
Žiga VODOVNIK*

POLITICAL SCIENCE OF THE FUTURE: ADOLF BIBIČ AND THE FUTUROLOGICAL COMPONENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Abstract. *The article presents an attempt to make sense of Adolf Bibič's oeuvre as a whole. It reveals his broader intellectual (and also political) project along with his coherent and systematic analysis of what may also be understood as the 'possibilities' of political science. We claim that Bibič's various analyses and interventions actually pivot on the question of the future or, even better, the role and position of political science in it. We name this aspect of Bibič's oeuvre the 'political science of the future', which necessarily returns to the history of political ideas and political history to even be able to understand the current political relations and their contradictions. The ambition and capacity of the 'political science of the future' is not merely an explanation of what exists since, as Bibič states, political science is the key science for facing the challenges of the future and, accordingly, vital for our existence – political and physical.*

Keywords: *Adolf Bibič, political science, future, state, democracy, citizenship.*

INTRODUCTION

When I was a student at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana I did not have the privilege of getting to know Professor Adolf Bibič in the lecture room. Nevertheless, as a freshman in 1997, namely, 1 year after Bibič's death, his *oeuvre*, meeting all the criteria of academic excellence (breadth, depth and originality) was available to me. The reference points on my journey of intellectual development were not only Bibič's 'key works', such as *Kaj je politična znanost?* ([1969] 2021), *Zasebništvu in skupnost* ([1972] 1984), *Politična znanost, ideologija, politika* (1978), *Civilno društvo i politički pluralizam* (1990) and *Civilna družba in politični pluralizem* (1997)¹ – these came much later. The first

* Žiga Vodovnik, PhD, Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

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¹ This book, edited by Niko Toš, consists of Bibič's articles and discussions from his later period and its full title is *Politološki preseki: civilna družba in politični pluralizem*.

'consultations' came in the form of his contribution to the history of (American) political thought in his article *Politična misel federalistov (posebej glede na Madisonov esej št. 10)* (1992a), accompanied by Bibič's *lege artis* translation of *The Federalist Papers No. 10*. For a student negotiating the twists and turns of political science (and the study of political science), there followed further "one-to-one tutorials" when it came to contemplating the role, state and prospects of the discipline (*Študij politologije: nekaj izhodišč k njegovi vsebini, členitvi in funkcijah glede na reformo študija* 1991) or a more in-depth understanding of the processes of political pluralisation in Slovenia (*Nekateri vidiki pluralizacije družbe in države na Slovenskem* 1992b; *Politika – še vedno umazana pesem* 1995). Moreover, we should not forget Bibič's 'macro' analyses of the ideological transformations in the second half of the 20th century, which still provide the much-needed context for understanding the current crises of capitalism and the state (*Konec zgodovine?* 1992c; *Civilna družba in demokracija* 1993).²

Let us stress already in the introduction that this paper does not deal with Bibič's contribution to the development of political science in Slovenia. On the contrary, we are interested in the position of political science today and its relationship with other social sciences, but especially its prospects, as Adolf Bibič already discussed and anticipated in his works. We claim that Bibič's various analyses and interventions actually pivot on the question of the future or, even better, the role and position of political science in it. That is why we name this aspect of Bibič's *oeuvre* the 'political science of the future'. In his *Politična znanost, ideologija, politika*, Bibič thus notes that it is precisely the "futurological component, anticipation, planning and the vision of the future ... that is one of its essential elements" (Bibič 1978, 52). According to Bibič, the 'political science of the future' necessarily returns to the history of political ideas and political history to even be able to understand the current political relations and their contradictions. Given that, in Bibič's view, "the past already includes an anticipation of the future" (*ibid.*, 52) and that "the present with its tendencies towards the future is its main field of research" (*ibid.*, 55), the ambition and capacity of the "political science of the future" is not merely to provide an explanation of what exists, that is, the current division of labour and the social structure based on it, the subjects living here, the known political motivations and conceptions (ideologies) or the established modes of political operation. Instead, Bibič understands the 'political science of the future' as a key science for facing the challenges of the future because it is necessary for our existence – political and physical. Even more so in the apocalyptic times we are living in.

