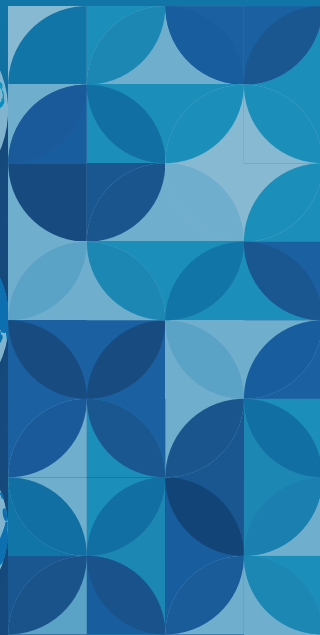# New Propaganda: How China's Security Forces Seek to Shape Public Opinion

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## Abstract

For over a decade, Chinese security forces have invested in new forms of propaganda. From television to social media, the state's efforts are widespread and well-funded. But in no area have new propaganda efforts been more prolific—or entertaining—than on *Douyin*, the popular short video sharing app known as TikTok to the rest of the world. Why expend valuable and in many cases limited resources when the ability of propaganda to persuade domestic audiences is limited at best? I argue that new types of propaganda on *Douyin* are more integrated and persuasive than traditional propaganda, making them a powerful, though not unlimited, tool for communication with the public. To understand the scope and response to new security propaganda, this report typologizes propaganda efforts and uses text analysis to analyze public comments to videos posted on key accounts, providing insight into how new propaganda is created and received. The results show that propaganda is largely focused on traditional goals of demonstrating state strength as well as newer and more sophisticated efforts to educate the public and present positive images of police and military officers. Importantly, state-produced propaganda is inwardly focused on China and Chinese interests.

## Policy Implications and Key Takeaways

- US policy makers must differentiate between generalized fears about the Chinese government's influence on social media and the actual content that is produced and consumed.

- PLA and police propaganda on *Douyin* is focused on shows of military capabilities and efforts to education or help the public. The most popular videos humanize officers by showing details of their everyday lives.

- Security force propaganda rarely references the United State or other countries. Content is focused almost exclusively on China. Any shifts in this trend, especially during times of strained US-China relations, would indicate a significant break from past practices.

- User comments also seldom reference foreign countries and the United States. Of the nearly 100,000 comments analyzed, only 33 mention the United States, indicating that the China-centric focus of security propaganda is also echoed by its most engaged users.

## Introduction

State propaganda was once an obvious affair. Flags, military parades, slogans, and posters were all clear in their functional intent and source. But what happens when propaganda evolves and inserts itself seamlessly into daily social media feeds? For over a decade, Chinese security forces have invested heavily in new forms of propaganda. From elaborate TV specials to posts on social media accounts, the state's efforts are widespread and well-funded. But in no area have propaganda efforts been more prolific—or entertaining—than on *Douyin*, the popular short video sharing app known as TikTok to the rest of the world. Why would military and police officials expend valuable and, in many cases, limited resources when the ability of propaganda to persuade domestic audiences is marginal at best?[1] The Chinese government seems to be betting that these new types of propaganda are more integrated and persuasive than traditional "hard" propaganda, although their power to shape hearts and minds remains unclear.

Why care about propaganda? China is an authoritarian state, but the power of government leaders is not absolute. By devoting considerable resources to propaganda production and dissemination, Chinese security forces show that they take public opinion seriously.

We should too. These new propaganda forms on *Douyin* are funny, humanizing, and engaging. They aim to send a message and sway opinion in ways that older forms of propaganda could not. By understanding these new forms of propaganda on *Douyin*, and how users respond to them, we can gain insight into state priorities and strategies, especially during periods of international crisis or uncertainty in US-China relations.

Learning how Chinese security forces use new propaganda on *Douyin* at home can also help policy makers in the United States recalibrate our own expectations and fears about the potential of *Douyin's* international version, TikTok, to serve as a mouthpiece of the Chinese state. This study shows that new propaganda on *Douyin* is far more focused on showing off military capabilities and building goodwill toward security personnel than in casting aspersion or engaging international issues. Understanding the nature of this content is essential for making informed decisions about government intentions and capabilities on social media.

