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**China's Propaganda and Perception Management Efforts, Its Intelligence  
Activities that Target the United States, and the Resulting Impacts on U.S.  
National Security  
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*Overview of China's Foreign Propaganda*

The Chinese government puts a high value on propaganda work, describing it as the life blood (*shengmingxian*) of the Party-State in the current era. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has historically divided propaganda work into two categories: internal (*duinei*) and external (*duiwai*), meaning that which is directed toward Chinese people and that which is directed toward foreigners in China, Overseas Chinese, and the outside world in general. CCP propaganda specialists also divide propaganda into four types: political, economic, cultural, and social. Relevant offices within the Chinese Party-State administration take over responsibility for propaganda work related to their area of expertise.

China's foreign propaganda experts are extremely critical of what they call the "Western media's ideological assault on the rest of the world." It is a matter of pride that in the current era, unlike the Mao years, China does not push its political ideology onto others. Unlike the Mao era, China's post-1989 foreign propaganda tends to be defensive, reacting to external criticisms and aimed at upholding China's political *status quo*. However foreign propaganda targeted at Overseas Chinese and the Taiwanese is essentially offensive in nature, with strategic goals in mind such as neutralizing support for anti-CCP forces and promoting Chinese reunification.

The audience for China's foreign propaganda is not one and the same, so different messages are promoted at different groups. The main divide in China's foreign propaganda is between Overseas Chinese and non-Overseas Chinese. The Taiwanese are targeted as a sub-category of China foreign propaganda targeted at Overseas Chinese. In the following sections I will discuss the themes, audiences, means of transmission, and institutional actors involved in China's contemporary foreign propaganda, as well as China's plans to expand foreign propaganda activities in the future.

### *Central Level Institutional Actors Involved in Foreign Propaganda*

The Central Propaganda Department is in charge of all internal propaganda, while its brother organization, the Office of Foreign Propaganda, which is more commonly known by its other nameplate, the State Council Information Office, oversees matters relating to external propaganda. The two bureaucracies are closely linked and coordinated. In recent years, with the advent of the Internet and China's increasing globalization and internationalization, the boundaries between the two categories of propaganda have been growing less and less obvious. For example the Office of Foreign Propaganda has been put in charge of monitoring the Internet both inside and outside China, while the News Department of the Central Propaganda Department also takes a close interest in developments in the same area, providing guidelines on the topic in its regular bulletins to propaganda workers around the country. In 2003, due to the increasing numbers of Chinese-speaking foreigners (either living in China or reading Chinese newspapers online outside China) and Chinese citizens who speak foreign languages and have access to foreign media sources, the Central Propaganda Department actually argued that internal propaganda should now be regarded as the same as external propaganda. This means that Chinese journalists must be mindful that they now have a foreign audience alongside their domestic audience.

The CCP Central Committee Foreign Propaganda Group which is a top level committee consisting of the heads of leading foreign propaganda outlets, has a central guiding role in setting foreign propaganda policies. These are implemented by the OFP/SCIO at the national level and by provincial level foreign propaganda offices at the local level. The OFP/SCIO and its local equivalents direct officials in various government departments and work units whose interests touch on foreign propaganda, such as foreign affairs; foreign trade; tourism; Overseas Chinese Affairs; radio and television; the print media; publishing; cultural, educational, and sporting institutions; as well as State planning, finance, State security, public security, customs, Taiwan affairs, and banking.

The Office for Foreign Propaganda/State Council Information Office (OFP/SCIO) is tasked with managing any sensitive news stories on the following topics: foreign embassies, diplomats in China, Overseas Chinese business people, foreign students, foreign travellers, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwanese residents, especially when they involve loss of life. They also guide the Chinese media during any major events regarding Tibet, Xinjiang, ethnic minorities, religion, human rights, democracy movements, internal and external terrorist activities, and Falungong. For extremely serious incidents,

only Xinhua News Agency is allowed to report on them and all other Chinese media must use the Xinhua report word for word.

The OFP/SCIO is also in charge of “clarifying and refuting” any stories which, while forbidden from being reported in China, have been reported on in the foreign media. Articles on foreigners are to be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for verification. Similarly, stories on Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwanese residents are to be sent to the Offices of Hong Kong and Macau, or Taiwan Affairs, while stories on Overseas Chinese businesspeople should be sent to the Ministry of Commerce. The Ministry of Culture is in charge of China’s foreign cultural propaganda, under the leadership of the CCP Foreign Propaganda Group. Cultural exchanges are regarded as useful way to break through prejudice and establish warm feelings.