It is becoming ever clearer that the climate crisis is not threatening us only with environmental and economic destruction. Primarily, it threatens to cause – and therein also lies its direct, albeit often overlooked danger – our political

² In these articles, Bibič discusses the "fundamental contradictions of the contemporary 'post'-era" (1992c, 527).

destruction. The contours of the climate crisis can already be traced in the slow, but persistent inhibition of politics and the undermining of political communities, the very idea of community or the commons and, last but not least, civilisational achievements, we could even claim decency itself. Today, we can already see the new territorial constellations, nexuses and vectors that are producing a new “geography of strategic spaces” and a “new geography of centrality” (Sassen 2012), where the position and role of the state are significantly redefined. In her analyses of the new configurations of territoriality and transnational politics, Saskia Sassen poses an important, if not even the crucial question: *Are we able to detect the formation of new political forms within the old or existing political conditions?*

Adolf Bibič also asked this question countless times in his works. Still, we cannot and should not understand Bibič and the ‘political science of the future’ in the sense of futurological conjectures, let alone eschatological claims. Bibič’s ‘political science of the future’ proceeds from the simple, yet infinitely complicated thesis that, in a period of the unimagined transformation of the world and political breakdowns, political science assumes the role of “anticipating, planning and envisioning the future”. In addressing the “conceptually broader circle of problems” before us, however, the ‘political science of the future’ cannot remain immune to the changes the world is undergoing, which, according to Bibič, is why it must maintain its analytical edge by constantly redefining the object of its research along with its fundamental concepts, approaches and methods.

BACK TO POLITICS

As Igor Lukšič (1996, 873) wrote in an obituary following Bibič’s death, Bibič “belonged to the great republic of the spirit whose citizens are also all political scientists”. In light of the current deviations of political science, we can of course polemicise whether it is still the case that *all* political scientists belong to this republic. Frances Fox Piven (2004) argues that contemporary political science is increasingly more often reduced to policy science or uncritical, instrumental social research.³ It is not insignificant that, in his *Kaj je politična znanost?*, Adolf Bibič ([1969] 2021, 28) highlighted the danger of “nationalising politics” or the unjustified equation of politics and the state. It is also not insignificant that, in (re)defining the limits of research in political science, he argued that political science is a science about power, drawing on the concept of *cratology*. Bibič thus does not limit the object of political science merely by the logics and regimes of

³ With this, Fox Piven not only refers to the excessive fragmentation of the political science community into individual subdisciplines and theoretical and methodological orientations, but chiefly draws attention to the loss of its autonomy and mission since the research policies – for example, the underfunding of basic, theoretical research and the pauperisation of certain parts of the political science community, with which we are very familiar – force it into its tacit collaboration in the defence of the existing socio-economic relations and inhibitions of politics itself.

governing (so *arkhē*), but places in the essence of political science the broader conception of politics – political power or capacity (so *krátos*). He wrote the following on this view of the object of political science:

The advantage of this starting point lies especially in it not being limited to studying merely state structures, but, as a rule, including a conceptually broader circle of problems. Attention thus shifts from the purely institutional system of state bodies, which hold in the monopoly of physical coercion the last sanction of their highest political power, to a series of other social lines of force, which operate in close connection with state power or in relation to it, but also have their specific functions; and sometimes it even encompasses questions that are not related to the functioning of the state at all. (ibid., 29)

In the above quote, we find not only Bibič's call for a broader and deeper understanding of the very object of political science, but also his call to rethink the role and position of political science and its community. He was even more direct in this regard in the foreword to the reissued *Zasebništvo in skupnost*, where he wrote:

If social scientists were robots examining society and politics in a completely disinterested way, where would they find the strength to persist on the rocky road of science? And if, on the other hand, we expected them to work only as propagandists, why, then, would they not choose that profession instead? (Bibič [1972] 1984, 9)

Bibič claims that the purpose of research in political science is not an “escape from reality” (Shapiro 2002), with scientificity being erroneously equated with non-involvement and disinterest in the social struggles occurring outside our offices and lecture halls. It is clear that such “robotisation” of political science entails not simply the lack of interest and the “strength to persist on the rocky road of science”, but also a path of moving away from a better understanding of political phenomena. On the other hand, according to Bibič, political science must not lead to a partisan defence or interpretation of partial theories and ideological explanations when, either with their creative and selective reading or their uncritical exegesis, it loses the distance sorely needed for critiquing and overcoming them.

