



China's Efforts to Shape the Information Environment in Myanmar

Ryan Loomis and Heidi Holz

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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 about China. This report is part of a series that assesses Beijing's efforts to influence the media environment in the neighboring Mekong countries—Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. This report focuses on China's efforts to shape the information environment of its neighbor, Myanmar. To place China's efforts into context, this report begins with an overview of Myanmar's information environment—the aggregate of key individuals, organizations, and systems that help shape opinion by disseminating news and information. Next, the report identifies key narratives that China is promoting to audiences in Myanmar and examines each of the tactics, tools, and techniques that it is employing to do so. The report concludes with a discussion of observations regarding the effect of China's efforts and issues to watch as the Myanmar information environment—and China's footprint there—evolves.

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Approved by:

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Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise- Director
China Studies Program
CNA China & Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Division

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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 about China. This report examines the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) efforts to shape the information environment of its southern neighbor, Myanmar.

Key findings

China has invested heavily in establishing a presence in Myanmar's information environment. Key elements of China's efforts include the following:

- ***Multiple PRC media outlets produce a broad range of Burmese-language content.*** More Chinese state-run media outlets produce Burmese-language content than any of the other major languages spoken in the Mekong region. Xinhua News Agency and China Radio International (CRI) both host Burmese-language webpages that feature reporting on a range of topics, including news, culture, and entertainment. Xinhua has launched a Burmese-language mobile news app, and CRI and the PRC embassy in Yangon co-publish *China Today*.
- ***PRC media engage in content sharing with a variety of state-run and private Myanmar media outlets.*** PRC media outlets have established content-sharing agreements with online, TV, radio, and print media outlets in Myanmar. Xinhua and CRI provide content to state-run outlets through via agreements with Myanmar's Ministry of Information (MOI), as well as with popular private media outlets such as *Mizzima*.
- ***PRC media outlets have established popular Burmese-language Facebook pages.*** Facebook is the most popular source of news and information in Myanmar, and PRC media has readily adapted to this environment. CRI and Xinhua have both established an active Burmese-language presence on Facebook.
- ***China seeks to influence Myanmar journalists by sponsoring forums, training, and travel.*** Beijing seeks to shape the perceptions of Myanmar media professionals by hosting international media forums, reporting trips, conferences, and training programs. Hundreds of journalists from Myanmar, including MOI officials, have visited China at invitation of Chinese entities.

- ***PRC media outlets tailor entertainment content to Myanmar audiences through joint production.*** In addition to actively exporting Chinese-produced entertainment to Myanmar, Chinese production companies also co-produce pro-China documentaries, films, and television series with local partners.
- ***PRC companies seeks to capture segments of Myanmar's telecom market to shape future development.*** China actively seeks to expand its presence in Myanmar's telecommunications sector. Two Chinese telecom companies, Huawei and ZTE, have partnered with Mytel and Ooredoo Myanmar, respectively, to roll out 5G technologies in the country. Additionally, China Telecom Group is reported to be in talks with Ooredoo Myanmar to purchase an ownership stake in the company.

Despite these efforts, PRC state-run media outlets have not yet overtaken other foreign media outlets in popularity.

- At least seven major international news outlets produce Burmese-language content: two from the US, two from China, and one each from the UK, Australia, and Japan. The most popular foreign-owned media outlets in Myanmar are from the United States (VOA, YouTube, and Facebook) and the United Kingdom (BBC).
- Chinese entertainment has yet to overtake other foreign entertainment programs in popularity, most notably Korean dramas.

China uses its presence in Myanmar's information environment to promote narratives that further its strategic interests. Key narratives that China seeks to promote to audiences in Myanmar include the following:

- ***China and Myanmar have a unique friendship.*** PRC officials and media tailor this narrative for audiences in Myanmar by using the Burmese term “pauk-phaw” (fraternal ties) to describe bilateral relations.
- ***Cooperation with China is beneficial to Myanmar.*** PRC media and officials promote the narrative that cooperation with China, particularly on projects associated with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is especially beneficial to Myanmar's economic development.
- ***Unlike the US/West, Beijing supports Myanmar's efforts to deal with the Rohingya crisis.*** In addition to being Myanmar's largest investor, PRC media points out that China has become an indispensable partner to Myanmar as it deals with isolation from the West and international legal repercussions over the Rohingya crisis.
- ***China provides Myanmar with the means to fight COVID-19.*** As a corollary to this narrative, Burmese-language PRC media also criticizes the US response to the pandemic and has published disinformation suggesting that the US is responsible for the emergence of the virus.

Popular domestic pushback against China's presence in Myanmar is likely to complicate PRC efforts to shape the media environment and limit the resonance of PRC narratives.

- Public opinion data show that the Myanmar public's views of China are mixed. Respondents to a recent survey indicated that they were worried about China's growing influence and were far more interested in learning English than Mandarin.
- Many in Myanmar have criticized China's role in ongoing militant clashes in Myanmar's north and east, China's consistent ranking as the top destination of human trafficking of Myanmar citizens, and the environmental effects of China's BRI projects. Both state-run and private media outlets in Myanmar have reported on expressions of popular anti-Chinese sentiment related to these topics.

Issues to watch

China has a substantial footprint in Myanmar's media environment, but it has yet to overtake or crowd out other external sources of news, entertainment, and media-related aid. As China seeks to further its interests in Myanmar, including BRI-related projects such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the development of the Kyaukpyu port, it is likely to continue its efforts to shape Myanmar's media. Some issues to watch include the following:

- ***Evidence that PRC media is taking concrete steps to increase the reach and resonance of content targeted at audiences in Myanmar, including the following:***
 - Increasing joint production of content with local partners in Myanmar
 - Expanding content-sharing agreements with state-run and private outlets
 - Hiring local journalists
 - Developing Burmese language programs at Chinese universities
 - Reporting on local events in Myanmar that do not involve China
 - Increasing direct radio and television broadcasting from China into Myanmar
- ***Opportunistic Chinese investment in Myanmar media outlets.*** In recent years, financial strain has forced many Myanmar media outlets to close and has left many others struggling to survive.¹ Local media experts have expressed concern that the global economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate the financial pressures that local media outlets already face, creating more opportunities for PRC investment.²
- ***Coordinated online activity amplifying pro-China narratives in Burmese.*** China has demonstrated a willingness to engage in coordinated inauthentic behavior on social media. Beijing may employ this tactic in Myanmar, where it can take advantage of Facebook's popularity to promote its preferred narratives.

- ***The spread of disinformation by Chinese state-run media.*** Chinese state-run media has engaged in a disinformation campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic.³ CRI Myanmar’s Facebook account, for instance, has posted Burmese-language videos implying that the US military is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. PRC media publication of blatant disinformation targeted at audiences in Myanmar is an issue that warrants careful monitoring.

Recommendations from experts & media professionals in the region

The Myanmar media professionals and experts with whom we spoke over the course of our research suggested ways that the international community could help to support the integrity of Myanmar’s information environment. These include the following:

- ***Support efforts to promote digital literacy.*** The complexity of the modern information environment and the rise of social media can work to the advantage external actors like China. Moreover, disinformation has played a role in worsening the internal conflict within Myanmar. Improving digital literacy in Myanmar would help provide media consumers with the skills to identify and utilize reputable sources of news and avoid disreputable sources.
- ***Provide financial support to independent media outlets.*** Because most people in Myanmar now consume news and information for free online, many media outlets’ revenues are down. The COVID-19–induced economic downturn is likely to further exacerbate the financial stresses that smaller, independent media outlets in Myanmar already face. Experts suggested that the international community could provide funding to support local independent media outlets. Reports by the Center for International Media Assistance provide useful resources for international donors looking for effective strategies for supporting independent media.ⁱ
- ***Partner with local media organizations to promote media development.*** A 2019 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report concluded that Myanmar media practitioners prioritize legal reforms, the right to information, gender and inclusion, and the development of local content promoting peace, democracy, and good governance. To support these local priorities, the international community could work with local media development and training organizations, such as the Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI), the Center for Myanmar Media Development (CMMD), and the Yangon and Mandalay Journalism Schools.

ⁱ The Center for International Media Assistance has published several reports exploring strategies for how to provide effective support for media development, see: <https://www.cima.ned.org/publications/>.

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1. Overview of Myanmar's Information Environment



Quick Country Facts

- Literacy rate (2016): 75.6%⁴
- Internet penetration (2018): 39%⁵
- Mobile phone subscriptions (SIM cards per 100 people in 2018): 113.84⁶
- Total population (2020): 56,590,071⁷
- Languages: Burmese (official);⁸ 100+ ethnic languages; English (official language during colonial rule from 1824 to 1948 and now required learning in public schools).⁹
- UN Least Developed Country Status¹⁰

1.1 Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch about China.¹¹ This report is part of a series that examines Beijing's efforts to influence the media environment in the neighboring Mekong countries—Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. This report focuses on China's efforts to shape the information environment of its neighbor, Myanmar.

To place China's efforts into context, this report begins by providing an overview of Myanmar's information environment—the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that play a key role in shaping opinions through the dissemination of news and information. Next, this report examines each of the ways that China attempts to shape the information environment in Myanmar in order to promote its preferred narratives. This report concludes with a brief

discussion of issues to consider as Myanmar's information environment—and China's footprint there—evolves.

1.2 Background & key developments

Despite recent reforms, Myanmar's government exercises tight control over the media and continues to be a dominant voice in the country's information landscape. From 1962 to 2011, Myanmar was led by successive military dictatorships that maintained exceptionally tight control over the media through ownership and censorship. Following the transition to a quasi-civilian-led government in 2011, a series of reforms abolished pre-publication censorship and relaxed media licensing regulations, paving the way for the emergence of private media.¹²

The reforms resulted in the proliferation of private and state-run joint-venture media outlets. The explosive growth of the media advertising market between 2011 and 2017 mainly benefitted state-owned or state-aligned media and is now trending downward; there has been little progress in establishing public service media outlets.¹³

The highest concentration of media outlets is in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city (see Figure 1). Despite the increased number of outlets, diversity of media ownership structures, and improved newsgathering capabilities, the state retains significant legal means to pressure the media, and state-run media outlets continue to dominate the media landscape.¹⁴

Myanmar's development status affects its information environment. The UN classifies Myanmar as a Least Developed Country. The challenges Myanmar faces in development—including limited access to resources and technology, vulnerability to economic shocks, and limited human capital—shape the domestic information environment. For instance, emerging commercial media outlets have found it difficult to compete with established state-run outlets, and many have been unable to survive the competition for the Burmese public's limited disposable income.¹⁵ State-run media outlets have the advantages of high print runs, nationwide reach, and political support. As a result, they remain the most popular with advertisers.

Figure 1. Media outlet concentration in Myanmar (2017)



Source: Jane Madlyn McElhone, "The State, the Military, and the Market: Capture in the New Burmese Media Landscape," *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*, ed. Anya Schiffrin (Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance, 2017), accessed Feb. 25, 2020, https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Capture6_State-Military-and-the-Market-1.pdf.

Broadcast media was once the most popular source of news in Myanmar, but most people now go online. Myanmar citizens' access to media is as follows:

- **Internet and social media.** A dramatic decrease in the cost of internet-capable SIM cards over the past 10 years has helped drive the internet's popularity as the go-to source for news and information.¹⁶ Even in rural areas, online sources are displacing radio as a primary source of news.¹⁷ Today, most people in Myanmar access their news via mobile social media, Facebook in particular.¹⁸ In an effort to keep state-owned print media relevant, the News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE) of the Ministry of Information (MOI) launched the Myanmar Digital News (MDN) mobile app and website in 2018.¹⁹
- **Television** remains a popular source of news in Myanmar. State-run Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) dominates the television market and serves as a mouthpiece of the state.²⁰ According to a 2017 International Republican Institute (IRI) public opinion survey (see Appendix C), 32 percent of respondents stated that they were most likely to get news and information from watching television.²¹
- **Radio** is also a popular source of news and information. According to the same 2017 IRI survey, 17 percent of respondents were most likely to get news and information from listening to the radio, which is more popular in rural areas than urban areas due to ease of access.²² State-run MRTV radio stations are the most popular. Voice of America (VOA) is the only active foreign broadcaster that receives more than 1 percent of the listenership.
- **Print** news ranks lowest in terms of popularity, with only 8 percent of IRI survey respondents identifying it as their preferred source of news.²³ State-run newspapers dominate physical print media. The country's three state-run dailies, which serve as mouthpieces for the government, have a circulation of more than 320,000, while even the more popular private newspapers sell only about 80,000 copies per day.²⁴ According to local Myanmar media organizations, about 40 percent of the country's population reads the state-owned *Myanma Alinn* and *Kyemon* newspapers. The highest-circulation English daily is the state-owned *Global New Light of Myanmar*.²⁵

Figure 2. The three daily newspapers published by the Ministry of Information



Source: Kyaw Phyo Tha, “Analysis: Myanmar’s Independent Media Struggling to Survive,” *The Irrawaddy*, Sept. 12, 2018, accessed Feb. 26, 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-independent-media-struggling-survive.html>.