### *Overseas Chinese*

Gaining influence over Overseas Chinese groups outside China in order to “turn them into propaganda bases for China” is a key task in foreign propaganda work. The student protests of 1989, which received strong support from the Overseas Chinese community, alerted the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the fact that many within the Overseas Chinese community were inclined to support democracy activities within China. Historically China’s revolutionary movements have always received considerable funding from the Chinese *diaspora* and many Chinese revolutionaries found safe haven in Overseas Chinese communities when the political situation in China became to tense. At the same time, as China’s economic reform process continued to expand after 1989, and especially from 1992, China sought to tap in to the considerable economic resources of the Overseas Chinese as a source of investment and technological transfer.

After 1989 China’s propaganda targeted at the Chinese living outside China—whether they were PRC passport-holders or ethnic Chinese who had been residing abroad for generations—aimed to build patriotic sentiment towards the Chinese Motherland (*zuguo*), and support for the political *status quo*. The goal was to neutralize antagonism towards the CCP government, enhance antagonism towards anti-CCP forces within China and their adherents in exile, and at the same time, encourage a constructive attitude towards Overseas Chinese helping to make China “rich and strong” (*fu qiang*). These efforts have been remarkably successful.

The means by which China promotes its foreign propaganda towards the Overseas Chinese community include: the numerous local Chinese language newspapers, radio and television stations; the Internet, China’s own China Central Television channel aimed at Overseas Chinese CCTV 4; as well as

through cultural activities; support for the teaching of Chinese language internationally which includes the rapid spread of Confucius Institutes; and special activities organized for the Overseas Chinese community such as conferences and “root-seeking” (xun gen) cultural tours.

China’s Xinhua News Service currently provides free content to the Chinese language news media outside China. Formerly Hong Kong and Taiwan-based news groups were the main source of news for Overseas Chinese, but in the last ten years they have basically been driven out of the market by a plethora of free Chinese newspapers which derive virtually all their content from the Mainland media. Few Chinese language newspapers outside China have the financial resources (outside of Taiwan, Singapore or pro-Falungong papers) to resist the offer of free content. The same goes for Chinese language radio and television stations abroad, they too now relay Mainland media programmes and exclude other Chinese language sources. Chinese embassy officials work closely with the Overseas Chinese media in order to ensure their continued compliance. It should be noted that in the current era, Xinhua reports are virtually indistinguishable from stories off the wire that might be available from say Reuters, with the exception that they represent a pro-PRC, pro-CCP viewpoint and match current propaganda guidelines on avoiding taboo topics. The PRC long ago stopped promoting revolution or its state ideology.

The Internet has become an extremely important means for China to build support with Overseas Chinese in the last ten years. PRC-based Internet sites are now the leading source of Chinese language and China-related news for Overseas Chinese. The Internet is also proving to be an extremely effective tool for guiding and organizing Overseas Chinese public opinion. An example of this was the role of the Internet in organizing popular protests by Overseas Chinese in 2008 against the perceived bias of the Western media in its coverage of unrest in Tibetan areas in March 2008 and, a month later, in organizing a series of worldwide demonstrations in support of China during the Olympic torch relay. These protests and the later demonstrations were genuine and popular, which shows the effectiveness of China’s efforts to rebuild positive public opinion within the Chinese *diaspora*, but it should be noted that they received official support, both symbolic and practical. This development matches the rise of popular nationalism within China since 1989, which has been fostered from the top down, but has a genuine resonance with the Chinese population.

Despite being genuine popular movements, the protests and demonstrations adopted the slogans of CCP foreign propaganda directed at Overseas Chinese such as “Ai wo Zhonghua” or “Love China”. Thanks to the Internet, even those who could not attend demonstrations could show their support for

China by attaching a red heart moniker next to the word China to their avatars. This initiative was launched by MSN China and spread rapidly throughout the Chinese Internet in 2008. MSN's involvement not only demonstrates how many Chinese companies respond to the CCP propaganda message on patriotism, but it is also an indication of how these days the propaganda message is not just promoted directly from propaganda authorities; rather it is frequently relayed through intermediaries on to a wider audience.

During torch relay demonstrations in cities such as Canberra, San Francisco or Seoul in 2008, Overseas Chinese were not compelled to turn up and there were no consequences for not taking an interest, but those who did come were given free matching t-shirts, souvenirs, transport, and in some cases accommodation, all courtesy of local embassy officials and China-based donors. These demonstrations successfully drowned out the protests of anti-CCP groups such as Falungong, Tibetan activists and human rights groups who had hoped to use the Beijing Olympics as a vehicle to promote their criticism of the Chinese government.

