



China's Playbook for Shaping the Global Media Environment

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Maps and graphics created by Sue N. Mercer

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Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch. The purpose of this report is to provide a practical framework for identifying Beijing's efforts to influence the global media environment and placing them into context.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch. The purpose of this report is to provide a practical framework for identifying Beijing's efforts to influence the global media environment and placing them into context.

Key findings

China uses a vast complex of Party and State entities to promote narratives that it wants told in the international media. It does this to achieve three objectives:

- ***Promote a positive image of China.*** Beijing believes that Western media portrays its policies unfairly at best and, at worst, with inherent hostility. Because a negative public image would hamper Beijing's pursuit of its national objectives, it actively seeks to spread good news stories about China and its activities around the world.
- ***Counter critics.*** Beijing seeks to counter critics who might tarnish its image. It does this by directly refuting criticism, and by promoting alternative narratives as well as narratives intended to undermine and delegitimize the policies, positions, and activities of its detractors.
- ***Support China's national objectives.*** Beijing wants other countries to support its policies and objectives. To that end, it propagates narratives that aim to foster support among foreign audiences.

China promotes four key global narratives about itself and its role in the international community to audiences around the world:

- ***"China is peaceful."*** China portrays itself as an inherently peaceful country that would never intentionally start a conflict. This narrative is aimed largely at countering international concerns about China's rapidly growing military power and regional assertiveness, and at fostering receptivity to China's diplomatic overtures.
- ***"Cooperation with China is beneficial."*** China asserts that its approach to economic cooperation with other countries is mutually beneficial and "win-win." This narrative seeks to counter criticism of China's economic aid and investment practices as being

exploitive and foster foreign support for cooperation with China on a range of issues, including economic, technological, and security matters.

- ***“China is a responsible member of the international community.”*** China portrays itself as an upholder of the international system that provides public goods, such as contributions to peacekeeping efforts, support to anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, and disaster relief. This narrative is intended to position China as a leader in the international community and allay concerns that it has revisionist aspirations.
- ***“China’s approach to development and international affairs is different from that of the US/West.”*** China often draws a contrast between its approach to foreign policy and development and that of the US and other Western nations. It does this to portray China as a more desirable partner and deflect criticism by the US and other Western countries, often by seeking to delegitimize their policies, positions, and activities.

Beijing tailors these narratives to appeal to audiences in particular regions or countries to support its pursuit of specific national objectives. In other words, Beijing customizes the stories it tells to different audiences to achieve its desired effect.

The Chinese Party-State has developed an extensive playbook for promoting its narratives in the international media. It includes the following:

- ***Tailoring the content produced by China’s state-run media outlets*** so that it is more accessible, credible, and compelling to foreign audiences. Beijing does this by producing content in foreign languages, reporting on local events overseas, and recruiting foreign journalists to tell China’s stories.
- ***Maximizing channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content*** to reach as broad an audience as possible. To achieve this, China uses foreign media outlets as channels for distributing Chinese-produced content. It has also established a presence on foreign social media and has created new channels for distribution by investing in Chinese-developed social media applications, foreign media outlets, and the development of overseas telecommunications infrastructure.
- ***Influencing foreign media outlets and journalists*** to promote China-friendly narratives and suppress narratives that China finds objectionable. China does this by promoting self-censorship among foreign journalists, buying the right to shape content by acquiring an ownership stake in foreign media outlets, and hosting international media forums, conferences, and training programs for foreign media professionals.
- ***Using entertainment as a means of promoting China’s narratives*** beyond the news media and making them virtually inescapable to global audiences. It does this by exporting Chinese-produced entertainment media, investing in the international film industry, leveraging access to Chinese markets to promote self-censorship among

foreign filmmakers, and promoting social media platforms subject to Chinese control, such as WeChat and TikTok.

It is possible to recognize and take stock of China's efforts to shape media narratives in a particular region or state. Below are some questions to ask when doing so:

- ***Is Beijing tailoring the content produced by China's state-run media outlets to appeal to local audiences?***
 - Do People's Republic of China (PRC) media outlets report on local events?
 - Do PRC media outlets produce broadcast, print, or online content in local languages?
 - Have PRC media outlets hired local journalists?
 - Do reports by PRC state-run media quote local experts and/or officials?
- ***Is Beijing maximizing channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content to local audiences?***
 - Do major local media outlets publish content originally produced by PRC media outlets, such as Xinhua or China Global Television Network (CGTN)?
 - Are major local media outlets engaged in joint production with PRC media outlets?
 - Do major local media outlets publish opinion pieces written by PRC officials or CCP-approved proxies?
 - Do major local media outlets publish pro-China advertorials or articles that are marked as "sponsored content"?
 - Do PRC officials and/or state-run media have social media accounts targeted at local populations?
 - Do PRC companies have an ownership stake in any local media outlets?
 - Has the PRC been involved in construction of the country's telecommunications infrastructure?
- ***Is Beijing seeking to influence local media outlets and journalists?***
 - Are there reports that China has threatened to cut off local media outlets' ability to market content in China?
 - Are there reports that China has cut off or threatened to cut off local journalists' or scholars' access to China?
 - Are there reports that PRC representatives have sought to pressure or intimidate local scholars or journalists for criticizing China?
 - Do local media professionals attend forums or training programs in China? Do they belong to any China-affiliated journalist associations?

- ***Is Beijing using entertainment as a means of promoting China's narratives to local audiences?***
 - Are Chinese-produced entertainment media, such as movies and TV shows, readily available?
 - Are films backed by Chinese investors readily available?
 - How popular are Chinese apps that are subject to PRC censorship, such as WeChat or TikTok?

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1. Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch.¹ In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Chinese president and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping gave voice to the aspirations of this campaign: “We will improve our capacity for international communication so as to tell China’s stories well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance our country’s cultural soft power.”² Beijing’s efforts to influence the global media environment by promoting narratives that further its interests and silencing

its critics have attracted attention in the international media and have prompted expressions of concern from journalists, scholars, and officials outside China.³

The purpose of this report is to provide a practical framework for understanding what China is doing to shape the global media environment. To that end, this report covers the following:

- Provides a brief background on the CCP’s efforts to manage foreign perceptions
- Identifies the narratives that Beijing promotes in the global media and discusses how it tailors them to achieve its objectives
- Identifies and analyzes the tools that Beijing employs to promote these narratives and silence critics

“We will improve our capacity for international communication so as to tell China’s stories well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance our country’s cultural soft power.”

*~Xi Jinping, report to the
19th Party Congress*

1.1 The CCP and perception management

Is China’s campaign to influence the global media environment something new? When thinking about Beijing’s efforts to shape the global news media, one question that comes to mind is whether this is a new behavior for China. The short answer is an emphatic no. Shaping foreign perceptions has long been a top priority for the CCP. This practice traces back to the early days of the CCP, when party leaders cultivated “friends of China,” such as the American journalist, Edgar Snow, whose sympathetic portrayals of the CCP and its leaders gained worldwide attention. Long before the 1949 founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC),

the CCP had already established organizations responsible for shaping foreign perceptions and conducting what the Party refers to as “external propaganda” (*duiwai xuanchuan*, 对外宣传 or *waixuan*; 外宣).⁴ Of note, the term *propaganda* (*xuanchuan*; 宣传) does not have a negative connotation in Chinese as it does in English. The PRC is, however, aware that the term has negative associations for foreigners and began translating it as “publicity” in the 1990s.⁵

Why does it matter that the CCP has been trying to shape foreigners’ views since its inception? External propaganda is in the DNA of the CCP. The Chinese Party-State maintains an extensive, mature, and experienced system of government and party organizations tasked with carrying out propaganda work. This coordinated system of bureaucracies provides China with the means to coordinate and synchronize its strategic communications with actions taken across the diplomatic, information, military, and economic spectrum. Table 1 lists key Chinese Party-State institutions and the roles they play in external propaganda.

What role does media play in CCP propaganda? Media has long played a major role in CCP efforts to shape perceptions—both at home and abroad.⁶ As a result, the Party-State maintains a massive state-directed media complex. This media complex provides the CCP with virtually every conceivable medium available in the modern information era, including the following: print, broadcast, and online news outlets, such as Xinhua and China Global Television Network (CGTN); publishing houses that print in multiple foreign languages; and multiple social media platforms. Chinese officials at the highest levels have publicly emphasized the importance of these outlets in spreading China’s messages to the masses. CCP general secretary Xi Jinping himself has stated that China’s state-directed media “speak for the party’s will and its propositions, and protect the party’s authority and unity.”⁷ Table 2 lists key state-run media outlets and provides brief descriptions of each and their roles as vehicles for CCP foreign-directed propaganda.

“The relationship between China and the rest of the world is undergoing historic changes. China needs to know better about the world and the world needs to know better about China.”

~Xi Jinping

Source: Zhang Jianfeng, “President Xi Urges New Media Outlet to ‘Tell China Stories Well,’” Xinhua, December 31, 2016.

Table 1. Key institutions in the Chinese Party-State’s propaganda apparatus⁸

Institution	Role
Central Leading Small Group for Propaganda and Ideological Work 中央宣传思想领导小组	Central coordinating body for propaganda and ideological issues Plans and coordinates the propaganda system’s support to PRC policy decisions
CCP Central Publicity Department 中共中央宣传部	In charge of all propaganda; most powerful media regulating body Coordinates with other PRC government organizations to ensure that media content supports CCP priorities
State Council Information Office/ CCP Central Committee International Communications Office 国务委员会新闻办公室/ 中国中央对外宣传办公室	Responsible for overseeing all foreign-directed propaganda work Responsible for release, or coordination of release, to foreign audiences of all information related to China’s domestic conditions, and CCP domestic, foreign, and security policies
State Council Taiwan Affairs Office/CCP Central Committee Taiwan Work Office 国务院台湾事务办公室/ 中国中央台湾工作办公室	Manages all propaganda related to Taiwan, which is considered especially sensitive in China
Ministry of Foreign Affairs 外交部	Implements PRC foreign policy Distributes information to media on China’s position on international issues, foreign policy, and foreign relations
Ministry of National Defense 国防部	Represents the PLA in dealing with foreign militaries Distributes information to the news media on the PLA and China’s position on security issues
CMC Political Work Department 中央军委政治工作部	Primary institution responsible for the Chinese military’s ideology, propaganda, and thought work, including foreign-directed propaganda
United Front Work Department 中共中央统一战线工作部	Responsible for influencing public opinion and government policies around the world in ways that favor Chinese interests
International Liaison Department 中国共产党中央委员会对外联络部	In charge of party-to-party relations Tasked with cultivating ties with foreign political parties and politicians

Table 2. Key PRC media outlets involved in foreign-directed propaganda⁹

Xinhua News Agency (新华)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's official news agency and one of the largest news agencies in the world • Publishes in 10 languages and operates over 200 bureaus around the world • Publishes its own content and supplies content to both Chinese and non-Chinese outlets, such as Thailand's <i>Khaosod</i>, Cambodia's <i>Khmer Times</i>, and Laos's <i>Vientiane Times</i>.
China News Service (中国新闻社)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's second-largest state-run news agency • Targeted at overseas Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan • Publishes content in both Chinese and English • Has branches and/or stations in Hong Kong, Macao, Tokyo, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, London, Paris, Sydney, and Moscow; also has reporters in Taiwan
China Daily	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's official English-language newspaper • Plays a clear role in promoting China's narrative to foreign audiences; its website describes it as the "voice of China on the global stage" • Publishes "China Watch" advertorials in foreign media
China Global Television Network (CGTN)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founded in 2017 as the overseas branch of China's official television network, CCTV • CGTN broadcasts in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian and has broadcast centers in London, Washington, and Nairobi • Merged in 2018 into Voice of China/China Media Group
China Radio International (CRI; 中国国际广播电台)/ China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's official international radio broadcaster • Broadcasts in 44 languages • Runs approximately 70 overseas, dedicated affiliate radio stations and 18 global internet radio services in the CIBN • CRI's English-language media are called China Plus, and include the China Plus app and website, China Plus Radio, and China Plus News on Facebook and Twitter • Merged in 2018 into Voice of China/China Media Group

People's Daily (人民日报)

- The official newspaper of the Central Committee of the CCP
- Widely regarded as the “mouthpiece of the party”
- News content on its website is available in multiple languages
- Website boasts a “reliable and extensive readership” of users from 200 countries

People's Daily Overseas Edition (人民日报海外版)

- The Chinese-language overseas edition of the CCP mouthpiece
- Distributed in 80 countries and regions and available online
- Targeted at overseas Chinese
- Described on its website as “China’s most authoritative and comprehensive Chinese newspaper for foreign audiences”

Global Times (环球时报)

- A commercial, non-authoritative subsidiary of *People's Daily*
- English-language edition was launched in April 2009 and aims to influence English-speaking audiences by covering world news from a “Chinese perspective”
- Designed to appeal to a foreign readership by appearing more balanced and including opposing viewpoints

The next section of this report identifies the narratives that Beijing promotes in international media and discusses how Beijing tailors these narratives to achieve its objectives. Section 3 examines Beijing’s playbook—its tactics, techniques, and tools—for shaping narratives in the international media. The report concludes by offering a framework for taking stock of China’s efforts to shape the media environment in a particular region or country.