“Facebook is the internet” and the internet is mobile. As is the case in other Southeast Asian countries, Facebook is virtually synonymous with the internet in Myanmar. According to a senior Myanmar government official, “to many in Myanmar, Facebook is the internet and the internet is Facebook.”²⁶ As a result, Facebook has supplanted traditional media as the most important source of news and information in Myanmar.²⁷ The popularity of Facebook as the preferred source for news and information is evidenced by the fact that 8 of the 10 most popular Facebook pages in the country are news outlets.²⁸ According to one Burmese journalist, 60–70 percent of his outlet’s online traffic is via Facebook.²⁹ The rapid increase in the consumption of social media, however, has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in digital literacy among audiences in Myanmar. As a result, disinformation campaigns spread on Facebook have contributed to ethnic violence in Myanmar.³⁰

Facebook's role in the Rohingya crisis

Marzuki Darusman, chairman of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, said in 2018 that social media had played a “determining role” in Myanmar. “It has... substantively contributed to the level of acrimony and dissension and conflict. Hate speech is certainly a part of that. As far as the Myanmar situation is concerned, social media is Facebook, and Facebook is social media,” he said.³¹ According to Darusman, ultranationalist Buddhists and the Myanmar military spread disinformation on Facebook pages targeting Rohingyas that led to escalating violence against the mostly Muslim minority group.³²

There is a robust foreign presence in Myanmar's information environment. At least seven major foreign news outlets produce Burmese-language content: two from the US, two from China, and one each from the UK, Australia, and Japan (see Table 2). More than a dozen foreign government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) support various media-development initiatives in Myanmar, including capacity building, digital literacy, infrastructure upgrades, and skills training programs. Myanmar's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environment is also a competitive and international market. By 2017, there were more than 15 internet service providers in the country, including private foreign companies such as Norway's Telenor AS and Qatar's Ooredoo QSC, as well as a joint venture between Vietnam's military-run Viettel and two local companies, one of which belongs to the Myanmar army.³³ State-run domestic media outlets also retain subscriptions to foreign wire services, including Press Trust of India, Reuters, and Russia's TASS. International news agencies such as China's Xinhua, Agence France-Presse (AFP), the Associated Press (AP), and Reuters have fully staffed bureaus in Yangon. Other international news organizations retain correspondents or stringers in Myanmar.³⁴

People in Myanmar are generally skeptical of the media. Focus-group respondents to a 2018 International Media Support and Fojo Media Institute (IMS-Fojo) audience poll of 168 people from three different states in Myanmar indicated a trust deficit toward not only the established media, but also news and information from other sources. The poll found that many regard state-owned media as being the most trustworthy and reliable, with respondents saying that state-owned or military-owned media outlets are more capable of providing accurate information because they have direct access to news and information sources.³⁵

Popular skepticism may be rooted in an awareness of the spread of online disinformation designed to stoke ethnic and religious animosity towards the majority Muslim Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine state. According to a 25-year-old man from rural Kachin quoted in the 2018 IMS-FOJO media survey, “Although I like information or news sourced on Facebook, I do not trust some of them because there can be fake news with fake photos. People fake them and post them on Facebook, so they cannot be trusted.... So we need to think carefully before we believe them.”³⁶

1.3 Key media outlets

Myanmar’s key media outlets are as follows:

- **Internet.** Facebook has emerged as the primary platform that Myanmar audiences use to access news and information.³⁷ Key media outlets in Myanmar have tens of millions of followers. Private media outlets like 7-Day News Journal and Eleven Media, as well as the formerly exiled non-profit Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) all have a popular presence on Facebook.
- **Television.** Myanmar has eight analog television channels—MRTV, Myawaddy TV, Sky Net, and Forever Group each have two channels. These analog channels cover the whole country. Another five digital channels broadcast free to air.³⁸
- **Radio.** In addition to the official MRTV Radio and military-run Thazin radio stations; there are a small number of commercial radio stations such as Shwe FM and Cherry FM, the latter owned by China’s state-run Global CAMG Media Group.³⁹
- **Print.** Two Burmese-language state-run dailies, *Myanma Alinn* and *Kyemon*, dominate print news media. A third state-run daily newspaper, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, is the country’s oldest English-language daily.⁴⁰

Table 1 summarizes key local media actors.

Table 1. Myanmar: key local media actors

	Name	Type of media	Description	Average daily reach	Ownership
Key digital outlets by FB followers	<i>7-Day News Journal</i>	Digital media	Online news outlet, Burmese-language Facebook, newspaper, journal ⁴¹	24,975,102 Facebook followers ⁴²	Owned by Thaug Su Nyein and his media company, Information Matrix Co Ltd. ⁴³
	<i>Daily Eleven</i>	Digital media	Online news outlet, Burmese-language Facebook, SMS, broadcast, newspaper, English website ⁴⁴	19,006,476 Facebook followers ⁴⁵	Owned by Eleven Media Group established by Than Htut Aung ⁴⁶
	<i>Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)</i>	Digital media	Online, streaming TV and radio. National and international news, opinion, lifestyle, education, entertainment ⁴⁷	13,273,124 Facebook followers	DVB Multimedia Group (independent, Burmese owned) ⁴⁸
	<i>Thit Htoo Lwin (Daily News)</i>	Digital news blog	Online news, entertainment, sports, technology, health, and education ⁴⁹	9,141,556 Facebook followers	Founder, Ko Di, formerly worked with BBC and VOA Burmese services. ⁵⁰ Ownership unknown.

	Name	Type of media	Description	Average daily reach	Ownership
Key TV outlets by daily reach: Nielsen 2019	MRTV4	TV	Free to air, variety of news and entertainment	3,307,453 ⁵¹	State broadcaster MRTV, under MOI
	Channel7	TV	Free to air, variety of news and entertainment	2,471,978 ⁵²	Joint venture with Forever Group and MOI
	MRTV Entertainment	TV	Free to air, variety of news and entertainment	518,478 ⁵³	State broadcaster MRTV, under MOI
	MNTV	TV	Free to air, variety of news and entertainment	Unknown	State-owned, operated by Sky Net, Shwe Than Lwin Media Co. Ltd. ⁵⁴
Key radio outlets by daily listeners: Nielsen 2019	MRTV Myanma Radio	Radio	State broadcaster, airs content in Burmese and English, including English lessons from VOA and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and Japanese lessons from NHK ⁵⁵	4,732,000 ⁵⁶	Government ⁵⁷
	Shwe FM (Gold FM)	Radio	News, music, variety, with advertising ⁵⁸	3,096,000 ⁵⁹	Shwe Than Lwin Co. ⁶⁰
	Padamyar FM (Ruby FM)	Radio	Music, entertainment, and education programming ⁶¹	2,552,000 ⁶²	Thein Kyaw Kyaw Co. ⁶³
	Cherry FM 89.3	Radio	Most popular radio station for young audiences in Myanmar	unknown	Global CAMG, majority owned by CRI ⁶⁴
Key print outlets by circulation	<i>Kyemon</i> ("The Mirror")	Newspaper	Daily, Burmese-language	200,000 ⁶⁵	Government, News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE)
	<i>Myanma Alinn</i>	Newspaper	Daily, Burmese-language	150,000 ⁶⁶	Government, NPE
	<i>Global New Light of Myanmar</i>	Newspaper	Daily, English	30,000 ⁶⁷	Government, NPE

Source: CNA.

1.4 Key factors that shape the information environment in Myanmar

Several factors affect the degree to which external actors shape Myanmar’s information environment:

- Regulations on press or individual freedoms of speech
- Regulations on foreign actors in the domestic information environment
- Foreign media presence and availability
- Diversity of foreign partners who can assist with deficits in media content, training, or infrastructure

1.4.1 Regulations on press or individual freedoms of speech

The Myanmar government regulates media content, programming, and licensing through national legislation and oversight by the MOI, the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MTC), and the semi-independent Myanmar Press Council (MPC).⁶⁸ Government-run media outlets are instructed to “give priority to news beneficial to the State in addition to the government’s accomplishments, goals, policies, departmental announcements, public information and parliamentary reports and other legal issues.”⁶⁹

State media avoidance of controversial topics

Myanmar’s state-run media outlets avoid reporting on controversial or negative news. For example, when prominent Muslim lawyer and NLD legal advisor Ko Ni was shot dead at Yangon International Airport in January 2017, private national media and “netizens” captured the grief and mourning of NLD party members, civil society activists, and ordinary citizens. In stark contrast, the state-run media reporting was subdued, highlighting official news of events and meetings attended by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and burying the assassination on inside pages.⁷⁰

Private and independent media that report on news deemed antagonistic to the state or military are liable to prosecution.⁷¹ France-based Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) ranked Myanmar 138th out of 180 countries on its World Press Freedom Index, citing multiple instances of journalists subjected to criminal prosecution for various “defamation” charges.⁷²

The 2014 Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law (PPEL) officially abolished pre-publication censorship and carved out a place for independent print publications in a media landscape dominated by the state.⁷³ However, laws such as Section 66(d) of the 2013 telecommunications law—which criminalizes “defamation” in any content communicated over the internet,

telephone, radio, or television—continue to hamper the freedom of the press and freedom of communication on the internet and social media.⁷⁴

The Official Secrets Act has also been used to control the media. Two Reuters journalists trying to investigate violence against Rohingya were convicted for violating this law in 2017. The subject of Rohingya in Myanmar is completely off limits, to the point that even the term “Rohingya” is officially banned, which according to RSF, has forced some media outlets to stop operating in Myanmar.⁷⁵

1.4.2 Regulatory framework for managing foreign media actors

Myanmar’s government has tightened its control over the activities of foreign journalists since the Rohingya refugee crisis began. In February 2014, the MOI reduced the duration of foreign reporters’ visas from three months with multiple entries to one month with a single entry. In some cases, foreign reporters were denied entry altogether, in likely retaliation for publishing reports critical of the government or political leaders.⁷⁶ Foreign reporters have complained that they are followed, filmed, and asked to sign official declarations that they will not visit restricted areas. Myanmar authorities have also sued international news outlets. For instance, the Rakhine state government sued the AP in 2018 for reporting on the discovery of five mass graves in a Rohingya village.”⁷⁷ Foreign journalists have also been arrested, presumably in retaliation for reporting on the Rohingya crisis.⁷⁸

Political sensitivities regarding media coverage of the Rohingya crisis have led to a reduction in the availability of some foreign broadcast media in Myanmar. For example, MNTV has carried BBC Burmese daily news broadcasts for its 3.7 million viewers since early 2004. In September 2017, however, the BBC cut ties with MNTV after the latter refused to broadcast segments on events in Rakhine state. Since then, BBC Burmese no longer has a presence on Myanmar broadcast media.⁷⁹ MNTV is run by Shwe Than Lwin Media Co. Ltd., which is owned by Burmese businessman Kyaw Win. According to local reports, Kyaw Win has a close relationship with the military and government.⁸⁰

Reuters reporters arrested for investigating massacre of Rohingya

In September 2018, two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, were both sentenced to seven years in prison for violating the Official Secrets Act. The charges stemmed from an incident in 2017, when a police officer invited the reporters to meet in Yangon. When the reporters got up to leave, the officer handed them supposedly secret documents, and they were quickly arrested before they could even look at the papers. The reporters were investigating a 2017 massacre of Rohingya at Inn Din village in Rakhine state, and the case against them was criticized internationally as an unjust reprisal for their work.⁸¹

1.4.3 Foreign media presence and access to foreign media

There is a sizeable foreign media presence in Myanmar. The AP and Japan’s NHK were the first international news agencies to open bureaus in Myanmar after the civilian-led government came to power. AFP and Reuters also now have fully staffed bureaus in Yangon. In addition, VOA and Radio Free Asia (RFA) both have a presence. Prior to the government transition, only China’s *Guangming Daily* and Xinhua had bureaus in Yangon staffed with Chinese citizens.⁸² According to a 2018 IMS-FOJO poll, the most popular foreign-owned media outlets in Myanmar are US- (VOA, YouTube, Facebook) and UK-based (BBC) outlets (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Overview of media outlets by region/state from 2018 IMS-FOJO survey

	Yangon	Mandalay	Rakhine	Kachin
Preferred news sources	DVB Facebook YouTube Local market MNTV Channel 9 MRTV Narinjara	Myitkyina News Journal Kachin News BBC DVB 7 Days VOA MRTV Facebook	DVB MNTV MRTV The mirror VOA Facebook Padamyar FM (rural)	BBC MRTV Myanmar A Linn The Mirror Facebook

Source: Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen, “Myanmar’s Media From an Audience Perspective,” IMS-FOJO, September 2018, accessed Feb. 23, 2020, https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Myanmar-Audience-Study_web.pdf.

Table 2 shows key foreign media actors that are present in or broadcast within Myanmar. In addition, according to a 2016 UNESCO report, Myanmar citizens living in border areas can view TV and radio stations from neighboring countries such as Thailand, China, India and Bangladesh. Since these media sources are foreign and are not transmitted from within Myanmar, they do not face the same regulatory or operating environment as local media outlets.⁸³

Table 2. External actors in Myanmar’s information environment

Name	Type of media	Description	Ownership	Social media following
BBC Burmese Service	Radio	Burmese news and information 1 hour per day ⁸⁴	British public service broadcaster	16,228,065 Facebook followers
Voice of America–Myanmar	Radio/TV	Burmese news and information 4-¾ hours per week radio and 17-½ hours per week TV ⁸⁵	US government	12,076,876 Facebook followers
Radio Free Asia–Myanmar	Radio	Burmese news and information 1-½ hours per day ⁸⁶	US government	5,958,130 Facebook followers
CRI Myanmar	Radio	Burmese news and information 3 hours per day ⁸⁷	PRC government	1,182,951 Facebook followers
Xinhua–Burmese	Online	Burmese news and information	PRC government	71,893,149 Facebook followers of Xinhua, unknown how many followers of Burmese Xinhua.
SBS Radio Australia–Burmese	Radio	Burmese news and information 1 hour per day ⁸⁸	Australian government	22,893 Facebook followers (SBS Radio Burmese)
NHK Japan–Burmese	Radio	Burmese news and information 1/4 hour per day ⁸⁹	Japanese government	NA
<i>Guangming Daily</i> –Myanmar Bureau	Online	Chinese-language reporting on Myanmar and Sino-Myanmar relations from sole correspondent in Yangon ⁹⁰	PRC government	NA

Source: CNA-compiled data from foreign media outlets’ websites.

