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First, let me thank the Commissioners for inviting me here today, and the Commission staff for putting together this illuminating program. All of you already are experts on China, but I hope I can contribute a useful perspective for understanding the production, content and plans for what China calls “external propaganda.”

The word propaganda, of course, is anathema to us in the land of the First Amendment—even if all governments, not to mention businesses, religious and educational institutions, yea, everything from the Pentagon to the American Heart Association, practice it. For good reason, the Chinese are beginning to translate the term as “publicity” or “information.” But even in Chinese, the term is falling out of favor. The most intrepid investigative reporters in China see propaganda authorities as adversaries, and try to outrun them!

Political scientist Harold D. Lasswell, a propaganda expert who some consider a “founding father” of U.S. communication research, famously summed up the communication process as “Who says what to whom in what channel with what effect” (“The structure and function of communication in society,” in *The Communication of Ideas*, ed. by L. Bryson; Harper, 1948). This formula, and the behavioral science orientation from which it arose, presumed a stimulus-response model that emphasized the power of media institutions to reinforce or change social behavior through messages directed at a mass of isolated, anonymous recipients. This approach obviously is outdated in today’s world of media convergence, Twittering, citizen journalists and the active audience. Lasswell indeed was a prolific scholar who made important and wide-ranging contributions to the study of politics, personality and culture, but his “Who says what to whom in what channel with what effect” formulation is now more of a historical footnote than the mantra for research it once represented.

Nevertheless, in searching for a convenient way to present my thoughts on China’s external propaganda efforts, Lasswell’s string of communication components came to mind as a useful outline—supplemented by Daniel Lerner’s addition (“Communication and the Nation State,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, v. 37 n. 4, Winter 1973-74) of “why (referring to policy) ... how (technique)... and who talks back (feedback)” to the list. Just bear in mind that I’m using an artificial and admittedly simplistic device to parcel out information and ideas that are interrelated with each other and embedded in the much larger matrices of both Chinese and global society.

Thus, question one: WHO are the planners and purveyors—the masterminds, if you will, as well as the implementers—of China’s external propaganda?

For starters, the Chinese Communist Party and government apparatus. Main guidelines for media and propaganda ostensibly emanate from the heart of the Party, the Central Propaganda Department—with policies managed and administered through an array of other agencies, including the State Press and Publication Administration and the State

Administration of Radio, TV and Film, as well as units and functionaries assigned to propaganda and managerial tasks at provincial, municipal, local and workplace levels.

However, much as “China” is not a monolith, neither are the Party or government or its agencies seamless unitary entities. Rather, both Party and government feature competing agencies and interests at national, regional and local levels, and within agencies and units are varied, and sometimes vying views.

Atlantic correspondent James Fallows has observed from Beijing: “Most Americans think this is an all-powerful central government; most of the time, it looks like a relatively weak, remote titular leadership trying to tell the equivalent of warlords (provincial governors) what they should do.” I would extend this analogy down through the hierarchy.

China’s centrifugal tendencies mean, for example, that local authorities may override central policies or preferences when it comes to handling news media in different locales. In part (although not entirely), this is behind the striking contrast in the stifling versus enabling of media coverage—both domestic and foreign—during two major events occurring in succession last year: the riots in Tibet in March 2008, and the Sichuan earthquake in June. Tibetan authorities—who include of course ethnic Tibetan officials appointed by (and thus benefiting from their association with) the central government, were adamantly opposed to journalistic access, despite some views to the contrary in Beijing; while Sichuan provincial authorities allowed broad access, which of course proved beneficial for eliciting worldwide sympathy and relief.

One of your questions for this panel is whether different institutional actors involved in external propaganda have different outlooks and interests—and the answer is decidedly yes. Central-local divergence is just one manifestation. One also finds differences across agencies on any given level; for instance, the State Council and Foreign Ministry often harbor what we might consider more enlightened opinions about license for expression and even dissidence when compared to, say, Public Security and the military. (Sound familiar when it comes to the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense? Or the local city council and police department!)

I would add that within institutions, individual actors, some of whom regularly or occasionally may be in pivotal positions, also possess different outlooks and interests. And while structural and organizational forces often exert prevailing influence, individual agency is of no small importance in China. This includes individual efforts to circumvent rules—and in fact, contrary to what might expect in a nation so authoritarian in structure, the country is full of scofflaws. There are good reasons the irrepressibly mischievous character of the Monkey King is such a beloved folk icon in China.