2. China's Narratives

2.1 Why does China promote narratives?

China promotes narratives that it wants told in the international media. It does this to achieve three objectives:

- **Promote a positive image of China.** Beijing believes the Western media portrays its policies unfairly at best and, at worst, with inherent hostility. A negative public image would hamper Beijing's pursuit of its national objectives; therefore, it actively seeks to spread good news stories about China and its activities around the world.
- **Counter critics.** Beijing seeks to counter critics who might tarnish its image. It does this by directly refuting criticism, by promoting alternative narratives, and by advancing narratives intended to undermine and delegitimize the policies, positions, and activities of its detractors.
- **Support China's national objectives.** Beijing wants other countries to support its policies and objectives. To that end, it propagates narratives that aim to foster support among foreign audiences.

2.2 What are China's global narratives?

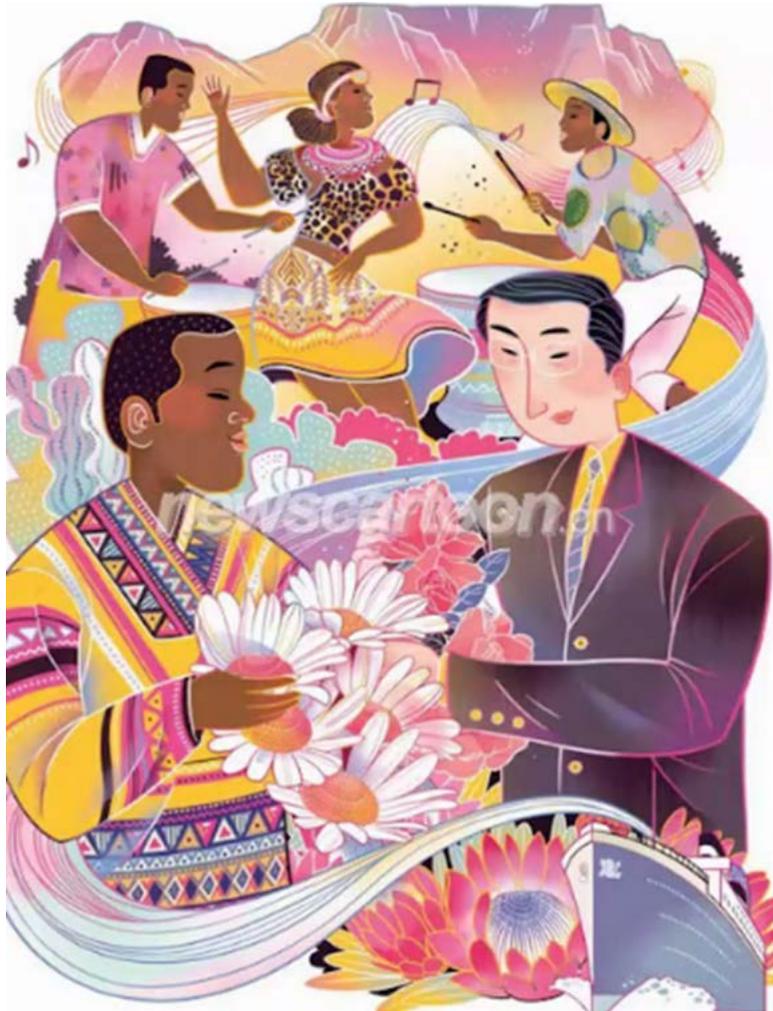
To achieve these three objectives, China promotes four key narratives about itself and its role in the international community to audiences around the world. Table 3 describes these narratives and explains how they support each of China's objectives. Figure 1 is a cartoon from China's official English-language newspaper that illustrates one of these narratives by extolling the benefits of China–Africa cooperation.

Table 3. China’s global narratives

<p>China is peaceful</p>	<p>China portrays itself as an inherently peaceful country that would never intentionally start a conflict.¹⁰</p>
<p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotes a positive image of China: Portrays China as peaceful and non-threatening ● Counters critics: Counters concerns about the rapid growth of China’s military power and regional assertiveness ● Supports China’s foreign policy objectives: Seeks to foster receptivity to China’s diplomatic overtures 	
<p>Cooperation with China is beneficial</p>	<p>China claims its approach to cooperation with other countries is mutually beneficial and “win-win.”¹¹</p>
<p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotes a positive image of China: Portrays China as generous and helpful ● Counters critics: Counters criticism of China’s economic aid and investment practices as being exploitive ● Supports China’s foreign policy objectives: Seeks to foster support for cooperation with China on a range of issues, including economic, technological, and security matters 	
<p>China is a responsible member of the international community</p>	<p>China portrays itself as an upholder of the international system that provides public goods such as contributions to peacekeeping efforts, support to anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, and disaster relief.¹²</p>
<p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotes a positive image of China: Portrays China as a responsible and active contributor to the international system ● Counters critics: Counters accusations that China is a revisionist power that seeks to reshape the international system; also counters concerns about the Chinese military’s expanding overseas operations ● Supports China’s foreign policy objectives: Seeks to foster support for China’s expanding global presence and position China as a leader in the international community 	
<p>China’s approach to development and international affairs is different from that of the US/West</p>	<p>China often contrasts its approach to development and foreign policy with that of the US and other Western nations.¹³</p>
<p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotes a positive image of China: Portrays China as better than the US and the West ● Counters critics: Deflects criticism by the US and other Western countries, often by seeking to delegitimize their policies, positions, and activities ● Supports China’s foreign policy objectives: Portrays China as a more desirable partner 	

Source: CNA.

Figure 1. China Daily cartoon that promotes the narrative that cooperation with China is beneficial to African countries



Source: Song Chen, "China-Africa Cooperation Is an Important Aspect of Belt-and-Road Cooperation; Diversification of Trade Is Extremely Important against the Backdrop of the Sino-US Trade War," *China Daily*, 27 June, 2019, <http://cartoon.chinadaily.com.cn/cartoonview.shtml?id=267133&cid=1&myty=1&page=10>.

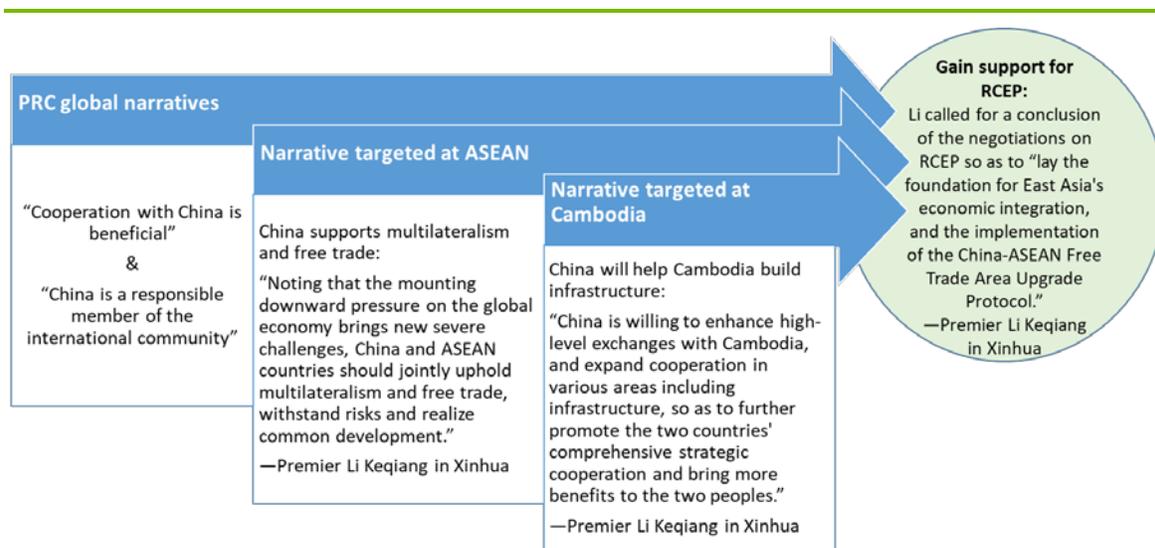
2.3 Does China tailor its narratives?

Beijing tailors these narratives to appeal to audiences in particular regions or countries in support of specific national objectives. In other words, Beijing customizes the stories it tells to different audiences in order to achieve its desired effect. This section offers three examples of how this works in practice.

Example #1: PRC narratives tailored to audiences in ASEAN and Cambodia to gain support for RCEP

During the 2019 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, Beijing sought to gain support for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a free trade deal that would include the 10 ASEAN countries, plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.¹⁴ To achieve this objective, Chinese officials and media presented a customized version of the narratives that cooperation with China is beneficial and China is a responsible member of the international community (see Figure 2). The customized narrative was designed to rally support for RCEP among ASEAN nations. It presented Beijing as a champion of multilateralism and free trade that would help ASEAN nations weather economic downturns and support their development.¹⁵ China further tailored this narrative to appeal to individual ASEAN states. For instance, in remarks reported by Xinhua, Premier Li Keqiang offered to help Cambodia develop its infrastructure.¹⁶

Figure 2. PRC narratives tailored to audiences in ASEAN and Cambodia to gain support for RCEP



Sources: “Li Urges China, ASEAN to Uphold Multilateralism, Free Trade,” Xinhua, November 4, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/04/c_138525870.htm; “China, Cambodia Agree to Further Grow Ties,” Xinhua, November 4, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/04/c_138525825.htm.

Example #2: PRC narratives tailored to audiences in ASEAN and Vietnam to advance negotiations on a South China Sea Code of Conduct

In recent years, China has sought to push forward negotiations with ASEAN on the development of a Code of Conduct for managing maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. To appeal to ASEAN nations for support on the South China Sea issue, Chinese officials and media tailored the narratives that China is peaceful and a responsible member of the international community. The customized narrative asserts that China’s diplomatic efforts to resolve its territorial disputes with ASEAN member states have contributed to peace and stability in the region.¹⁷

Beijing adjusted this narrative even further to appeal to Vietnam (as shown in Figure 3), which has loudly opposed China’s encroachment in its claimed maritime territory and has stymied negotiations over a Code of Conduct. To audiences in Vietnam, Beijing presents itself as ready and willing to work with Vietnam to manage bilateral South China Sea disputes and holds out the promise of future cooperation in exchange for Vietnam’s support. In remarks publicized by Xinhua, for instance, Premier Li stated, “China is ready to consolidate political mutual trust and expand mutually beneficial cooperation with Vietnam.”¹⁸

Figure 3. PRC narratives tailored to audiences in ASEAN and Vietnam to advance negotiations on a South China Sea Code of Conduct

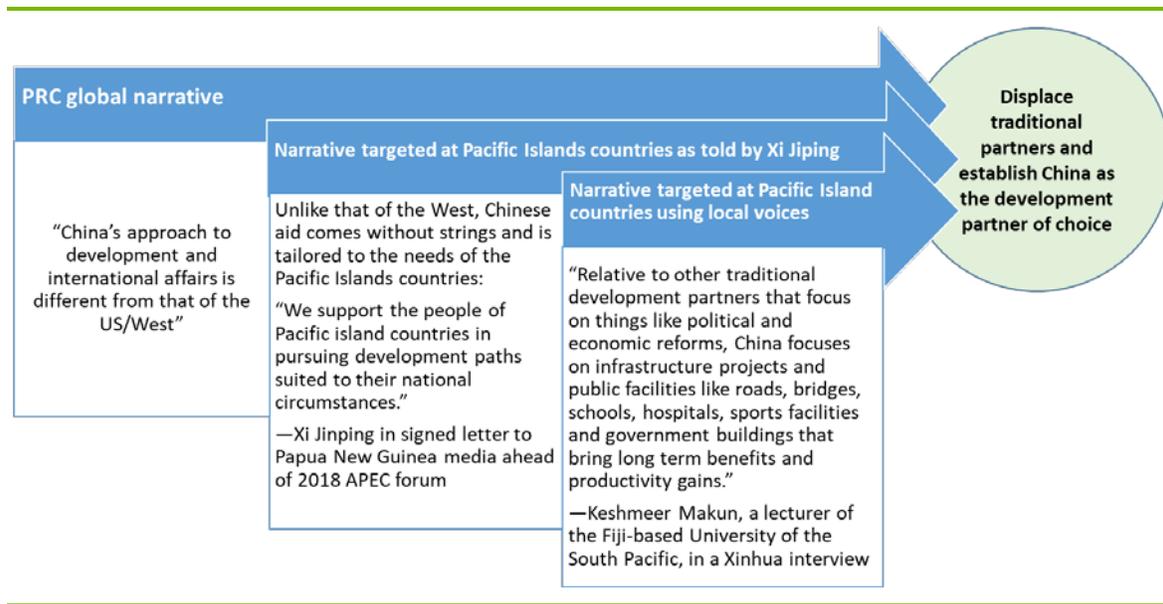


Source: “Li Urges China, ASEAN to Uphold Multilateralism, Free Trade.” Xinhua. November 4, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/04/c_138525870.htm.