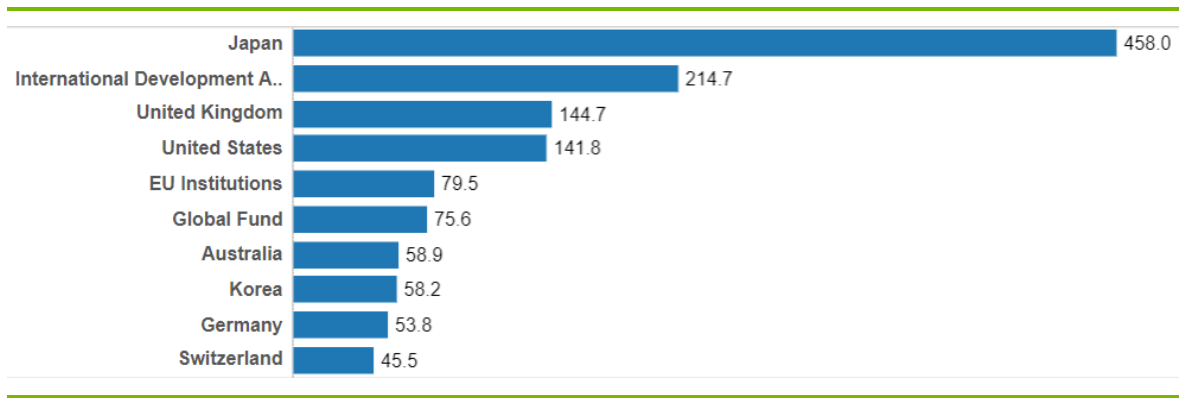
1.4.4 Diversity of foreign partners and allies

Myanmar relies on foreign assistance in many areas, including ICT infrastructure. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that Myanmar has a wide range of foreign partners that provide official development assistance (ODA) and is not overly dependent on a single partnership.ⁱⁱ The top three primary sources of ODA (see Figure 1) are the following:

- The government of Japan
- The World Bank’s International Development Association
- The government of the United Kingdom⁹¹

The Japanese government provides support for Myanmar’s telecommunications infrastructure. For example, in November 2019, the Japanese government provided a US\$65.92 million low-interest loan to a consortium of four Japanese companies that was contracted by Myanma Posts & Telecommunications (MPT), the country’s largest telecom operator, to upgrade its telecommunication infrastructure.⁹² Of note, China is not among the top 10 sources of ODA to Myanmar.

Figure 4. Top ten donors of ODA for Myanmar, 2017–2018 (USD millions)



Source: OECD, Top Ten Donors of Gross ODA, Dec. 21, 2018, accessed Apr. 8, 2020, <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/aid-at-a-glance.htm>.

Note: Global Fund is a partnership designed to accelerate the end of AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria as epidemics.

ⁱⁱ According to OECD: “Official development assistance (ODA) is defined as government aid designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Loans and credits for military purposes are excluded. Aid may be provided bilaterally, from donor to recipient, or channeled through a multilateral development agency such as the United Nations or the World Bank.” For more information, see: <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>.

Myanmar media receives support from a variety of foreign sources. According to the Civil Society and Media Project, a capacity-building project funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), 16 local Myanmar media organizations receive funding from USAID.⁹³ The Japanese government and Japanese foundations also support Myanmar's media outlets. A consortium of French, Danish, Swedish, and German public institutions along with local stakeholders (MOI, journalists' associations, press groups and organizations, and universities) helped establish the MJI in 2016.⁹⁴ The European consortium of CFI, DW Akedemie, FOJO, and IMS invested over USD \$1.3 million to support Myanmar journalism through training, scholarships, governance, and technological support.⁹⁵ In addition, at least six media organizations reportedly receive support from the Chinese government.⁹⁶ Table 3 lists international sources of support for Myanmar's media.⁹⁷

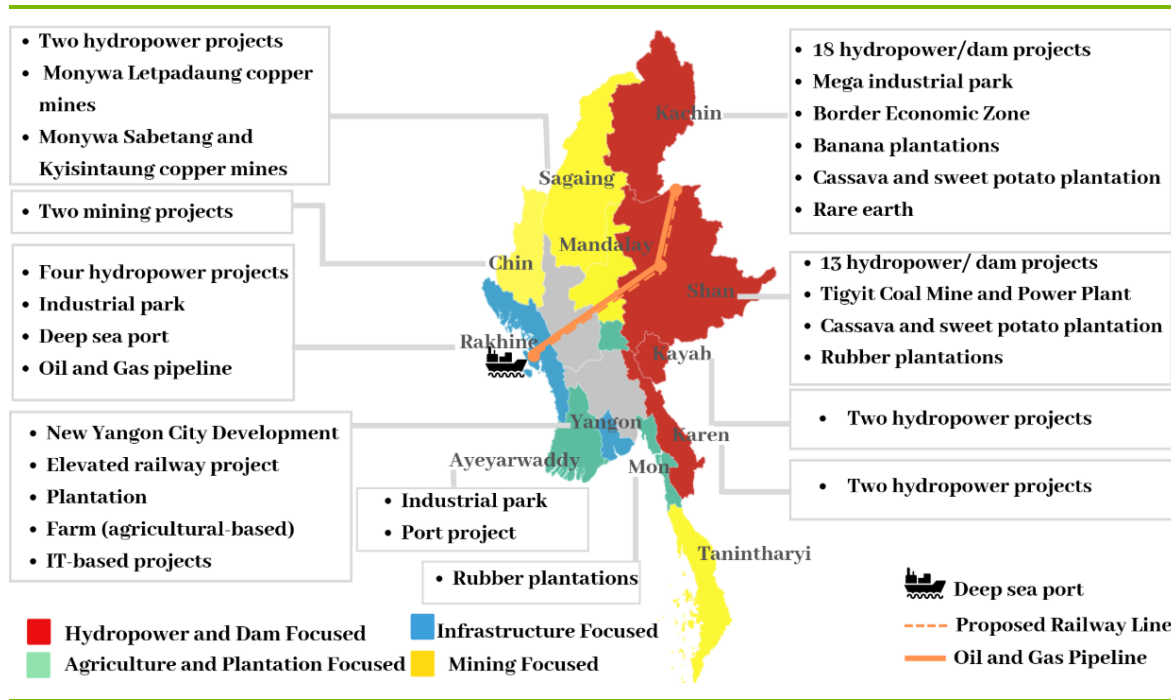
Table 3. International sources of support for Myanmar media

Name of organization	Home country
Guangxi Radio and Television Information Network Corporation	China
IMS (International Media Support)	Denmark
CFI	France
DW Akedemie	Germany
NHK	Japan
Nippon Foundation	Japan
FOJO Media Institute	Sweden
UNDP	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations
FHI 360	US
Internews	US
National Endowment for Democracy (NED)	US
Open Society Foundation (OSF)	US
Omidyar Network	US

Sources: Shin, Aung. "Dying Myanmar Media Face Great Challenges." *Myanmar Times*. Jul. 27, 2018. Accessed Feb. 6, 2020. <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/dying-myanmar-media-face-great-challenges.html>; FHI 360, "A New Project in Myanmar to Support Civil Society and Media," *The Science of Improving Lives*, March 11, 2015, accessed Feb. 23, 2020, <https://www.fhi360.org/news/new-project-myanmar-support-civil-society-and-media>; "Women Journalists in Myanmar Push Against the Glass Ceiling," *Internews*, Oct. 21, 2019, accessed Feb. 23, 2020, <https://internews.org/updates/women-journalists-myanmar-push-against-glass-ceiling>; Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen, *Myanmar's Media From an Audience Perspective*, IMS-FOJO, 2018, accessed Feb. 23, 2020, https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Myanmar-Audience-Study_web.pdf; China State Council Information Office, "Chinese TV Series Broadcast in Myanmar," *SCIO News*, Aug 23, 2017, accessed Jan. 2020, http://english.scio.gov.cn/2017-08/23/content_41465657.htm; "Setting up the Myanmar Journalism Institute," *CFI Media Development*, accessed Feb. 26, 2020, <https://www.cfi.fr/en/project/setting-myanmar-journalism-institute>.

Although it is not one of the top 10 ODA donors to Myanmar, China is its second largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI), its top investor in terms of accumulated foreign direct investment, and its largest trading partner.⁹⁸ A January 2019 Irrawaddy Online report compiled all Chinese investment projects in Myanmar, including proposed, soon to be implemented, currently implemented, completed, and suspended projects; the report's findings are summarized in Figure 5.⁹⁹

Figure 5. Chinese investment projects in Myanmar (January 2019)



Source: Nan Lwin, "Infographic: 30 Years of Chinese Investment in Myanmar," *The Irrawaddy*, Jan. 25, 2019, accessed Feb. 26, 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/infographic-30-years-chinese-investment-myanmar.html>.

2. China's Efforts to Shape the Media Environment in Myanmar

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

This section focuses on China's employment of these tactics, techniques, and tools to shape the media environment in Myanmar. The checklist in Table 4 offers a framework that can be used to assess China's efforts to shape the media environment in a particular venue—in this case, Myanmar. The checkmarks indicate tools China currently employs in the Myanmar information environment. Question marks indicate tactics that we have not yet observed in Myanmar, but are areas worthy of continued monitoring.

Table 4. Checklist: China’s playbook for shaping the information environment in Myanmar



China’s playbook for shaping the information environment in Myanmar

Tailoring PRC media content to appeal to Myanmar audiences	
✓	Producing content in Burmese language
?	Reporting on local events that do not necessarily involve China
✓	Recruiting foreign voices
Maximizing channels for distribution of China’s narratives	
✓	Selling or providing content for free to Myanmar media
✓	Jointly producing content with Myanmar media outlets
✓	Authoring opinion pieces for Myanmar media outlets
✓	Buying space in Myanmar media
✓	Establishing a presence on foreign social media
✓	Investing in Myanmar media outlets
✓	Investing in overseas telecommunications infrastructure
Influencing foreign media to promote only China-friendly narratives	
?	Promoting self-censorship among Myanmar’s journalists and scholars
?	Purchasing a right to shape content
✓	Hosting international media forums and conferences
✓	Hosting education and training programs
Using entertainment to promote Chinese narratives	
✓	Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment
✓	Investing in the Myanmar film industry
✓	Promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms

Chinese academics advocate strategy for tailoring content to Southeast Asian audiences

In a 2019 article in the Chinese journal *International Communications*, Chinese academics advocated the development of a long-term strategy for strategic communications targeted at Southeast Asia. The strategy would promote Chinese messages and counter US strategic communications aimed at the region. Elements of the proposed strategy include the following:

- **Precise communication** tailored to each country, with a unique communication strategy designed to meet audience needs.
- **Increased Chinese language teaching** in order to “tell China’s story to the target country in a subtle way.”
- **An emphasis on economic, social, and environmental issues**, which the US “tries to wield to serve its political purposes,” but are issues on which “China has become closer and closer to Southeast Asian countries.”

Source: Chen Jingjing (陈静静), “A Comparative Study of US and Chinese International Broadcasting For/To Southeast Asian Countries” (*zhong mei dui dongya guojia guoji zhuanbo de bijiao yanjiu*; 中美对东亚国家国际转播的比较研究, *International Communications (Duiwai Zhuanbo; 对外转播)*, no. 9 (2019), accessed Jan. 17, 2020, <http://mall.cnki.net/magazine/Article/DWDC201909006.htm>.

2.1 PRC narratives targeted at audiences in Myanmar

China promotes narratives that it wants disseminated in the international media. It does this to (1) promote a positive image of China, (2) counter Beijing’s critics, and (3) support China’s national objectives (see Appendix C for China’s global narratives). China tailors these narratives to target audiences in specific regions or countries. Key narratives that China promotes to audiences in Myanmar include the following:

- **Cooperation with China is beneficial to Myanmar.** Chinese media and political leaders promote the narrative that cooperation with China, particularly on projects associated with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is especially beneficial to Myanmar.
- **China and Myanmar have a unique friendship.** China promotes the narrative that its relationship with Myanmar is unique and close due to shared geography, history, and cultural affinity. China tailors this narrative for Burmese-speaking audiences by using the Burmese term “pauk-phaw” to describe Sino-Myanmar relations. “Pauk-phaw” refers to fraternal ties.

- **Unlike the US/West, Beijing supports Myanmar’s efforts to deal the with Rohingya crisis.** In addition to being Myanmar’s largest investor, China points out that it has become an indispensable partner on the international stage as Myanmar deals with isolation from the West and international legal repercussions over the Rohingya crisis.¹⁰⁰ As other nations turn away, China broadcasts its support for Myanmar’s efforts to “promote peace and reconciliation” and “safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.”¹⁰¹
- **China provides Myanmar with the means to fight COVID-19.** Chinese media directed at audiences in Myanmar promotes the narrative that China is the primary source of aid fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. As a corollary to this narrative, Burmese-language PRC media has also criticized the US response to the pandemic and published disinformation suggesting that the US is responsible for the emergence of the virus.

The following sections offer examples of how China promotes these narratives using the various tactics, techniques, and tools in its playbook.