#### *Taiwanese*

A sub-group of China's foreign propaganda directed at Overseas Chinese is that directed towards the Taiwanese. The message aimed towards them also aspires to build feelings of patriotism towards the Chinese Motherland and support for the political *status quo*, but it is also designed to garner support for the reunification of Taiwan with the Chinese Mainland. These efforts have also been relatively successful in recent years.

Some of the means which China employs to promote its views to Taiwanese audiences include: special television programmes directed at Taiwanese audiences on CCTV 4; the setting up in 2005 of Strait Star TV a Fujian Province-based satellite station which beams towards Taiwan; study tours for the Taiwanese elite; joint conferences held on themes which help to build common interest such as Chinese heritage and Confucianism; and the hosting of large-scale events which promote notions of ethnic unity across the Taiwan Strait such as commemorations for the birth of Confucius, celebrations for the cult of Mazu (which is prominent in Taiwan and Fujian) and ceremonies in honour of the Yellow Emperor, the symbolic ancestor of all Han Chinese.

#### *Foreign Propaganda Targeted at Non-Chinese*

China's foreign propaganda directed at non-Chinese audiences has undergone major reform in the last decade. These reforms are indicated by the Chinese media's avoidance of the term "propaganda" in foreign language publications to discuss CCP media management, though the term

“xuanchuan” (propaganda) continues to be used in Chinese. So for example, the CCP Central Propaganda Department (*Zhongxuanbu*) is now translated as Central Publicity Department by *China Daily* and Xinhua and they use terms such as “publicity”, “information”, “public relations”, “cross cultural communication” and “public diplomacy” to discuss activities which are still classified as *waixuan* (Foreign Propaganda) in Chinese language publications. As in its domestic propaganda, China now adapts many of the methods of public opinion management which originated in modern industrialized societies such as the United States.

China’s international image was considerably damaged in the eyes of non-Chinese foreign audiences after 1989. Since that date China has worked hard to build constructive international public opinion. The overall themes of China’s foreign propaganda work since 1989 and up to the present have been to promote the image of China’s social, economic, and political stability; as well as the continuance of China’s reform and opening up policies and CCP leadership over the political system. But in particular, promoting the Chinese economy and encouraging further foreign investment and trade has become the primary task of foreign propaganda work, particularly after 1992. Throughout the 1990s China was certainly successful in promoting awareness of its economic growth and enthusiasm for the opportunities which the Chinese market offered international investors, but perceptions towards the politics of China proved much harder to shift, at least among Western audiences. It should be noted that beginning in the 1990s and continuing up to the present day, China’s prestige began to grow in the developing world.

Promoting a new national image (*guojia xingxiang*) internationally was one of the key strategic goals of China’s 2008 Olympic bid. The new image aimed to allay international fears about China’s increasing political, economic and military power, at the same time as projecting awareness of China’s renewed strength and prosperity. The two weeks of the August 2008 Olympics were indeed a sporting and PR triumph for Beijing. Despite the controversies surrounding hosting the Olympics in Beijing—human rights, the environment, food safety and other issues—the Chinese government actually managed to increase its public approval in China and succeeded in re-shaping its image on the international scene.

There are multiple means adopted for the transmission of China’s foreign propaganda targeted at non-Chinese foreigners. These include PRC-based foreign propaganda outlets such as *China Daily*, CCTV-9, China Radio International, *People’s Daily* online published in translation in a number of languages, and china.org the main portal for China’s foreign propaganda, as well as publishers such as the Foreign Languages Press; but they also include

the foreign media and foreign VIPs who China targets to promote certain views. In the following section I will discuss some of these channels for transmission in more detail.

CCTV-9 was launched as a 24-hour channel in 2002, and from 2004, it began broadcasting in Spanish and French. In September 2005, the station was re-launched with much fanfare, though with little noticeable change to content or style of programming. The goal was to make CCTV-9 China's equivalent to CNN, a global media presence with 24-hour news coverage. However, unlike CNN, which is not (formally at least) the mouthpiece of any particular government, CCTV-9 is most definitely the mouthpiece for the Chinese government's perspectives on international affairs and the Party-line perspectives on China's own affairs. The station has been granted substantial resources in terms of equipment; but has no editorial independence. CCTV-9 journalists are under constant pressure to present a positive account of China. In August 2005, a series of items reported factually on coal mining disasters in China; soon after the channel's leaders received a warning from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that its reports were harming China's international image. Following this incident, senior editorial staff and journalists were all forced to write self-criticisms. This is a classic example of the current relative lack of agency of Chinese journalists involved in China's foreign propaganda activities aimed at non-Chinese foreigners. In many ways they are more constrained than journalists who write for Chinese audiences.

