

# The role of china press media essay

[Media](#)



The word "propaganda" has often been associated with negative impressions; people often associate it with words like bias, misleading, rumor, injuring, damaging, and so on. According to Oxford Dictionaries. com, propaganda has been defined as "chiefly derogatory information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view"; while Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defined it as "The spreading of ideas, information or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, cause, or person; ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause." Whether or not the word has been linked with negative associations, propaganda is largely used towards the public through the various forms of communication in order to win their support. Most researches and scholar's work on propaganda were basically reviewed from Communication and Political aspects. From communication aspect, propaganda means presenting information primarily to influence an audience. According to Harold D. Lasswell, a leading American political scientist and communications theorist, "Propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols".[1]These symbols would disseminated in systemically and repeatedly order, and also dispersed over a wide variety of media, so that it will eventually created a socially reality that leads the audiences to act according to a certain pattern of valuation, that "the existence of an attitude is not a direct datum of experience, but an inference from signs which have a conventionalized significance".[2]From the political aspect, propaganda refers to any persuasive technique that aimed towards influencing the attitude of a community toward some political actions or ideologies, by presenting one

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sided or often false, but certainly "compelling" claims. For Laurin, "Propaganda means any form of communication in support of national objectives designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, whether directly or indirectly".[3]In sum, for a propaganda to work, as Linebarger said, it must "consists of the planned use of any form of public or mass-produced communication designed to affect the minds and emotions of a given group for a specific purpose, whether military, economic, or political."[4]In war time, propaganda is specifically important and had been widely used as part of psychological warfare. The goal is to find out ways to mold opinion, behavior or attitude of public, especially the enemies, to support their cause. In Guerrilla warfare, propaganda can be used as an art of winning over "hearts and minds". Through its psychological manipulation of information, a good propaganda will be able to create a desired result. Richard Stubbs in *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* argues that the hearts and minds approach was about gaining the enthusiastic support of the population rather than just their acquiescence. [5]For Mao Zedong, a theorist of "popular war", the relationship between guerrilla army and the population is like the fish and the water. Where the population is like water and the army is like the fish who inhabit it. In fact, propagandist seldom concern about the interest and benefit of audiences; and whether or not telling the truth is also not being their main concern. The most impressive part of a successful propaganda is that, it exercise its soft power in order to make the targeted audiences accepted certain idea, not because they were forced to accept, but accepted it with heartedly and mindfully.

## **2. 2 Origins of propaganda: Historically & modern warfare**

Although the word propaganda is now often been associated with lies and dishonesty, in English, however, the word was originally a neutral term for the dissemination of information in favor of any given cause. According to Oxford English Dictionary, the modern word "propaganda" is derived from the Latin verb propagare, meaning "to propagate, to disseminate, and to spread". Also, the Encyclopedia of Propaganda defines the term as the "spreading of doctrine, especially religious or political doctrine; there was no connotation that the doctrine was false or that it was being spread by deceitful means".[6]The term Propaganda gained currency in 1622, when Pope Gregory XV created a new branch of the Catholic Church called Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (congregation for propagating the faith), or informally simply Propaganda. The main activity of the branch is pitching Catholicism in non Catholic countries.[7]From the 1790s, the term began being used also for propaganda in secular activities, and began taking a pejorative connotation in mid 19th century, when the idea was appropriated from religion to the political sphere.[8]In our modern era, the term has been given a much broader and sinister meaning, which is generally associated with intent to mislead, or to influence through manipulation of symbols and psychology of the target audience.

## **2. 3 Types of propaganda:**

As listed by Linebarger, propaganda can be distinguished by consideration of five elements, namely Source (including Media), Time, Audience, Subject, and Mission.[9]Among them, Source is the most important element. Basically, the source of information could be either open and acknowledged, or faked.