2.2 Tailoring PRC media content

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

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



2.2.1 Producing content in local languages

Two of China’s core state-run media outlets produce content in Burmese, Myanmar’s official language—China’s official news agency, Xinhua, and China’s official international radio broadcaster, China Radio International (CRI).

- Xinhua’s bureau in Yangon operates a robust Burmese-language website. The Xinhua site has thousands of local-language articles on global issues, as well as a page dedicated to Sino-Myanmar relations with daily news on bilateral political, economic, cultural, and social issues.¹⁰²
- The CRI Burmese website publishes news on global issues but also has a China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) news section with Myanmar-specific issues.

- The Chinese Embassy in Yangon and CRI’s Burmese service jointly produce the magazine *China Today* in Burmese. According to a piece in the popular Irrawaddy Online, *China Today* is widely distributed among Chinese expats, businesses, and travel agencies. A Myanmar media expert said that *China Today* is available for free in the lobbies of most hotels.¹⁰³ The magazine often carries promotional articles about Chinese investment and projects in Myanmar and elsewhere in the region.¹⁰⁴
- China.com’s Burmese-language website, China.com Myanmar language (ချမန္တဘာသာ), features news and entertainment coverage from CRI and the China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN). China.com is a state-run PRC site, hosted by the China Internet Information Center, under the auspices of the China International Publishing Group and the State Council Information Office.¹⁰⁵

PRC media also produces a wide variety of content in English, which is spoken by many of Myanmar’s educated elite. English is taught as a second language in Myanmar’s schools and many math and science classes are taught in English. English-language media and publications have increased in popularity as Myanmar’s economy and society globalize.¹⁰⁶

Table 5. Chinese state-run media outlets producing local-language content in Myanmar

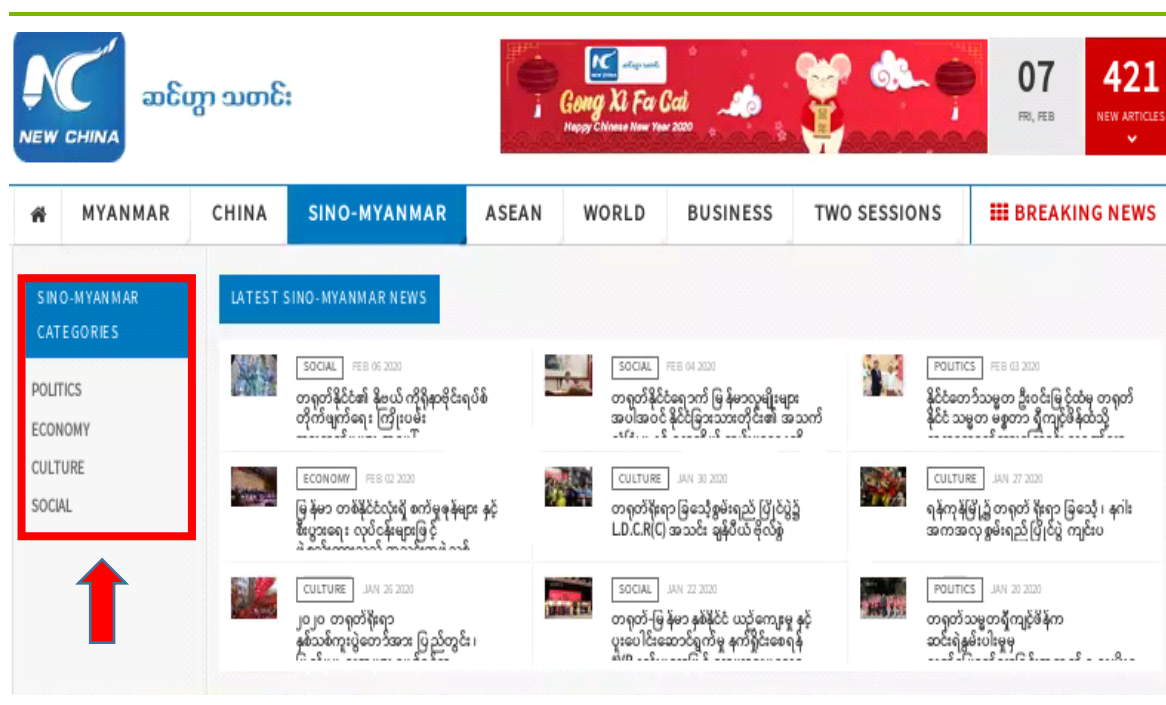
Media outlet	Burmese	English
Xinhua News Agency (新华社)	✓	✓
China Radio International (CRI; 中国国际广播电台)	✓	✓
China Today	✓	✓
China.com	✓	✓
China News Service (中国新闻社)	✗	✓
<i>China Daily</i>	✗	✓
China Global Television Network (CGTN)	✗	✓
<i>People’s Daily</i> (人民日报)	✗	✓
<i>Global Times</i> (环球时报)	✗	✓

Source: Data compiled by CNA from the websites of each state-run media outlet.

In addition to the Burmese-language website Xinhua launched in 2015, the PRC’s official news agency expanded its online presence to include Facebook (@XinhuaMyanmar), Twitter (@XHMyanmar 13,000 followers), and a mobile Xinhua Myanmar app (ဆင်ဟွာမြန်မာ App).¹⁰⁷ The launch of these Chinese news platforms in Myanmar were diplomatically important enough to warrant then-Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Yang Houlan and Myanmar’s MOI permanent secretary to preside over the website launch. The two officials then offered interviews about

the new platform’s significance to their bilateral relationship for Myanmar TV stations, including MRTV, MRTV4 and MNTV.¹⁰⁸

Figure 6. Xinhua Myanmar homepage highlighting “Sino-Myanmar” news categories



Source: Xinhua, “Sino-Myanmar,” ဆင်ဟွာ, New China, 2020, accessed Feb. 7, 2020, <http://www.xinhuaanmar.com/sino-myanmar/social/26209-2020-02-06-09-10-41>.



2.2.2 Reporting on local events that involve China

The Burmese-language content produced by Xinhua and CRI covers a variety of topics, including news, culture, and entertainment. Both outlets highlight reporting on Sino-Myanmar ties and predominately publish Sino-centric content. The Burmese-language Xinhua Myanmar website has a section dedicated to “Sino-Myanmar” news with politics, economy, culture, and society categories. CRI’s online Burmese-language reporting focuses on China-Myanmar cooperative programs on trade, infrastructure development, and cultural exchange.

Reports that focus exclusively on local events without also mentioning China are scarce. We observed only a few examples of PRC media reports that focused on exclusively on events in Myanmar—all related to COVID-19.¹⁰⁹ This lack of reporting on local events may limit the popularity of PRC media outlets among local audiences in Myanmar, who tend to be more interested in local news than national or international news. According to a 2018 audience

survey conducted in three of Myanmar’s states, “what is happening locally is far more important to the individual than concerns of a more national scope.”¹¹⁰

Figure 7. Xinhua Burmese highlighting Wa People’s welcome of Xi Jinping

တရုတ်သမ္မတရှိကျင့်ဖိန်က ဆင်းရဲနွမ်းပါးမှုမှ
လွတ်မြောက်လာခြင်းအတွက် ဝ လူမျိုးစု ရွာသားများအား ဂုဏ်ယူကြောင်း
ပြောကြား

XINHUA / 20 JANUARY 2020 /

နိုင်ငံရေး တရား

HITS: 857



Source: Xinhua, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Says He is Proud of Wa Ethnic People for Their Escape from Poverty,” တရုတ်သမ္မတရှိကျင့်ဖိန်က ဆင်းရဲနွမ်းပါးမှုမှ လွတ်မြောက်လာခြင်းအတွက် ဝ လူမျိုးစု ရွာသားများအား ဂုဏ်ယူကြောင်း ပြောကြား New China - Myanmar, Jan. 20, 2020, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <http://www.xinhuaanmar.com/sino-myanmar/politics/26031-2020-01-20-06-20-21>.

Xinhua’s Burmese-language “Culture” and “Social” pages highlight China’s generosity and the benefits of cooperation with China. The “Culture” stories appear to receive the most hits, according to the “hit-counts” listed on the page (see Figure 8).¹¹¹

Figure 8. Xinhua Burmese media on Chinese ophthalmologists providing free care in Myanmar

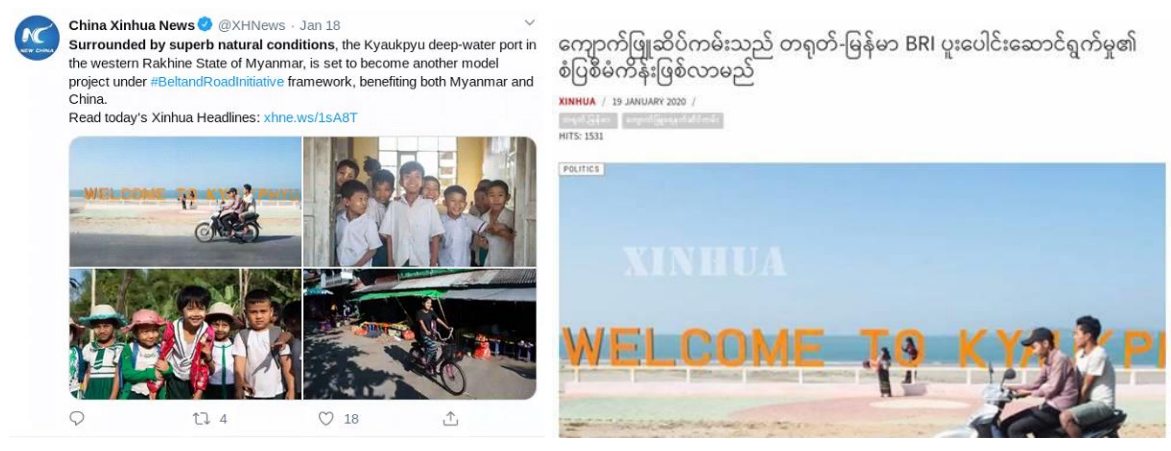


Source: Xinhua, "The 'Bright Journey' Campaign, Conducted by China Ophthalmologists for Myanmar, Strengthens China-Myanmar Relations," စက္ခုအလင်းဒါန "အလင်းရောင် ခရီးစဉ်" လှုပ်ရှားမှုက တရုတ်-မြန်မာ ဆွေမျိုးပေါက်ဖော် ချစ်ကြည်ရေး အတွက် ပိုမို ခိုင်မာစေ New China-Myanmar, Jan. 13, 2020, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <http://www.xinhuamyanmar.com/sino-myanmar/social/25971-2020-01-13-10-32-10>.

Chinese media reporting directed at audiences in Myanmar emphasizes the benefits of BRI projects in Myanmar such as the Kyaukpyu special economic zone (SEZ) and deep-sea port, New Yangon City, as well as roads, railways, and energy infrastructure to local populations (see

Figure 9). For example, Xinhua asserts that Kyaukpyu deep-sea port “is intended to benefit local people.”¹¹²

Figure 9. Xinhua English and Burmese reporting on Kyaukpyu port project’s benefits to locals



Source: China Xinhua News, “#BeltandRoadInitiative,” Twitter, Jan. 18, 2020, accessed Jan. 2020, [https://twitter.com/search?q=%40XHNews%20surrounded%20by%20superb%20natural%20conditions&src=typed_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%40XHNews%20surrounded%20by%20superb%20natural%20conditions&src=typed_query;); “Kyaukpyu Port will be a model project of Sino-Myanmar BRI cooperation,” (ကျောက်ဖြူဆိပ်ကမ်းသည် တရုတ်-မြန်မာ BRI ပူးပေါင်းဆောင်ရွက်မှု၏ စံပြုစီမံကိန်းဖြစ်လာမည်), Xinhua Myanmar, Jan. 19, 2020, accessed Jul. 30, 2020, <https://xinhuamyanmar.com/sino-myanmar/politics/26026-bri>.



2.2.3 Recruiting Myanmar voices

PRC media often seek to “borrow” foreign voices to amplify and lend credence to Chinese narratives by creating the appearance that they are espoused by others outside of China. Chinese state-run media routinely quotes Myanmar government officials, industry leaders, and average citizens in an effort to promote China’s narratives.

