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Propaganda Methods

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

"The aim of all our efforts", Mao Tse-tung wrote in New Democracy, published in 1940, "has been the building of a new society and a new nation of the Chinese people. In such a new society and new nation, along with a new political organization and a new economy, a new culture must arise".

To achieve this "new culture" the Chinese Communists are conducting an all-out ideological assault on the minds of the people of China, and probably more time, effort and energy are devoted to the task of influencing what people think than to any other activity in China today. The goal is complete thought control, and the propaganda apparatus established by the party and state is tremendous and pervasive.

The Marxist dogma maintains that any society's economic and political systems determine its culture, but the Chinese Communists, while asserting their Marxist orthodoxy, seem to believe that they must first revolutionize attitudes, opinions, and ideas in order to create a firm foundation for their planned economic, political, and social changes.

It is impossible in a brief newsletter to describe more than a few of the techniques used by the Chinese Communists to carry out domestic propaganda in the most populous country in the world, but perhaps an incomplete picture may at least suggest the kind of propaganda methods by which the ideological revolution in China is being conducted.

There are several important premises in the ideological field on the basis of which the Chinese Communists operate. In the first place they believe that everything the people feel, think, and do is of concern to the party and government. Nothing is "non-political". For example, whether a peasant plants wheat or cotton can be a political matter, because the state usually has a definite opinion on which he should plant - depending on the time and place - and therefore the peasant's attitude on this question reflects his attitude toward the state. If a man beats his wife it is not merely a personal problem; it is a political offense, because the man obviously is opposing the Communists' policies

on emancipation of women. A professor who wants to spend all of his time on laboratory research, and balks at attending time-consuming political meetings, is showing dangerous "bourgeois" traits of "individualism", "separating theory and practice", "divorcing himself from the masses"; these traits cannot be ignored.

In China today there is an officially-sanctioned, "correct" line defining almost all human attitudes and behavior, and if a person violates the line, it has serious ideological implications. Such a person must not only correct the specific actions and attitudes which are out of line (i.e. he must plant cotton, stop beating his wife, or attend political meetings, and must proclaim that he fully realizes that it is the right thing to do), but he must also get down to fundamentals (i.e. he must study - or re-study - Marxism-Leninism and the "thought of Mao Tse-tung" to understand the nature of the Chinese revolution, the "leadership" of the Communist Party, the "line demarcating friend and foe", and so on.)

In short, almost everything one thinks or does in Communist China is either "right" or "wrong" in the eyes of the authorities. And the incentive to be right is very strong. At best a person who is wrong, even on seemingly unimportant things, will probably be subjected to public criticism, propaganda attacks, or well-organized social pressure to make him recant and reform. At worst, a person who is wrong may be punished by the "instruments of state power".

In China today there are several primary sources for the final word on the correct line regarding any question. Most important are the fundamental scriptures which include all the writings of Mao Tse-tung as well as those of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and similar luminaries. These are supplemented by the interpretations of prophets of the second rank including, in China, men such as Liu Shao-ch'i. On most questions, however, these serve mainly as basic reference works, and they are further interpreted in more specific terms by the statements, speeches, and articles of other Communist leaders and by the decrees, laws, and regulations issued by both the party and the government.

Once the line is defined, it is disseminated by the tremendous propaganda apparatus of the regime through every conceivable media capable of conveying ideas to the people.

"News", all of which is disseminated through the official New China News Agency (NCNA), is one of the most important propaganda instruments. News is frankly and unapologetically propagandistic, and the "bourgeois concept of objectivity" is not tolerated. Foreign news comes largely from Soviet sources such as Pravda and Tass. Domestic news is gathered from all over the country, from reports sent in by NCNA branches; it is then re-edited and distributed through the same network. A very high percentage of the news carried in local papers everywhere in the country originates in the capital, however, and the texts of government decrees, reports, speeches, and the like, take up a large part of the space of the average newspaper.