According to the source and nature of the message, propaganda can be classified into three types[10]:

1. White propaganda
2. Grey propaganda
3. Black propaganda

White propaganda is propaganda which issued from an acknowledged source. This is the most common type of propaganda; the source of information normally can be correctly and openly identified; and contains more accurate information. This type of propaganda typically uses standard public relations techniques and by one-sided presentation of an argument, where an organization is trying to highlight positive attributes while ignoring negatives. The information normally carried by media which targeted at the public. For example, during the Anti Bandit Month campaign, which launched in the Malaya from February 1950 to April 1950, both local and foreign newspapers had given wide coverage of the campaign, where they openly published anti-communists news[11]; condemned PKM's armed rebellion and called on the public to support the government in fighting communists.[12] This example matches what Jacques Ellul mentioned in his book, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, that "white propaganda as an awareness of the public of attempts being made to influence it... and that propaganda is being made; its source is known; its aims and intentions are identified".[13] In this category of propaganda, most media organizations are normally controlled by the government and seldom against government's policy because of their self-imposed censorship.[14]

Grey propaganda does not clearly identify any source.[15] In some cases, the source might be correctly identified, but the accuracy of the information is not certain; or in adverse, the information might be accurate, but the source is not identifiable. From this sense, we can say that the major application of grey propaganda is to make enemies believe falsehoods, and to make

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audience confused about the real situation. The negative effects occurred from grey propaganda is almost the same with what black propaganda would have brought.

2. 3. 3 Black propaganda

Black propaganda purports to emanate from a source other than the true source.[16] This type of propaganda occurs when messages are produced but are portrayed as coming from the enemy side or another entity. Sometimes the source is concealed, and sometimes it is credited to a false authority. The main purpose of a black propaganda is to spread lies, fabrications, and deceptions, so that it will vilify, embarrass or misrepresent the enemy.

[17] The differentiation of grey and black propaganda is in outright deception of the audience regarding the source.[18] According to Richard Clutterbuck, black propaganda was believed to be used during the Malayan Emergency, as he noted, "black propaganda...was also used.[19] Anthony Short, in his book, *Communist Insurrection in Malaya* mentioned that, 'Black propaganda, i. e. manufactured by Government but purporting to be from Communist sources, became an operation on its own. It is a highly sensitive area of inquiry and no assessment has been attempted'.[20] According to Anthony Short in his book, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, the British Government, through its Emergency Information Services (EIS), for example, had sent out forging letters with dubious value to guerrillas from their families, and inciting others to murder their superiors before surrendering. And according to some District Officers in 1950, ninety per cent of government's poster propaganda was discredited.[21] The major strength of black propaganda is that the audiences are not aware that someone is trying to influence them through manipulating the message, and do not feel that they are being pushed in a certain direction.[22] Another set of distinctions

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can be set up in terms of the timing. Propaganda set for long term objectives can be categorized as Strategic Propaganda; while the other one with short term objectives categorized as Tactical Propaganda[23].

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2. 3. 4 Strategic Propaganda Linebarger defined Strategic propaganda as, " directed at enemy forces, enemy peoples, and enemy-occupied areas in their entirety, and – in coordination with strategic planning – is designed to effectuate results planned and sought over a period of weeks, months, or years".[24] This form of propaganda, with its long term objectives, might be carried out through political and economic reforms in order to counter the insurgents' ideas, and its purpose is to wear down the enemy by psychological changes that may extend over months, or even years. During the Malayan Emergency 1948-1960 when the British government fighting the communist guerrilla, the aim of the government was not only to defeat the guerrilla in the jungle, but to end the communist's influence in the " hearts and minds" of the Chinese, so called the Malayanization process.[25] It was aimed to change the Chinese loyalty from Chinese Communism to the Malayan Western oriented values. Mohamed Zarougui in his doctorate thesis, Propaganda and Psychological Warfare in Guerrilla Warfare and Counter-Guerrilla Warfare: the Malayan Emergency 1948-1960, mentioned that many guerrillas were not merely ' bandits' who carried out a new kind of military action, they were in fact had strong ideals. " Thus to defeat an idea was to find another stronger idea".[26] Instead of just saying to people that Communism was an evil, the government should prove to people that Western Democracy would work better for them. In these respect, the

importance of propaganda was to repeatedly and continuously address the audience on the issues and, in favored by its various propaganda means including leaflets, newspapers, radio, television, pamphlets, air-broadcasts and so on, to convince them to believe in the government's claims and ignore the insurgent's cause, hoping that the Chinese community would eventually stop supporting the communist. 2. 3. 5 Tactical

Propaganda Tactical propaganda is directed at specific audiences, usually named, and is prepared and executed in support of localized combat operations.[27] This type of propaganda normally aimed at some specific target, his/ her name can be identified, and the location where he/ she were hiding can be traced. This short term objective of tactical propaganda is to have quick defeat of the insurgency, for instant, to encourage surrenders, to convince the population to co-operate with the Security Forces, or at least to stop supporting the guerrilla movement.[28] Tactical propaganda also known as propaganda of deception, one of the most common tactics was to use loudspeaker to broadcast psychological contents targeted at enemy's battlefield, with the purpose of weakening their morale and eventually surrendered themselves. On the propagandist side, they normally have got all the information related to their enemy, for example the name of the team, who was their leader, the strength of the team, the aim of the operation and so on.

