

Excerpts from

2009
REPORT TO CONGRESS
of the
**U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC AND
SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION**
ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION
NOVEMBER 2009

**SECTION 2: CHINA'S EXTERNAL PROPAGANDA
AND INFLUENCE OPERATIONS,
AND THE RESULTING IMPACTS
ON THE UNITED STATES**

“The Commission shall investigate and report exclusively on—

“REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND SECURITY IMPACTS—The triangular economic and security relationship among the United States, Taipei and the People’s Republic of China (including the military modernization and force deployments of the People’s Republic of China aimed at Taipei), the national budget of the People’s Republic of China, and the fiscal strength of the People’s Republic of China in relation to internal instability in the People’s Republic of China and the likelihood of the externalization of problems arising from such internal instability.

“FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION—The implications of restrictions on speech and access to information in the People’s Republic of China for its relations with the United States in the areas of economic and security policy. . . .

Introduction

The Chinese government makes a considerable effort to shape international perceptions of China through the extensive use of propaganda and the dissemination of selective information. The coordinated messages of the party and the government emphasize China’s economic growth and attractiveness as a destination for investment, the government’s stated desire for a peaceful international system, and China’s “stability” and “harmony” under party leadership. The effort serves two goals: the continued survival and growth in influence of the Communist Party within China and the enhancement of China’s reputation and influence abroad.

The Chinese government views foreign propaganda as an essential tool of state power and maintains an extensive bureaucracy dedicated to this purpose. It also seeks to deploy its state-controlled media in the service of China’s foreign policy goals. Motivated by a pervasive belief that western governments manipulate the press to unfairly portray China in a negative light, the Chinese government is increasing resources devoted to China’s state-sponsored foreign language media outlets. In addition to the expansion of media directly controlled by the government, China is expanding the creation of facade “independent” news outlets in which the Chinese government or Chinese state-owned firms exercise influence behind the scenes.

In recent years, Beijing has also increasingly sought out the assistance of western public relations and lobbying firms to help improve its international image as well as to advocate for its preferred policies. The

advice of these firms has helped to shape the messages that the Chinese government presents to international audiences. Additionally, the Chinese government seeks to shape opinion in elite policy-making circles by influencing the commentary about China and U.S.-China relations that emerges from U.S. academics and think tanks. This effort includes giving rewards to “friendly” scholars, such as preferred access to career-enhancing interviews and documents, as well as taking punitive actions, such as visa denials, for academics who anger the authorities. These rewards and punishments offer the Chinese government leverage over the careers of foreign scholars and thereby encourage a culture of academic self-censorship. By influencing scholars, these actions also shape analysis and public understanding of China.

Using Foreign Propaganda to Conduct Domestic Propaganda

Perhaps the most important motivation for the Chinese government’s efforts at foreign propaganda actually relates back to China’s own domestic politics. As the CCP worked to rebuild its tattered legitimacy in the wake of June 1989, a cornerstone of its efforts was the construction of a nationalist narrative of restored Chinese historical greatness. One component of this effort is presenting to China’s own citizens a message that foreigners now greatly admire China due to its recent achievements under CCP leadership. Dr. Cull testified that this is a matter of “conducting domestic propaganda by conducting foreign propaganda.” 176 This process includes emphasizing to a domestic audience the expanding number of foreigners studying the Chinese language and the similarly expanded level of Chinese-language news media now lavish opening ceremonies surrounding the August 2008 Beijing Olympics. As Dr. Cull stated, this is about “display[ing] the kudos that come to the Communist Party by saying, ‘Look, behold, we give you the gift of the admiration of the world.’ ” 177

China’s Efforts to Influence U.S. Institutions and Public Opinion

This year, the Commission also examined alleged efforts by the Chinese government to influence both public and elite opinion as it relates to China policy. The CCP employs a range of both carrots and sticks to ensure that those able to shape U.S. public opinion and government policies advance positions that are in alignment with Beijing’s interests. This has included efforts to influence commentary emerging from the U.S. academic and think tank community, encouraging U.S.-based corporations to advocate policies that are in Beijing’s interests, and sponsoring lobbying and public relations activities by U.S. firms.