In the sections that follow, I describe the evolution of security force propaganda in China and the rise of *Douyin* as a new mode of propaganda delivery.

I then present a typology of propaganda content produced by Chinese military and police forces and discuss the prevalence of each type. The section that follows outlines public response to *Douyin* propaganda by presenting the results from a qualitative analysis of 1200 videos and a text analysis of comments posted to propaganda videos. Taken together, the results of this study provide insight into how propaganda is created by state accounts and received by the Chinese public. Throughout the paper, I define security forces as military and police personnel. Despite its name, the People's Armed Police is a branch of the military and treated as such. This broad approach acknowledges the similarities between content created by military and police accounts while also helping to capture differences among the two. Throughout the paper, I disaggregate the two where relevant and note key differences.

## Evolution of Security Force Propaganda

Understanding the history of propaganda in China helps to inform the present day. During the Mao Era, posters and banners were distributed widely in a concerted effort to marshal support for the new communist ideology and related policy changes. Catchy and not-so catchy slogans conveyed important state messages, while print media, radio, and television platforms were employed to disseminate this information as widely as possible. For security forces, propaganda was frequently used during campaigns to combat political and traditional crimes. Military propaganda also flourished during this time as a way for government leaders to showcase strength and celebrate accomplishments.

During the early Reform Era, security force propaganda remained active as military and police forces built and maintained propaganda divisions that were gradually rebranded as public relations departments. Moreover, military forces continued to stage large scale performances to show off gear and precision training that often included select police forces, and both military and police were prominently featured during special times like Spring Festival celebrations. In these activities, propaganda served an entertainment function that would help usher in a new era of public engagement.

Television and live special performances soon became the bread and butter of security force propaganda. Both the military and the police maintain dedicated divisions that focus on providing entertainment. The Ministry's

Grassroots Police Culture Group was formed in 2006 to produce large scale performances that tout the achievements of local police and honor officers for service to the country. Military and police performances are frequently broadcast on CCTV channels to reach a national audience. Similar groups, known as "police officer art troupes" (*jingcha yishu tuan*), have also formed at the provincial and municipal levels and frequently put on performances in their area and beyond.

The rise of social media brought new propaganda opportunities for entertainment and education. Around 2010, security force Weibo accounts began popping up around the country to communicate directly with the public about daily news, military and police activities, and other issues of interest. Police accounts like Peaceful Beijing (*pingan Beijing*) were particularly popular since they communicated information that might be immediately useful to residents like road closures or local crime reports. As these accounts gained popularity and migrated to new platforms like WeChat, the content often became more sophisticated and positive. Stories about police officers helping the elderly or highlighting the sacrifices officers and military personnel make in the line of duty also became common. Later, these accounts migrated to WeChat as the platform's popularity grew.

## Security Force Propaganda on *Douyin*

Recently, *Douyin* emerged as the latest space for the state to expand its propaganda reach. Security forces from Beijing to Xinjiang are creating content to persuade and entertain at a rapid clip. The first police and military accounts went online in 2018 and quickly morphed from a few handful to over 5,000, and in some areas, police officers can even increase their monthly take-home pay by posting new content. According to ByteDance, the private Chinese tech company that owns *Douyin* and its international version, TikTok, over 600 million users in China interact with the app on a daily basis.[2] Because the popularity of the app expanded so quickly, industry experts and scholars are racing to understand the success of the app's algorithm as well as its addictive properties.[3] *Douyin* works by providing users with a continuous scroll of videos populated by an algorithm based on viewer history and new, suggested content. The medium of *Douyin* thus provides a unique opportunity for savvy public relations officials

to infiltrate user feeds by sandwiching pro-military, pro-state content between clips of celebrities, cooking how-tos, and self-care tips.