Example #3: PRC narratives aimed at becoming the development partner of choice to the Pacific Island countries

China would like to displace traditional partners—such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—to become the Pacific Island countries’ preferred economic partner. To that end, Beijing tailors the narrative that China’s approach to development and international affairs is different from that of the US and the West to appeal to audiences in the region. It does this by touting that Chinese aid, unlike aid from such democratic partners as the US and Australia, comes free from “political conditions” and is tailored to local needs (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. PRC narratives tailored to audiences in the Pacific Island countries to further the objective of becoming their development partner of choice



Sources: Xi Jinping, “Full text of Xi’s signed article on PNG newspapers,” Xinhua, November 14, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/14/c_137605468.htm; Tai Beiping Zhang Yongxing, and Zheng Xin, “Interview: Cooperation between China, Pacific Island Countries Enjoy Great Potential,” Xinhua, October 22, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/21/c_138490597.htm.

Typically, PRC officials simply imply the contrast with the US and other Western countries without directly stating it. They emphasize “win-win” economic cooperation and investment in the Pacific Island countries based on “mutual respect and equality.”¹⁹ Chinese media then quote local voices—such as local scholars, officials, and ordinary citizens—to make the contrast explicit. For example, a Xinhua report quoted Keshmeer Makun, a lecturer at the Fiji-based University of the South Pacific, who emphasized that there were “no political conditions” involved in cooperation with China. Xinhua further quoted Makun as stating, “Relative to other

traditional development partners that focus on things like political and economic reforms, China focuses on infrastructure projects and public facilities like roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, sports facilities and government buildings that bring long term benefits and productivity gains.”²⁰

The next section examines Beijing’s playbook for promoting its preferred narratives in the international media.

3. China's Playbook for Shaping Global Media Narratives

The Chinese Party-State has developed an extensive and wide-ranging array of tactics, techniques, and tools for shaping narratives in the international media. These include the following:

- Tailoring the content produced by China's state-run media outlets so that it is more accessible, credible, and compelling to foreign audiences
- Maximizing channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content to reach as broad an audience as possible
- Influencing foreign media outlets and journalists to promote China-friendly narratives and suppress narratives that China finds objectionable
- Using entertainment as a means of promoting China's narratives to global audiences beyond the news media

3.1 Tailoring PRC media content

China's state-directed media outlets tailor content in a variety of ways in order to make it accessible, credible, and compelling to foreign audiences. The tools that China uses to achieve this include the following:

- Producing content—print, broadcast, and online—in foreign languages
- Reporting on local events
- Recruiting foreign voices

Producing content in foreign languages

In addition to Mandarin, PRC state-run media outlets produce content in a variety of other languages. This gives them the ability to make Chinese narratives directly accessible to foreign audiences around the world. The self-professed purpose of the English-language *Global Times*, for instance, is to cover world events from a “Chinese perspective.”²¹

China's core state-run media outlets—*People's Daily*, Xinhua, China Central Television (CCTV), and China Radio International (CRI)—all make their websites available in multiple languages. CRI broadcasts in 44 languages and China Global Television Network (CGTN), the overseas branch of CCTV, broadcasts in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian. Table 4 lists the

languages in which reporting from *People's Daily*, Xinhua, CGTN, and CRI is available online. PRC media outlets also work with foreign partners in other countries to translate Chinese-language media—such as television shows, movies, and books—into local languages.²²

Although major Chinese news outlets publish in an impressive range of languages, it is worth pointing out that it is not comprehensive. China's major news outlets do not produce content in any of the dozens of local languages spoken in the Pacific Island countries, for instance—only English and French.²³ Nor do Chinese media outlets publish content in any of the official languages of Timor-Leste.¹ This may change with time. As China seeks to expand the overseas footprint of its media, it may also increase the number of languages in which it publishes news.

Table 4. Website languages of core state-run PRC media outlets

CCTV/CGTN				
English		Arabic		Spanish
Chinese		Russian		French

<i>People's Daily and Xinhua</i>				
Chinese	Japanese	Spanish	Arabic	German
English	French	Russian	Korean	Portuguese

CRI				
Albanian	Czech	Hindi	Nepali	Spanish
Arabic	English	Hungarian	Persian	Swahili
Bengali	Esperanto	Indonesian	Polish	Tamil
Belarusian	Filipino	Italian	Portuguese	Thai
Bulgarian	French	Japanese	Pushto	Turkish
Burmese	German	Korean	Romanian	Urdu
Cambodian	Greek	Lao	Russian	Ukrainian
Croatian	Hausa	Malay	Serbian	Vietnamese
Chinese	Hebrew	Mongolian	Sinhalese	

Sources: CRI, <http://chinaplus.cri.cn>; Xinhua, www.xinhuanet.com; CGTN, www.cgtn.com; *People's Daily*, <http://en.people.cn>.

¹ See Appendix A for a comparison of CRI broadcast languages with languages spoken in Southeast Asia.

Reporting on local events

China's state-run media outlets have a significant presence overseas. This presence provides PRC media outlets with the capacity to report on local events around the world and appeal to foreign audiences who are interested in what is going on in their own countries. It also provides China with the capacity to fill deficits in countries where the media lack resources for producing local news and content.²⁴ Xinhua has the largest overseas presence of any of China's major media outlets with more than 200 bureaus around the world.²⁵ CGTN has broadcasting centers in Washington, DC; Nairobi; and London.²⁶ Figure 5 illustrates the overseas presence of China's major state-run media outlets.

Figure 5. PRC state-run media presence in Southeast Asia and Oceania



Sources: "Introduction to Xinhua News Agency," Xinhua, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/xhsjj/zwfs.htm>. "About China Daily," *China Daily*. www.chinadaily.com.cn/cd/introduction.html; "About Us," CGTN, https://www.cgtn.com/home/info/about_us.do; Home page of *People's Daily Online*; see: world.people.com.cn.

Chinese media reporting on local events overseas often promotes pro-China narratives. For example, in early December 2019, Xinhua North America tweeted two articles about local events in the state of Kentucky: one article highlighted remarks by a local Kentucky trade official who stated that Chinese businesses were fueling the paper and fishery industries in Kentucky. The other article highlighted efforts by a Chinese-American businesswoman to help deal with the invasion of Asian carp in the Mississippi River. Figure 6 shows both tweets.

Figure 6. Examples of Local Reporting from Xinhua North America’s Twitter Feed



Source: <https://twitter.com/XHNorthAmerica>.

Recruiting foreign voices

PRC media often seek to “borrow” foreign voices in order to amplify and lend credence to Chinese narratives by creating the appearance that they are espoused by others outside China. In an effort to tailor content, Chinese media reports often quote foreign officials and non-Chinese subject matter experts from the country or region that PRC messaging targets. For example, Xinhua reporting on the 2019 China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum quoted remarks by local officials, scholars, and average citizens to promote a tailored narrative that China comes bearing gifts. The customized narrative asserts that cooperation with China is economically beneficial to the Pacific Islands and tailored to suit their unique needs. Xinhua reports also portrayed China as a partner to the Pacific Islands in their fight against climate change. See Table 5 for examples.

Table 5. Examples of Xinhua “borrowing” foreign voices to promote a narrative to the Pacific Island countries

PRC narrative: “Cooperation with China is beneficial”		
Xinhua headline	Person quoted	Remarks quoted
“Commentary: The future is bright for China, Pacific Island Countries”	Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi	<i>Cooperation with China is important from economic and trade perspectives. China is a vital partner for countries in the region in combating climate change.</i>
“Through Targeted Cooperation, China Caters to Needs of Pacific Island Countries”	John Maposua, a Samoan farmer	<i>Previously I kept eggplants and could hardly sell them for a good price. Now, using seeds from Chinese experts, my farm produce is in great demand.</i>
	Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi	<i>China is not only a heavyweight partner in economic and trade cooperation, but also an important ally in environmental protection.</i>
	Meg Taylor, secretary-general of the Pacific Islands Forum	<i>Climate change is a big threat for the security and well-being of the region, and China is an ally in coping with the problem.</i>
“Interview: Cooperation between China, Pacific Island Countries Enjoy Great Potential”	Keshmeer Makun, a lecturer of the Fiji-based University of the South Pacific	<i>In fact, the cooperation has led to the PICs receiving substantial economic benefit from China that has helped these countries to progress in many ways.</i>
“Interview: South Pacific Region Satisfied with Tourism Year with China”	Chris Cocker, CEO of the Suva-based South Pacific Tourism Organization	<i>We warmly welcome more Chinese tourists and hope they can help us maintain the sustainable development of our region’s tourism industry. The BRI has provided a new blueprint for open and inclusive regional cooperation, which will bring peaceful development, mutual benefit, and win-win results.</i>
“Feature: Family of Samoan Taxi Driver Benefits from Close Ties with China”	Aukusitino Ng Lam, a Samoan taxi driver	<i>My family is a half Chinese. I like China and the hardworking Chinese. They are friendly towards us and have helped us a lot. Now I can drive taxi for making more money to support my family as more and more Chinese tourists visit our country. They [the Chinese] are helping us through a number of successful projects such as the demonstration farm project near Apia. They have helped us build big buildings, airports, bridges and roads in our country.</i>

Source: All articles can be found at <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english>.

Chinese media also hire foreign voices directly. For example, CGTN’s Washington, DC, bureau has recruited reporters from CNN and Fox News.²⁷ When it opened in December 2018, CGTN’s London bureau boasted 90 local employees.²⁸ CGTN Africa hired accomplished Kenyan journalist Beatrice Marshall (shown in Figure 7) as a news anchor, ensuring that African audiences would see a familiar and credible face when they turned on CGTN.²⁹ China’s English-language publications, including *China Daily*, *Global Times*, and the English-language website of *People’s Daily*, often publish articles written by non-Chinese journalists. *People’s Daily*, for instance, publishes columns by American expatriates who reiterate and expound on China’s official position on various international issues, including the US-China trade war and unrest in Hong Kong.³⁰

Figure 7. Photo of CGTN Africa anchor Beatrice Marshall



Source: CGTN on YouTube, March 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbfByLmz34M>.

CRI in Myanmar: Tailoring content and delivery

China’s state-run media complex does more than just tailor content so that it is more appealing to foreign audiences. It tailors the delivery of media content to ensure that China’s messages reach their desired target audiences. CRI’s efforts to reach audiences in Myanmar provide an excellent example.

Facebook is extraordinarily popular among internet users in Myanmar. Indeed, many access the internet exclusively through Facebook. According to one Myanmar official, “To the average

citizen of Myanmar, the internet is Facebook and Facebook is the internet....Some people don't even know what email is; they know only Facebook.”³¹

To reach audiences in Myanmar, CRI has an official Facebook page targeted at audiences there. As of December 2019, the page has 1,182,951 followers. It is in Burmese, includes a mixture of entertainment and news content, features reporting on events in Myanmar—including visits by senior PRC officials such as Foreign Minister Wang Yi—and highlights positive remarks about China by Myanmar officials. One post from December 9, 2019, for instance, includes a photo of Wang Yi meeting with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces. The post includes a remark by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing describing China as “a trusted friend of Myanmar and its relative forever,” thereby promoting the narrative that China is peaceful. Figure 8 includes screenshots of this post, as well one of Wang Yi’s meeting with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Figure 8. Screenshots of CRI Myanmar’s Facebook page



Source: CRI Myanmar Facebook page.