## **2. 4 Techniques of propaganda:**

There are a variety of propaganda techniques that can be used by a propagandist to deliver their message to target audients. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis, formed by Clyde R. Miller in 1937,[29] identified seven



techniques of propaganda: Name-Calling, Glittering Generality, Transfer, Testimonial, Plain Folks, Card Stacking (or Selection), and Band Wagon"[30]while International Relations scholar, K. J. Holsti added Frustration Scapegoat and Fear to the list,[31]and introduced a total of nine techniques of propaganda:

2. 4. 1 Name-CallingName-Calling also known as Labeling, the propagandist attaches an emotion-laden symbol to their enemy, labeled them with some negative names, expecting that this would creating hatred, fear or doubtful feelings among target audiences without examining any evidence. For example, a political propaganda might call their opponents as " loser", " fence-sitters" or " warmongers"; an American car manufacture might label their competitors product as " foreign car" instead of a more neutral word as " imported car". Name-calling, or labeling, is very powerful means to hit on enemies; propagandists related their appeals to stereotypes that already exist in the audience, it is effective in creating negative images to the enemy and arouses feeling of hatred. Thus, the Malayan Communist Party members were named as " communist terrorists" or " bandits".

2. 4. 2 Glittering GeneralityIn name-calling, one paste negative label on enemy; while in glittering generality, one paste a virtuous label on the propagandist's side or the desired product. Different with name-calling, this technique is used to describe an idea or policy rather than individual. Words and phrases used in this technique are normally attractive and slippery; while the contents are rather empty and vague. For example, the term free world was a favorite generality of Western propagandists; while " socialist solidarity" was used in the Communist world to describe the complex relations among Communist states and parties.[32]

2. 4. 3 TransferWith the technique of transfer, the propagandist attempted to

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identify one idea, person, country, or policy with another in order to make the target audience approve or disapprove it. It can be two way round: either to transfer the prestige, authority, or virtue of some group to the product that is being promoted; or, to transfer the negative identities to their enemy. For example, some gambling companies in Malaysia, i. e., Sport Toto and Magnum continuously sponsoring charity events and programs, creating good and generous images of the company, hoping that it would dilute the negative image that public viewed on this type of business. 2. 4. 4

TestimonialIn both politics and advertising, we frequently see a famous person (e. g., a movie star or politician) endorse a candidate or product. This type of propaganda technique is to take someone who the audience " knows" and likes, and attempt to transfer the famous person's opinion to the audience, where the target audience is asked to believe something, simply because some " authority" says it is true. Testimonial is one of the most frequently used techniques by British government during the Malayan Emergency. The British used the surrendered communist members as their testimonial, by telling their beautiful life outside the jungle, to " impress" more communists to surrendered themselves to the government, and at the same time, their stories also been used to " prove" how dangerous the communist would be, and persuade the population to stop supporting them.

2. 4. 5 Plain FolksPlain folks normally used by politicians, especially during elections, in which they attempt to present themselves as just ordinary citizens or as just ordinary members of one group. This is because propagandists know that if they are " foreigners" or more " superior" to the audience, they will not get audiences' support. Therefore, they seek to identify as closely as possible with the culture and lifestyle of the target

audiences. What they normally do, for example, is like jogging at the community; wear hard hats or farmers' caps; wearing working khakis and standing by the assembly-line, frying Kuey Tiao like the hawkers, etc. The purpose was to convince target audiences that, politicians are just an ordinary people like what they are.