Cooperation with China is beneficial to Myanmar

A January 2020 Xinhua article quoted U Khin Maung Lynn, joint secretary of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, saying his country's participation in the BRI “will strengthen cooperation between Myanmar and various countries, and create opportunities in trade, investment and infrastructure construction.”¹¹³ The same article quoted Win Tin, editor-in-chief of Myanmar's *Northern Light Journal*: “Bilateral cooperation is good for tranquility and prosperity, and can contribute to the development of both countries.”¹¹⁴ A January 2020 *Global Times* article quotes U Ko Ko Hlaing, co-founder of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, who advocated closer ties with China because China will be able to “address the local infrastructure shortage, create jobs, and improve locals' livelihood.”¹¹⁵

Chinese media also routinely quote Myanmar citizens who express a preference for China's model for economic development. For instance, Xinhua quoted the editor-in-chief of Myanmar's *Northern Light Journal*, Win Tin: "China is the world's second largest economy and has gained rich development experience from which Myanmar can draw inspiration."¹¹⁶ Articles that promote the narrative that China's "development model" is the preferred alternative to that of the West also frequently list Chinese multibillion-dollar investment figures in Myanmar and highlight 15 percent-plus year-over-year increases in "mutually beneficial" trade.¹¹⁷

China and Myanmar have a unique friendship

A CRI Facebook post from December 9, 2019, quotes Senior General Min Aung Hlaing describing China as "a trusted friend of Myanmar and its relative forever," thereby promoting the narrative that China and Myanmar have a unique, close relationship. PRC state-run media reporting on Xi's January 2020 visit also amplified this narrative by quoting prominent local voices. For example, Xinhua quoted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi: "Myanmar highly cherishes its friendship with China... and Xi's visit will greatly deepen the Myanmar-China 'Pauk-Phaw' friendship."¹¹⁸

Unlike the US/West, Beijing supports Myanmar's efforts to deal the with Rohingya crisis

Chinese media reporting on Aung San Suu Kyi's January 2020 meeting with Xi Jinping highlighted her remarks contrasting China's treatment of Myanmar with that of the West. Xinhua published Aung San Suu Kyi's remark that, "Some countries have been wantonly interfering in the internal affairs of other countries in the name of human rights, ethnic or religious issues.... I hope China will continue to defend justice for small countries such as Myanmar on international occasions." The article also quoted Xi's response: "China is a good friend worthy of Myanmar's trust."¹¹⁹

China provides Myanmar with the means to fight COVID-19

Xinhua Myanmar reports routinely highlight Chinese government, military, and corporate entities' provision of COVID-19 relief to Myanmar. These articles follow a formula that includes quoting remarks by aid recipients expressing gratitude for China's assistance. Chinese provision of COVID-19 support appears to target localities within Myanmar of strategic importance to China. For example, one Burmese-language article published on Xinhua Myanmar's website and Facebook page details how Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) CITIC Group has donated several batches of COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) to Kyaukpyu Township in Rakhine State. The article quotes the Rakhine Ethnic Affairs Minister Zaw Aye Maung as saying, "The donation is a source of strength not only for the Rakhine people in Kyaukpyu Township but also for the Rakhine people in Kyaukpyu Township."¹²⁰ The CITIC

Group is the lead company constructing the strategic BRI Kyaukpyu deep-sea port, and therefore has reason to engender goodwill among locals, especially local officials.

Figure 10. Chinese SOE CITIC Group donates COVID-19 supplies to Kyaukpyu township



Source: "CITIC Group Donates Medical Supplies for the Second COVID-19 Disease Prevention in Kyaukpyu Township, Rakhine State," ရန်ပုံငွေနှင့် ကျောက်ဖြူမြို့နယ် COVID-19 ရောဂါ ကာကွယ်ရေး အတွက် CITIC Group မှ ဆေးဘက်ဆိုင်ရာ ထောက်ပံ့ရေး ပစ္စည်းများ ဒုတိယ အကြိမ် လှူဒါန်း Xinhua Myanmar, May 19, 2020, accessed Jul. 21, 2020, <http://xinhuaanmar.com/statistics/covid-19/covid-19-mm/27601-covid-19-citic-group-2>.

2.3 Maximizing channels for distribution of China's narratives

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 in Myanmar, including the following:

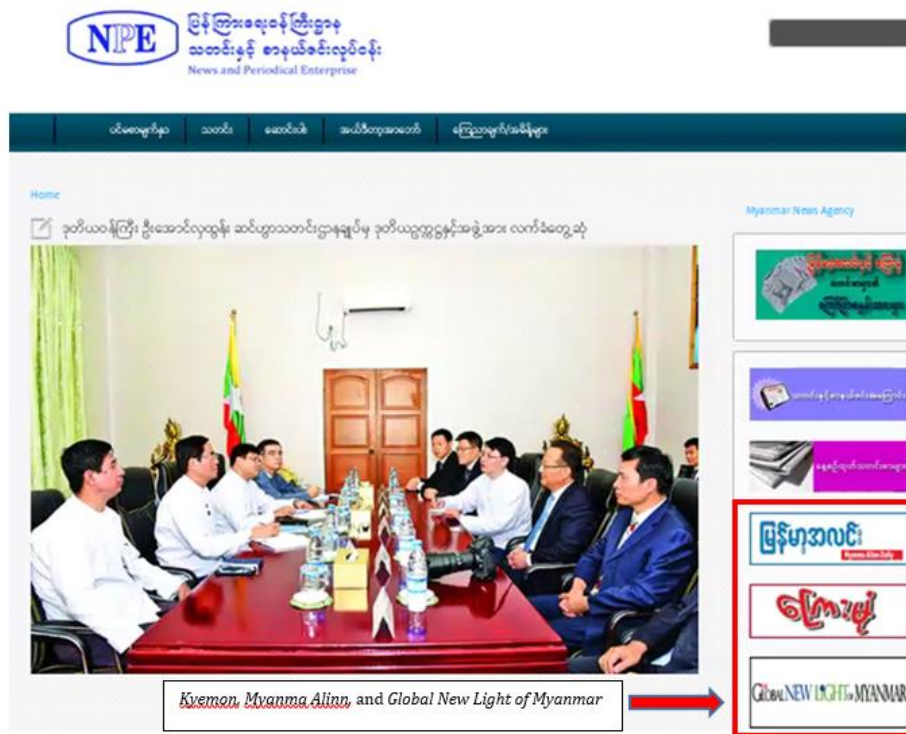
- Using Myanmar media outlets as channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content
- Establishing a presence on social media platforms popular in Myanmar, especially Facebook
- Creating new channels for distribution by investing in the development of telecommunications infrastructure and Myanmar media outlets.



2.3.1 Providing content to Myanmar media

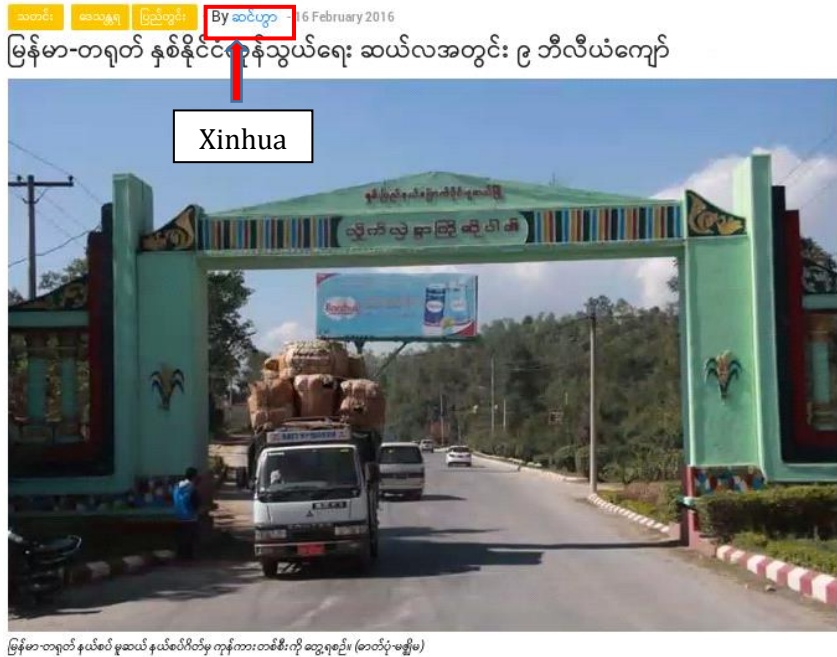
PRC media outlets actively seek to place their content in Myanmar media through content-sharing agreements. Domestic media outlets in Myanmar frequently republish content produced by Chinese media outlets, especially Xinhua. Xinhua’s Myanmar bureau produces English- and Burmese-language reporting, which it provides to the MOI’s News and Periodicals Enterprise (NPE).¹²¹ The NPE then provides the Xinhua content for publication to the state-run daily newspapers, *Kyemon*, *Myanma Alinn*, and *Global New Light of Myanmar*, which offer both print and online editions, links for which are seen on the right side of Figure 7.¹²² The Myanmar News Agency article on the NPE homepage below (Figure 11) not only describes how Xinhua executives court Myanmar’s state-run media in efforts to further cooperation, but also depicts how the NPE serves as a hub and feeds content to Myanmar’s state-run media outlets.

Figure 11. Myanmar’s Deputy Minister of Information meets with Xinhua vice president to discuss deepening cooperation in media



Source: Ministry of Information, “Deputy Minister of Information U Aung Hla Tun Meets Xinhua Delegation led by Liu Siyang,” ဒုတိယဝန်ကြီး ဦးအောင်လှထွန်း ဆင်ဟွာသတင်းဌာနချုပ်မှ ဒုတိယဥက္ကဋ္ဌနှင့်အဖွဲ့အား လက်ခံတွေ့ဆုံ, News and Periodical Enterprise, Oct. 13, 2019, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <https://www.moi.gov.mm/npe/?q=news/13/10/2019/id-90583>.

Figure 12. Xinhua bylines in state-run (top) and private (bottom) Myanmar newspapers



Source: "Erdogan and Trump Meet by Phone, Discuss Territorial Issues," အာဒိုဂန်နှင့်ထရမ်ဒေသဆိုင်ရာအရေးကိစ္စ ဖုန်းဖြင့်ဆွေးနွေး, Xinhua, *Kyemon The Mirror Daily*, Jan. 29, 2020, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <https://www.moi.gov.mm/npe/km/?q=download/file/fid/5554>; "Over 9 Billion Myanmar-China Bilateral Trade Months," မြန်မာ-တရုတ် နှစ်နိုင်ငံကုန်သွယ်ရေး ဆယ်လအတွင်း ၉ ဘီလီယံကျော်, *Mizzima Daily*, Feb. 16, 2016, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <http://mizzimaburmese.com/article/11249>.

Domestic media outlets also carry content produced by AFP, AP, India-based Asia News International (ANI), and Japan's Kyodo News. In a survey of *Global New Light of Myanmar* international news wires, Xinhua articles appeared primarily when the topic of the article was about China.¹²³

Xinhua-produced Burmese- and English-language content appears not only in Myanmar state-run media such as *Kyemon* ("The Mirror"), but also regularly in private news outlets such as *Mizzima*, which has more than 13 million followers on Facebook, and others.¹²⁴

Other PRC media outlets have also signed content-sharing agreements with Myanmar media outlets. For example, the Director General of CRI, Wang Gengnian, visited Myanmar in 2012 to sign an agreement to broadcast Chinese TV shows in Myanmar. Wang is quoted describing Beijing's efforts to spread its message internationally as "borrowing a boat to go to sea." The phrase refers to the strategy of using established media in foreign countries to push the Chinese narrative.¹²⁵

Figure 13. Head of the CCP Propaganda Department visiting Shwe Than Lwin Media and Myanmar International Radio in July 2018



Source: Tin Htet Paing, "How China Pushes Its Agenda in Myanmar Media," Myanmar Now, Oct. 9, 2019, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/how-china-pushes-its-agenda-in-myanmar-media>.

The Dehong Media Group has a content-sharing agreement with the *Myitkyina News Journal*, one of Kachin state's most popular newspapers.¹²⁶ According to China's State Council Information Office, Dehong Media Group, which is controlled by the CCP Propaganda Department of the local government in Dehong—an area in China's Yunnan province that borders Kachin and Shan states and is home to more than 50,000 Burmese temporary residents—also publishes *Pauk Phaw*, China's first Burmese-language newspaper.¹²⁷ Seng Mai Maran, the *Myitkyina News Journal* co-founder and editor-in-chief, told the independent outlet Myanmar Now that one reason she entered the agreement was to get access to more Chinese sources. "There are many Chinese companies in this region but most of them don't have spokespeople. They only came to invest but say nothing to journalists and the media. We collaborated [with *Pauk Phaw*/Dehong Media Group] in the hope of getting sources," she said.¹²⁸

Another outlet that routinely republishes content from Chinese state-run media is Myanmar International (MI) Radio, which broadcasts in English 24 hours a day and covers Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyitaw. MI Radio was founded in 2018 as a joint project between the MOI and Shwe Than Lwin Media, which has several contracts to broadcast shows from different Chinese stations, including Yunnan TV. Huang Kunming, the head of the CCP's Propaganda Department, visited the offices of Shwe Than Lwin media, SkyNet, and MI radio and urged more collaboration with China during a trip to Myanmar in July 2018.¹²⁹

Mizzima, a formerly exiled news outlet that now has over 15 million followers on Facebook, has republished opinion pieces from PRC state-run *Global Times*. For example, a 2016 *Global Times* piece republished in Burmese by Mizzima suggested that the US was baiting Myanmar with sanctions relief to get it to cede to US demands (see Figure 14).¹³⁰ Myo Thant, a former Mizzima editor, said the two publications had a content-sharing agreement and that Mizzima did not receive any money for publishing the pieces.¹³¹ Mizzima has also published articles critical of China.¹³²

Figure 14. Cartoon from *Global Times* article critical of US republished in Mizzima



Source: *Global Times*, "Suu Kyi Returns from US Without 'Gold Pot' of Lifting All Sanctions on Myanmar," အမေရိကန်သွားသည့် ဒေါ်စု ရွှေအိုးထမ်းမလာဘဲ ရွှေအိုးရမယ်ဆိုတဲ့ ကတိသာ ရခဲ့ဟု တရုတ်သတင်းစာရေး, Mizzima, Sept. 21, 2016, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <http://www.mizzimaburmese.com/article/18306>.