The editorials of the Peking People's Daily, the principal central organ of the party, play a particularly important role in propagating the official line on current issues. These editorials frequently are reprinted in full in newspapers all over the country, and they always provide the cue for what local editors should write. Editorial "opinions", in short, spread over the country in a process of chain-reaction. When the question involved is not of national interest or fundamental importance, the original source may be one of the party's organs at a regional level, but the process of dissemination is the same. The importance of the Peking People's Daily editorials in this scheme of things, however, can be illustrated by one single incident. On the day when the results of the recent Sino-Soviet Moscow talks were released in China, all morning newspapers in Shanghai were actually held up for over twelve hours; they finally reached the streets in the evening, after the text of the People's Daily carrying the official line from the horse's mouth had been received by the Shanghai editors.

All the party members, political workers, and activists are expected to read newspapers daily, and failure to do so is criticized as dereliction of duty. As the official party organ in Canton recently put it, "neglect of newspaper reading is neglect of politics. The neglect of politics is not an ordinary trifle but is a serious manifestation of bourgeois decayed mentality infiltrating into the minds of our working cadres". Everyone else is "encouraged" to read newspapers too, and various devices are used to get them to do so. Postal personnel, for example, solicit subscriptions, and all mass organizations consider it part of their duty to foster newspaper reading. Another very effective means by which readership is increased is the formation of collective newspaper reading groups, which meet at regular intervals and are usually led by professional propagandists. Such groups are particularly useful in extending the audience of newspapers to include illiterates, and they have been organized in China on a large scale. The Chinese Communists claim, for example, that 40,000 such groups have already been organized in the East China Region alone.

The outreach of the press is further extended by a radio monitoring network which covers rural areas not served by large newspapers. In every hsien (county) and town the government assigns full time monitoring personnel to copy dictation-speed news from Peking. In addition to news and editorials, this channel is used for the rapid distribution of important decrees, regulations, laws, and policies. The monitor stations reproduce this material so that - in theory, at least - it reaches virtually the entire population. Some of them mimeograph local newspapers; others send the most important material to personnel maintaining thousands of "blackboard papers" and "wall-newspapers" (hand-written local sheets). In some villages "megaphone broadcasts" by propaganda personnel are held daily to reach the masses.

In addition, of course, the news is broadcast vocally over an extensive network of regular government-run radio stations which blanket the country. But the number of radio receivers, particularly in rural areas, is so limited that the more primitive forms

of dissemination via the monitor network reach a larger number of people. The outreach of regular radio programs is gradually being enlarged, however, by several methods. One method is the organization of collective listening groups. To date this has generally been restricted to special events, but it is a method which can mobilize a huge listening audience when desired. This Spring, for example, special broadcasts of trials which took place during the anti-corruption campaign are reported to have been heard in the city of Canton alone by over 600,000 residents who were organized by roving propaganda teams to listen to the available receivers. Another method which is officially encouraged, but which probably has not yet developed very far due to equipment shortages, is the establishment of village and town systems of wired loudspeakers attached to central receivers.

Publications of all sorts are, very naturally, another principal propaganda medium used by the Chinese Communists. More books and periodicals are being published in China today than ever before in history. And more people are reading what is being printed.

The Chinese Communists, who now have 62 state-owned publishing houses, claim that during 1952 five times as many books and periodicals will be published in China as in the peak pre-war year, 1936. The Feking Government's Publication Administration states that 886 million books and 180 million copies of periodicals are scheduled to roll off the presses during the year. These publications, regardless of the type, all carry a propaganda message. Even purely literary works, such as poetry, plays, and novels, cannot be non-political; widespread "rectification studies" carried out by Communist-organized artists and writers associations have attempted to overcome remnant non-political tendencies. The Communist-sponsored national association of scientists has done the same with its members, as have other mass organizations.

