

CHINESE EXTERNAL PROPAGANDA

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Executive Summary

1. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is convinced that the outside world has a distorted view of China due to systematic misrepresentation of the country in Western media. To the Chinese, the negativity obviates its tremendous achievements in the past four decades.
2. The CCP believes that its achievements warrant a better international image and more soft power. In the past decade China has invested heavily on upgrading its international image and fight negative publicity abroad with a “Grand External Propaganda Push”.
3. President Xi Jinping characterised the plight of China’s external propaganda as the “inability to express our views and inability for our views to travel far”. He has set ambitious goals to craft a new image of China by reshaping the international discourse to gain trust from the international community based on new, non-liberal values that would allow China to claim legitimacy and moral high ground.
4. China heavily utilises its cultural traditions and ancient Chinese philosophy as the building blocks of its alternative narrative. With substantial financial resources, it has adopted a commercial approach and runs external propaganda as a media business. Chinese diplomats and propagandists are now on the offensive, vigorously countering negative views and promoting Chinese perspectives.
5. What the CCP is up against is formidable—the entire edifice of the liberal international order and the deeply entrenched values, norms, rules, regimes, institutions and mindset that dominate the discourse on international relations. China wants to grow out of this straightjacket now.
6. In Western countries, General Secretary Xi’s campaign has aroused widespread suspicion of and backlash against what is conceived as communist infiltration and covert interference of the domestic politics of liberal democracies from an authoritarian regime.

7. Confucius Institutes have been cut back, so has the number of correspondents from Chinese official media. The United States reclassified major state media in the country as “foreign government functionaries”. Chinese official media tend to be ignored as lacking credibility.
8. Besides the dominance of the liberal discourse, Chinese external propaganda is also constrained by domestic politics because it is part and parcel of the same propaganda edifice. It is subject to “political correctness” with Chinese characteristics and the styles and practices that are inappropriate for foreign audience.
9. In fact, much of the external propaganda is oriented internally—to satisfy the bosses at home, win applause from domestic audience and keep up with rising nationalist sentiments. As a result, China’s alternative discourse is evolving into a “civilisational monologue”, potentially opening another front for decoupling from the West.