2. 4. 6 Card Stacking  
Card stacking refers to the selective presentation of only facts that are favorable to the desired conclusion, and at the same time, bypass those facts that are not favorable to the desired conclusion. As what Holsti observed, " Almost all propaganda, even when they uses the other techniques discuss above, relies on the selection of facts, although it is seldom very specific in its factual content". [33]

2. 4. 7 Band Wagon  
From psychological point of view, most people prefer to be in the majority than in minority. This is because they like to be conformists, rather than to be criticized for being different. This technique plays on the audience's desire to " belong" or be in accord with the crowd, " Everyone's doing it. Why don't you?" This technique is similar to the testimonial; the difference is that testimonial attracts audience by a single esteemed or authority person, but in Band Wagon, the mass of people serve as attraction.

2. 4. 8 Frustration Scapegoat  
Scapegoat means someone who is blamed for the errors of others. When a problem occurred, people do not like to blame themselves, therefore they will actively seek for a scapegoat, for it be one person or a group of people, and blaming the problem on the scapegoat, even though they could be other factors involved. Scapegoat is said to be one easy way to create hatred and relieve frustration.

2. 4. 9 Fear  
This is a technique appealed to the fear of the audience psychologically. Propagandists make the target audiences aware of an impending or imminent threat to their lives and welfare, and had warned them that, if they

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do not follow or change their attitudes accordingly immediately, they will be caught in the danger. Some of the techniques described above were alternatively used during Malayan Emergency by the British through mass media, later in Chapter Four, I will analyze contents published in the China Press, which in this dissertation plays as propaganda instrument of the government, and examine how these propaganda techniques had been applied in shaping public opinions and attitudes toward Malayan Communist Party.

## **2. 5 Media as Propaganda instrument**

The function of propaganda is to use communication (through media), to influence behavior[34]. Therefore, it is important for us to understand the nature of communication, the role of communication in social environment, and the process of communication. Katz in his essay Communications Theory and Research and Their Application to Psychological Operations underlined that, ' communication, in a very broad sense, includes the various processes by which one person influences another, and involves the total spectrum of human actions, including speech, written matter, music, drama, the pictorial arts, and other forms of behavior.'[35]In its simplest form, communication is the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver. Leading American political scientist Harold Lasswell (1948) said that, a convenient way to describe communication is to answer these questions: Who? Says What? Through Which channel? To Whom? With what effect? Lasswell Model of CommunicationThe above Lasswell's Communication Model is about the process of communication and its function to society. As we can see, the Who is the " Source"; Says what is the " message"; the message is delivered

through a channel or medium to whom, the " receiver" is, hopefully, creates the desired effect. What makes this model relevant to the function of propaganda is that, the message was always created in order to get desired effects. According to Lasswell, the three functions of communication are as follows: first, the surveillance of the environment; second, the correlation of components of society; and third, the cultural transmission between generation.[36]Based on Lasswell's idea, Katz further classifies the social communication under four main functions. From the viewpoint of sender, the functions are to inform, to instruct or reach, to entertain, and to persuade. While from the receiver's point of view, the functions are to understand, to learn, to enjoy, and to dispose or decide.[37]As a propagandist, he should be fully aware of these functions of communication, and then only he can be able to design content of message to reach his desired aims. It is important to acknowledge that these inform-instruct-entertain-persuade functions of communication are not always independent from each other. David Berlo, a famous communication theorist says in his book:...Some professional communicators in the press and education state that they are not trying to persuade people, they are merely giving them information. Others view the entertainment industry as something independent of persuasion and ignore the effects their message might be having on the levels of knowledge, thought processes, and attitudes of their audiences. The theatre, for example, is a distinguished vehicle of communication with a considerable tradition and heritage. Many people would classify the theatre as an " entertainment" vehicle: Yet countless examples could be given of plays that were intended to have, and did have, significant effects on an audience, other than " entertainment." [38]In this respect, when I analyze the contents

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published in the China Press later in chapter four, I will carefully examine all the articles that published in the newspaper, including entertainment columns, and analyze what are the meanings they were trying to spread behind the stories.

## **2. 6 Media effects**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we all know that media has been used as propaganda tools to influence target audience, and to get desired effects from the audience. What I will discuss in this session is – do media really have great impacts on audience? And how do media create impacts on audience? Communication theorists have developed tens of theories to explain the effects cause by media since second half of the 19th century when mass media flourished Western countries. In this dissertation, however, I will mainly focus on four theories that most relevant to its propaganda purposes.