2.3.2 Jointly producing content with Myanmar media

The first jointly produced China-Myanmar television programming aired in both countries in 2014. The TV series *Legends of Song and Dance* is a historical drama about cultural exchange between the Tang dynasty and the Kingdom of Myanmar.¹³³ According to Chinese media, the story "promotes the two countries' friendly exchange through the strength of music [and] the long-standing China-Myanmar 'pauk-phaw' fraternal friendship."¹³⁴

In 2019, Myanmar and China started coproducing two films. The first is a documentary titled *Drink from the Same River*, promoting the narrative that the two countries have a unique and close relationship due to geographic proximity, cultural affinity, and shared history.¹³⁵ The second, *Bagan's Treasure Trove*, is described by Xinhua as the story of "a Chinese young man who goes to Myanmar to find treasure and his hilarious and exciting experience in the country." The movie was coproduced by Myanmar's Brave Empire Entertainment, China's Beijing Trawind Division, Beijing Good Fortune Capital, and Myanmar International Travel Asia.¹³⁶



2.3.3 Authoring opinion pieces for Myanmar media outlets

It is common practice for Chinese officials to author editorials in Myanmar state-run media outlets ahead of state visits and during other significant bilateral diplomatic events. Ahead of his January 2020 visit to Myanmar, Chinese President Xi Jinping published a signed article titled “Writing a New Chapter in Our Millennia-Old ‘Pauk-Phaw’ Friendship” in Myanmar’s state-owned newspapers *Myanmar Ahlinn*, *Kyemon*, and *Global New Light of Myanmar*; it was also featured on state broadcast radio and television.¹³⁷ Xi described pauk-phaw (ပေါက်ဖော် in Burmese and 胞波 in Chinese) as the sense of being “siblings from the same mother” and stressed that Myanmar and China need to deepen “result-oriented Belt and Road cooperation” to move from “the conceptual stage to concrete planning and implementation” of Beijing’s infrastructure projects across Myanmar.¹³⁸

Likewise, in a recent editorial in Myanmar state-run media, China’s ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai described bilateral cooperation in combating COVID-19: the “epidemic is temporary, but the efforts to build China-Myanmar community... is another demonstration of the deep-rooted pauk-phaw friendship between our two countries.”¹³⁹ Of note, local media experts contend that the “pauk-phaw” narrative promoted by PRC media is not widely repeated by Myanmar media or officials.¹⁴⁰

Figure 15. A man reads Xi Jinping’s January 2020 letter in Myanmar’s state-run daily *Kyemon*



Source: CRI, “President Xi Jinping’s Article Published in Major Burmese Media,” ဂျပန် အဓိကမီဒီယာများဖြင့် ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ ဂျီတီဒီအိုင် မိန့်ခွဲ၏ ဆေးဝေးပေးကွပ် ထုတ်ဖော်ချက်, China Radio International–Myanmar, Jan. 17, 2020, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <http://myanmar.cri.cn/20200117/877d301e-5712-cca9-c60a-4a67f0013b0c.html>.

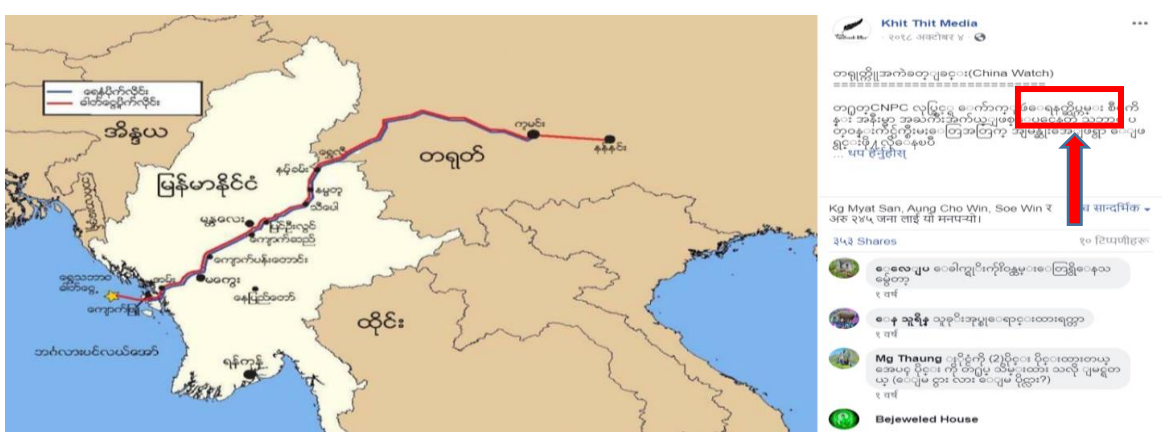
In addition to authoring opinion pieces for foreign publications, Chinese officials and scholars also promote PRC narratives through interviews. For example, in an interview with Xinhua’s Yangon Bureau, PRC Ambassador Chen Hai highlighted the benefits that have accompanied Myanmar’s agreement to establish the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) as part of the BRI.¹⁴¹ The CMEC features a Y-shaped route from China’s Yunnan Province to Myanmar’s Rakhine state and Yangon with multiple projects, including the Kyaukpyu SEZ, a US\$1.3 billion deep-sea port project that gives Beijing a gateway to the Indian Ocean, and a railway project that falls on this route.¹⁴² The PRC acts of goodwill cited by Chen include China’s construction of two hospitals and 23 “China-Myanmar Friendship Schools;” a program in which Chinese doctors performed 6,000 free cataract surgeries; and the PRC government’s granting of scholarships to more than 1,300 Myanmar students so that they can study in China.¹⁴³

K 2.3.4 Buying space in Myanmar media

According to online news outlet Myanmar Now, Chinese state-run media outlets have placed “advertorials”—paid inserts in the form of editorials—in Myanmar media. For example, the national *7Day* newspaper, which has over 23 million followers on Facebook, has published stories and advertorials produced by PRC media outlets, including a series of three two-page advertorials promoting the BRI. The publication of the advertorials coincided with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi’s visit to China to attend a forum on the initiative.¹⁴⁴ According to the Myanmar Now article, *7Day* decided against publishing two additional Xinhua-proposed advertorials, one of which was aimed at countering the narrative that China was luring Myanmar into a “debt trap” with development loans, and the other piece blaming unrest in Myanmar on interference by Western countries.¹⁴⁵ Other Myanmar outlets did publish the “debt trap” advertorial. Citing a source at the paper, Myanmar Now reports that the *Voice Daily*, one of Myanmar’s top daily newspapers, published it across two pages in exchange for one million kyat (about \$650).¹⁴⁶

The PRC’s paid print and online news supplement English-language *China Watch* is similarly used to promote PRC narratives in Myanmar. Digital news outlets such as Khit Thit publish Burmese content from *China Watch*. According to local media experts, China pays translators top dollar to translate Chinese propaganda from Chinese and English into Burmese. One local expert even jokingly said that it was “enough money to buy a car.”¹⁴⁷ A December 2019 *China Watch* insert published in Myanmar’s media highlighted the efforts of state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to improve environmental conditions at the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port, which is 100 percent owned by CNPC (see Figure 16).¹⁴⁸

Figure 16. Excerpt from *China Watch* "advertorial" published by Burmese online news outlet



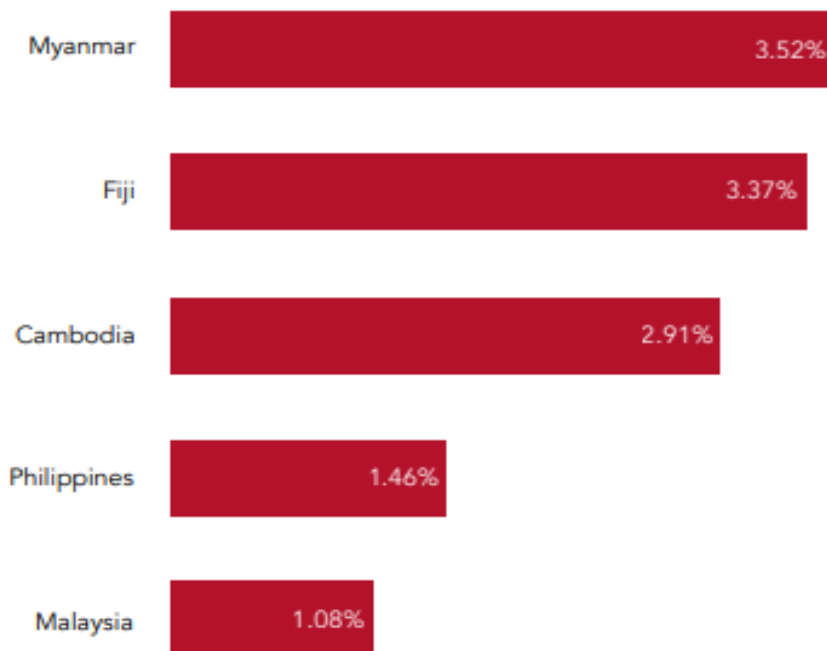
Source: “Chinese CNPC to Undertake Rapid Solution for Massive Environmental Damage near Kyaukpyu Deep-Sea Port Project,” တရုတ် CNPC လုပ်ငန်းရုတ်တရက်ရပ်စဲရေးနည်းလမ်းများ စီမံကိန်း အနီးမှာ အသက်သာရန် အလွန်မြန်ဆန်စွာ ဆောင်ရွက်နေကြောင်း ပြောဆိုခဲ့ကြောင်း အကျဉ်းချုပ်ဖော်ပြပါသည်။, Khit Thit News, Dec. , 2019, accessed Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.khitthitnews.com/2019/12/%E1%80%84%E1%80%BD%E1%80%B1%E1%80%80%E1%80%AD%E1%80%AF%E1%80%84%E1%80%BA%E1%80%9E%E1%80%B1%E1%80%AC-%E1%80%9B%E1%80%9F%E1%80%94%E1%80%BA%E1%80%B8%E1%80%99%E1%80%BB%E1%80%AC%E1%80%B8%E1%80%9E.html>.



2.3.5 Establishing a presence on social media in Myanmar

As noted earlier in this report, Facebook is extraordinarily popular among internet users in Myanmar. Indeed, many access the internet exclusively through Facebook, and many Myanmar internet users follow Chinese media outlets on Facebook. According AIDDATA, among East Asian and Pacific Island countries, Myanmar has the most Facebook fans of Chinese state-owned media ¹⁴⁹

Figure 17. Top countries by average share of internet users who are Facebook followers of Chinese state-owned media



Source: Samantha Custer, Mihir Prakash, Jonathan A. Solis, Rodney Knight, and Joyce Jiahui Lin, *Influencing the Narrative: How The Chinese Government Mobilizes Students and Media to Burnish Its Image* (Williamsburg, VA: AIDDATA, 2019), 11.

CRI has an official Facebook page targeted at audiences in Myanmar. CRI Myanmar’s Burmese-language Facebook page has 1.2 million followers, and includes a mixture of entertainment and news content. CRI Myanmar’s Facebook presence appears to be more popular than its FM radio broadcasts. According to a 2017 Center for Insights in Survey Research public opinion survey, CRI is not among the top 12 radio stations.¹⁵⁰

Content posted on CRI Myanmar’s Burmese-language Facebook page promotes the narrative that China is Myanmar’s most important source of aid for fighting the spread of COVID-19. The image in Figure 18, which garnered more than 1,000 likes in one day, describes the COVID-19 medical-support material China has donated to Myanmar.

Figure 18. CRI Myanmar infographic highlights the quantity of tests, masks, PPE, ventilators, and other supplies that the Chinese government has donated to Myanmar



Source: “Chinese Government Donates to COVID-19 Fight in Myanmar,” တရုတ်စိုးရသည့် ပျမနွားိုင့်အား COVID-19 ရောဂါတိုက်ကုရေးဆိုရာ ဝေထာက္ကံရေး ပစာညွှန်းမား လွှဲဒါနူးပေးအပူ, CRI Myanmar Facebook, May 27, 2020, accessed Jun. 2, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/myanmar.cri/photos/a.371733656302067/1811807505628001/?type=3&theater>.

The CRI Myanmar page also features reporting on events in Sino-Myanmar relations—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,” helping promote the narrative that China and Myanmar have a unique friendship. Figure 19 includes screenshots of Wang Yi’s meeting with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.¹⁵¹

Figure 19. Screenshots of CRI and Xinhua Myanmar’s Facebook content



Source: CRI Facebook page, accessed Feb. 24, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/crimyanmar>; Xinhua Myanmar Facebook page, accessed Feb. 24, <https://www.facebook.com/XinhuaMyanmar>.

Chinese state-run media’s social media efforts in Myanmar appear to engage in targeting posts and advertising. During a July 2020 discussion with local media experts, participants noted that they regularly see targeted Facebook posts from Chinese accounts even though they do not follow the source accounts. Some posts described by the participants included Chinese-language learning games, news articles from Xinhua and CGTN, and political cartoons from China.com. One participant mentioned a China.com cartoon that showed Westerners (i.e., the US and UN) helping Rohingya people cross Myanmar’s border.¹⁵² According to the participant, this targeted political cartoon plays on anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya sentiment, and suggests that China is sympathetic to the Myanmar government’s treatment of Rohingya.

PRC media's COVID-19 disinformation in Myanmar

Among the Mekong countries, Myanmar was one of the first places that we observed the publication of disinformation about the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020, CGTN published a video that implied that the US military was responsible for the pandemic. CRI's Myanmar Facebook account posted the video with Burmese subtitles and dubbing. The video implies that COVID-19 may have originated in US military facilities at Fort Detrick, Maryland.



Source: "Secrets of the Fort Detrick Biological Research Station," Fort Detrick ဇီဝသုတေသနစခန်း၏ လုံခြုံရေးကိစ္စများ, CRI Myanmar Facebook, May 19, 2020, accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=721337195093425>.