In order for political science to “systematically and continuously study the genesis, structure and function of politics in the contemporary world” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 75), it must overcome the “envy towards other sciences” (Dahl 2004). The latter too often try to conceal their deficiencies with a thin veneer of scientific rigidity, as best illustrated by the dominating mantra of positivism and its attempts at a mechanistic and econometric explanation of reality. The consequences of this short-sightedness and uncritical imitation can be fatal.

Thus, in affirming political science, Bibič also points out precisely the incredible complexity of the field, which cannot be eliminated by way of reductionism in the understanding of the political and attempts at simplifying the operation of complex systems. With the constitution of political science and all of its heterogeneous and plural – that is, dialectical – approaches (with which it establishes itself and which it requires), the complexity of the field is not understood as a problem that needs to be resolved/eliminated, but as an opportunity that should be taken advantage of both academically and politically.⁴ Bibič hence claims that the affirmation of political science as an independent scientific discipline is not important only for “science, but also for the political life of contemporary societies and the contemporary world” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 9).

EXCURSIONS

Not only due to space limitations, but mainly due to the aim and purpose of this contribution, the ‘excursions’ set out below are not conclusive, but speculative. Speculative not in the sense of conjecture, but in the sense of anticipating and imagining the current discussions on the dilemmas and challenges that political science faces at the beginning of the 21st century and in which Bibič would have participated or which he actually predicted in his contributions decades ago. This reveals the topicality of Bibič’s ‘political science of the future’, which raises its ambition from a positivistic description, which is unstoppably becoming a thing of the past, to clarifying, explaining and co-creating the political future. That is why Bibič was right when claiming that political science can retain its topicality only by constantly redefining its object of research while persistently rethinking its fundamental concepts and recalibrating its approaches and methods. In view of the new conditions and challenges, they can quickly become outdated and useless when they lose touch with the dynamics of political events. They often no longer offer answers to the questions we are ourselves asking or, at best, only help us solve problems that no longer exist. Moreover, it is only with constant self-reflection and recreation that political science can remain or become a “scientific discipline that will not examine political activity in instalments, but will capture it as a whole” (Bibič [1969] 2021, 25; *cf.* Bibič 1991).

In the following sections, attention is paid to understanding the state, democracy and citizenship, with the *first excursion* problematising the predominant (geographic) explanations of the state in political science according to which the state is still limited to or even defined merely as a geographically delimited and unchangeable territory. We stress the loss of analytic sharpness in such considerations of the state as they completely overlook the processes of redefining and

⁴ This is a simple realisation that political science addresses the key problems of contemporary societies and that, in the methodological and theoretical discussion on the latter, it allows itself or demands the innovativeness, improvisation and eclecticism that the research of a particular problem requires. Expressed differently, in discussing the political, political science subordinates its methods and theories to the problems and not vice versa, which Shapiro (2002) labels problem-driven research.

redistributing the state and thereby the processes of its de-/reterritorialisation and rescaling when the state is forced to adapt to the economic dynamics and no longer the other way round. The danger of the ‘territorial trap’ that is often unconsidered in examinations of the state is the simultaneous delimitation of the chronotope for understanding and researching democracy. This leads us in the *second excursion* to analyse the main theories of democracy and identify their biggest limitations – the erroneous equation of democracy and the rule of the people, which is realised only through state-forming projects.

Excursus I: the State

In recent decades, the state has encountered the growing power of (global) cities, corporations, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and social movements. We are therefore witness to the gradual emergence of new territorial vectors, which make today’s political topography more complex than ever before.⁵ The state still functions as the main form of the territorialisation of capitalism, although the expansion of the capitalist economy and its rescaling of territoriality demand a simultaneous de-/reterritorialisation of the state on various levels. In his works, Bibič ([1969] 2021; 1991) justifiably cautioned that the political science community has to return to the question of how to (again) understand and re-conceptualise the state and adapt its categorial and methodological arsenal. Within the mainstream of political science, studies on the state remain split between excessive traditionalism and normativism, overlooking the current changes that demand new explanations, methods and approaches. They are thus still based on (geographical) assumptions that limit the state and its execution of power to a geographically demarcated and fixed territory or even define them in those terms.⁶ Instead of political science understanding the state in its various historical mediations, as a rule it has resorted to a naïve reification of the state, which Edward W. Soja and Costis Hadjimichalis (1978) labelled “spatial fetishism” and John Agnew (1994) a “territorial trap”.⁷