3.2 Maximizing channels for distribution

In addition to tailoring content, China also seeks to maximize the number and types of channels that it uses to distribute PRC-produced media content overseas. China's tools include the following:

- Using foreign media outlets as channels for distributing Chinese-produced content
- Establishing a presence on foreign social media
- Creating new channels for distribution by investing in the development of telecommunications infrastructure and investing in foreign media outlets

Using foreign media outlets as a channel for distributing Chinese-produced content

China seeks to maximize its reach by using foreign media outlets as channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content. It does this in several ways, including the following:

- Selling or providing content free via content-sharing agreements
- Jointly producing content with foreign media outlets
- Authoring opinion pieces for foreign media outlets
- Buying space in foreign media in the form of advertorials, inserts, and sponsored content

Selling or providing content for free

PRC media outlets actively seek to place their content in foreign media through sales and content-sharing agreements. In recent years, China's state-run media outlets have sought to position themselves as major international suppliers of news and entertainment content. Xinhua, for instance, operates a wire service in an effort to compete with major international press agencies, such as Agence France-Presse and Reuters. Xinhua typically sells subscriptions to this wire service but sometimes provides access free of charge. For example, Thailand's *Khaosod* newspaper receives Xinhua copy free as part of an agreement with the Thai newspaper's parent company, Matichon Group.³² When using Xinhua copy, foreign media outlets will typically cite Xinhua as the source, just as they would the Associated Press or Reuters (see Figure 9).

Content-sharing agreements between Chinese and foreign media outlets are often announced as part of diplomatic exchanges or initiatives. These announcements promote the narrative that cooperation with China produces tangible benefits. For example, during Xi Jinping's June 2019 visit to Russia, CCTV's parent organization, China Media Group, signed a cooperation

agreement with the Russian media outlet, SPB TV, to broadcast the English and Russian language channels of CGTN and the Chinese language channel CCTV-4 in Russia.³³

Figure 9. Example of Xinhua article reprinted by Laos newspaper, Vientiane Times



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China, Singapore pledge to boost bilateral cooperation
BANGKOK (Xinhua) -- China and Singapore have pledged to boost bilateral cooperation. While meeting with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on the sidelines of the ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) foreign ministers' meeting and other related meetings in Thailand recently, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the two countries have witnessed frequent high-level exchanges between the two sides since the beginning of the year which has injected new impetus to the bilateral relations. As the year 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, China is ready to work with Singapore to implement the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries and deep cooperation in building the Belt and Road and forging the New International I Sea trade Corridor, among others, Wang said. China is ready to join hands with Singapore to continue to firmly support free and build an open world economy, Wang said. The top Chinese diplomat said China was the first country to establish a strategic partnership with ASEAN and has played a leading and exemplary role for ASEAN's other dialogue partners. China and ASEAN are strategic partners and a community with shared future, Wang said, adding that China will work with Singapore for the successful holding of the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting and other related meetings and focus on cooperation and development so as to jointly promote common prosperity in the region. For his part, Balakrishnan spoke highly of the development of China-Singapore relations, saying that the two sides have witnessed close high-level contacts and deep connection of development strategies of the two countries. The Singaporean foreign minister said his country will uphold the one-China policy and continue to play a constructive role in promoting relations between ASEAN and China.

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi (R) meets with Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan in Bangkok, capital of Thailand, July 31, 2019. --Photo Xinhua

(Latest Update August 1, 2019)

Source: http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/Region/world/Reworld_China_singapore_175.php.

Jointly producing content with foreign media outlets

Chinese media outlets jointly produce content with foreign media outlets. Joint production helps to ensure that the resulting content is tailored to local audiences in the foreign media outlet's home country. For example, CCTV has an arrangement with Papua New Guinea's state-owned broadcaster, the National Broadcasting Corporation. The two broadcasters cooperate on the production of *Today*, a weekly 30-minute news program that includes local news, international news, and news about China for Saturday broadcasts.³⁴

Similarly, in June 2019, China Media Group and Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* established a China-Russia "commentary workroom" in Moscow, the purpose of which is to jointly plan and produce "articles related to major issues and events concerning the China-

Russia relationship” to be published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*'s printed newspaper copies and its official website (see Figure 10).³⁵

Figure 10. Opening ceremony of China Media Group-Rossiyskaya Gazeta “commentary workroom” in Moscow



Source: “CMG, Russia’s Rossiyskaya Gazeta Newspaper Open Commentary Studio in Moscow,” CGTN, June 6, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414d784d544d35457a6333566d54/index.html>.

Authoring opinion pieces for foreign media outlets

PRC officials and CCP-approved surrogates often write opinion pieces for publication in foreign media outlets. These opinion pieces invariably promote CCP-approved, pro-China narratives. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these are the signed letters that Xi Jinping publishes in local media ahead of state visits to foreign nations.³⁶

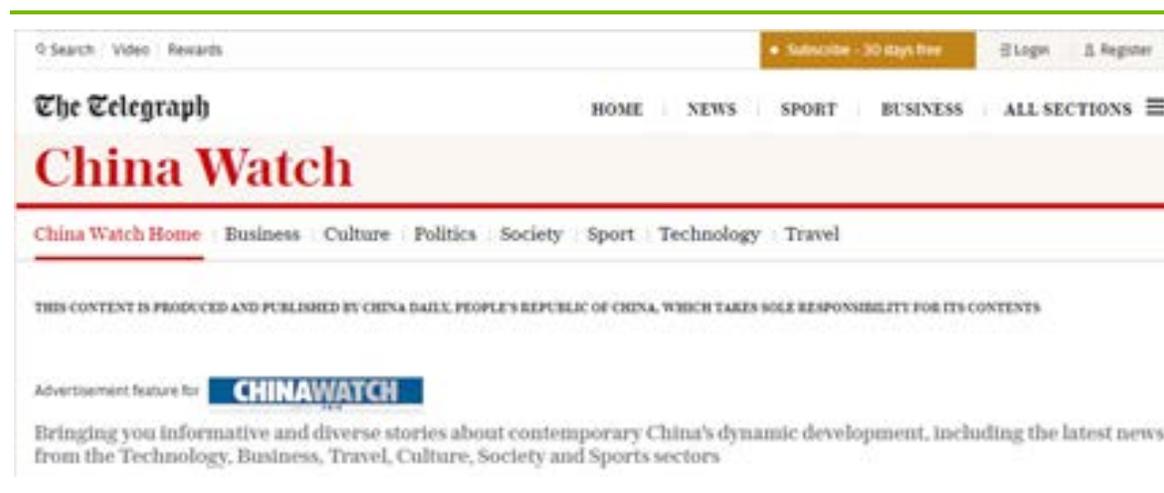
PRC ambassadors frequently pen letters for publication in local media overseas. Ahead of the 2019 G20 summit in Osaka, PRC ambassadors around the world—including Indonesia, London, and Paris—published letters in local media outlets in an apparent campaign to drum up support against alleged US unilateralism before the meeting.³⁷ As part of this campaign, the

PRC ambassador to Thailand wrote an article entitled “Win-Win Cooperation, Rather than Unilateralism is the Right Choice,” which was published by Thai media outlets *Manager*, *Khaosod*, and *The Nation*.³⁸ Of note, voices from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) are also joining the public discourse. For example, Senior Colonel Zhou Bo, director of the Center for Security Cooperation of the Central Military Commission’s Office of International Military Cooperation, frequently authors opinion pieces that present China’s perspective on security issues. Zhou’s op-eds are published in prominent foreign media outlets, such as Singapore’s *The Straits Times*, the US-based outlet *Foreign Affairs*, and the London-based *Financial Times*.³⁹

Buying space in foreign media

China often pays to place its message in foreign media outlets. Perhaps the most prominent example of this are the “China Watch” advertorials that *China Daily* publishes in approximately 30 major daily newspapers around the world, including the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, and *Mainichi Shimbun* (see Figures 11 and 12).⁴⁰ Reporters Without Borders describes these inserts as “Trojan horses” because they resemble the routine supplements published by many newspapers and the casual reader might not recognize them as state-sponsored propaganda aimed at furthering Beijing’s agenda.⁴¹ For instance, one 2018 insert in the *Des Moines Register* (shown in Figure 12) appeared to be directly targeted at undermining support for tough US trade policies against China and influencing the outcome of the US midterm elections.⁴²

Figure 11. China Watch page on the Telegraph’s website



Source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/china-watch/>.

Figure 12. China Watch insert in the Des Moines Register



Source: Josh Funk, "Chinese Broadens its Propaganda Drive to Heartland America," Associated Press, October 20, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2018/10/20/chinese-broadens-its-propaganda-drive-heartland-america/MqgLYCEEgGtxTDGiurM8H/story.html>.

China pays to publish articles and opinion pieces in small, local publications. An example of this can be found in Tongan media. The popular online news website, *Matangi Tonga*, has published multiple speeches by PRC leaders or op-eds penned by Tonga-based PRC embassy staff that are clearly marked as "sponsored posts" or "sponsored articles" (see Figure 13). For example, it recently featured a piece by Yang Zhaohui, chargé d'affaires of the PRC Embassy in Tonga, that conveyed standard official talking points on the ongoing unrest in Hong Kong.⁴³

Figure 13. Screenshot of PRC sponsored content from Matangi Tonga

The screenshot shows the Matangi Tonga Online website interface. At the top left is the logo 'Matangi Tonga Online' and the tagline 'Tonga's Leading News Website'. The date 'Saturday 2 Nov 2019, updated 21:59.' is displayed. A search bar is located at the top right. Below the header, there are navigation links for 'LOGIN', 'Sign up', and 'Subscribe'. A main navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Latest news', 'Pacific Islands', 'Sports', 'Parliament', and 'Opinion'. The article is labeled as a 'Sponsored article' and has a title 'Promote cooperation, enhance development and share prosperity'. It includes a 'Print' icon and social media sharing buttons for '@', Facebook, and Twitter. The article text starts with the date 'Monday, December 28, 2015 - 14:03. Updated on Sunday, January 31, 2016 - 22:54.' and the location 'Nuku'alofa, Tonga'. The author is identified as 'By H.E. Huang Huaguang, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Tonga'. The main image shows Crown Prince Tupouto'a and H.E. Huang Huaguang shaking hands while holding their respective national flags (Tonga and China) in front of a fleet of vehicles. A caption below the image reads: 'Crown Prince Tupouto'a and H.E. Huang Huaguang at the handover of 30 vehicles for the Coronation of HM King Tupou VI. 27 June 2015'.

Source: <https://matangitonga.to>.

Establishing a presence on foreign social media

Although Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are blocked in China, PRC government organizations, officials, and state-run media outlets have established a robust presence on these popular overseas social media platforms. Xinhua has described the objective of its “global social media presence” as “better communicating the voices of China.”⁴⁴ As illustrated in Table 6, CRI has an especially robust presence on Facebook and has pages targeted at

audiences in particular countries, including Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Recently, Chinese embassies and diplomats have collectively taken to Twitter to promote China’s messages to foreign audiences. In July 2019, the PRC embassy in Washington, DC, and its ambassador, Cui Tiankai, each opened Twitter accounts and began tweeting PRC talking points.⁴⁵

Table 6. CRI Facebook accounts in Southeast Asian languages

Language	Facebook Account	Followers	URL
English	China Plus News	20,941,191	facebook.com/chinaplusnews/
Burmese	CRI Myanmar	1,182,951	facebook.com/myanmar.cri/
Khmer	CCFR Beijing (China-Cambodian Friendship Radio)	1,214,192	facebook.com/ccfrbeijing/
Indonesian	Indonesian Service, China Radio International	48,935	facebook.com/indonesian.cri.cn/
Lao	CRI-FM 93 Vientiane	1,185,992	facebook.com/crifm93/
Malay	Radio Antarabangsa China	437,486	facebook.com/crimalay/
Filipino	CRI Filipino Service	1,006,480	facebook.com/CRIFILIPINOSERVICE/
Tamil	CRI Tamil	2,353,594	facebook.com/critamil/
Thai	China Face	2,453,364	facebook.com/ChinafacecriThai/
Vietnamese	Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc	1,961,314	facebook.com/criviet

Investing in the acquisition and creation of new channels

China has used its vast economic resources to acquire and even create new channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content. It has done this in two main ways: by purchasing or leasing foreign media outlets and by investing in the development of overseas telecommunications infrastructure. These approaches to shaping the international media landscape are less about promoting specific PRC-approved narratives and more about improving China’s capacity to do so.