When any "deviations" from the correct political line occur in publications this merely provides an occasion for enthusiastic self-criticism and reinforcement of orthodoxy by prolonged discussion of errors. This year, for example, the magazine Hsueh Hsi (Study), which is probably the top official theoretical magazine dealing with ideological questions in Communist China got slightly off the beam in its analysis of bourgeois thought; as a result it was suspended from April to August (by what olympian authority it is difficult to guess), and when it reappeared it was filled with humble confessions and elaborate definitions of the correct line.

A great many of the books being published are volumes dealing with politics, economics, philosophy, and social science, all written from the Marxist point of view. New textbooks, many of which are adaptations of Soviet ones, are coming out in great numbers, as are scientific and technical volumes of practical use. It is perhaps significant, however, that the best creative writers in China have been notably unproductive during the past three years.

In the book field one development, which is paralleled in other fields of creative expression in China, has been the debasement of literary values under the banner of popularization. The two best sellers in China during the past year, for example, have both been simplified, illustrated editions of books dealing with current government policies; one on the new marriage law sold 11.5 million copies and one on the suppression of counter-revolutionaries sold 10.6 million copies. Pocket-size cartoon books have also been promoted on a big scale, and since the Communist take-over several thousand titles, and millions of copies, have been sold; the majority of themes and stories are overtly political.

Although there has been no dramatic destruction of pre-Communist literature in China, the process has taken place steadily and quietly. Libraries have weeded out "bad books" in which "there are ideological mistakes". Many plays and operas have been banned, and others revised. "Undesirable" books from abroad have been cut off. And even the old-style cartoon books have slowly been withdrawn and destroyed.

A flood of new periodicals has appeared in China. The best seller of them all has been one called Current Affairs Handbook (Shih Shih Shou Ts'e), a fortnightly propaganda guide which in a single issue during the past year is reported to have sold 3.5 million copies. The other best sellers are mainly in the fields of slick mass pictorials, such as People's Pictorial (Jen Min Hua Pao), and cartoon magazines such as Cartoons (Man Hua). But probably the majority of magazines are specialized, official, house organs of the myriad of government, party, and mass organizations in China; these specialized magazines aim at specific target groups such as children, youth, women, artists, movie workers, scientists, and the like. They translate the general party line into terms relevant to specific audiences, and often they are virtually required reading for thousands of people.

The development of a new literature for the semi-literate rural population is another important development in Communist China. Many pamphlets, books, and even newspapers are being put out in colloquial, simply-written language to reach peasants and workers who have never been readers before. Hand in hand with this, a national program of literacy training has been undertaken. The system being used is the so-called "Chi Chien-hua short-course literacy method", devised by a teacher in the army. (Actually the method is based on ideas developed many years ago by Chinese linguistic experts but never tried out on any large scale). The Chinese Communists now claim that illiterate soldiers, workers, and peasants can be taught 2,000 basic Chinese characters (enough to read popular newspapers and books) by this system through intensive study in the relatively short period of 300 hours. (Some sources claim it only takes 100 hours.)

A national anti-illiteracy forum in Peking in September defined the targets for the present campaign being developed all over the country: "to eliminate illiteracy among cadres of all organs and bodies in the country within two years; to eliminate illiteracy among all industrial workers within 3 to 4 years; to

eliminate illiteracy among young peasants and workers of all trades within 6 to 7 years; to eliminate illiteracy entirely in China within the next ten years". The Chinese Communists are not averse to ambitious projects. Their primary motives for being so ambitious in regard to literacy are practical ones. "The starting point of culture now is literacy", Teng Tzu-hui, Deputy Chairman of Central-South China said in a speech last July. "After they are literate, the masses of workers will be able to go a step further by studying political theories systematically and learning advanced industrial techniques. The short-course literacy method is a prerequisite for such studies. Once the mass of workers and peasants have mastered the cultural tool, their progress will be rapid, and they will easily catch up with the requirements of national construction".