Neil Brenner (2004) also claims that political science lost its analytical edge when it considered the state as a “reconstituted geographical unit of analysis”. It understood the state as “the self-enclosed geographical container of socioeconomic and politico-cultural relations” and often as the only one, which prevented researchers from going beyond the state-centric modes of working and researching. In his attempt to construct “new modes of analysis”, Brenner combines fragments of heterodox, interdisciplinary and even post-disciplinary

⁵ Because these processes globalised and at the same time localised the state, the latter now faces the challenge of “multi-level meta-governance” (Jessop 2009) in adapting to the current spatial and scalar restructurings.

⁶ For a broader and more in-depth critique of “spatial fetishism” in contemporary theories of the state, see Vodovnik (2022).

⁷ In his elaboration of the “territorial trap”, Agnew notes that a reified understanding of the state predominates in contemporary political science, which is “too geographical and not sufficiently historical”.

methodologies that reject *spatial fetishism*, *methodological territorialism*, *methodological nationalism* and, thereby, state-centric epistemologies.

In fact, many studies have managed to move beyond the state-centric geographical presupposition. However, as Brenner (1999, 41) notes, the old errors have been eliminated by introducing a new one: the state's conceptual negation. In other words, these new re-conceptualisations have detected the emerging spatial forms and consequently new political geographies, but have completely overlooked the role of the state in them – i.e., the new position of the state and, hence, the novel forms of its de-/reterritorialisation and rescaling. Brenner claims that the expansion of capitalism should be seen as a complex, conflictual process that not only includes the transcending of regulatory systems on the national scale – which is what we typically see and study – but also simultaneously produces the new sub- and supra-national modes of accumulation and the (state) control required to strengthen and coordinate this process.

By referring to the “scalar shift”, Brenner (ibid., 62) indicates that the present wave of globalisation means that the global scale depends on the simultaneous reterritorialisation on a sub-global scale, mostly the new sub- and supra-national scales, and no longer exclusively on the national one. Moreover, we are witness to the inversion of the capital–state relationship since “it is no longer capital that is to be molded into the (territorially integrated) geography of state space, but state space that is to be molded into the (territorially differentiated) geography of capital” (Brenner 2004, 16). (Post)modern statehood thus means a complex and continuous rescaling “at once upwards, downwards and outwards”, resulting in polymorphic institutional geographies (ibid., 66–67). Globalisation processes and the expansion of capitalism should be considered as a contradictory socio-spatial dialectic, constantly creating new configurations of territoriality. The studies on the emerging spatial and political forms therefore reveal that the contradictions of neoliberalism (short-term) on one hand and the broader project of modernity (long-term) on the other simultaneously are leading to: i) the expansion and acceleration of movements of goods, services, labour and capital; and ii) the creation and imposition of a (relatively) fixed socio-territorial infrastructure for enabling and controlling these processes (Brenner 1999, 43).

We can thus easily conclude that Bibič's theories anticipated the discussions on the state which the political science community is involved in today and that, even years and decades later, they can still easily and creatively enter into a fruitful dialogue with them.⁸ Especially relevant in this regard are Bibič's warnings that what political science needs today is not only conceptual clarity and theoretical thoroughness, but a broader epistemological transformation that will enable a holistic research of political reality, while being able to cross and combine disciplinarily confined theoretical and methodological registers. To comprehensively

⁸ For instance, his explorations of the contradictory relationship between state and society. See also Lukšič (2023).

understand the processes of de-/reterritorialisation and redefinition of the state, we need new concepts, methods and even research logic “where conceptual tools and methodological strategies are adopted with reference to the challenges of making sense of particular social phenomena rather than on the basis of traditional disciplinary divisions of labor”. Such words we might easily ascribe to Bibič even though we actually find them in *New State Spaces* (2004), the arguably fundamental and epochal work by Neil Brenner.