¥ 2.3.6 Investing in Myanmar media outlets

The Chinese Yunnan provincial government oversees publication of a Burmese-language newspaper, *Pauk Phaw*, and journal, *Mingalar*. Yunnan Gateway of China publishes these sister publications under the auspices of the Dehong, Yunnan CCP Propaganda Department.¹⁵³ Of note, *Mingalar* is one of four local language journals meant to function as a “bridge between China and the Mekong Countries,” published for audiences in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. These journals focus on bilateral commerce, culture, and travel.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, there are at least four Chinese-language outlets targeted at audiences in Myanmar. These include *Myanmar Golden Phoenix*, which is a weekly print newspaper with ties to the Yunnan provincial government.¹⁵⁵

Table 6. Media outlets in Myanmar with PRC ownership ties

Name	Type	Description	Ownership	Social media following
<i>Pauk Phaw</i>	Print, online, WeChat	Burmese and Chinese reporting “for the brotherhood of the Myanmar and Chinese people: Understanding, exchange, and cooperation.” ¹⁵⁶	Controlled by CCP Propaganda Department of Dehong, Yunnan, PRC. ¹⁵⁷	WeChat
<i>Mingalar</i>	Print, online	Burmese reporting China's politics, economy, and the cooperation between the two countries. ¹⁵⁸	Controlled by CCP Propaganda Department of Dehong, Yunnan, PRC. ¹⁵⁹	WeChat
<i>Myanmar Golden Phoenix</i> (金凤凰)	Print, online	Chinese-language weekly print newspaper based in Yangon, Myanmar	Associated with the Yunnan provincial government ¹⁶⁰	缅甸金凤凰中文报社 @mmgoldenphoenix 18,601 people follow this; managed from within Myanmar ¹⁶¹
MD-ZW News Portal (缅甸中文网)	Online	Chinese-language online portal; “Myanmar's first Chinese-language integrated media, 24 hours of rolling release of Myanmar news, business, tourism, housing, work.”	China-Myanmar Culture Communication (Guangzhou) Co., Ltd. ¹⁶²	缅甸中文网 @md0095 41,453 people follow this; managed from within Myanmar ¹⁶³
Mian Hua News Portal (缅华网)	Online	Chinese-language online portal to “serve Myanmar-China society, strengthen ties with Myanmar overseas Chinese from all over the world, enhance friendship and promote friendly relations between Myanmar and China.”	Unknown	缅华网 @mhwmm2014 2,474 people follow this; managed from unknown ¹⁶⁴
<i>Guangming Daily Myanmar bureau</i> (光明日报分社)	Print, Online	Chinese-language reporting on Myanmar and Sino-Myanmar relations from sole correspondent in Yangon. ¹⁶⁵	PRC government	Guangming Daily-光明日报 @guangmingdailyChina 4,898,513 people follow this ¹⁶⁶

Sources: “Mian-Hua News” (*mian hua wang*; 缅华网), Facebook page, accessed Jan. 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/mhwmm2014/>; “Burma-China News” (*miandian zhongwen wang*; 缅甸中文网), Facebook page, accessed Jan. 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/md0095/>; “Golden Phoenix,” Facebook page, accessed Jan. 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/mmgoldenphoenix/>; “Guangming Daily Correspondent Station in Rangoon, Myanmar,” *Guangming Daily*, accessed Feb. 20, 2020, https://en.gmw.cn/gj_new/e_md.htm; SCIO, “China's First Burmese Newspaper ‘Pauk Phaw’ Launched in Dehong, Yunnan” (*zhongguo shou fen mian wen baozhi “baobo” zai yunnan dehong chuankan*; 中国首份缅文报纸《胞波》在云南德宏创刊), State Council Information Office (*guowuyuan xinwen bangongshi wangzhan*; 国务院新闻办公室网站), 2015, accessed Feb. 28, 2020, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/zhzc/35353/35354/Document/1513321/1513321.htm>.



2.3.7 Investing in telecommunications infrastructure

China is actively seeking to expand its presence in Myanmar’s telecommunications sector. Currently, there are four major telecommunications providers in Myanmar (see Table 7), whose ownership is based in Qatar, Norway, Vietnam, and Japan.¹⁶⁷ However, two Chinese telecom companies, Huawei and ZTE, have partnered with Mytel and Ooredoo Myanmar, respectively, to roll out 5G technologies in the country.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, China Telecom Group is reported to be in talks to purchase an ownership stake in Ooredoo Myanmar.¹⁶⁹

Table 7. Foreign companies that have invested in Myanmar’s ICT infrastructure

Company	Ownership
Ooredoo Myanmar	100% Qatari owned
Telenor Myanmar	100% Norway owned
Mytel	49% owned by Viettel (Ministry of Defense of Vietnam), 51% Myanmar consortium
MPT	USD \$2 billion investment by Japan’s KDDI and Sumitomo Corp, ownership stake unknown

Sources: Teppei Kasai, “Japan’s KDDI, Sumitomo Corp to Invest \$2 bln in Myanmar Telecoms,” Reuters, July 16, 2014, accessed Mar. 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/kddi-myanmar-idUSL4N0PR1L320140716>; Moe Myint, “Military-Backed Mytel Announces Successful Test of 5G Service,” *The Irrawaddy*, Aug. 5, 2019, accessed Mar. 2, 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/military-backed-mytel-announces-successful-test-5g-service.html>; “Ooredoo Group Announced Revenue of QAR 7.2 Billion for Q1 2019 EBITDA Increased 4% to Reach QAR 3.2 Billion,” Ooredoo, Apr. 29, 2019, accessed Mar. 2 2020, https://www.ooredoo.com/en/media/news_view/ooredoo-group-announced-revenue-of-qar-7-2-billion-for-q1-2019-ebitda-increased-4-to-reach-qar-3-2-billion/; “Telenor 2016 Q2 Company Presentation,” July 2016, 2016, accessed Mar. 2, 2020, <https://www.telenor.com/globalwholesale/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Q2-2016-Company-Presentation.pdf>.

Huawei has also been working with Myanmar’s MTC on the development of the country’s five-year plan for 5G broadband services.¹⁷⁰ In addition to helping the MPT plan the nation’s 5G upgrades, in 2019 Huawei partnered with Mytel, the fourth telecom operator established in the country, to test Myanmar’s first 5G services. Mytel had 5 million subscribers within a year of its 2018 launch, and hopes to have 10 million subscribers by 2021.¹⁷¹ Mytel is a joint venture between the armed forces of Myanmar and Vietnam.¹⁷²

In 2019, China’s ZTE Corporation partnered with Ooredoo Myanmar to launch 5G technology in Myanmar’s major cities.¹⁷³ Ooredoo Myanmar is subsidiary of Qatari parent company Ooredoo Group, which has been operating telecom services in Myanmar since 2014 and is now one of the four telecoms operating in the country.¹⁷⁴ In addition to Ooredoo Myanmar’s 5G partnership with ZTE, Bloomberg News reported in late 2019 that Ooredoo was in talks with state-owned China Telecommunications Corporation over a USD \$4 billion deal for the Chinese telecom 40 percent stake in Ooredoo Myanmar.¹⁷⁵ As of 2019, Ooredoo Myanmar had 10.9 million subscribers.¹⁷⁶

2.4 Attempting to influence Myanmar media to promote China-friendly narratives

Besides 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. There is evidence that Beijing is using the following tools to do this in Myanmar:

- Hosting international media forums and conferences
- Hosting education and training programs for foreign media professionals



2.4.1 Hosting international media forums and conferences

Myanmar officials and media professionals have participated in numerous media-related forums hosted or organized by China. For instance, the China-Myanmar media forum, held in Yangon in May 2019, focused on promoting BRI and relations between China and Myanmar. Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Hong Liang told participants that he was pleased to witness the deepening of the bilateral friendship and praised media professionals for their efforts to serve as a bridge between the two countries. Xinhua reported that Monywa Aung Shin, editor-in-chief of Myanmar's *D-wave Journal*, pledged to continue efforts to further cooperation between Myanmar and China on BRI and the implementation of the CMEC.¹⁷⁷

China has hosted forums for Myanmar media professionals that focus on promoting the BRI. Ahead of Xi Jinping's state visit to Myanmar in January 2020, Xinhua reported that the latest "China-Myanmar Belt and Road Cooperation Media Roundtable," sponsored by China's CCTV, had been held in Yangon. According to Xinhua, the forum brought together more than 70 media professionals from China and Myanmar to discuss the role that media should play in promoting China-Myanmar BRI cooperation and the need for the media of both countries to "jointly deal with the unobjective and unfair strong interference of certain Western media."¹⁷⁸



2.4.2 Hosting education and training programs

Some Chinese-hosted trips for Burmese reporters appear designed to promote positive coverage of PRC investment in Myanmar. The Chinese government and various Chinese organizations have invited more than 1,000 Myanmar professionals—including journalists, government officials, and legislators—on trips in recent years, according to a study by the Myanmar-based Institute for Strategy and Policy. The study estimates that hundreds of journalists were among those who went along for the visits, which are often billed as exchange trips, study tours, or training.¹⁷⁹

Myanmar media professionals are often invited on multiple all-expense-paid trips to China. A 2020 report by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) notes that each of the nine Myanmar journalists that IFJ surveyed had been on two to nine PRC-sponsored trips to China. According to the IFJ report, the Myanmar journalists who went on these trips were clear-eyed about Beijing's goal. It quotes one journalist stating that China "set a long-term plan to influence Myanmar through media."¹⁸⁰

A 2019 article published on CRI's Burmese website described the most recent of five Myanmar Journalist Association trips to China at the invitation of the All-China Journalists Association. According to CRI, the trips are designed to offer Burmese media insight into the development of Chinese media and build relationships with neighboring PRC provincial media and Beijing-based media institutions. The article noted that the 12 Burmese journalists who went on one such trip included 8 representatives of Myanmar's MOI and 4 representatives of independent news organizations.¹⁸¹

In October 2018, China's State Power International Corp (SPIC), the state-owned enterprise behind the suspended \$3.6 billion Myitsone Dam hydropower project in Kachin state, hosted the editor-in-chief Monywa Aung Shin of *D-wave Journal*, the magazine distributed by Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy party. Aung Shin and eight other journalists and legislators toured five dams along China's Yellow River. After the Chinese tour, Tin Aye, a regional NLD lawmaker from Kachin, told Reuters, "I am not the decision-maker, but I think it's better to do the project."¹⁸²

During a July 2020 discussion with local media experts, one participant described Chinese efforts to influence media as having two tiers: efforts that are aimed at influencing entire media organizations and efforts that are targeted at individual journalists. In that expert's view, efforts targeted at organizations seek to encourage editors to choose more PRC-produced content. At the individual level, Chinese entities invite journalists on no-cost trips to China to view and report on Chinese infrastructure projects and other positive developments. Of note, the participant said that, upon return from these trips, the Chinese Embassy in Yangon asks Myanmar journalists to refrain from publishing negative stories about China.¹⁸³

2.5 Using entertainment to promote Chinese narratives

In recent years, Beijing has sought to expand its footprint in the global entertainment industry as a means of promoting a positive image of China to global audiences beyond the news media. In Myanmar, there is evidence that China is doing this by exporting Chinese-produced entertainment and promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms. According to one Chinese scholar, Southeast Asia is one of the major output destinations for Chinese TV series

and movies. Among China's surrounding countries, Southeast Asian countries watched the most Chinese movies per year, with an average of 2.8 times more than other countries.¹⁸⁴



2.5.1 Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment

China is actively exporting Chinese-produced entertainment content to Myanmar.

However, it is unclear how popular it is among audiences there. According to China's state-run English-language newspaper, *China Daily*, Chinese soap operas are making inroads in the Myanmar TV market and are "poised to challenge the dominant position held by South Korean programs."¹⁸⁵ According to local media experts, Chinese literary dramas like "Dream of the Red Chamber" and "Journey to the West" were popular with Myanmar audiences for many years; however, Korean, Western, and even Philippine contemporary entertainment has surpassed them in popularity.¹⁸⁶

The primary Chinese organizations responsible for providing and dubbing Chinese television programs to Myanmar are CRI, Guangxi People's Broadcasting, and Yunnan Dehong TV. The primary Myanmar organizations responsible for broadcasting Chinese television programs are MOI, MRTV, SkyNet, and Channel 7.

Chinese television programming that has been exported to Myanmar consists largely of dramas, comedies, and historical literary classics. In 2013, CRI introduced the first Burmese-dubbed Chinese TV drama in Myanmar: "Jin Tailang's Happy Life," an urban comedy about a married couple.¹⁸⁷ A year later, MRTV broadcast the 1986 edition of "Journey to the West."¹⁸⁸ Under a 2014 agreement with Myanmar's MOI, CRI began translating and introducing two to three Chinese TV dramas each year.¹⁸⁹ As of September 2019, at least 11 Chinese TV series and documentaries had been dubbed into Burmese and were airing on MRTV state-run television.¹⁹⁰ MRTV collaborated with Guangxi Radio and Television Information Network Corporation to translate and dub the classic Chinese literary dramas "Dream of the Red Chamber" and "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," as well as contemporary Chinese dramas like "Hello, Joann" and others, into Burmese.¹⁹¹ At the 2017 premiere of "Hello, Joann" in Myanmar, the director of the Guangxi People's Radio Station, Fan Yi, said, "the cooperation represents a new model for regional media outlets to cooperate with partners from countries along the Belt and Road routes."¹⁹²

Recent Chinese film and TV offerings for Burmese-speaking audiences have promoted China's political system. Myanmar's SkyNet Knowledge TV channel airs political television programming from China translated into Burmese. China Media Group produced the documentary TV series *Marching on the Main Road* and dubbed it into Burmese. According to Myanmar's state media, the series "includes Xi Jinping's modern socialist system thinking that contributes to valuable historical documentary visual art and information to show how within 70 years, successive communist leaders of China have led its citizens to revolution, formation,

and reforms toward the socialist system.” China’s SCIO minister presented the 24 episodes to the Myanmar MOI in January 2020; they air on the SkyNet Knowledge Channel at 7 p.m. daily.¹⁹³ Another series new to Burmese airwaves is titled *Xi Jinping’s Favorite Chinese Classical Texts*. The Yangon Media Group chairperson described the series as “providing enlightenment to national leaders and for the lives of ordinary people,” while the Managing Director of SkyNet explained that the series “provides Myanmar audiences a new perspective for understanding Chinese culture and the leadership of China.”¹⁹⁴ It is unclear how popular this programming is with audiences in Myanmar.