What does the content look like? The videos posted to military and police accounts are sometimes very traditional, such as press release clips or news media style interviews. Yet most accounts also embrace more engaging messaging styles. Military accounts, for example, frequently post impressive videos of highly trained soldiers loading and firing bullets in time to music or short clips of happy soldiers sending heartfelt Mother's Day greetings to their moms. Police content also seeks to engage viewers, often presenting real-life footage to convey their messages. Notable content includes videos of police officers helping children get to school safely or saving people from dangerous situations. In true social media fashion, videos also show police officers singing, dancing, and cracking jokes. For all types of security force propaganda, the most popular short videos provide a full sensory experience by timing visuals and words to the music.

In contrast to heavy-handed "hard" propaganda, such as military parades or ideological training, "soft propaganda" is more subtle and entertaining and has been shown to more successfully manipulate emotions and attitudes toward the state and other outside groups.[4] Humorous propaganda can also be used as a tool of the state[5] by providing a way to indirectly connect audiences with regime priorities. This study builds off prior research to understand how certain types of new propaganda—particularly humorous and humanizing approaches—are used to persuade and convey information to the Chinese public. For many years now, security forces in China, particularly the police, have been leaders in propaganda innovation,[6] and on *Douyin*, they have found a new, promising platform to disseminate state messages.

To analyze security force propaganda, I identified 20 key military, People's Armed Police (PAP), and police accounts and viewed the most recent 60 videos posted to each account that had garnered at least 1000 hearts.[7] While these accounts are not necessarily representative of all security personnel accounts, they likely come close, since some small accounts will repost or mimic videos on the most popular accounts. Most importantly, these accounts produce the content that members of the public are the most likely to see, simply by the very nature of their popularity.[8] The 10 military and PAP accounts have the highest viewership, with an average of 254 million hearts and 12 million

followers. In contrast, the police accounts have an average of 78 million hearts and 4.5 million followers. However, there are far fewer military accounts in comparison with police. This means that while a few large military accounts may have considerable reach, the more localized police accounts may reach a broader audience.

I use the dataset of 1200 propaganda videos from the 20 key accounts to create a typology of propaganda types. I also collected comment data for 60 videos and employed text analysis to understand how users publicly respond to the content. The results reveal new information about the nature of security personnel propaganda that is currently circulating on *Douyin* as well as key indicators of how users react to this content. Significantly, the study finds that propaganda is largely inwardly focused on educating and impressing the Chinese public while avoiding mention of foreign adversaries and international issues.

## Types of Propaganda on *Douyin*

There are seven major types of propaganda posted to security accounts on *Douyin* that serve two primary functions: education and entertainment. From a propaganda perspective, the most successful videos will do both. For example, one series of videos posted to the Chengdu Tianfu Police account (成都天府公安) featured the same actor comically playing all roles of cop, criminal, and members of the public. In an effort to make viewers both laugh and learn, one of the videos shows the cop pulling over a driver (played by the same actor) and the female passenger (also the same actor). While the cop is looking at the driver's identity card and license, the passenger inadvertently tells the officer that they have been drinking. The driver and companion then proceed to argue in comical voices about whether drinking beer counts as drinking, prompting the police officer to step in and settle the dispute. As the video ends, viewers are treated to a written public reminder that consuming beer before driving following is illegal.

## Propaganda as Entertainment

Of course, not every video serves an educational function. Many videos are designed for pure entertainment, such as the displays of military might that are

commonly featured on military and PAP accounts. These videos tend to vary depending on the account holder. People's Liberation Army (PLA) Ground Force accounts, for example, often feature videos of soldiers firing bullets or setting off explosives, while PLA Navy accounts often feature footage of ships in action. Similarly, PAP and some police accounts might show officers in riot gear, participating in training drills, or engaging in undercover operations. Military might videos are typically short and visually interesting. The accompanying music can be serious or whimsical, but the overarching theme is to show officers doing something impressive, such as assembling a gun from scratch, parachuting out of planes at high altitude, or piloting boats at high speeds in formation. The most successful videos can easily garner tens of thousands of hearts and are the most widely viewed form of military propaganda.