China's Use of Social Media to Spread Disinformation

China has begun to use social media platforms to conduct information operations and spread disinformation. According to information released by Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, Beijing conducted a disinformation campaign against Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters in the summer of 2019. The three social media platforms identified and disabled fake social media accounts run by China. The fake accounts posted content that exaggerated protesters' violence in an apparent effort to undermine popular support for the movement. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), the campaign largely consisted of re-purposed Twitter accounts that behaved like a marketing spam network and failed to target specific online communities. This lack of sophistication suggests that China's disinformation campaign against the Hong Kong protesters was hastily organized. In December 2019, researchers from ASPI identified a similar "massive spambot network" aimed at influencing Twitter discussion of China's mass detention of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang autonomous region. Unlike the previous disinformation campaign against Hong Kong protesters, this campaign consisted of recently created accounts, many of which used profile pictures of Western celebrities.

The image shows two screenshots of social media posts. The left screenshot is from a Twitter post by 'HK時政直擊 @HKpoliticalnew'. The text in the post reads: '立會經暴亂一役，幾近淪為廢墟。' followed by a paragraph in Chinese: '據《星島日報》報道，昨日，警方組織罪案及三合會調查科到立會蒐證調查，已掌握十名暴徒資料，他們事涉暴力衝擊包圍等事，並於日內拉人。本報於早上亦曾報道，執法者或會拘捕起警底作欺凌者。' Below the text are hashtags: '#香港 #立法會大樓 #星島日報 #暴徒 #日內拉人'. There is a video thumbnail with Chinese text: '《星島日報》報道 警掌握十暴徒罪證 日內拉人 撐執法彰公義即Like!'. The right screenshot is from a Twitter post by 'Dream News @ctcc507'. The text reads: 'The legislative council belongs to the people of Hong Kong. Those people with ulterior motives indicated by forces hide behind the scenes laid siege to the legislative. The path of your darkness and the bright roads of the masses of the Hong Kong people will not inevitably coexist.' Below the text is a photograph showing a group of people behind a metal barrier, with some individuals appearing to be in a state of chaos or conflict.

Sources: Nathaniel Gleicher, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from China," Facebook, August 19, 2019, <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/08/removing-cib-china/>; Twitter Safety, "Information Operations Directed at Hong Kong," Twitter, August 19, 2019, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html; Shane Huntley, "Maintaining the Integrity of Our Platforms," Google, August 22, 2019, <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/maintaining-integrity-our-platforms/>; Tom Uren, Elise Thomas, and Jacob Wallis, "Tweeting Through the Great Firewall: Preliminary Analysis of PRC-linked Information Operations on the Hong Kong Protests," Australian Strategic Policy Institute International Cyber Policy Centre, 2019, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/tweeting-through-great-firewall>; Masha Borak, "New Swarm of Pro-China Twitter Bots Spreads Information about Xinjiang," December 4, 2019, <https://www.abacusnews.com/tech/new-swarm-pro-china-twitter-bots-spreads-disinformation-about-xinjiang/article/3040559>.

Investing in and acquiring foreign media outlets

In recent years, China's propaganda apparatus has sought to expand its reach and acquire new channels for shaping foreign public opinion by investing in foreign media outlets.⁴⁶ According to Reporters Without Borders, the United Front Work Department coordinates this acquisition policy.⁴⁷ Chinese companies can use their ownership stakes in foreign media outlets to influence the content that those outlets produce, silencing criticism and encouraging positive reporting about China.

CRI, China's official international radio broadcaster, for instance, has reportedly leased local stations around the globe and across the US.⁴⁸ In addition, its subsidiary, Global CAMG Media Group (环球凯歌国际传媒集团), runs 45 radio stations in 22 countries through 18 local companies.⁴⁹ In Australia alone, Global CAMG Media Group owns 11 radio stations in several major Australian cities, nine newspapers, websites, magazines, and other businesses.⁵⁰

CAMG Presence in Southeast Asia

Global CAMG Media Group (环球凯歌国际传媒集团), a subsidiary of China's official international radio broadcaster, China Radio International, has a significant presence in Southeast Asia:

- ❖ **Bangkok.** Since January 2011, CAMG has been cooperating with Bangkok FM103. They broadcast hit music and Chinese news in Thai. CAMG claims that the station can cover Bangkok and reach over 10 million listeners.
- ❖ **Manila.** CAMG Philippines co-manages DZME 1530, the flagship station of Philippine radio network Capitol Broadcasting Center. CAMG claims that the station broadcasts over Metro Manila and the surrounding area, covering a population of nearly 25 million people. The station carries Filipino news, commentary on current affairs, and entertainment content.
- ❖ **Jakarta.** CAMG operates and manages AM 738, which broadcasts to Jakarta and the surrounding area, covering a population of 9 million people. The station broadcasts music, economic and business news, and cultural programs.
- ❖ **Yangon.** CAMG Myanmar launched Cherry FM 89.3 in October 2014. The station claims to cover more than 5 million listeners and provide a range of programs in the local language.
- ❖ **Vientiane.** CAMG Laos FM 93 started in 2006 and initially broadcast 13 hours a day in Lao, English, and Mandarin Chinese. The station was reformatted in 2011 and now consists of a 24-hour broadcast to nearly 1 million people in the capital.
- ❖ **Phnom Penh.** The station, Cambodia Chinese Radio FM 96.5, began in 2008 and consists of more than 18 hours of daily broadcasts in Cambodian, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Chaozhou. AM 96.3's programming includes Cambodian and Chinese music, news, and talk shows. According to information found on its website, the station currently now reaches Siem Reap.

Source: Global CAMG Media Group's website, <http://www.camg-media.com/en/about.html>.

A particularly troubling aspect of China's acquisition of foreign media outlets is that it is not readily observable. Foreign audiences may be listening, viewing, or reading what appears to be content produced by a non-Chinese media outlet without realizing that the outlet is wholly or partially owned by a Chinese entity. Moreover, determining the ownership structure of foreign media outlets requires research skill, experience, and foreign-language capabilities.

Investing in the development of overseas telecommunications infrastructure

China has invested heavily in the construction of telecommunications infrastructure overseas, including submarine cables and radio and television broadcasting facilities. This investment not only provides China with a major stake in overseas telecommunications infrastructure, it also creates the infrastructure necessary to deliver Chinese-produced media content. Indeed, infrastructure deals between Chinese and foreign media entities often lead to agreements to share or jointly produce content.

In Laos and Cambodia, for instance, China has invested in television broadcast infrastructure to promote the adoption of the Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast (DTMB)—a Chinese mobile and fixed digital television standard—and create opportunities to broadcast Chinese television programming to those countries.ⁱⁱ In 2012, Cambodia signed a cooperation agreement in which it agreed to adopt DTMB and engage in joint production with Chinese media outlets in exchange for China's help building the necessary infrastructure.⁵¹ According to *China Daily*, the new digital network would increase “mutual understanding and trust” between China and Cambodia through the content that it broadcast.⁵² Laos began construction of a digital broadcasting network that uses the DTMB standard in 2012.⁵³ Since then, Chinese media outlets have cooperated with local media outlets to create content for the network.⁵⁴

The PRC has established a significant foothold in Africa's telecommunications infrastructure. At the December 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in South Africa, Xi Jinping announced the 10,000 Villages Program (*wan nongcun*; 万村通).⁵⁵ The objective of the program is to “promote China-Africa cultural exchange and people to people bonds”⁵⁶ by providing access to satellite television for 10,112 rural villages across 25 African countries.⁵⁷ One result of the program is that the Chinese company contracted to construct the digital satellite network, StarTimes, has a virtual monopoly over the television broadcasting market in much of Africa.⁵⁸ According to StarTimes, it transmits “China's most authoritative media” so that the people of Africa can “completely and truly understand China and Chinese culture.”⁵⁹

ⁱⁱ See Appendix B for more about the popularity of DTMB relative to other digital television standards.

3.3 Influencing foreign media

In addition to using its own state-run media to promote its narratives, Beijing seeks to influence reporting by foreign media outlets and journalists. It does this by promoting censorship and seeking to shape the perceptions of foreign media professionals. The tools that Beijing uses to do this include the following:

- Promoting self-censorship among foreign journalists
- Buying the right to shape content by acquiring an ownership stake in foreign media outlets
- Hosting international media forums and conferences
- Hosting education and training programs for foreign media professionals

Promoting self-censorship

China engages in policies and practices that create a climate in which critics of Beijing have to worry about consequences or reprisal. American scholar, Perry Link, coined the metaphor of the “anaconda in the chandelier” to describe the Chinese government’s cultivation of a culture of self-censorship among domestic editors, writers, journalists, and scholars. Perpetually conscious of the snake coiled above them, most Chinese internalize the rules about what can and cannot be written. At the same time, China is exporting its culture of self-censorship abroad.⁶⁰ It does this in three main ways:

- Threatening to cut off access to Chinese markets.
- Threatening to cut off access to China.
- Pressure and intimidation.

Threatening to cut off access to Chinese markets

According to news reports, the Chinese Party-State has used the threat of losing access to China’s vast markets to encourage foreign media to self-censor. Some foreign media outlets have reportedly obliged rather than risk being banned within China. Examples include the following:

- In 2017, Springer Nature, whose publications include *Nature* and *Scientific American*, acknowledged that it had removed articles from its mainland China website that touch on topics the ruling Communist Party considers sensitive, including Taiwan, Tibet, human rights, and elite politics.⁶¹

- Google, which has been cut off from the Chinese market since 2010 because of its unwillingness to censor its search engine, was recently revealed to have been developing a censored search engine for mainland China. However, this program appears to have been shut down following backlash from inside the company.⁶²
- According to John Fitzgerald, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation largely eliminated news and current affairs from its Chinese-language programming in order to land a commercial deal with the PRC-owned Shanghai Media Group in 2014.⁶³
- The *New Zealand Herald* reportedly voluntarily censors the content of its Chinese-language website in order to maintain the permits necessary to disseminate news via the PRC-based social media platform WeChat.⁶⁴

Threatening to cut off access to China

According to reports by academics, journalists, and other specialists, the Chinese Party-State punishes foreign scholars or journalists who are publicly critical of China by refusing to grant them visas.⁶⁵ The inability to obtain a visa to enter China is a potential career-killer for journalists or scholars whose professional livelihood depends on access to China for interviews and research and creates significant pressure to self-censor.⁶⁶ On several occasions, China's refusal to grant visas to foreign journalists has made international news. Two recent examples follow:

- In August 2019, China effectively expelled a *Wall Street Journal* reporter in alleged retaliation for a report that detailed allegations that Xi Jinping's cousin was involved in high-stakes gambling and potential money laundering in Australia. Chinese authorities refused to renew press credentials for Chun Han Wong, a Singapore national who had covered Chinese politics out of the paper's Beijing bureau since 2014.⁶⁷
- In October 2018, China refused to renew the work visa of *Financial Times* Hong Kong-based Asia News editor Victor Mallet. The decision was widely viewed as punishment for Mallet's hosting of a talk by a Hong Kong pro-independence activist at the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondent's Club. When Mallet later attempted to reenter Hong Kong as a visitor, he was denied.⁶⁸

Reports of pressure and intimidation

It is not unusual for official PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokespersons and Chinese diplomats to publicly condemn foreign officials, scholars, and journalists for criticizing China.⁶⁹ In recent years, however, a far more troubling trend has emerged: a growing body of reporting alleges that China is also using intimidation and coercion to silence and deter critics.⁷⁰ These reports are inherently difficult to verify. Some prominent examples follow:

- In January 2019, Chinese businessmen—allegedly acting on behalf of Beijing and in cooperation with the Swedish ambassador to China—reportedly threatened Angela Gui, the daughter of Gui Minhai, a Chinese-born Swedish bookseller who was being held in China. One of the men allegedly told her that she would never see her father again if she continued speaking to the media about his case.⁷¹ The PRC embassy in Stockholm publicly denied any involvement in the incident.⁷²
- Since publishing a 2017 paper detailing the extent of PRC influence activities in New Zealand, scholar Anne-Marie Brady reports that her home and office have been broken into twice and her family car has been tampered with. She has also received a threatening letter and answered numerous, anonymous phone calls in the middle of the night.⁷³
- In 2018, Canada-based journalist Xin Feng reported receiving death threats after publishing an article critical of China’s prime minister.⁷⁴
- In 2006, Li Yuan, the chief technical officer of the *Epoch Times*, was attacked in his Atlanta home by individuals allegedly acting on behalf of Beijing. The attackers stole his laptops. *Epoch Times* is a Chinese-American newspaper founded by the Falun Gong, an organization that is outlawed in China.⁷⁵

Buying the right to shape content

As mentioned earlier in this report, China has sought to expand its reach in recent years by investing in foreign media. When it acquires an ownership stake in a foreign media outlet, a Chinese company may also acquire the necessary leverage to shape the content that the foreign media outlet produces and make it more China-friendly.