Another relevant point is that, while China’s Communist Party and government do have widespread and pervasive monitoring capacities to conduct surveillance on all manner of media, the country does not have a systematic pre-publication censorship apparatus (as did the Soviet Union and most Eastern European countries). This is partly from tradition, and

partly because such a system would be simply impossible to implement in such a vast and variegated country. Conformity to policy largely hinges on anticipation of consequences.

Media industries and organizations constitute another set of institutional actors that may differ with propaganda dictates as well as housing differences within. China's media outlets are often described as "state-controlled" or "official," but even the most obvious standard-bearers for Party and government are also self-interested entities in their own right. So, for instance, claims or even appearances that Chinese media are maidservants of coherent national strategy can be misleading—they may be first and foremost working in their own organizational interests.

As with individuals in bureaucratic agencies, individual mass communicators also have varied ideas and approaches to their work that may put them at odds, directly or indirectly, with official dictates. In the foreword to my recent book *China Ink*, Aryeh Neier, president of the Open Society Institute, identifies "professionalism" as the most important trend today in Chinese journalism (and numerous other fields such as medicine and law). He writes that, "the professionalism of Chinese journalists is gradually expanding the space in which they are able to operate... [and] expanding freedom in China."

The sort of journalists we would consider most professional are those who resist orthodoxy in savvy ways, using unassailable tools of assiduous fact-finding, solid verification and moderation in language. Such journalists, furthermore, cultivate networks of protection that buffer consequences of transgression (editors protect reporters in their purview, reporters look for editors who will go to bat for them, reporters who "make mistakes" get shifted to the library, not to a labor camp).

#### WHAT messages do these actors hope to, and what do they actually, convey?

The content of Chinese media aimed at foreigners long suffered from direct translation of domestic propaganda—so it not only was often replete with misrepresentations, exaggerations, jargon-laden screeds, and all the other ills of domestic media, but it took no account of what foreign audiences might find relevant, interesting or even coherent. The first challenges for external propagandists once China began its reforms and opening up were to redress these obvious problems—with new training, education and recruitment of journalists who could write directly in foreign languages. Xinhua's *duiwaibu*, external news department, shifted from translation to greater volumes of original reporting and writing in other languages; and the *China Daily* was founded with this mode in mind.

When it comes to sensitive issues—Tibet, Taiwan, foreign policy, dissidence or human rights violations—I don't have to tell you that simplistic bombast with intransigent positions still dominates content, in both domestically and foreign-directed media. My Chinese colleagues and friends (a goodly number formed over the past 30 years)—mostly intellectuals, including many journalists—are mortified by this practice. Not only for pragmatic reasons (it's stupid and ineffective) but because they, too, long for intelligent coverage and discussion of these issues.

The Chinese government is often seen as being complicit in nationalistically-tinged reporting, rants aimed at the West, protests about Western media and financial conspiracies and so forth—and clearly there is a vocal constituency for these ideas in China. Again, though, my colleagues and friends think this stream of communication, which gets lots of attention both in China and abroad, is childish and counterproductive—and while loud, not broadly representative of either Chinese elite or mass thinking.

Popular themes, again for domestically as well as international consumption, include appreciation of China's ancient culture along with modernization and dynamism, global engagement and international citizenship. The 2008 Beijing Olympics, of course, provided a good vehicle for messages of glorious tradition and vigorous modernization. And just serendipitously, the fact that the international media recently had given a great deal of attention to “bad news” stories of Tibet and Sichuan probably cleared the air for more positive coverage during the Games (in fact, I heard one U.S. China correspondent say as much).

A good deal of what goes out to the world pertains to topics, events, issues and also controversies and problems that journalists want to cover: Real life at the grass roots, human interest stories, enterprise and investigation. The nature and scope of such stories hinge largely on content in the domestic media, whose range and diversity undeniably have grown greatly over the past three decades. Nowadays China's domestic media provide the main leads for most of the important stories that foreign correspondents then pursue. The days when China-watchers sat in Hong Kong and read tea leaves are long over. The days when foreign correspondents get scoops have not arrived, however; they are more likely to build on scoops of domestic reporters.

To WHOM is the communication directed, i.e., who are the purported and actual audiences?

Intended audiences include, most directly, foreigners in China—tourists, teachers, students, diplomats, business people; and, interestingly, foreign-language learners (mainly English) in China. This domestic constituency actually constitutes the largest proportion of *China Daily's* circulation, although actual numbers are closely held; and is the main target of a lucrative stable of English-language weeklies put out by that paper, *21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in editions for elementary, middle school, high school and college students as well as a teachers edition.