Relatedly, another type of propaganda video shows officers in action. These videos are often crafted from body or security camera footage or still photos of officers doing their jobs. The results are sometimes grainy or choppy, but officers in action videos convey a sense of authenticity that is often lacking in more heavily produced or actor staged videos. Because these videos rely on real footage, this type of propaganda is favored by police accounts, since police have the most contact with the public as well as easy access to body and security camera footage. A typical officer in action video might show a drug bust, a fast-paced chase, or undercover officers engaging in a sting operation. While less frequently seen in military propaganda, military accounts also post videos of officers in action for search and rescue missions or with videos of training that occurs under difficult conditions such as heavy rain or snow.

Not all entertainment propaganda is serious in nature. Many accounts create and post what is best described as social media style propaganda. These videos serve a pure entertainment function, but unlike military might and officer-in-action propaganda, they rely on familiar social media tropes or tactics to gain likes and views. Social media style propaganda might show impressive food prep skills in a PLA kitchen or feature officers or soldiers singing and dancing. One recent trend in military propaganda simply shows officers flashing genuine smiles at the camera. Other common videos feature cops and actors playing criminals who are engaging in slapstick humor or before and after shots of officers in street clothes and uniforms. These videos tend to be short and light-hearted.

## Propaganda as Education

While military might, crime fighting, and social media style propaganda videos aim to entertain, another subset of propaganda commonly featured by security personnel accounts is designed to educate the public. As noted, sometimes these videos are also funny or engaging, but the primary purpose of educational propaganda is to stretch beyond entertainment to convey an important message, either overtly or subtly.

Overtly educational videos that aim to inform or teach the public are very common among police videos. There is a wide range of propaganda on *Douyin* that falls into this category and the messages vary. Some videos target very specific behavior, such as one video posted to the Wuhan City Public Security account that encouraged residents to lock their car doors by filming officers walking around the city streets and checking car door handles until they found unlocked cars. Other educational videos might involve more shocking footage, such as a short video from the same account that reminded viewers not to drink and drive by showing security footage of a car that crashes head into a motorcyclist.

Often there is a fine line between officer-in-action videos and educational ones, as many education videos contain elements of both. Ultimately, an officer-in-action video will show cops arresting suspects, sometimes without clear portrayals of the exact crime, whereas education videos that include officer in action elements will include clear explanations of the crimes or undesirable behavior in question and end with a notice telling viewers not to engage in x behavior. These videos will also sometimes include information about fines or punishment. In contrast to police educational propaganda, education videos posted to military accounts tend to focus on helping the public learn about the work that military personnel do on a daily basis. The accounts, for example, might describe life on a naval ship, provide a lesson in military history, or describe the differences between various bars on military uniforms.

Other types of educational propaganda tend to be more subtle in nature. Videos that show security personnel helping people, for example, do not flash formal educational messages on the screen, but they do signal an important state message: the police and the military are here to help. As noted, police officers typically have more contact with the public and easy access to body and security camera footage; thus, helping propaganda is more commonly seen on

police accounts. Typically, videos might show police officers assisting others during the holiday season, bringing food to senior citizens, or saving a person after a traffic accident. Many of the helping videos feature children, and occasionally some videos will feature animals such as cats, dogs, and even wildlife. During the National College Entrance Examination (*Gaokao*) period, for example, some accounts showed videos of officers stopping traffic to ensure that students would get to their exam on time and even putting students on the back of police motor scooters to escort them to the exam site. When helping videos appear on military and PAP accounts, they typically show soldiers engaged in humanitarian efforts during floods or other natural disasters.

Relatedly, many security personnel accounts feature efforts to humanize officers. This type of propaganda often tells a story from an individual perspective. In these videos, security personnel might describe the hardships they face on the job or explain the reasons they entered the military or police force. A typical military video often showcases the physical difficulties soldiers face such as time spent away from family members, and some videos will show joyful reunions. One PAP account also frequently features propaganda videos of officers sweating profusely and straining to hold position during grueling drills or while standing at attention, presumably to solicit empathy with the officers and respect for their training. Similarly, police videos show footage of officers describing the dangers of their work and the time it takes away from their families. As a group, these videos are more likely to feature female personnel. While the majority of videos present only male military or police personnel, 147, or just over 12 percent, of the videos also featured females. Sometimes the female subjects will discuss gendered differences they face, but more often they are simply presented as soldiers or police officers doing their jobs.

