pressures affecting what information and interpretations are offered by the news media – distort the marketplace of ideas, or the ecology of information, and frustrate the promise of democracy.