A further channel for China's foreign propaganda is the Chinese PR Association, set up in the early 1990s, which works closely with the Central Propaganda Department towards the goal of "optimizing a pro-China international environment," "establishing a positive image of China internationally," and "packaging China." One of the organization's tasks is to act as an intermediary between foreign embassies and organizations in China with Chinese government departments. The association also takes a behind-the-scenes role in PR campaigns (targeted at the concerns of Western governments and NGOs) such as the high-profile anti-AIDS campaign of November-December 2002.

The CCP has a longstanding policy of utilising foreigners in its foreign propaganda work, this is called "using foreign strength to promote China" (*liyong waili wei wo xuanchuan*). Historically, pro-CCP foreigners have been extremely useful in producing a wide range of propaganda materials, ranging from books, films and poetry, to public and private lobbying. Soon after June 4, Jiang Zemin instructed foreign affairs personnel to step up their activities to garner the support of prominent foreigners "friendly to China," to influence Western governments and get them to drop their sanctions against China.

Henry Kissinger and George Bush Senior are commonly cited as being particularly helpful (behind the scenes) to blunt the effects of sanctions in this period. The foreign friends the CCP has come to value most in the post-1989 period are prominent foreign figures that can bring commercial and political advantages to China and the Chinese oligarchy. Public agreement on China's political positions is not required, though it might help business along a little.

In the years since 1989, Beijing has worked hard to get foreigners to promote China. Foreigners based in China and Western China specialists are often approached by foreign affairs cadres to write articles on China for the Chinese media. Naturally, only viewpoints which are in accord with the current propaganda line can be published. *China Daily* specializes in featuring this type of material, although similar stories also periodically appear in the Chinese language media. Another tried and true practice in China's foreign propaganda work is to bring in "prominent person" foreign delegations on all-expenses-paid tours of China, in the hope that they will go home promoting China's point of view. Local propaganda officials are instructed to host foreign journalists and researchers; do thought work on foreign experts, students, tourists, Taiwanese, and Overseas Chinese; and increase sister-city exchanges; all in order to create an "international army of friendly propagandists" for China.

In 1992, a meeting of foreign propaganda officials was held to discuss techniques for getting China's propaganda materials published in the Western media. Since that meeting there has been a dramatic increase in materials published abroad. Between 1992 and 2000 over two thousand articles were published in Taiwan alone. China's propagandists try to get foreign newspapers to do China's propaganda work; this is called "borrowing foreign newspapers" (*jieryong haiwai baokan*). In order to achieve this, China's local level foreign propaganda officials host approved foreign journalists, take them around approved sites and give them materials for their reports. Non-approved visits to sensitive sites (if found out) can have foreign journalists thrown out of China.

In early 2009 Beijing announced that it would invest a further phenomenal 45 billion yuan into its main media outlets to strengthen their international news coverage and global presence. As part of this, Xinhua News Service will increase their overseas bureaus from 100 to 186, almost enough to have one in every country in the world. The *Global Times*, an extremely popular *People's Daily*-owned tabloid with a strong international focus, will soon set up an English language edition. And CCTV-9 will set up Arabic and Russian language services.



There are also concrete plans in the next two year to establish an Asia-based television station (Singapore or Thailand are the likely locations) that would beam global news to the world as told from a pro-PRC perspective. This new channel would take as its model Phoenix Television, which is beamed via restricted satellite to the Chinese elite within China and on paid satellite tv outside China. Phoenix is nominally privately-owned; however its current main investor is the State-owned enterprise China Mobile.

Phoenix has long been regarded by Party propaganda insiders as “more loyal than CCTV”. The proposed new channel would similarly be “privately-owned” and closely tied in to the CCP foreign propaganda agenda. If it were to follow the Phoenix Television model, which is that of a “loyal opposition”, this channel could well be more effective than CCTV-4 or CCTV-9 in building positive international public opinion for China. It certainly is likely to appeal to Overseas Chinese audiences as will focus on stories which are close to their interests and not covered elsewhere in such detail, while retaining the crucial impression of “objectivity” which CCTV-4 and CCTV-9 often lack. The new channel could also prove to be appealing to many viewers in the non-Western world such as Africa, the Middle East, South America and the South Pacific who are attracted to China’s alternative perspective of global affairs. As such this new initiative could well have a significant impact in strengthening China’s soft power internationally.

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