## Traditional Propaganda

Even as these new types of propaganda flourish, more traditional propaganda continues to appear on nearly every security force account in this study, although it tends to be less common. Typical examples include footage from military parades, clips of officers saluting, or videos of officers singing patriotic songs. Sometimes, the traditional propaganda contains modernized elements.

For example, one video posted to a Chengdu Tianfu district account featured four officers in uniform reading quotations from Xi Jinping out of shiny red notebooks, but it also includes sweeping, cinematic views of the city. Often, this type of propaganda receives fewer likes and comments, but not always.

## Propaganda By the Numbers

Figure 1 presents the frequency of propaganda types across all accounts and videos in the study. It shows that security force accounts produce more videos that are designed to educate the public, convey messages about military might, and show officers helping people. Humanization and social media style videos are slightly less prevalent, and only 85 videos in the study were traditional propaganda videos. We also observe a lower number of officer in action videos.

Because military and police accounts tend to feature slightly different content, Figures 2 and 3 break down propaganda types according to account type. In Figure 2, we see that military account propaganda is largely characterized by military might videos with significant attention also given to social media style, helping, and humanization videos. In contrast, Figure 3 shows that police accounts are more focused on education and helping videos. These numbers make sense, given differences in the nature of the work performed by military personnel and police.

## Public Reception of Police Propaganda

How does the public receive and respond to these different types of propaganda? Interacting with users directly is difficult and carries risks, but fortunately some key indicators about the public's reception of propaganda are readily available online. Both hearts and comments to videos indicate user interactions with videos, and while it is possible that private and official accounts connected to other security personnel artificially inflate these numbers, there is significant variation both within and across accounts, indicating that there are no obvious efforts to drive up the popularity of videos across the board. Put more simply, some videos are more popular than others and some accounts receive far more traffic than others. In fact, many security accounts and videos garner very little attention at all. Moreover,
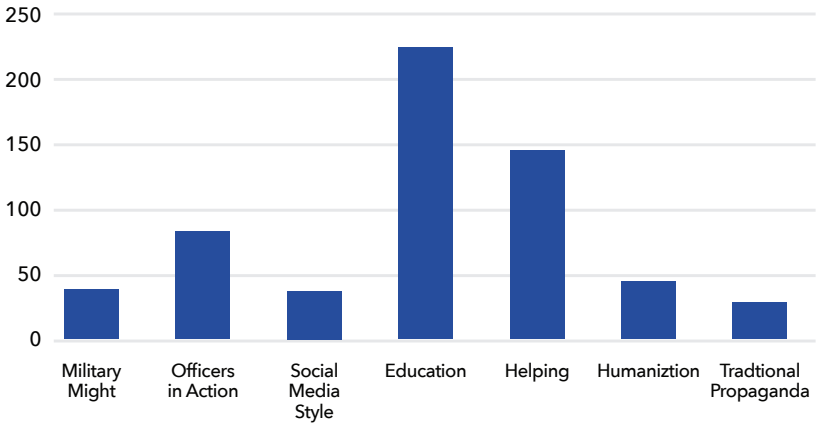
**FIGURE 1.** Propaganda Type Counts Across 1200 Military and Police Videos
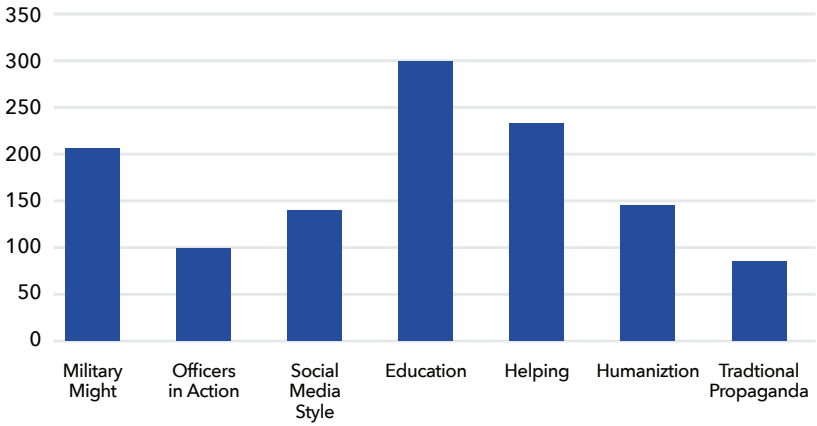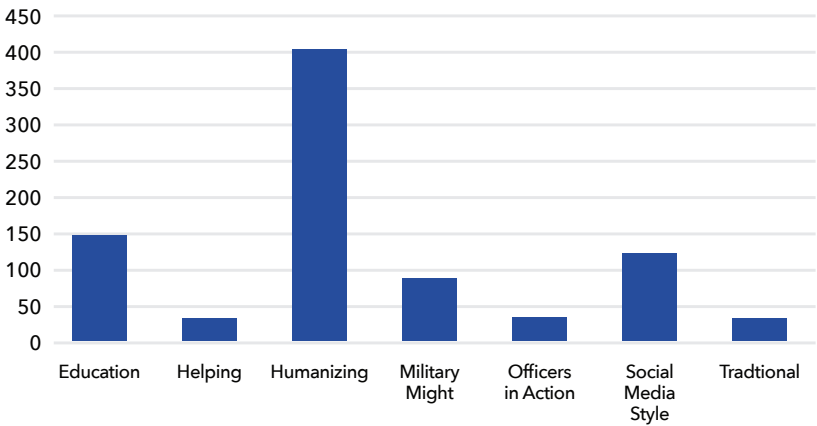