In addition to putting out an unprecedented number of publications, and increasing the number of people who can read them, the Chinese Communists have also further developed the mechanics of distribution and sales. State book-stores have been opened in all areas of the country. The New China Publishing Company, a state enterprise, has centralized distribution, and it now has over 1,000 branches throughout the country; from these branches it sends out circulating teams which penetrate towns and villages. Rural libraries have been fostered, and officially it is claimed that there are already over 13,500 of them in existence. "Cultural centers" in both villages and urban factories have been pushed; almost a year ago the Communists asserted that 700 had already been set up. Through these channels, as well as through schools, organized indoctrination classes, and mass organizations, publications of all sorts filter down to the grass roots, and strong pressures are applied to induce people to read them.

It isn't possible to describe the whole list of propaganda media which the Chinese Communists employ, but a few more should at least be mentioned. All motion picture studios in China are now grinding out propaganda films and dubbing Soviet films with Chinese sub-titles. Films are scarce, because all those from the U.S. and other western countries which formerly dominated the China market, have been banned. But the few which are now available are fully used. In the cities, they normally rotate until shown in all theatres, and block-scale of tickets to members of various mass organizations is a convenient way to ensure attendance at theatres, however dull a motion picture may be. Many rural projection teams have also been organized; they tour the countryside. In addition, simple slide projectors are being produced on a fairly large scale, together with appropriate slides, for showing in rural areas.

These are merely the most obvious and conventional propaganda media, however, and the Chinese Communists do not confine themselves to the obvious. In the big cities today, for example, one cannot go anywhere without being exposed to some sort of propaganda. Tall buildings have long cloth streamers bearing slogans (the current emphasis is on the Communists' "peace" campaign). Wall space is covered with written slogans. A group of workers going to their factory in a truck is likely to be carrying flags and banners enscribed with slogans. An old man read-

ing on a park bench will probably have a book-mark bearing Communist maxims stuck in the back pages. A young girl writing her diary at night undoubtedly will read a Communist thought for the day on each page. School-children in a singing class will learn words about how China must "Oppose America and Aid Korea". Middle school children during recess may well be going through the motions of a dance with political significance. An old couple which prefers Chinese opera to Communist propaganda films is likely to find their favorite opera modified to carry a political message on current affairs. The calendars in restaurants, if they are new ones, do not bear portraits of pretty girls any longer; instead they carry scenes on land reform or the "People's Volunteers" in Korea. Portraits of Communist leaders are everywhere.

The situation in villages, although less highly organized, is similar. Even in the traditional "New Year pictures" which plaster the doorways of most homes, the old gods are being replaced by modern figures representing revolutionary heroes. Paper cut-outs decorating windows are used to convey a political message. Itinerant story-tellers are being indoctrinated with new story material.

To produce the huge volume of propaganda in these varied forms, virtually all persons in China working in creative literary and artistic fields have been organized into mass organizations, which operate under the direction of Communist propaganda agencies, and they are in effect tools of the Communists' propaganda machine.

A simple listing of the propaganda media which the Chinese Communists employ gives only a partial picture of the extensive propaganda system in China today, however. In actual fact, perhaps the most important element in the system is agitation and personal contact by trained propaganda teams and individuals.

On January 1, 1951, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued a "Directive for the Establishment of a Propaganda Network for the Masses Throughout the Party". The system which is being organized on the basis of this directive reaches down to the lowest levels of Chinese society; the trained propagandists working in the system are responsible for oral propaganda even in individual homes!

By the start of this year, twelve months after the original directive, the Chinese Communists stated that in this party-run network they had already organized almost two million propagandists and over 50,000 information officers. At present the number is undoubtedly much larger. The immediate aim is to bring at least one percent of the general population into the network (this would amount to over 4.5 million people), and up to five percent of the personnel in key places such as factories.