### 2. 6. 1 Magic Bullet Theory and Hypodermic Needle Theory

Mass Society theorists believe that media influence toward audience is potent and swift. To mass society theorists, " average" people were all those who did not hold their superior taste and values, therefore, they are defenseless against media's corrupting influence.[39]The fundamental assumption of this thinking can be referring to the magic bullet theory or the hypodermic needle theory. Magic bullet theory graphically assumes that the media's message is a bullet fired from the " media gun" into the viewer's " head".[40]. Similarly, the hypodermic needle theorist suggests that the media " injects" its messages straight into the passive audience.[41]Both theories share the same symbolic that, media are a dangerous drug or a killing force that directly and immediately penetrates a person's system. The

successful use of propaganda by totalitarian governments in Europe, especially Germany's National Socialist Party (the Nazis), provide further evidence that media has overwhelming power.

## 2.6.2 The Social Constructive of Reality

Similar to Mass Society theory, the social constructive of reality also viewed that media has powerful effect toward audience. However, the difference between the two theories is the matter of time. While mass society theorists believe in swift effects, social constructive of reality more concern about the long term impacts of the media. In the paper "The Social Construction of Reality", sociologists Berger and Luckmann argued that "reality is not something out there to be experienced; it is a historical construction that is complex, multidimensional, and social." [42] In other word, reality is therefore said to be socially constructed. Although both of them never mentioned mass communication in the book, but they offer a comprehensive theory to explain how cultures use signs and symbols to construct and maintain a uniform reality. In the process of the constructing reality, media definitely plays a proactive role, for it is not always presented the "objective reality", but rather actively and selectively constructing the reality. Selectively constructing the reality means that, when an event has occurred, from the reporter's observation, until the article has published on the paper, it was actually a process of selection. When a newspaper is controlled by certain organization and had played as propaganda tool, the "reality" that presented on that particular paper has in fact been selected base on the organization's value, interest or perception; and before published on the paper, the articles need to go through layers of modification. This process of gathering, recording, selecting to presenting, and finally constructed an "authoritative" and "indubitably" reality, is what

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scholars called process of construction. 2. 6. 3 Public Opinion As discussed earlier, the most important function of propaganda is to influence the population and to gain their supports, or so called winning over their " hearts and minds", therefore, it is very important to understand how do people shape the world they are living in. Earlier in 1922, prominent American journalist, Walter Lippmann had described in his paper " Public Opinion" that, people did not respond directly to events in the " real world" but instead lived in a " pseudo-environment" composed of " the pictures in our heads". [43] According to Lippmann, audiences are profoundly influenced by mass media. Through daily consuming of mass media and base on the information provided, audience would have constructed their perception and picture of outside world, and finally form a so called " public opinion" accordingly. However, Lippmann also claims that, in order to conduct propaganda, there must be some barrier between the public and the event.[44] With this separation, media would have the opportunity and ability to manipulate events or present limited information to the public. Contrary to Lippmann, Edward Bernays who was also examining public relations, propaganda, and public opinion, recognizes that propaganda can be either beneficial or harmful to the public. For Bernays, although propaganda may influence individuals in deciding what to think about or alter the opinions of individuals, but this may actually be beneficial to society's functioning as a whole. Bernays states, " We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of... Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society"[45]

2. 6. 4 Agenda

Setting Another common technique used by propagandist to " direct"

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audience's point of view is through agenda setting. Agenda setting theorist argues that media may not tell us what to think, but media certainly tell us what to think about.[46]According to the theory, mass media set the agenda for public opinion by highlighting certain issues. This theory was essentially developed by Lippman (1922). By 1972, McCombs and Shaw had studied this phenomenon in their work " The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." This study examined the 1968 United States presidential campaign, by asking undecided voters to identify the key issues of the presidential campaign, and then comparing those ideas to the issues that were being presented by the mass media at the time. Based on the study, they conclude, In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in news story and its position...the mass media may well determine the important issues - that is, the media may set the " agenda" of the campaign.[47]Agenda-setting is believed to occur in the press because the press must be selective in reporting the news. In the case of the China Press during Malayan Emergency, it acts as gatekeepers of information and makes choices about what to report and, what not to report. Through the articles' position arrangement, for example, to publish on the cover page or inner pages? How large the coverage? Will it be color or " black and white" printing? Will it be published on the upper-left or lower-right of the page? All these distinctions will create different impacts on readers.