**FIGURE 2.** Propaganda Types across 600 Military Videos
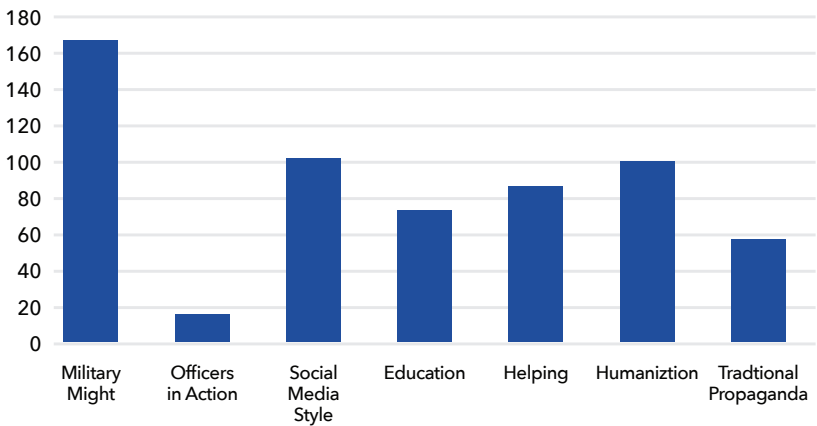
**FIGURE 3.** Propaganda Types across 600 Police Videos



**FIGURE 4:** Average Number of Hearts Across all Videos and Accounts

the qualitative analysis of the videos revealed that more popular videos (as denoted by likes and hearts) were typically more engaging.

## Public Perceptions and Hearts

The first metric for assessing the public's response to a video is the number of hearts it has received. I chose to select videos based on hearts rather than comments, because hearts indicate quick, positive engagement with a video, whereas comments are more indicative of a deeper engagement with the video but are not always positive in nature. I take the action of users clicking the heart on a video at face value (i.e. as an indication that the viewer likes the video), although it is possible that people with negative responses to the video will also heart it in order to see more content of that style. Figure 4 shows the average number of hearts received by each type of propaganda across all videos and accounts in the study.