The network is organized and run by the Communist Party Committees at all levels. The Party propaganda departments, cooperating with the cultural and educational bureaux in local governments, select and train the personnel. They also provide them with propaganda plans, directives, and material. Although

present evidence indicates that the system is not yet completely standardized, it is planned that provincial and municipal party committees will issue detailed propaganda plans and directives bi-monthly or monthly, while the basic party branches will hold planning and briefing conferences fortnightly or weekly.

Information officers are generally found only at the level of district committees and above and are, for the most part, responsible leaders of the party. Their function is to make periodic speeches and reports on important issues, not only to party personnel but also to mass gatherings in villages, factories, and so on. The propagandists are the real workhorses, however. They are usually party members, but some Youth Corps members and trusted activists are also included. They are responsible for all activities at the bottom level. They not only distribute available propaganda materials but also must carry on extensive oral propaganda. Their manifold duties include the following: making speeches, delivering reports, picking out individuals and indoctrinating them, story-telling, organizing slide showings, picture exhibitions, puppet shows, singing sessions, and dramatic performances, maintaining "wall newspapers" or "blackboard newspapers", giving "megaphone broadcasts from the rooftops", and so on. They must "deliver propaganda to the door" and conduct "propaganda on the 'kang'" (a 'kang' is a bed in North China). They are urged to "talk to anybody you meet" and "replace family gossip by talk on current events and form the habit of propagandizing whenever and wherever you can".

In many places there are local "propaganda stations" or libraries; the propagandists manage them. Propagandists must also mobilize assistance from among local activists drawn from the ranks of the masses. The aim is to have "people's propaganda teams", composed of activists organized by the professional propagandists, in every village and in every urban street. These teams can be used to reach into all homes. The Communists claim that this aim has already been accomplished in some areas, and that in isolated places up to 15 percent of the population can now be mobilized for propaganda activities - to work on the other 85 percent.

Apart from Youth Corps members and leaders of mass organizations, a major population group which can be mobilized for propaganda activists consists of rural teachers. The Chinese Communists estimate that there are over 700,000 primary school teachers alone in rural China, and they call them a "formidable force in our propaganda corps". "A scrutiny of the school teachers' experiences has shown that propaganda by teachers in public places has been very effective, and the school children will carry the propaganda deep into the families, to the women and their young friends. The combination of rural teachers and primary school students can form a huge propaganda force indeed".

This nationwide party network of information officers, propagandists, and propaganda activists is a permanent system, apart from the special propaganda teams and personnel used for innumerable purposes by the huge Chinese Communists' propaganda machine. It is a system by which the Communists can ensure that their

propaganda reaches people throughout the country on a continuing basis. It is a system for guaranteeing that the current party line reaches into every home.

What I have so far described, in barest outline, is the regular propaganda set-up in Communist China. In addition, the Chinese Communists have developed a system of group indoctrination which is probably even more effective in influencing the minds of the Chinese people than the regular flow of propaganda. Not only are the schools centers for indoctrination, but a large percentage of the adult population in China has been subjected to intensive indoctrination in small "hsueh hsi" ("study") groups during the past three years. In these groups the party line is hammered into people's minds by methods which deserve the attention of psychologists and psychoanalysts; group pressure is used to break down any individual resistance or non-conformist tendencies until every group member expresses full acceptance of the ideas which the Communists wish to get across. This is not the place to start a description of indoctrination methods in China, however; that will have to wait until a later newsletter.

There is no doubt that Chinese Communist propaganda techniques are extremely effective. On the surface, China is turning into a regimented country of yes-men who parrot the Communist Party line. Surface appearances may be somewhat deceiving, however. Ideas can go underground, and probably a significant number of the educated adult population of China have resisted Communist propaganda with varying degrees of success. But the question of what is happening to the minds of illiterates and youths who lack a sound basis for judging and evaluating Communist propaganda is a different matter. It is these groups - particularly the youths - who are most important in Chinese Communist eyes. And the Communists will undoubtedly be able to inculcate them with their "new culture", because before many years pass they will not remember or know anything else.

Yours faithfully,



A. Doak Barnett.

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