

Review of
《关于对外宣传艺术问题》
(*The Art of External Propaganda*)

A 1962 document reprinted in 《罗俊关于对外宣传工作的八个文件》 (*Eight Documents by Luo Jun on External Propaganda Work*) (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Cultural Revolution Committee Preparatory Committee, January 1967), pp. 15–32. Text also available here:
http://www.phzx.net/phzx11/phrw/article_detail.asp?id=1650

Early in 1942, Mao Zedong in his famous Yan'an Talks emphasized the importance of the “front of the pen” in revolutionary work.¹ The Yan'an Talks laid the foundation for China's cultural policy, characterized by direction and control by the Communist Party, and stressed significance of propaganda work.² Usage of propaganda tools, especially during the Mao era, has been of vital importance to the CCP in creating a legitimate and positive image and directing public opinion in favor of its policies domestically as well as internationally. External propaganda directed at a foreign audience gained much attention from the Party Center, especially during the Cultural Revolution period, when the Central Cultural Revolution Group instructed Chinese embassies, trade missions and individuals to disseminate Mao Zedong Thought as well as to distribute Mao's quotation books and badges where this was possible.³ By the early 1960s, the Foreign Languages Press had published a number of books and periodicals in foreign languages, and this was regarded as an accomplishment in the sphere of external propaganda. The publications made it possible to show a foreign reader positive results that New China had gained as well as to propagate Chinese revolutionary experience and expand dissemination of Mao Zedong thought worldwide.⁴ Despite certain achievements, there were numerous shortcomings, especially in the “artistic” quality of propaganda materials due to one-sidedness and the lack of “seeking truth from facts” among “some comrades.”⁵ The present document - *The Art of External Propaganda* is an early attempt at comprehensive analysis and discussion of those shortcomings with an attempt to improve the “art” - content and form of propaganda materials directed at the foreign audience.

¹ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art,” in *Marxists Internet Archive*, accessed

² Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 122.

³ Barbara Barnouin and Changgen Yu, *Chinese Foreign Policy during the Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 66.

⁴ 《关于对外宣传艺术问题》 [The Art of External Propaganda] (July 1962), in *Eight Documents by Luo Jun on External Propaganda Work* (Beijing, 1967), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

While the introduction to the document discusses the achievements and draws attention to the flaws of China's external propaganda, the second part brings in more details concerning the question of political (content) and artistic (form) nature of foreign propaganda. To produce a good propaganda piece one should not separate political content from the form but should consider them both within a "healthy" political agenda as the basis and decisive requirement, plus an attractive form as a means of achieving the desired propaganda effect. If an article projects nothing but naked political agenda and thus does not appeal to a reader, the desired propaganda goal will not be fulfilled. Despite of the political character of any propaganda material, artistic form also has a decisive character and should not lag behind the content. At the same time, one should not go to extremes and put stress exclusively on the form, thus turning a piece into an expression of the "purely artistic view".

The third part of *The Art of External Propaganda* goes on discussing the "external propaganda view", considered as a cardinal principle. The article argues that a correct "external propaganda view" uses the Marxist-Leninist standpoint to research and analyze the nature and characteristics of external propaganda for the sake of understanding and mastering its regularity. Mastery of Marxism-Leninism is seen as a precondition, but cannot on its own be a substitute, for a correct "external propaganda view." The article goes on discussing the main principles of the latter and points out firstly that the target of the foreign propaganda is a foreign reader, who is raised in a different social and cultural environment and is not similar to a domestic readership. External propaganda workers should take this fact as a starting point, study and adjust their "artistic form" of a propaganda piece according to such differences. Furthermore, this part of the article mentions division of the target audience according to different regions (e.g. *Renmin Zhongguo* 人民中国 in Japanese, directed at a Japanese audience) as well as according to their social politics and attitudes towards imperialism – left, medium and right. The stress should be on the medium audience, whose "tastes" and requirements should be considered first in the production of propaganda materials.

Speaking about the objective and tasks of the external propaganda, the article states that they should correspond to the guiding ideology of the CCP's foreign policy general line - developing friendship with other communist countries and struggling against the imperialist enemy. As for the basic content of a propaganda piece, it mentions: (1) The

PRC's foreign policy general line and standpoint in important international issues; (2) Achievements in the building of China's socialist economy and culture, material and cultural life of the Chinese people and their outlook; (3) China's experience of a people's and socialist revolution; (4) Dissemination of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought; (4) Opposition against modern revisionism and "reactionary capitalist ideology and theories."

The next issue discussed in the article is the core principle of external propaganda - *Keeping inside information from outsiders* 内外有别 (*neiwai youbie*), which is based on and encapsulates the difference between domestic and external propaganda. External propaganda should need not accord with the preferences and requirements of a domestic audience, but should be in accordance with what is appropriate for foreigners. Based on the *neiwai youbie* principle, there are some specific points to keep in mind: (1) the questions of what can be propagated to a domestic audience, but cannot be mentioned in the external propaganda, and what can be propagated for foreigners in the future but cannot be now etc., depend on the situation both at home and abroad as well as on the current policies of the Communist Party; (2) the question of "tone": if the tone is too high ("tone" is here understood to mean "political content"), a foreign reader will not be interested in reading an article, and thus it is self-defeating to use the high tone; (3) and allowing for a "division of labor" among different publications with some being able to add more explicit propaganda content but with others keeping it to a lower extent. It is highly important to carry out these principles in choosing topics, preparing manuscripts, and translating.

The fourth part deals with the practical question of how to strengthen the artistic quality of a propaganda piece. It starts with stating that without the artistic quality, a foreign reader will not be interested in reading propaganda materials, and thus the function of external propaganda will not be fulfilled – "if there is no artistic quality, there is no external propaganda as such". It is highly important to create an appealing form, which will not overtly reveal the political agenda, but softly help to achieve the desired political goal. The article suggests some practical techniques on how to reach this effect, as well as warns against taboo expressions that may exist in many countries. It also speaks about five major mistakes to avoid in the style of writing, such as for example texts being long, tedious and devoid of content with exaggerating expressions, dry and clichéd language.

The article's fifth and final part discusses several points of experience and lessons that external propaganda workers with the Chinese Communist Party could summarize after the 1959 "struggle against right deviations," the 1960 "inspection campaign" of books and periodicals, and intense "study sessions" in 1961. Among the points made are the importance of avoiding the trap of committing mistakes connected with the deviations either to the right or to the left; enhancing the style by way of "seeking truth from facts", which requires deep analysis and research work to escape the mistakes of one-sidedness and subjectivism; and enhancing the spirit of responsibility among the external propaganda workers.

The article then concludes by saying that external propaganda is an important tool in the *international* class struggle. In addition to the peculiarity of general written propaganda, external propaganda has its own specific character, which should be considered while producing propaganda materials but without going to the extreme of leaving behind the political content. The major shortcoming of external propaganda is said to be its often poor artistic quality.

Representing one of the early attempts of systematization of the Chinese Communist Party's "external propaganda view," its main principles, objectives and shortcomings, this once classified Foreign Languages Press article is important in the sense that it provides students of propaganda art in Mao's China, as well as in the contemporary PRC, with valuable information about ideas that still remain central to the CCP's propaganda machine and beyond.

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