Humanizing videos—the ones that emphasize hardships officers face and tell their life stories—are clearly favored by viewers in comparison to other types of propaganda. This is logical, given the rising prevalence of this type of video in recent years on government accounts. *Douyin* gives security forces a special opportunity to tell visual stories that might not translate the same way over written text. Video of an officer showing their blistered feet and recounting their efforts to recover victims from a car accident, for example, provides a powerful message about the job that officer is doing. This is apparently far more engaging to viewers than images of officers simply helping people, which ranks slightly below traditional propaganda in terms of number of hearts. Not surprisingly, social media-style videos are more likely to gain hearts, but so are educational videos, which may be one reason why we see so many education videos in the sample.

## Public Perceptions and Comments

While the number of hearts tells us something about the popularity of a particular video or type of video, actual user comments give us even more information about public perceptions of security personnel propaganda on *Douyin*. Because the most popular security videos can garner as many as a few million

hearts and tens of thousands of comments, analysis of this data immediately becomes an issue of scale for both collecting and classifying the comments. This is further complicated by the frequent use of emojis and coded language in the comments, as well as a need for proper context. Someone saying something negative in the comments, for example, might be directing the comment at the suspects or the situation, not the police or military. With these issues in mind, I collected 96,449 comments data from 60 propaganda videos by carefully selecting videos from each propaganda type that were both representative of typical videos and less likely to involve multiple actors that could skew the comments in an ambiguous direction.

Text analysis of user comments can provide more information about questions that emerged in the qualitative analysis. Notably, few of the 1200 videos made any reference to foreign actors or adversaries. For the handful of videos where mention of international actors surfaced, commentary was vague or superficial. For example, one video posted by the PLA Naval account noted that submarines could face provocation and harassment by foreign troops (*miandui waijun tiaoxi zirao*) but the narrator quickly pivoted to say this is not the only threat they face and went on to describe the difficulties and safety of life under the water. Similarly, the one video in the sample that directly mentioned Taiwan simply showed images of the island's landscape and skylines accompanied by a simple message: Taiwanese compatriots, we are waiting for you to return home (*Taiwan tongbao, deng ni huijia*). Yet the widespread absence of direct references to foreign actors in the propaganda videos does not mean that users do not draw their own connections to international issues.

To see if users were writing about international issues when commenting on video content, I employ a keyword analysis to identify the prevalence and placement of such discussions. Among the nearly 100,000 comments, only 22 referenced foreign nations (*waiguo*) generally and 33 mentioned the United States specifically. Of the references to the United States about half were negative, and interestingly, every type of propaganda contained references to the United States, even the categories of helping, humanization, and social media style, which we might expect to be the most inwardly focused. Comments on videos of officers in action contained 10 references out of over 18,000 comments, and even displays of military might contained only 12 references out of nearly 12,000 comments. The text analysis thus reveals that the inward focus

**TABLE 1.** References to Foreign Nations and the United States in Security Force Propaganda User Comments

| Category | Number of Videos | Number of Comments | Mention of Foreign Countries | Mention of the United States |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Helping** | 10 | 13,816 | 2 | 1 |
| **Humanization** | 8 | 13,151 | 0 | 2 |
| **Officers in Action** | 9 | 18,186 | 4 | 10 |
| **Military Might** | 9 | 11,872 | 12 | 12 |
| **Trad Propaganda** | 8 | 1,045 | 0 | 2 |
| **Social Media Style** | 8 | 16,397 | 0 | 3 |
| **Education** | 8 | 21,982 | 4 | 3 |

on China of the videos themselves is also echoed in the comments section; comments were thus not a hotbed of anti-foreign sentiment or a place for discussion of international issues. Table 1 shows the full breakdown. Notably, traditional propaganda is so scarce and user comments are so infrequent that it is under-represented in this sample.

## Analysis

By parsing the actual content of security personnel propaganda on *Douyin*, this article has sought to demystify Chinese propaganda by giving concrete examples of real videos and analyzing two different indicators of public response to propaganda. The study finds that security force propaganda content is inwardly focused on improving perceptions of security forces and/or educating the public in ways that avoid engagement with international issues or outside actors, although a handful of viewers make those comparisons. Familiarity with Douyin videos helps us better understand the actual content that is produced and consumed. It also provides a baseline by which to access any shifts during times of crisis or change.