According to Reporters Without Borders, PRC investment in overseas Chinese-language media outlets has virtually silenced critical voices in publications that cater to Chinese diaspora communities.⁷⁶ Many Chinese diaspora publications—including Taiwan’s *China Times*, the New York-based *World Journal*, and the US-based *Duowei* website—have all reportedly adopted a more pro-Beijing editorial bent following their acquisition by companies with ties to the PRC.⁷⁷

China also invests in English-language media outlets and has reportedly sought to control their content. In one particularly high-profile case, an English-language South African newspaper, *Independent Online*, fired a journalist in a move that some interpreted as being intended to appease the paper’s Chinese investors. *Independent Online* is owned by Independent News & Media, whose investors include the PRC-state-backed China-Africa Development Fund and China International Television Corporation, a subsidiary of China’s official television broadcaster, CCTV. *Independent Online* abruptly fired Azad Essa a few hours after he published a column criticizing China’s persecution of its Uighur community.⁷⁸

Hosting international media forums and conferences

Beijing organizes and sponsors a variety of international and bilateral media forums and conferences for foreign media professionals in an effort to shape their perceptions of China. These forums and conferences serve as platforms for directly promoting China's preferred narratives to foreign journalists.⁷⁹ At the 2019 World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, for instance, China's propaganda chief, Huang Kunming, contended that a "Cold War mentality" and "bully behavior" are hindering mutual trust in cyberspace. In a veiled reference to US restrictions on Huawei, Huang further argued: "By using national security as an excuse, some countries have attacked some countries and enterprises. This has increased the uncertainty, opposition and negativity in cyberspace."⁸⁰

Perhaps the best example of this particular tool at work is the variety of media-related forums and organizations that China has established to promote Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy project, the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI)—also known as "One Belt One Road" (OBOR). The initiative has included the launching of a Belt and Road News Network (BRNN) created by CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily* and media outlets from other BRI participants to promote the initiative.ⁱⁱⁱ In September 2019, China hosted a Belt and Road Journalists Forum in Beijing. More than 60 heads of journalist organizations from over 50 countries and regions attended.^{iv} During the forum, the All-China Journalists Association and other journalist groups in the countries and regions involved in the BRI founded the Belt and Road Journalists Network (BRJN) to serve as yet another platform for "deepening exchanges and cooperation"—and likely promoting Chinese narratives.⁸¹

Because they are so high profile, these forums have received a great deal of attention in foreign media discussion of China's efforts to influence the global media.⁸² It is unclear, however, how effective they are in achieving China's objectives. Recent iterations of the World Internet Conference, for instance, have failed to attract key players in the international media landscape. Neither Google nor Apple has sent representatives to the last two iterations of the conference.⁸³

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on BRNN, see Appendix C.

^{iv} The event was organized by the All-China Journalists Association (ACJA). For more on the ACJA, see Appendix C.

2019 ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges

中国—东盟媒体交流年

The ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges was announced in late 2018 during an event commemorating the 15th Anniversary of the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership. The opening ceremony for the year of exchanges, hosted by Huang Kunming, head of the CCP Propaganda Department and a member of the CCP Politburo, took place in February 2019 in Beijing. In a congratulatory letter read at the opening ceremony, Xi Jinping stated that the year of exchanges was “an important step in deepening the bilateral strategic partnership,” and that media can “play an even larger role in the China-ASEAN relationship.” Xi further stated that he hopes China and ASEAN media can “contribute even more to building a closer China-ASEAN community of shared future for mankind.”

As part of the year of exchanges, the China International Publishing Group (see Appendix C), the PRC Mission to ASEAN, and the ASEAN-China Center organized the 2019 ASEAN-China Media Cooperation Forum in Beijing. The forum, held under the theme “New Trends, New Cooperation, New Future,” included more than 200 participants from government, international organizations, and almost 60 different media outlets. The participants discussed how media from China and ASEAN countries “should actively adapt to new technologies and promote cooperation, and explore innovative ways to better report stories on achievements of win-win cooperation and strengthening people-to-people ties.”

In July 2019, the PRC National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and PRC Mission to ASEAN cohosted the High-Level Conference on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-China Media Cooperation in Jakarta, Indonesia. According to *China Daily*, senior policymakers from the countries participated as part of an effort to “strengthen cooperation in information and communication as the region faces new challenges.”

Sources: “Ambassador to ASEAN Huang Xilian Holds Reception for the Commemoration for the 15 Year Anniversary of the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership,” Mission of the People’s Republic of China to ASEAN, November 21, 2018, <http://asean.chinamission.org.cn/chn/dshd/t1615182.htm>; “Huang Kunming Hosts Opening Ceremony for China-ASEAN Year of Media Exchanges,” State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, February 21, 2019, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/tt/hkm/Document/1647390/1647390.htm>; “Xi Jinping Sends Congratulatory Letter to China-ASEAN Year of Media Exchanges Opening Ceremony,” Xinhua, February 20, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-02/20/c_1124142468.htm; “2019 ASEAN-China Media Cooperation Forum Held in Beijing,” State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 15, 2019, http://english.scio.gov.cn/scionews/2019-05/15/content_74787113.htm; “China, ASEAN Mark Progress in Year of Media Exchanges,” *China Daily*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/articles/199/155/181/1563887023257.html>.

Hosting education and training programs

China hosts a variety of training, education, and exchange programs for foreign journalists. The programs aim to cultivate a positive impression of China among foreign journalists and serve as platforms for directly promoting China’s preferred narratives. Multiple Chinese government organizations and media outlets are involved in organizing these training and education programs, including the National Radio and Television Administration’s Research and Training Institute (RTI, 研修学院), the China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA, 中国公共外交协会), the China International Press Communication Center (CIPCC, 中国国际新闻交流中心), and

state-run media outlets, such as *China Daily*.^v These programs vary greatly in duration and scope. The following are just a few examples:

- In May 2019, RTI organized the Seminar for Media Reporters of the Philippines (a 14-day seminar set in Beijing and Shenzhen), the professed purpose of which was to “build cooperation and understanding between the media industries in the two countries.”⁸⁴
- The CPDA runs a 10-month training program held in Beijing that involves as many as 50 journalists from countries across the Asia-Pacific and Africa. CPDA vice president Hu Zhengyue has claimed that the program provides foreign journalists with “an in-depth understanding about China’s situation.”⁸⁵
- The Dongfang Fellowship is organized by the Chinese state-run newspaper, *China Daily*, in conjunction with Shanghai International Studies University, the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, and China Eastern Airlines.⁸⁶ In 2018, the program brought editors and reporters from 12 countries involved in China’s Belt and Road Initiative to Shanghai for 26 days of training.⁸⁷

Much like the high-profile media forums that China hosts, these training and education programs have attracted a great deal of attention in foreign media discussion of China’s influence efforts.⁸⁸ However, it is unclear how effective they are in shaping foreign journalists’ perceptions and their subsequent reporting about China.⁸⁹ Indeed, we have even identified at least one instance in which participation in one of China’s longest training programs appeared to have little or no effect on a journalist’s subsequent reporting.⁹⁰

3.4 Using entertainment to promote China

In recent years, Beijing has sought to expand its footprint in the global entertainment industry as a means of promoting China’s narratives to global audiences beyond the news media. It does this in four main ways:

1. Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment
2. Investing in the international film industry
3. Leveraging access to Chinese markets in order to promote foreign self-censorship
4. Promoting social media platforms subject to Chinese control

^v For more about the National Radio and Television Administration and RTI, see Appendix C.

Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment

Seeking the financial promise of global markets, Chinese companies increasingly produce video games, movies, apps, and social media platforms designed to appeal to foreign audiences, while still adhering to CCP propaganda guidance. A 2017 report by the US Department of Commerce International Trade Administration valued China's media and entertainment industry at \$205 billion.⁹¹ By way of comparison, the same report valued the US media and entertainment industry at \$712 billion, the United Kingdom's at \$99.8 billion, Canada's at \$45.3 billion, and India's at \$32.2 billion.⁹²

The Chinese Party-State actively promotes Chinese-produced entertainment media abroad to foster admiration for Chinese culture and history. For example, as part of a campaign to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, PRC embassies around the world organized Chinese film festivals and reached agreements with local TV networks to air Chinese programs. According to Nie Chenxi, head of the PRC's National Radio and Television Administration, China worked with 60 foreign TV networks in 50 countries to air a selection of Chinese TV series, documentaries, and cartoons from August to October.⁹³ The TV networks included the national networks of Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Mongolia; the Discovery Channel; and Hungary's ATV.⁹⁴ The PRC embassy in Myanmar, for instance, arranged for a collection of Chinese documentaries and 10 popular historical drama series to be dubbed or subtitled in Burmese and aired in Myanmar.⁹⁵ In a related effort, China's Guangxi Radio and Television Information Network Corporation worked with state-run Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) to translate into Burmese and dub the classical Chinese TV series, "Dream of the Red Chamber," which is based on one of China's great literary works.⁹⁶

Investing in the international film industry

In recent years, China-based companies have invested heavily in Hollywood, buying production and finance companies and engaging in joint ventures with US studios. By doing so, they have acquired the potential to shape the content of Hollywood films in ways that suit China's interests.⁹⁷

This includes censoring content that Beijing might find offensive. For example, Chinese tech giant Tencent is one of the private investors in the sequel to the 1986 classic *Top Gun*. When the trailer for *Top Gun: Maverick* was released in July 2019, many noticed that the patches on the back of the main character's jacket no longer bore the flags of Japan or the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, both of which—especially the ROC flag—would be politically sensitive in China. Instead, both flags had been replaced with ambiguous symbols in the same colors (see Figure 14).⁹⁸ China regards Taiwan as a renegade province and actively seeks to deny Taiwan recognition as a state by the international community.

The exact impetus for the decision to remove the flags from Maverick's jacket is unclear: Were the filmmakers directed by the Chinese government? Did Tencent executives make the decision out of genuine patriotism? Did they self-censor to ensure that the film could be distributed in mainland China? Regardless of the answer to these questions, the result is the same.

Films bankrolled by private Chinese companies have not only censored content to please China; they have also inserted content that promotes Chinese narratives. The 2019 animated film *Abominable*, for instance, promotes China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. A joint production between DreamWorks and Shanghai-based Pearl Studio, the film is about a young Chinese girl who embarks on a quest to return a Yeti to his homeland in the Himalayas. Early in the film, a map appears (see Figure 15) that clearly displays China's controversial nine-dash line claim to the South China Sea. The nine-dash line—a U-shaped dotted line that encircles almost all of the South China Sea—is disputed by Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei.

Figure 14. Removal of Japan's and Taiwan's flags from Top Gun jacket



The photo on the right shows Maverick's jacket in the original *Top Gun* film; the photo on the left shows the jacket in the trailer for the sequel.

Source: Mark Mackinnon on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/markmackinnon/status/1152241649893945346?lang=de>.

What is interesting about the *Top Gun* and *Abominable* examples is that there was a public outcry in response to both. CNN reported critically on the altering of Maverick's jacket in the

Top Gun sequel, and journalists took to Twitter to criticize the move.⁹⁹ Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia all responded with outrage to the appearance of the nine-dash line map in *Abominable*. Vietnam pulled the film from theaters, and Malaysia censored out the offending map before allowing the film to be shown.¹⁰⁰ The public outcry raises the question of how effective China's efforts were at shaping foreign perceptions in these two cases. Given the scope of China's investment in the international film industry, one might ask: how often do China's efforts to promote its narratives via films go unnoticed by the international community?

Figure 15. Map from *Abominable* showing China's controversial nine-dash line claim to the South China Sea



Source: Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Hollywood Is Paying an 'Abominable' Price for China Access," *Foreign Policy*, October 23, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/23/abominable-china-dreamworks-propaganda-hollywood/>.

Wolf Warrior II: Promoting Beijing's Narratives at Home and Abroad

The 2017 Chinese action film, *Wolf Warrior II* (*Zhan Lang*; 战狼 2), illustrates how entertainment can serve as a tool for promoting CCP narratives—both within China and abroad. The first *Wolf Warrior*, released in 2015, is an action extravaganza that tells the story of how an elite Chinese special forces unit nicknamed the “Wolf Warriors” and their leader, Leng Feng, capture an evil Chinese drug lord by defeating his army of white mercenaries, most of whom are former US marines. In *Wolf Warrior II*, Leng travels to an unspecified African country and becomes caught in the middle of a civil war between government troops and armed rebels aided by mostly white mercenaries. With the help of the Chinese Navy, Leng rescues African and Chinese civilians, defeats the white mercenaries, and personally beats up their American leader, known as “Big Daddy.”