Excursus II: Democracy

With a great deal of scepticism and reservation, Bibič observed the academic discussions on the triumph of (liberal) democracy supposedly brought about at the end of the 20th century by the end of history or rather the domination of a very specific economic and political paradigm. Bibič (1993, 772) noted that “the question of democracy is still an open problem for political science”, warning about its simplified explanations or theories with which the political science community tried to subjugate it. As he remarked, “democracy (politics included) has sunny and shady sides, a dignified and efficient image, an institutional, value and behavioural reality” (ibid., 771). According to Bibič, democracy is hence neither a technique, procedure nor mechanics since there “is no serious discussion on democracy that would not also reflect on freedom, equality, human rights, brotherhood (solidarity) and, more recently, also the environment, welfare and peace” (ibid., 772). Despite this, a cursory overview of the current theoretical examinations of democracy quickly shows that recent discussions on democracy still suffer from the same illness diagnosed by Bibič years ago.

As Francesca Polletta (2002, vii) acknowledged, democracy is a most elusive concept that, with time, only becomes increasingly more difficult to study because, with the inflation of the word “democracy”, the concept starts to lose its meaning. It comes as no surprise that Finley (1999, 15) even concluded that, due to all the semantic (ab)uses, democracy as a concept has been devalued to the point of analytical uselessness. Democracy is thus an empty signifier. Jacques Rancière (2014, 53) pointed out an even deeper problem in understanding democracy given that, in the current discussions, representative democracy is considered only as a pleonasm even though it has actually always been an oxymoron. What does he mean by that? In order to understand this paradox and the fateful consequences it holds for our conceptions of democracy, we must return to the discrepancy between the etymological origin or the original meaning of democracy and the use of this term today. Democracy never really meant the rule of the people, but was born as a word referring to the power or ability (*krátos*) of the people (*dēmos*).⁹

⁹ More precisely, democracy became a substitute for republicanism only in the 18th and especially 19th century when it also assumed the meaning that it has today – namely, the rule of the people manifested through political representation, elections and majority.

In his analysis of democracy, Bibič (1981) returned to its duality. He does not discuss and demarcate direct democracy and representation only on the basis of their different physical modalities, so the (in)directness of bodies and space, but first and foremost deals with their own political and interest (in)directness. In this respect, Bibič reaffirmed the original understanding of democracy as direct democracy and thereby anticipated the revolutionary work of Bernard Manin (1997), which prompted the political science community to begin readdressing the principles of representative government and their (un)democraticness. Manin believed these principles do not entail a departure from the idea of (direct) democracy only in the moment of physical presence or absence, rather a deeper discontinuity is actually at stake, which the hegemonic theories of democracy do not even detect. What is at stake is the very understanding of a political community and the eligibility to be inscribed in the political process. According to Bibič and Manin, the key difference between the ‘representative’ and the ‘direct’ model thus lies not in the number of people participating in political decision-making but in the very method of selecting them. Representative systems are therefore not ‘representative’ due to the small number of persons ruling in the name of the people but due to the way the representatives are selected (elections) and interests mediated.

It is quite clear that democracy had always had a problematic relationship with the state. It was only later that it became involved in the state-forming projects and solidified the belief that there is no difference between them. According to James C. Scott (2009, 3–4), politics beyond the state is no exception, but instead a rule of history. The concept of uniform, homogeneous state politics is an invention of the modern age and emerged as a political or, better yet, depoliticising tool, which contemporary explanations of the state and democracy in political science usually forget. Scott claims that the tension between politics and the state should be understood as an “uneasy bargain”, which has led to completely new forms of political membership and legibility:

Statecraft proved difficult in these conditions of vernacular measures and vernacular resistance to assessment ... It is no exaggeration to claim that the conquest of illegibility is the most momentous achievement of the modern state. This required the standardization of weights and measures against determined local resistance. It required elaborate censuses and population rolls, cadastral surveys of landed property, and, not least, the institution of individual freehold properly adapted to cadastral science. The project of legibility allowed the state to “see” the human activity of interest to it through the simplified approximation of documents, lists, and statistics. (Scott 2013, 97)