Efforts to Influence U.S. Academics and Think Tanks

Testimony received and interviews conducted by the Commission this year demonstrated that the Chinese government employs both positive inducements and coercive pressure to draw favorable commentary from scholars in U.S. universities and think tanks. This influence can take the form of giving career rewards for favored authors, such as providing greater access to officials and documents for research, as well as the harsher hand of meting out penalties for scholars who publish materials critical of the Chinese government. As stated by one academic economist, “Academics who study China . . . habitually please the Chinese Communist Party, sometimes consciously, and often unconsciously . . . the incentives for academics all go one way: one does not upset the Party.” 205 One of the punitive tools that the Chinese government may employ to intimidate foreign academics is the denial of visas to enter China to conduct research. Although the PRC will not officially acknowledge doing so, elements within the Chinese government have clearly placed a number of foreign academics on a visa denial “blacklist” due to their publishing on topics that hit a nerve with Beijing. One example may be seen in the case of several authors who contributed to a 2004 collection of articles about Xinjiang and subsequently found themselves denied visas to enter China. As described by one of the affected authors, no official explanation was given, other than, “You are not welcome in China. You should know why.” 206

To be denied access to China for research purposes can seriously damage scholarly careers, particularly for younger academics still seeking tenure or hoping to become established in their fields.²⁰⁷ The resulting fear of visa denial throws a shadow of self-censorship over sociological and political science research on China, but this phenomenon has not been widely discussed in public—most likely because those not blacklisted fear bringing attention to the issue, and many of those who have been blacklisted may hope to be “for-given” if they keep silent. Out of six allegedly blacklisted academics contacted by Commission staff this year, only two were willing and available to speak publicly on the record about the issue.²⁰⁸

Such control over access—along with the positive rewards granted to academics deemed “friendly”²⁰⁹—can give the Chinese government real influence over the ways in which academic opinionmakers address issues related to China. Perry Link, professor of comparative literature at the University of California—Riverside— and himself denied visas to enter China since 1996²¹⁰— has described this phenomenon as an “anaconda in the chandelier” that hangs silently over scholars who deal with China. He has stated that “[t]he problem is most salient . . . for political scientists who study the Chinese government and need to nurture their contacts among Chinese officials. The effects are hard to measure, because people are reluctant to speak about them [and] no scholar likes to acknowledge self-censorship.”²¹¹

Another prominent sinologist, Orville Schell, has described the process of self-censorship as follows:

I try to say, ‘Okay, here is what I think, what I understand, what I think I see, have learned and read.’ Then, I try and think through what the Chinese government’s reaction will be. . . . And then I try to be as truthful as I can in a way that is respectful and unprovocative but that is not pandering. China has a tremendously highly evolved capacity to create panderers both among its own people and foreigners who become involved with them.²¹²

One academic who was willing to speak in public about this issue was Ross Terrill, a professor of modern Chinese history and currently a fellow in research at Harvard University’s John K. Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies. Dr. Terrill put the matter this way:

Self-censorship, which is a daily necessity for journalists in China, also occurs in diluted form among American editors, academics, and others dealing with China. Folk worry about their next visa, their access to a sensitive area like Xinjiang for research, or take a Beijing point of view because of the largesse available for their projects from the Chinese side.²¹³

Dr. Link, who testified before the Commission this year, stated that both academics and government officials are also encouraged to self-censor by the opportunities available for profitable consulting work outside of the channels of academia and government. He expressed concern that the U.S. government might not always receive the best or most objective advice on U.S.-China policy as a result of the “subterranean economic interests that are at play.”²¹⁴ Dr. Victor Shih, professor of political science at Northwestern University, echoed some of these concerns. He testified to the Commission that

[a] problem is [that] Western academics and government officials . . . are self-censoring themselves For example People who do research in Xinjiang in a very serious way are barred from going to China. So many of us avoid that topic . . . and then there [are] the economic interests which face both academics and government officials. They don’t want to offend the Chinese government and . . . close the doors to future opportunities to make money.²¹⁵

Others among the handful of academics willing to discuss this issue in public have further described a “radiation effect,” in which the negative example of those penalized by the Chinese government deters other scholars from researching or writing on “sensitive” issues that might offend the CCP.²¹⁶ As summed up by

another academic sinologist, “There is a tendency not to do anything that will threaten your ability to get access.” 217