Understanding security force propaganda is important for several reasons. First, this analysis reveals the broad range of propaganda that is present on *Douyin*. I present seven primary types, but one could also divide the content into subtypes that further classify elements such as humor, intent, and video sourcing (i.e. staged or realistic). Rather than all security force accounts operating from a central playbook or relying heavily on reposts across accounts, the videos analyzed demonstrated very little repetition, with each account producing much of its own content and in some cases creating a particular niche. The Siping Police account, for example, is dominated by longer skits featuring the same group of actors who may or may not be real police officers. Mostly, they interact with one another, but sometimes the primary actor will go and talk to real suspects and post these interactions. Other accounts, such as the Hefei police account, tend to rely heavily on traffic footage for their videos, and often feature images of police helping people on the street. The variety of all the videos demonstrates the level of commitment that security personnel leaders and officers place on producing and disseminating this type of content as well as their interest in developing a unique voice on social media that may increase their reach and number of followers.

Security force propaganda also reveals state priorities. Some types of propaganda, such as military might and crime fighting videos, aim to show the state as strong and competent. This is consistent with traditional propaganda goals and, at least in the case of police propaganda, may serve to invoke a sense of fear among would be criminals that could further governance objectives like adherence to the law. Similarly, many of the education propaganda videos more directly encourage law-abiding behavior, both by showing what happens to people who don't follow the law and by educating people about what actions are illegal. Helping and humanizing propaganda reveal another state priority: improvement of state-society relations. Because security personnel like police have extended and sometimes negative contact with the public, propaganda that shows them as regular people or as helping those in need might ease those tensions and establish a more positive relationship. In the case of military-produced helping or humanizing propaganda, state leaders may also be seeking to invoke feelings of national pride and connection.

Finally, the analysis of security force propaganda is informative because of what is absent. Though military account propaganda could easily target

military rivals or invoke real world crisis scenarios such as trouble in the Taiwan Strait or the Korean Peninsula, international actors and issues were largely absent from the sample. Thus, rather than developing adversarial content, the propaganda produced by security personnel accounts remains inwardly focused on Chinese capabilities and affairs. As a result, military propaganda is largely positive in nature and appears to be designed to make people feel awe, pride, and connection to the PLA rather than negativity toward another nation. While this sample does not account for every military or police account and is not necessarily predictive of what type of content we might see in the future, the ultimate finding of this study is that the United States is not currently being targeted on security force *Douyin* videos in terms of content produced or user generated comments.

# Notes

1.    Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities Of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

2.    Saheli R. Choudhury, "The Chinese version of TikTok now has 600 million daily active users," *CNN,* https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/15/bytedance-douyin-has-600-million-daily-active-users.html.

3.    Christian Montag, Haibo Yang, and Jon D. Elhai, "On the Psychology Of Tiktok Use: A First Glimpse From Empirical Findings," *Frontiers in Public Health* 9 (2021): 641673.

4.    Daniel C. Mattingly, and Elaine Yao, "How Soft Propaganda Persuades," *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 9 (2022): 1569–1594.

5.    Patrick Merziger, "Humour in Nazi Germany: Resistance and Propaganda? The Popular Desire for an All-Embracing Laughter," *International Review of Social History* 52, no. S15 (2007): 275–290.

6.    Suzanne E. Scoggins, "Propaganda and the Police: The Softer Side of State Control in China," In *Justice, Crime, and Citizenship in Eurasia*, pp. 200–220. (Routledge, 2022).

7.    On Douyin, users who like a video can click a heart button to show their appreciation. Videos with more hearts are more likely to be shown to other users, and the user who clicked the heart will be shown similar content to that video, either from the same or other accounts. Typically, a higher number of hearts will also indicate a higher number of user comments, though this is not always the case.

8.    Readers interested in the full list may email the author at sscoggins@clarku.edu.