

Chinese Propaganda Falls Short

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This article studies the methodology of Chinese propaganda warfare against Taiwan vis-à-vis Russian propaganda campaign, to analyze their exercise of soft power and the resulting effects. The author finds fundamental deficiencies in the Chinese case, and therein lie opportunities for Taiwan to exploit.

Russian and Chinese propaganda methodologies differ vastly. To understand a nation's propaganda methodology, one needs to analyze its cultural values. For the purpose of this article, "cultural value" is defined as patterns of thinking, behaviors and emotional reactions on both the conscious and sub-consciousness levels. Individuals adopt patterns as they socialized, and on a larger scale cultural value is the software that predicts societies' responses to external stimuli.

Russian culture has always been rooted in ideologies. Orthodoxism and Tsarism dominated before being substituted by Communism. Modern ideology is a combination of many strands: Great Russia, Slavicism, Orthodoxism and even some imperial-communist philosophy. For centuries, when Russia wants to influence other countries, it intends to reach whole societies and win the heart and mind of every individual. Therefore Russians propaganda is designed to manipulate nations in their entirety. Because of the impossibility to impose one particular vision of truth on every group in a society, propaganda specialists create different strategies for different subjects. The indoctrination works well if the mentality of the target is similar to Russian mentality.

Unfortunately for Moscow, the propaganda techniques effective in Russia usually fail in a society with different cultural software, as demonstrated by its numerous misadventures in European countries like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, France and Great Britain. The most susceptible groups in these countries are right-wing organizations, whose members already subscribe to some kind of creed therefore are more open to ideological persuasion than those not ideologically driven (the majority in European societies). Leftist circles are also vulnerable because of their nostalgia for Russia, so are Russian minorities. During the current Ukrainian conflict, Russian psychological operations (psyop) mostly failed because of the inadaptability resulted from Ukraine's different cultural software.

Chinese propaganda methodology is completely different because it is based on a different culture. In contrast to Kremlin, Beijing does not intend to proselytize but only to sell the Chinese economical model as a more effective counterbalance to Western free market. China does not seek converts, only clients who are enticed by profits but in effect turned into economic dependencies. The second difference is range. Russia targets whole societies. China targets only elites in politics, business, the military, the academia, and the media. China intends to construct strong economical connections with states, not to form emotional bonds with their citizens. This calculation yields results in non-democratic countries but not in

democracies. Another weakness of the Chinese propaganda is its focus on economy. It will work as long as China is booming, but when the money ceases to flow, its influence will not endure. In contrast, Russia's converts will be faithful to Moscow regardless of its economic situation.

China's propaganda campaign against Taiwan is based on two mechanisms. The first is to build up *guanxi* with individuals and boosting it with financial inducement (*guanxi* literally means relationship but also implies interpersonal investment); the second is to push the notion that Taiwan has no economic future other than dependency on China. Members of the ruling party KMT profit personally from stronger ties with China and their conscience is soothed by the belief that Taiwan would also benefit. However the youth, with little to gain from China, are immune to this tactic. Beijing used to assume that once they have bagged those in authority, the public would follow subserviently. Therefore Beijing was caught off guard by Taiwan's Sunflower student movement earlier this year; it was simply beyond their comprehension.

After successive protest waves in Taiwan and Hong Kong, China belatedly realized that they have ignored the youth to their cost. But it would not be easy to address this problem for they do not understand their targets and lack the required techniques. I estimate that a full-blown psychological operation would take ten to fifteen years. The propagandists first need to identify each group functioning on different social levels before decoding its software for behavioral prediction. Then they must tailor specific strategies to change their cultural values. The last stage is implementation followed by continuous adjustment. A quicker way to subdue Taiwan

might be to manufacture major economic crises in Taiwan and indicate cooperation with China as the only salvation. However this would not be a psychological operation but blatant economic hijack.

Taiwan has real opportunity not only to defend its cultural integrity but also to exercise its soft power on the Chinese people. Contemporary Taiwanese culture is a mixture of Chinese, Taiwanese aboriginal, American, Japanese and Korean cultures. For the young Chinese it could be just as attractive as any of the above. Moreover, because Taiwanese culture corresponds to the Chinese software much better than the others do, it could be even more appealing to the Chinese sentiment. To maximize its influence takes a sophisticated psychological operation like the one described above. At the beginning stealth is of the essence so as to avoid detection and countermeasures. Popular and mass cultural products are ideal vehicles. It will of necessity be a huge and long-term operation. The effects might take a dozen years or even one generation (20-25 years) to show. I only hope Taiwan can afford the luxury of time. **BT**

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