Less directly, intended audiences include international correspondents, who pick up leads and stories from foreign-language as well as Chinese-language media; and ultimately citizens abroad, including international elites and policymakers. Although Xinhua News Agency fancies itself an equivalent of Associated Press, Reuters or AFP, U.S. news organizations certainly do not use its dispatches verbatim, but many news outlets elsewhere around the world certainly do, and overseas Chinese media make ample use of the China News Service. The implications of this will depend on your thoughts about audience credulity, and different people will judge content and sources in different ways; but we have no reason to believe foreign audiences have any particular susceptibility to Chinese content going directly into overseas use as opposed to content from any other sources.

Some Chinese propaganda functionaries and media managers do seem to have an illusion, however, that people abroad have an unmet appetite for media content directly from Chinese sources. This ostensibly is the rationale for the start a couple of months ago of a “North American edition” of *China Daily*—which strictly speaking is a weekly Monday supplement folded into papers printed in New York and San Francisco. Frankly, I am baffled at this development and don’t see a market—those who wish already can read *China Daily* on the web, and are not about to use even a daily edition as a substitute for *The New York Times* or whatever their regular daily news fare might be. So the best explanation I’ve heard is the current editor wants this—and I suspect it’s a way of fostering confidence and even garnering prestige, in response to beliefs (or more properly, delusions) at higher levels that there actually is a demand for *China Daily* on Main Street America.

WHY is the communication generated? What policy objectives and other intentions propel external propaganda efforts?

In terms of broad objectives, some agencies and actors producing media content aimed at foreigners genuinely hope to explain China’s policies and programs to “outsiders” and engage in conversation with them. I would say this is the primary motivation of middle-aged and veteran reporters, writers and editors at *China Daily*.

Regarding the new investments and ambitions for China’s external propaganda, the desire to interject China’s “voice” and perspectives into the international arena seems to be a genuine motivation. Perhaps some think expanding external propaganda truly can influence or even manipulate international opinion—and perhaps propaganda authorities have such hopes, but I don’t think most serious journalists actually involved in the external communication sector believe this.

I have no doubt that propaganda authorities are trying to develop more sophisticated approaches to international image building, including through external propaganda; but I think this motivation is less prevalent among the journalists actually generating the news for foreign audiences. Rather, they are more likely to have an occupational perspective, wishing to pursue careers that provide them with both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards—ideally, both.

I am not of the school that contends that externally directed media, and those working in this sector, are primarily driven by ulterior motives, e.g., that such media are major conduits for disinformation, distraction, smokescreens. More realistically, I think, this sector is likely to be valued for its capacity to generate both tangible and intangible goods for those involved in it—such as reputation, influential connections and commercial rewards.

Those actually producing content for foreign audiences, e.g., working as editors, producers, writers, reporters and even in technical roles, are best positioned to recognize perhaps unplanned or unintended byproducts of the sector—such as its contributions to increasing professionalism among media workers, and its role in fostering foreign (English) language learning and, more generally, cosmopolitanism, within China.

WHAT CHANNELS carry the communication? More broadly, HOW is the communication created and disseminated?

The behemoth is Xinhua News Agency's *duiwaibu*. Xinhua is hoping to both expand its international correspondent network and build broadcasting capabilities—it already is providing video footage for TV. The agency is now looking for native speakers of other languages to both work in Beijing and serve as correspondents abroad, and the latter is new.

When the *South China Morning Post*, citing anonymous high-level sources, reported China's plans to invest some \$10 billion in expanding external propaganda efforts, including a major initiative by Xinhua News Agency, I immediately thought: Xinhua empire-building! Xinhua patently has been building up its empire, in its own interests as much as if not more than in the national interest, since the reform period began in the late 1970s. Reports say Xinhua hopes to start its own Asia-based channel, presumably Chinese-language, that some dub the Chinese Al-Jazeera. The State Administration of Radio, TV and Film reportedly is not pleased at Xinhua's TV plans.

Broadcasting includes China Radio International (the former Radio Beijing), the international central television channel CCTV 9, and lots of intermittent attempts, not systematically tracked, at English-language regional/local programming for both radio and TV—often enlisting “polishing” or editing help from foreigners who happen to be teaching English in the vicinity. China Central TV also set up French and Spanish-language channels before the Olympics last year, and is said to be planning Russian and Arabic services.