Wolf Warrior II encapsulates several of Beijing’s global narratives and portrays China as a benevolent and responsible world power. In the film, a Chinese hero serves as the protector of innocent civilians against an evil American mercenary, and the Chinese Navy comes to the rescue. Meanwhile, Chinese workers help Africans build their economy, and Chinese doctors search for a cure for a deadly epidemic.

Wolf Warrior II was wildly successful. It is the highest-grossing Chinese film ever released. At a total domestic gross of US \$874 million, it the second-highest-earning title in a single territory in history, behind *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in North America. The film also gained popularity overseas, earning \$2.3 million in North America alone. The film’s popularity has reportedly led many in Hollywood to rethink their approach to the burgeoning Chinese movie market, which is on track to become the largest in the world. The lesson for foreign filmmakers is that appeals to patriotism—along with lots of action—attract Chinese audiences.



Sources: Patrick Frater, “Wolf Warrior II’s Massive Success Forces Studios to Rethink China Approach,” *Variety*, August 31, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/biz/news/china-wolf-warrior-ii-1202543266/>; Helen Raleigh, “Wolf Warrior II Tells Us a Lot about China,” *National Review*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/07/wolf-warrior-ii-tells-us-a-lot-about-china/>; “Wolf Warrior 2 (2017),” IMDb, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7131870/?ref=ttmi_tt.

Leveraging access to Chinese markets to promote self-censorship

As discussed earlier in this report, Beijing routinely uses access to China's vast markets as leverage to encourage self-censorship among foreign media. This also applies to the film industry. Rather than risk being banned in China, Hollywood studios will often modify films to ensure that they will meet with the approval of Chinese censors. High-profile examples include the following:

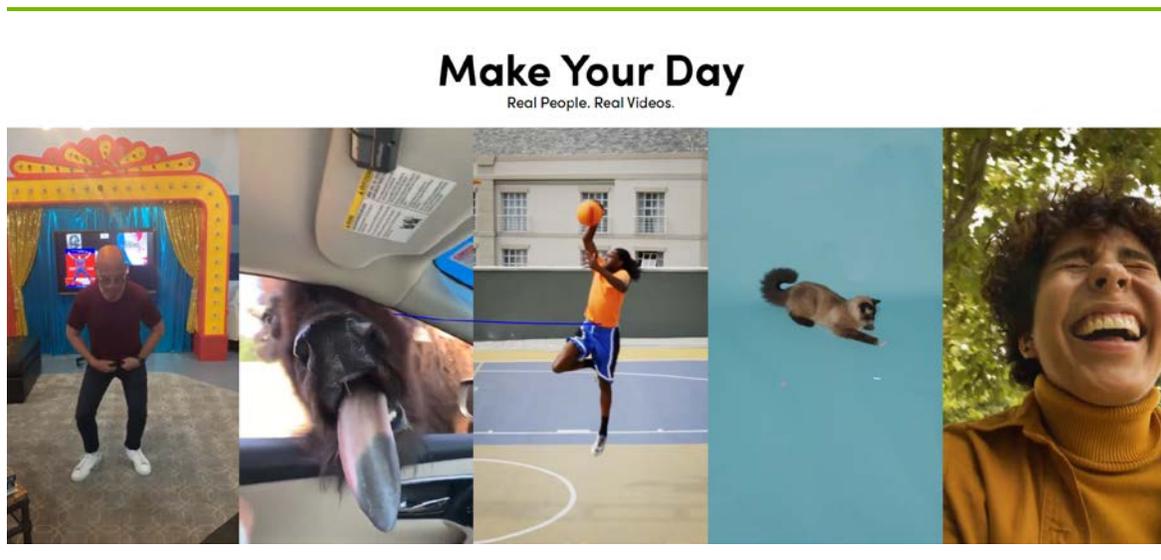
- *Red Dawn* (2012). Initially, the plot of the film involved a Chinese invasion of the United States that is thwarted by a high school football team. However, when MGM realized that casting China as the villain could jeopardize the film's marketability in China, it recast North Korea as the villain and replaced all Chinese flags and insignia with North Korean ones.¹⁰¹
- *World War Z* (2013). Rather than risk offending Chinese censors, Paramount deleted a scene in which the film's characters suggest that China could be the geographic source of the viral outbreak that brought about the zombie apocalypse.¹⁰²
- *Doctor Strange* (2016). In the comic books on which the film is based, Doctor Strange's mentor, the Ancient One, is a Tibetan monk. However, Marvel Studios chose to cast the Ancient One as a Celtic woman played by Tilda Swinton. According to one of the film's writers, this was done to avoid offending Chinese sensitivities about Tibet.¹⁰³

Promoting social media platforms subject to Chinese control

China promotes the overseas use of social media platforms that it can control, such as WeChat and TikTok (see Figure 16). International media have reported instances in which content on both platforms has been censored in order to silence criticism of China.

Within overseas Chinese communities, WeChat is among the most important social media platforms. As of 2018, there were nearly 3 million WeChat users in Australia and 180,000 in New Zealand.¹⁰⁴ Developed by Tencent Holdings Ltd., a Chinese multinational investment holdings conglomerate, WeChat is a multipurpose app with messaging, social media, mobile payment, and other functions integrated into one interface. Because it is based in China, it is subject to PRC governmental control. Not only does this mean that WeChat—and the Chinese government—can track users from abroad, but it also means that users consume content regulated by Chinese censorship rules. WeChat users in the United States, for instance, have reported that their accounts have been blocked for posting articles or sending messages that included content deemed politically sensitive by PRC authorities.¹⁰⁵

Figure 16. Screenshot of TikTok's English-language homepage



Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/en>.

WeChat is not the only China-based app to gain popularity overseas—or experience Chinese censorship. TikTok, a short-video app developed by Beijing-based ByteDance Technology Co Ltd. for overseas markets, has exploded in popularity to become one of the most frequently downloaded apps worldwide. According to Chinese state-run media, TikTok has over 100 million registered content creators across Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States.¹⁰⁶

Because the app's parent company is based in China, US lawmakers have expressed concern that it could be compelled "to support and cooperate with intelligence work controlled by the Chinese Communist Party."¹⁰⁷ In December 2019, the US Department of Defense (DoD) issued guidance identifying "TikTok as having potential security risks associated with its use" and directing all DoD employees to "uninstall TikTok to circumvent any exposure of personal information." Shortly thereafter, the US Army instructed its personnel not to use the app on government phones.¹⁰⁸

According to *The Guardian*, leaked documents have revealed that TikTok instructs its moderators to censor videos that mention politically sensitive topics, such as Tiananmen Square, Tibetan independence, or Falun Gong.¹⁰⁹ In late November 2019, TikTok suffered a major international public relations debacle when it suspended the account of a US teen who had posted videos critical of China's mass detention of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang province.

Although the company's leadership subsequently reversed the ban on the US teen and issued a public apology, the incident raised serious concerns about the extent of the PRC government's control over the platform.¹¹⁰

The next section offers a framework that can be used to take stock of China's efforts employ these tactics, techniques, and tools to shape the media environment in a particular place.

4. How Can You Tell If China Is Attempting to Shape the Narrative?

4.1 A framework for taking stock

The Chinese Party-State's toolkit for shaping narratives in the international media is extensive, diverse, and global in scale. In many cases, Beijing's efforts to promote its desired narratives in the international media are legal, overt, and readily observable if one knows where to look. In other cases, Beijing's efforts to shape media narratives may be less readily apparent and difficult to attribute. All of this raises three questions:

1. ***How can you tell if China is attempting to shape the media environment in a particular region or state?*** Based on the playbook described in this report, Table 7 offers a framework that can be used to take stock of China's efforts to shape the media environment in a particular place.
2. ***How effective are China's efforts at shaping foreign perceptions in its favor?*** Although China's efforts to shape the global media environment are extensive, coordinated, and well funded, this does not automatically mean that they are effective at reaching foreign audiences and shaping their views. Assessing the reach and resonance of China's narratives requires a country-by-country approach that takes into account the unique media landscape in each country.
3. ***How should countries respond to China's efforts to shape their media environments?*** Once a country has assessed the scope and effectiveness of China's efforts to shape its media environment, the next step is to take stock of whether this undermines its interests and warrants a response. The next subsection discusses factors that shape individual countries' ability to respond to an unwelcome Chinese presence in their media environment.

Table 7. A framework for taking stock of China’s efforts to shape a country’s media environment

PRC approach	Tool	Questions to ask
Tailoring PRC media content to appeal to foreign audiences	Producing content in foreign languages Reporting on local events Recruiting foreign voices	Do PRC media outlets report on local events? Do PRC media produce broadcast, print, and/or provide online content in local languages? Have PRC media outlets hired local journalists? Do PRC state-run media quote local experts and/or officials?
Maximizing channels for distribution of China’s narratives	Selling or providing content free to foreign media Jointly producing content with foreign media outlets Authoring opinion pieces for foreign media outlets Buying space in foreign media Establishing a presence on foreign social media Investing in foreign media outlets Investing in overseas telecommunications infrastructure	Do major local media outlets publish content originally produced by PRC media outlets such as Xinhua or CGTN? Are major local media outlets engaged in joint production with PRC media outlets? Do major local media outlets publish opinion pieces written by PRC officials or CCP-approved proxies? Do major local media outlets publish pro-China advertorials or articles that are marked as “sponsored content”? Do PRC officials and/or state-run media have social media accounts targeted at local populations? Do PRC companies have an ownership stake in any local media outlets? Has the PRC been involved in the construction of the country’s telecommunications infrastructure?
Influencing foreign media to promote only China-friendly narratives	Promoting self-censorship among foreign journalists and scholars Purchasing a right to shape content Hosting international media forums and conferences Hosting education and training programs	Are there reports that China has threatened to cut off local media outlets’ ability to market content in China? Are there reports that China has cut off or threatened to cut off local journalists’ or scholars’ access to China? Are there reports that PRC representatives have sought to pressure or intimidate local scholars or journalists for criticizing China? Do local media professionals attend forums or training programs in China? Do they belong to any China-affiliated journalist associations?
Using entertainment to promote Chinese narratives	Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment Investing in the international film industry Promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms	Are Chinese-produced entertainment media, such as games, movies, and TV shows, readily available? Are films backed by Chinese investors readily available? How popular are Chinese apps that are subject to PRC censorship, such as WeChat or TikTok?

4.2 Thoughts on responses to China's efforts

It is ultimately up to individual countries to determine the extent to which they are willing to cede the narrative to China or accept a Chinese presence in their media environments. Several factors shape a particular country's options for responding to China's presence. These include the following:

- ***Regulations on press or individual freedoms of speech.*** Countries that protect freedom of speech and the press tend to have a more diverse media landscape. This means that there is more likely a plurality of voices to balance the narratives China promotes.
- ***Regulations on foreign actors in the domestic information environment.*** Does the country have laws and regulations on foreign ownership, foreign investment, foreign content, and/or immigration restrictions on foreign journalists? If so, these statutes can regulate the extent to which China or any foreign actor, for that matter, legally participates in the country's information environment.
- ***Domestic resources.*** Countries with robust resources to support domestic media, including content, infrastructure, and training, are less likely to open the door to Chinese media penetration out of need. In contrast, countries that lack media resources may be more receptive to Chinese offers of support.
- ***Diversity of foreign partners.*** The extent to which a particular country is politically and/or economically reliant on China shapes its options for responding to PRC media efforts.

Appendix A: Availability of China Radio International Broadcasts in Southeast Asian Languages

CRI broadcasts content in one or more local languages to 10 of the 11 countries in Southeast Asia. Table 8 shows the languages spoken in each Southeast Asian country and the availability of CRI broadcasts in those languages.