The resulting power either to foster or to hobble academic careers has given the Chinese government significant authority to shape the formation of public knowledge and opinion regarding China. In response, Dr. Terrill recommended to the Commission that the government of the United States should “resist China’s picking of winners and losers among Americans dealing with cultural and intellectual exchanges with the PRC.” 218

Exchanges between U.S. and Chinese Think Tanks and Academic Institutions In recent years, exchanges have continued to expand between academic and think tank institutions in the United States and their counterparts in China. However, despite the many potential benefits of academic dialogue, these are not exchanges between groups of objective scholars: Chinese academics working in the social sciences at prominent institutions are selected in part based on their loyalty to the CCP.²¹⁹ Chinese think tanks do have limited leeway to engage in debates on public policy; however, they operate as adjunct institutions of the party-state, with no independent status.²²⁰ Chinese think tanks are also actively engaged in the process of formulating government policy, a role that has been increasing in importance in recent years.²²¹ Notwithstanding a tendency by many foreign academics to treat Chinese institutions as if they operate in a parallel fashion to their western counterparts,²²² the status of Chinese think tanks as government institutions inherently means that they serve as a channel for propagating the preferred messages of the Chinese Communist Party.

One of China’s most prominent think tanks is the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) in Beijing, which also functions as a bureau of one of China’s leading foreign intelligence agencies, the Ministry of State Security. (For further information on the ministry and other Chinese intelligence services, see chap. 2, sec. 3, of this Report, “China’s Human Espionage Activities that Target the United States, and the Resulting Impacts on U.S. National Security.”) CICIR is one of the largest foreign policy think tanks in China, employing approximately 150 research analysts and 220 support staff. ²²³ According to information from the institute’s Web site, CICIR participated in 119 different visits or exchanges with scholars from U.S. think tanks and universities from January 2007 through June 2009.²²⁴ Members of this Commission have also held discussions with representatives of CICIR in the course of fact-finding trips to China, including meetings in March 2008 and May 2009.²²⁵ While such visits offer a genuine opportunity for exchanges of scholarly views—as well as a potentially productive pathway for “Track Two” dialogue—they also offer the PRC a channel for controlled and coordinated efforts at perception management. CICIR’s expanding international contacts allow it greater opportunities to shape international perceptions of China: As one such example, a workshop held at CICIR contributed to the deliberations of the U.S. National Intelligence Council in producing its 2008 report, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*.²²⁶

Conclusions

- The Chinese government is directly engaged in promoting its preferred propaganda narratives to foreign audiences and has an extensive bureaucracy dedicated to work in this area. The international propaganda messages of the government are similar in most respects to those for a Chinese audience—emphasizing China’s economic growth, China’s desire for a peaceful international system, and China’s “stability” under CCP leadership.
- To its domestic audience, the Chinese government promotes the message that China is under attack from hostile forces abroad. Many figures within both the Chinese government and the public express a sense of frustration that the western media presents unfair portrayals of China and state that China therefore needs

more effective international communication tools to counter such “attacks.”

- The Chinese government views effective foreign propaganda as an essential tool of state power and is significantly increasing the level of effort and resources devoted to China’s state-sponsored foreign language media outlets. Some of these efforts may also assume the form of nominally “independent” news outlets in which the Chinese government or Chinese state-owned firms exercise considerable influence behind the scenes.

- The Chinese government actively seeks to influence the commentary about China and U.S.-China relations that comes from U.S. academics and think tanks. This takes the form of providing both positive rewards to “friendly” scholars—such as preferred access to interviews and documents—as well as taking punitive actions such as denying visas for academics who anger Beijing. These rewards and punishments offer the Chinese government leverage over the careers of foreign scholars and thereby encourage a culture of academic self-censorship.
- In recent years, U.S. public relations and lobbying firms have played a more prominent role in Beijing’s efforts to improve its image and advocate for its preferred policies. The advice of western public relations firms has helped to shape the messages that the Chinese government presents to international audiences. However, China’s use of direct lobbying in the United States is still limited in scale compared to the efforts of many other countries.