Here, Bibič’s thesis that, paradoxically, the question of the state and democracy remains unresolved also in socialism, with the state becoming even the

only subject of political and social activity, is not insignificant: “Insofar as the state was becoming not only an important, but practically the only subject of the development of the socialist society, it seemed that all dialectics between the state and society disappeared” (Bibič 1981, 267). In his short and rough sketch of his extensive work *De l-État*, Henry Lefebvre claims something similar when stating that the modern state is founded precisely on the “principle of equivalence”, which secures unity, identity and political integration. In his thinking about the state in the modern world, he opposed the prevailing Marxist theorisations of the state which, in the 1970s too, perceived the state as a form of “heavenly life” in contrast to the “earthly life” of civil society. Lefebvre noted:

Foundations of the modern State: The (forced) equivalence of non-equivalents: the (forced) equalization of the unequal, the identification of the non-identical... The logic of homogenization and identity as the logic and strategy of State power. The State as reducer (of diversities, autonomies, multiplicities, differences) and as integrator of the so-called national whole. (Lefebvre 2009, 108)

This means it is not surprising that the ‘uneasy bargain’ between the state and democracy has always called for various strategies and policies aimed at pacifying the unruly *dēmos*. It has striven towards “synoptic legibility”, as Scott would say, which enabled the efficient performance of its main functions – e.g., taxation, conscription, monopoly of coercion. The subsumption of democracy under the state and citizenship did not remain without further unwanted consequences. It also led to theoretical purism and anti-intellectualism, which rejected every in-depth reflection on concepts like political power and especially citizenship. Originally, citizenship was never related to the state or nation, but meant exclusively a specific ‘urban relationship’ between the rights and duties in the city. Citizenship therefore meant membership in a city. This explains why, according to Bibič (1997, 38), it is erroneous to talk only about a “citizen of the state”, we should instead also shed light on the other forms of “citizenship” that are constituted according to other – for example, territorial or functional – criteria. The concept of citizenship should hence be returned to its place which, according to Bibič, can also be taken literally since political membership was first related to the local community.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Political science is a relatively young science that became established as an independent discipline in Slovenia later than in other countries. Nevertheless,

¹⁰ The etymological origin of the word citizenship – from the concept of *civitas*, *civitatis* all the way to the modern citizen – linked political membership to smaller and more fluid polities. For more on the genealogy of citizenship, see Turner (2002, 199–226).

we cannot claim that we have remained historical latecomers. Quite the opposite. Political science's path to an independent scientific discipline was specific because it managed to develop theoretical and conceptual excellence despite or precisely due to the political, social and economic divisions in this territory and the numerous state formations that have marked it. It was also often defined by the unpleasant and exhausting coexistence with the centres of power, which found the autonomous scientific production disruptive. Nonetheless, political science in Slovenia has managed, primarily based on Bibič's insightful input and works, to claim a unique position in the international political science community, having actively co-created the discipline over the decades and, by developing completely new theories, importantly influencing political science discussions across the world. Put differently, while political science abroad was preoccupied with the bipolar division and related research aspirations and priorities, political science in Slovenia was engaged in original theoretical production and was examining possibilities outside and beyond the mentioned division.

That is probably one of the central reasons that political science in Slovenia was able to produce original analyses in a wide range of different contexts – from the narrower field of institutional politics and praxeology to political theory and philosophy and political anthropology. We could also say that the result of such positioning was a quite different, authentic envisioning of the role and position of political science in society, as evidenced by Bibič's *oeuvre* and his 'political science of the future'. With 'political science of the future', we suggest that Bibič's diverse analyses have a common thread. That is, his interventions should be understood as a well-considered and systematic attempt at re-conceiving and repositioning political science while searching for radically different political and economic models, proceeding from past and current perturbations in order to be able to overcome their own limits in the future. All of this requires that we again thoroughly think about how to establish a completely new relationship between life and work, creation and consumption and, last but not least, the individual and the communal. As Bibič stated:

Such a task can be performed only by a political science that will not limit itself to counting election results and repeating political programmes. A science that will meticulously collect facts without becoming empirical, that will co-discover the purposes of revolution without becoming utopian; that will search for the means of their realisation without becoming instrumentalist. A science that will – while taking into account the contribution of other social sciences – connect a meticulous analysis of a political phenomenon from the sociological, historical perspective with its deontological (self-managing) perspective. In short, only a historically and humanistically oriented political science will be able to perform such a task. (Bibič [1969] 2021, 75)

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