Table 8. Spoken languages in Southeast Asia and availability of CRI broadcasts

Country	Main Languages	CRI Broadcast Availability
Brunei	Malay (official) English Chinese Dialects	Chinese (CRI Broadcast) English (CRI Website)
Cambodia	Khmer (official) Other	Khmer (CRI Broadcast)
Indonesia	Indonesian (official) English Dutch Local Dialects (Javanese most widely spoken)	Indonesian (CRI Broadcast) English (CRI Website)
Laos	Lao (official) French English Various Ethnic Languages	Lao (CRI Broadcast) French (CRI Broadcast) French (CRI Website) English (CRI Website)
Malaysia	Malay (official) English Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow) Tamil Telugu	Malay (CRI Broadcast) Malay (CRI Website) Cantonese (CRI Broadcast) Mandarin (CRI Broadcast) Chinese (CRI Website) Hakka (CRI Broadcast)
Myanmar (Burma)	Burmese (official) Minority Languages	Burmese (CRI Website)
Philippines	Filipino (official, based on Tagalog) English (official) Tagalog Cebuano Ilocano	Filipino (CRI Broadcast) Filipino (CRI Website) English (CRI Website)

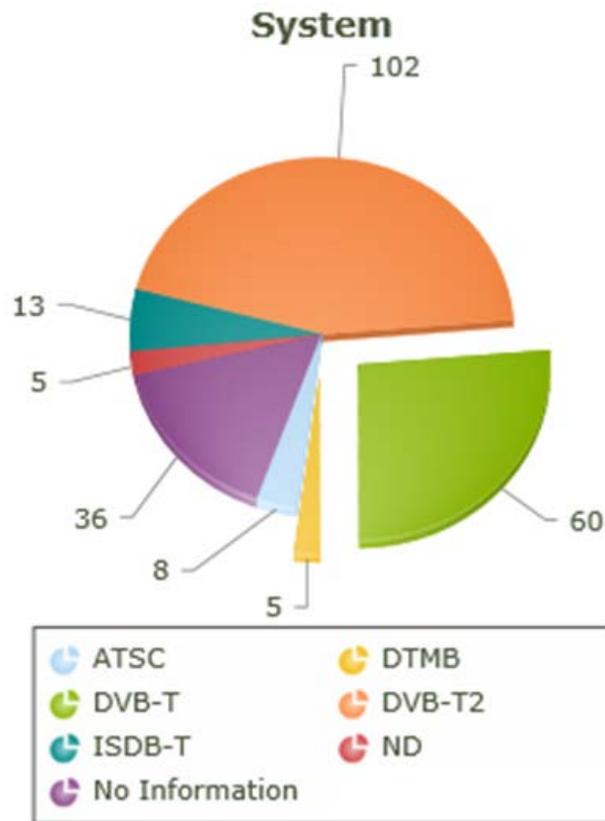
Country	Main Languages	CRI Broadcast Availability
Singapore	English (official) Mandarin (official) Malay (official) Tamil (official) Chinese Dialects (Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka)	Chaozhou (CRI Broadcast) Cantonese (CRI Broadcast) Hakka (CRI Broadcast) Tamil (CRI Broadcast) English (CRI Website) Chinese (CRI Website) Malay (CRI Website) Tamil (CRI Website)
Thailand	Thai (official) Other languages (includes Malay, Burmese)	Thai (CRI Broadcast) Thai (CRI Website)
Timor-Leste	Tetun Prasa Mambai Makasai Tetun Terik Baikenu	N/A
Vietnam	Vietnamese (official) English (increasingly favored as a second language) French Chinese Khmer	Mandarin (CRI Broadcast) French (CRI Broadcast) French (CRI Website) Vietnamese (CRI Website) English (CRI Website) Chinese (CRI Website) Khmer (CRI Website)

Sources: Data on languages spoken in Southeast Asian countries from *The World Fact Book* on the Central Intelligence Agency's website: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>; data on CRI broadcasts from *World Radio TV Handbook*, WRTH Publications Limited, 2018 and CRI's website, <http://chinaplus.cri.cn>.

Appendix B: Digital Television Standards and StarTimes

DTMB, the Chinese digital television standard, is used by only five countries and competes with other major standards, including the North American ATSC, European DVB-T, and Japanese ISDB-T). Figure 17 illustrates the relative popularity of each type of digital television standard.

Figure 17. Number of countries using each type of television standard



Source: International Telecommunication Union, "Statistics," 2019, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Spectrum-Broadcasting/DSO/Pages/statistics.aspx>.

PRC Funding and StarTimes Make Television Affordable for Africans

Starting in 2002, StarTimes began providing Africans with digital television access at a fraction of the cost of other providers. At that time, television ownership was rare and subscriptions were relatively expensive. The company’s ability to provide such cheap access was likely facilitated by loans from the Export-Import Bank of China (CEXIM)—a state-owned PRC bank that plays a major role in China’s overseas investment. *China Daily* reported that between 2012 and 2014 CEXIM provided StarTimes with \$163 million in loans to “expand its presence in African broadcasting and radio sectors,” along with another \$60 million loan “for further expansion.” The Chinese government also provided StarTimes with approximately \$7.8 million during the 2018 implementation of the 10,000 Villages program in Kenya.

StarTimes’ website also advertises equipment and content packages, or “bouquets,” to African consumers. While most of the products include set top boxes, digital TVs, and speakers, StarTimes also advertises a solar power system for families that live without electricity. The system includes a solar panel, LFP battery, four LED lights, a television, satellite kits, a phone charger, and power cable for the television. The company also provides free installation, 24-hour customer support, and a financial assistance program that allows families to pay for their solar power system in smaller installments. Below is a table of the four Dish Bouquets that StarTimes offers its consumers.

StarTimes Dish Bouquets

Bouquet	Price (USD)	Channels	Media Outlets					
Chinese	19.53	24	Various PRC News Sources in Chinese					
Super	14.64	14	Bloomberg	Fox News	MSNBC			
Smart	8.78	33	BBC World	Al Jazeera	France 24 E	Africa News	DW	
Nova	4.39	30	CGTN Documentary	CNC World (Xinhua/Private)	CCTV-4	KTN News (Kenyan)	TVC News (Nigerian)	Channel Ten

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Appendix C: Key Institutions and Organizations

All China Journalists Association (ACJA)



The ACJA (中华全国新闻工作者协会), established in Beijing in 1957, is the successor of the China Young Journalists Association, created in Shanghai in 1937.¹¹¹ The English version of the ACJA website describes the association as a “national non-governmental organization,”¹¹² but the Chinese version defines it as a “national people’s organization for Chinese media led by the Communist Party of China, a bridge and link closely connecting the Party and government to the media.”¹¹³ The ACJA constitution describes a large number of the association’s missions, two of which include uniting Chinese journalists “around the Central Committee of the Party with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core,” and “creating favorable public opinion for achieving the ‘two centenary’ goals and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.”¹¹⁴

The ACJA is also involved with foreign journalists and media outlets. Among its many responsibilities, the ACJA works to “play a unique role in creating favorable international public opinion.” The association intends to build relationships with international media organizations and foreign journalists living in China and spreads China’s voice to create a more “realistic and objective” understanding of China.¹¹⁵

Belt and Road News Network (BRNN)



The BRNN was created by the *People’s Daily* and a number of media institutions from countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). President Xi Jinping has described a BRI “news alliance” as “an important initiative that promotes people-to-people exchanges” in BRI countries. The BRNN is led by a council of 14 Chinese members and 26 members from countries across the globe.¹¹⁶ The council, chaired by the *People’s Daily*, is in charge of “organization and coordination of the BRNN” and “consulting and carrying out research on major issues concerning the development of the BRNN.”¹¹⁷

According to an April 2019 joint statement by the council, participating media outlets come from such countries as Bangladesh, Belarus, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Spain, and Russia.¹¹⁸ The BRNN seeks to “form a normalized mechanism for collaboration” among media organizations from participating BRI countries, and it intends to achieve this goal by emphasizing the role of social media and making use of the “unique advantages of media in communication.” The network’s website describes four primary BRNN functions:

1. ***Building an Open, Collaborative Platform.*** This platform is aimed at bringing together BRI media organizations and providing opportunities for exchange.
2. ***Promoting Mutual Assistance, Collaboration, and Exchange.*** This effort intends to organize member visits, forums, and dialogues on the BRI, as well as training workshops and programs for member countries.
3. ***Carrying out Pragmatic Cooperation in Innovative Ways.*** This cooperation involves information sharing among members of the network and the establishment of an aggregated news platform, including a range of sharing services.
4. ***Strengthening Research on Major Issues.*** This work involves policy research on issues regarding joint BRI construction, aiming to deliver intellectual and public support for the joint construction of the BRI.¹¹⁹

China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration/ China International Publishing Group (CIPG)



中国外文出版发行事业局
China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration

The China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration (中国外文出版发行事业局) is also known as the China International Publishing Group, or CIPG (中国国际出版集团). It is a subordinate organization to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It was established in October 1949 as the International News Office of the Central People’s Government General News Office (中央人民政府新闻总署国际新闻局). It is China’s oldest and largest publishing organization specializing in foreign dissemination. CIPG “devotes itself to telling China’s story,” and is responsible for exposing the international community to China’s long history, the accomplishments of its reform and development, and the important role of its culture in “going out.” CIPG claims that, since the 18th Party Congress, it has “vigorously reinforced the construction of international dissemination capabilities guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” to “sufficiently show the world a true picture of China in the New Era.¹²⁰

CIPG claims to provide an “abundance of information on China” to readers across a number of countries via books, periodicals, audio, video, and the internet.¹²¹ Each year, CIPG publishes more than 4,000 books in over 40 languages and 34 periodicals in 14 languages that are disseminated to over 180 different countries. Its online presence has a target audience that “extends to all parts of the world.” CIPG’s foreign presence includes 26 offices located in 14 countries¹²² and regions outside China that provide such services as publishing, translation, overseas public sentiment and think tank research, and international exchanges.¹²³

China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA)



The CPDA (中国公共外交协会) is a non-profit PRC organization that consists of scholars, experts, and influential personalities engaged in China’s public diplomacy.¹²⁴ The association is responsible for mobilizing, coordinating, and organizing public diplomacy activities in support of China’s overall diplomatic efforts. According to the CPDA website, the association has four main objectives:

1. **Building a Public Diplomacy Platform.** This platform is responsible for holding forums, study groups, lectures, and visits, as well as coordinating civilian public diplomacy activities.
2. **Promoting Two-Way Exchange.** The effort assists civilian organizations, think tanks, scholars, media, and companies in expanding foreign exchange cooperation and increasing China’s international influence.
3. **Researching Theories of Public Diplomacy.** This includes researching issues relevant to Chinese public diplomacy in order to guide its practice.
4. **Providing Public Diplomacy Consulting and Training.** This involves consulting and training geared toward all areas of society with the support of the diplomatic resources and methods of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹²⁵

The CPDA has a number of outreach programs involved in exchanges and training for foreign journalists, some of which are run through the China International Press Communication Center (CIPCC, 中国国际新闻交流中心). In February 2019, the CPDA conducted a 10-month training program through the CIPCC. The program, which took place in Beijing, involved 50 journalists from countries across the Asia-Pacific and Africa. Hu Zhengyue, vice president of the CPDA, claimed that the journalists “will have an in-depth understanding about China’s situation” after the program.¹²⁶

National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA)



The NRTA (国家广播电视总局) is a ministerial-level organization directly subordinate to the State Council.¹²⁷ In March 2018, the CCP Central Committee announced the establishment of the NRTA as part of the Chinese government’s institutional reforms. According to the announcement, the creation of the new administration was a means to reinforce Party leadership in news and public opinion, and highlight the role of radio and television as a mouthpiece for the Party. The NRTA replaced the former State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT, 国家新闻出版广电总局,).¹²⁸ Its responsibilities include the following:

- Implementing the Party’s propaganda policies and guidelines and drafting policy measures for the service management of radio, television, and online programs
- Formulating industry standards and organizing their implementation, supervision, and inspection
- Carrying out international exchanges and cooperation in radio and television
- Coordinating and promoting “going out” work in television and radio¹²⁹

NRTA’s Research and Training Institute (RTI, 国家广播电视总局研修学院) is China’s largest media-related education and training institution. The institute implements NRTA training plans as well as overseas media research and training activities.¹³⁰ For example, in May 2019, RTI held a training seminar with journalists and government media from the Philippines. NRTA’s vice president, Liu Ying, stated that the seminar intended to create an “extensive communication platform for media professionals in China and the Philippines, actively promote the in-depth media convergence and promote the common development of the industry of the two countries.”¹³¹

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Abbreviations

ACJA	All China Journalist Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRJN	Belt and Road Journalism Network
BRNN	Belt and Road News Network
CCFR	China-Cambodia Friendship Radio
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CEXIM	China Export-Import Bank
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CIBN	China International Broadcasting Network
CIPCC	China International Press Communication Center
CIPG	China International Publishing Group
CPDA	China Public Diplomacy Association
CRI	China Radio International
DoD	Department of Defense
DTMB	Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIIT	Ministry of Industry and Informational
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MOE	Ministry of Education
MRTV	Myanmar Radio and Television
NRTV	National Radio and Television Administration
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PIC	Pacific Island Country
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RTI	Research and Training Institute
SAPPRFT	State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television
SCIO	State Council Information Office
VOC	Voice of China

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