*China Daily* marked its 25<sup>th</sup> year of publication in 2006. Its experience makes it the lead candidate for high-profile projects, frustrating the ambitions of the *Beijing Youth News*, which had been publishing an English weekly, in a contest for the contract to publish an English-language daily for the Beijing Olympics. *China Daily* similarly put out a daily special when the Asian Games were held in Beijing. Along with the *21<sup>st</sup> Century* group, *China Daily* also publishes the weekly *Shanghai Star*; as overt competition to the latter, a former *China Daily* journalist started the *Shanghai Daily*, under the municipal government; the *Shenzhen Daily*, started in 1997, is aimed at readers among the concentration of foreign residents in southern China.

The new English edition of *Global Times*, which began publishing weekdays on Monday, April 20, is an offshoot of the Chinese *Global Times*, or *Huanqiu Shibao*, a successful (i.e., popular and money-making) subsidiary of *People's Daily*, or *Renmin Ribao*, flagship paper of the Central Committee. Editors of the English *Global Times*, acknowledge they are going after the same audiences as *China Daily*. They also purport, however, to be different from *China Daily* in offering a more “independent” stance. The Chinese *Huanqiu Shibao* styles itself independent; Western observers often label it “nationalistic;” and it is replete with what we probably would call “news analyses,” although they are not labeled as such. *Global Times* claims a worldwide staff of correspondents—neither Chinese nor English editions bothering to clarify that they are the *People's Daily's* correspondents, moonlighting for piece rates! *Global Times* editors have told interviewers that no government money went into launching the English edition. That's because the Chinese original can afford the investment.

The roster of magazines that used to be published in many foreign languages has been cut down substantially—*Beijing Review* remaining as a distillation of documents and major news—even as the domestic magazine marketplace has burgeoned. Technically, foreign investment is not allowed in media content—but in actuality, publications produced by and aimed at expats, emphasizing arts and entertainment coverage, have strong followings in Chinese cities.

The adoption and encouraged expansion of a government “spokesperson” system, the increasing practice of press conferences, including live televised sessions, at the national level, and production of central government white papers and plans on controversial issues—most recently, a human rights plan—are all part of developing a more sophisticated public relations apparatus for dealing with both the domestic and the foreign press.

The loosening of restrictions on international correspondents prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics—and then an extension of the program after the Games—is sometimes interpreted as a PR move; but I think it actually is a sign that arguments within central units such as the Foreign Ministry and the State Council about the ultimate long-term benefits of greater openness and transparency have made headway.

Media outlets and government agencies have Internet operations of growing scope and importance. The Internet obviously poses special quandaries for Chinese authorities seeking to restrict and manage the terrain even as it necessarily expands.

WHAT FEEDBACK is generated, with what results on the communication process?

From the inception of the People’s Republic, Chinese media organizations have enlisted “foreign experts” to polish foreign-language content; and since the beginning of reforms, have invited foreigners to comment and critique—albeit with varying degrees of responsiveness. Some foreigners who have worked at *China Daily* will swear that all their advice fell on deaf ears. My experience—I worked at the paper its very first year of publication, 1981-82, have spent shorter periods there since and have kept up with doings there—has been quite different.

In general, though, responsiveness to the ostensible target audiences is not a strong suit!

WHAT EFFECTS does the communication produce? What are the implications or results of China’s external propaganda efforts, e.g., regarding knowledge, values, attitudes and behavior of individuals, groups, institutions and/or societies reached directly or indirectly; impact on media producers, organizations and institutions; influence on international activities, attitudes and policies, etc.

Here’s the real unknown. Should we make a presumption that China’s external propaganda amounts to psychological warfare, aimed at political influence, if not diabolical manipulation? Or shall we believe the assertions that motivations are benign, aimed at

sharing viewpoints and information and fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange? And in either case, are the efforts successful?

Ultimately, potential influence relies on credibility—and the prerequisite for that of course is greater media independence. My own research suggests reason to be hopeful, but others have a bleaker view.

In my view, the most important ramifications of expanded external communication efforts may not be intentional objectives at all, whether malevolent or benign (although I tend to favor the benign interpretation). Rather, in my view, the more individuals, organizations and institutions are brought into the mere effort of trying to do better at communicating—which includes, centrally, the enhancement of abilities to deal directly in foreign languages with foreign people and cultures—the more potential there is for enhanced knowledge, sophistication and understanding of the rest of the world among Chinese involved in this project.

In other ways, the endeavor to develop media that in both format and content are not merely palatable but compelling to foreign audiences can have positive results for China internally. Specifically in reference to journalism, I would argue that external propaganda efforts, in exposing Chinese media workers to international knowledge, ideas and examples, create dynamics that further encourage professional trends in China's journalism corps.