

The nation could better promote its successes

Written by Yang Chung-hsin 楊昌欣

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The phrase “grand external propaganda strategy,” which has gained publicity recently, refers to the overseas propaganda campaign that China has been pushing on the world since 2009.

Since taking power in 2012, Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) has increased campaign efforts. The effect has been most powerfully felt during the COVID-19 pandemic, as China is trying to use the media to turn its image from that of a “pathogen” into that of a “savior.”

This includes claiming that the virus originated in the US, reporting zero new domestic cases of COVID-19 infection, and proclaiming its willingness to share its disease prevention experience with the world.

That the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is skilled at propaganda is no news. During the Yanan period of the Chinese Civil War, US journalist Edgar Snow interviewed Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and other CCP founding members. Snow published his account in the book *Red Star Over China* and depicted the party’s down-to-earth attitude.

The book is considered a key factor in the CCP’s ability to later gain international support.

It was not until Snow traveled to China again years later that he discovered the reality was different from what he had seen in the past, and he expressed deep regret over the book.

If the CCP even during that existential crisis was so good at image-building, China today — backed by an integrated party organization and a tremendous amount of resources — is having much more success than before.

The public opinion and psychological warfare tools available to an authoritarian state and a democratic state are unequal. Advances in broadcast media further give “grand external propaganda” a higher priority.

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This is what US political scientist Joseph Nye, former US assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, refers to as “sharp power.”

In Chinese communities, Chinese propaganda is more often called “red infiltration.”

To prevent the situation from worsening, US President Donald Trump took the lead, saying: “Our Country’s biggest enemy is the Fake News so easily promulgated by fools!” in a June 13, 2018, tweet, shortly after meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore.

Many countries have subsequently followed in Trump’s footsteps.

Taiwan’s government is adopting administrative and judicial means to fight fake news. Concrete actions include trying to amend the law to make dissemination of misinformation a crime, pushing the online Taiwan FactCheck Center, and establishing misinformation prevention units in prosecution and investigation agencies.

Nevertheless, these actions are passive in nature, placing more emphasis on defense than on attacking misinformation.

The reason is that most people perceive political propaganda as being a routine trick used by totalitarian governments and thus something to be avoided by democratic governments. Such thinking could very possibly prevent Taiwan from setting the agenda.

Whether a nation promotes itself should not be a criterion when judging whether its intentions are good or bad. It should be determined by looking at what it promotes and whether it deviates from the truth.

During the pandemic, Taiwan has accomplished many outstanding achievements covered by international media.

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While praise from other nations certainly enhances Taiwan's reputation, its soft power could be more effectively demonstrated if it were more proactive in promoting disease-prevention results and showing the world that efficiency and compliance are not exclusive to totalitarian regimes.

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Translated by Chang Ho-ming

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