Figure 20. SkyNet Knowledge Channel broadcast of *Xi Jinping’s Favorite Chinese Classical Texts*



Source: CRI, “Burmese Audiences Learn About China through the “Chinese Literary Text” Program,” လောကီလောမ္ဘာ: တရုတ်နိုင်ငံသားများ” ရှိ အစီအစဉ်များ တရုတ်ပြည်ထောင်စုကား နားလည်ရှိလာသည့် ဂျပန် ပရိသတ်များ ဆို, China Radio International Myanmar, Jan. 15, 2020, accessed Feb. 26, 2020, <http://myanmar.cri.cn/20200115/acef9e38-df43-fce2-79c7-9953ba7438d1.html>.

The Myanmar government appears to be receptive to the PRC’s push to promote Chinese-produced entertainment in Myanmar. A 2018 report in the state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* described a ceremony for the introduction of both a new Burmese-dubbed Chinese cartoon series and the Burmese edition of Xi Jinping’s book, *The Governance of China*. The article emphasized that Myanmar’s Minister for Information, Dr. Pe Mying, and state-run broadcaster MRTV had worked with CCP Propaganda Department head Huang Kunming and Guangxi People’s Broadcasting to bring the Chinese cartoon series and book to Myanmar.¹⁹⁵ In addition, as part of a program jointly run by the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar, CRI, SkyNet, and China’s Yunnan Dehong TV, China gave three popular Chinese animated series—*Journey*

to the West, Chess Player, and Huge Worm Park—to MRTV in September 2019.¹⁹⁶ Myanmar's MOI published English- and Burmese-language news reports publicizing China's gift of these dubbed television shows.¹⁹⁷

Figure 21. Chinese cartoons on MRTV and Myanmar state-run media's reporting



Source: MRTV, “Chinese Cartoon Show Introduction and Chinese Drama Program ” တရုတ်ကာတွန်းကားအစီအစဉ် မိတ်ဆက်ခြင်းနှင့် တရုတ်ဇာတ်လမ်းတွဲ အစီအစဉ်ကြည့်ရှုအားပေးမှု ဆုလက်ဆောင်ပေးပွဲ ကျင်းပ, Myanmar Radio and Television, Jul. 7, 2018, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <https://www.mrtv.gov.mm/en/news-16675>; MNA, “Chinese Cartoon Series, The Governance of China Volume I, Introduced,” The Global New Light of Myanmar, Jul. 10, 2018, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <http://www.moi.gov.mm/npe/nlm/?q=download%2Ffile%2Ffid%2F4528>.

Although the volume of Burmese-dubbed Chinese film and TV in Myanmar continues to increase, it is unclear how regularly Chinese television programming is aired on Myanmar’s TV stations. A review of the lineups of the two free-to-air TV channels with the largest average daily reach—Channel 7 and MRTV-4—found that only 2 of the 12 international television shows that they currently air are from China. Based on translated descriptions, the majority are Korean dramas. The two Chinese television series are *Sweet Combat*, which originally aired on Hunan TV in 2018, and *Ode to Joy*, a 2016 drama series produced by Shandong Television Media Group.¹⁹⁸

Figure 22. Chinese TV series *Sweet Combat* and *Ode to Joy* on free-to-air Channel 7 and MRTV



Channel 7

မြန်မာ့အသံနှင့် ရုပ်မြင်သံကြား
Myanma Radio and Television

BREAKING NEWS | နယ် သံဇော့ဇီလောင်မူတွင် မီးငြိမ်းသတ်ရေး၊ ရှာဖွေကယ်ဆယ်ရေးနှင့် လုံခြုံရေးလုပ်ငန်းများ ဆောင်ရွက်ခဲ့ကြသော တပ်ဖွဲ့ဝင်များအား ဂုဏ်ပြုပွဲအခမ်းအနားသို့ တက်ရောက် | နိုင်

ပျော်ရွှင်မှုရှာပုံတော် (တရုတ်ဇာတ်လမ်းတွဲ) ၅-၁၂-၂၀၁၉ ရက်နေ့ မှစတင်ပြီး အပတ်စဉ် ကြာသပတေးနှင့် သောကြာနေ့များ၌ နေ့လယ် (၁၀း၁၅) နာရီတွင် ထုတ်လွှင့်ပြသမည်

MRTV ပျော်ရွှင်မှုရှာပုံတော် (တရုတ်ဇာတ်လမ်းတွဲ)

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Local News | February 26, 2020

Source: Channel7, "Sweet Combat - International Drama," အခ်စ်စိတ်ကြီးချုပ်ငှားချုပ်ငှား, pyoneplay, 2020, accessed Feb. 6, 2020, <https://www.pyoneplay.com/tvshows/63e5c23e7333456c917f0f1e2e04eedf.;> MRTV, "Ode to Joy (China Episode) Will Air Every Thursday and Friday at 1:15 pm.," ပျော်ရွှင်မှုရှာပုံတော် (တရုတ်ဇာတ်လမ်းတွဲ) ၅-၁၂-၂၀၁၉ ရက်နေ့ မှစတင်ပြီး အပတ်စဉ် ကြာသပတေးနှင့် သောကြာနေ့များ၌ နေ့လယ် (၁၀း၁၅) နာရီတွင် ထုတ်လွှင့်ပြသမည်, Myanmar Radio and Television, Nov. 30, 2019, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <https://www.mrtv.gov.mm/en/news-58975.>

2.5.2 Investing in the Myanmar film industry

China does not yet appear to be a major investor in Myanmar’s film industry. Two companies control the majority of Myanmar’s film industry: Mingalar Company Ltd., which is the largest film distributor in the country (holding about 80 percent of market for domestic cinema) and the Shwe Taung Group, which controls most of the remaining cinema market. US-based 20th Century Fox International recently reentered the market.¹⁹⁹ China does not appear to be an investor in either Mingalar Company Ltd. or the Shwe Taung Group. South Korean theater giant CJ CGV has operated a joint venture with the Shwe Taung Group since 2014, running multiplex cinemas throughout the country.²⁰⁰

While China is not a major investor in the Myanmar film industry, the Chinese Embassy holds annual Burmese-dubbed Chinese film festivals—week-long events with free showings of popular Chinese films for local residents designed to “help the people of Myanmar better understand the philosophy and everyday life of the Chinese people,” according to PRC Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai.²⁰¹ Myanmar state media reported that a variety of films were screened at the 2019 festival, but specifically noted a film “depicting China’s rural development of a poor village becoming a rich and prosperous village.”²⁰²

Figure 23. Chinese film festival posters in Yangon



Source: CRI, “Chinese Movie Theater Opens in Yangon,” ဝေဟာဂျာနယ် ရှုပွင့်” တရုတ် ရုပ်ရှင်ပွဲတော် ကြင်းဆင်းပွဲသမား ရှုပွင့် စတင်, China Radio International - Myanmar, Sept. 18, 2019, accessed Feb. 27, 2020, <http://myanmar.cri.cn/20190918/96ce4f7a-a9d4-f5f7-fa21-16447b6cb8d6.html>.

Ahead of the 2019 Chinese film festival, the China Natural Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)—the state-owned enterprise that operates the natural gas pipelines running from the Kyaukpyu deep-water port on the Bay of Bengal to Yunnan, China—sponsored the construction of a new cineplex in Yangon that screens Chinese film festival offerings and other films.²⁰³ According to local media experts, China also targets audiences in Rakhine state, where the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port is under construction, by offering free Chinese-language lessons.²⁰⁴

Of note, despite Chinese efforts to present a positive image of China to Myanmar audiences, depictions of Chinese characters in Myanmar entertainment broadcasts are not always positive. For example, in *Ot Cha Myak Pauk*, an action movie that deals with issues of sex slavery and human trafficking, the villains are Chinese and Thai mafia figures.²⁰⁵

2.5.3 Promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms

Chinese-owned TikTok has made major inroads into the Myanmar social media environment. According to local media experts, TikTok's popularity has risen dramatically.²⁰⁶ According to a social media statistics tracker, TikTok is the fifth most popular app in Myanmar, coming in after (1) Chinese online shopping app Mooker-online, (2) mobile account app My Ooredoo Myanmar, (3) Korean drama-focused streaming app Vuu, and (4) Facebook.²⁰⁷ As of 2019, both major mobile telecom providers in Myanmar, Ooredoo and Telenor, have official partnerships with TikTok that allow data plan subscribers to use the app.²⁰⁸

3. Assessing the Impact of Chinese Narratives

3.1 Reach and resonance

This report offers an understanding of the variety and scope of Beijing’s efforts to shape the information environment in Myanmar, but should not be viewed as a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of China’s efforts. Such an assessment would require extensive polling data and sentiment analysis that goes beyond the scope of this report and is difficult to conduct during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, during the course of our research, we did identify several factors appear to affect the reach and resonance of PRC narratives in Myanmar. These include the following:

Popular domestic pushback against China’s presence in Myanmar is likely to complicate PRC efforts to shape the media environment and limit the resonance of PRC narratives.

Many citizens in Myanmar have criticized China’s role in ongoing militant clashes in Myanmar’s north and east, China’s consistent ranking as the top destination of human trafficking of Myanmar citizens, and the environmental effects of China’s BRI projects. Both state-run and private media outlets in Myanmar have covered instances of popular anti-Chinese sentiment, which suggests that PRC narratives may not resonate well among domestic audiences in Myanmar. Some examples include the following:

- State-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* published an article in 2016 noting that “China has long exercised strong influence on some of the armed groups such as the Kokang (who are ethnic Chinese), the Wa, and the Kachin that operate along China-Myanmar border regions, [and] have been a source of tension between the two countries.”²⁰⁹ The popular *Mizzima*, *The Irrawaddy*, and *Myanmar Times* have all published reports about local anger towards China over caches of Chinese-made weapons that the Myanmar military continue to seize from “rebel militant” groups in Northern Myanmar.²¹⁰
- The state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* published an op-ed in February 2020 that lamented how “trafficking cases have not declined year by year” and “of the total human trafficking cases in 2018, 75% involved forced marriages [and] by country of destination, 79.61% of cases were related to China.”²¹¹
- The *Myanmar Times*, a private media outlet with nearly 5 million Facebook followers, published an article highlighting Burmese skepticism toward China’s role in its peace process, PRC maritime territorial claims, and the benefits of BRI to Myanmar.²¹²

- Ahead of President Xi’s January 2020 visit, the state-run *Global New Light of Myanmar* published numerous articles describing pushback from environmental activists and parliamentarians against the Myitsone Dam project, a joint venture between the China Power Investment Corporation, Myanmar’s Ministry of Electric Power, and the Asia World Company.²¹³
- *The Irrawaddy*, a formerly exiled Burmese- and English-language publication with the fourth most popular Facebook page in the country (over 13.7 million followers), ran an article describing how 40 civil society organizations had called on Xi Jinping to permanently terminate the suspended Myitsone Dam project. The article warned that the “project threatens the prosperity of the Myanmar people” and “friendly relations between the two countries will deteriorate if the project goes ahead.”²¹⁴

Chinese media is increasingly present, but viewed with skepticism

In July 2020, CNA hosted an online roundtable discussion with local media experts to discuss China’s presence in the Myanmar media environment. During the discussion, several participants acknowledged that PRC state-run media’s presence has grown in recent years, especially online and on Facebook. Participants also noted that this increased presence does not equate to a positive impression of China among the general public in Myanmar. One participant stated, “Myanmar people are suspicious of China.” Another participant tied China’s growing presence in Myanmar’s media environment to PRC efforts to win local support for BRI projects of strategic importance to China. Referring to the Kyaukpyu deep-sea port and Yunnan-Kyaukpyu natural gas pipeline projects, the participant observed that “China’s energy demands and maritime policy have implications for Myanmar and the Burmese people are aware of this.”²¹⁵

Public opinion data show that the Myanmar public’s views of China are mixed. Local news outlets and media experts alike refer to the Myanmar-Chinese relationship as a “love-hate relationship.”²¹⁶ According to a 2020 public opinion survey of 244 Myanmar citizens conducted by ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute and the ASEAN Studies Center, respondents appear more willing to side with China (over the US) if compelled, but are worried about China’s growing influence and are far more interested in learning English than Mandarin.

- In a hypothetical scenario where Myanmar were forced to align itself with either China or the US, 61.5 percent of respondents chose to align with China.²¹⁷
- 73.9 percent of respondents said, “They are worried about China’s growing regional economic influence.”²¹⁸
- When asked which foreign languages are the most useful and beneficial for work and professional development 100 percent of respondents chose English and only 18 percent of the respondents also chose Mandarin (in addition to English).²¹⁹

What can the international community do to support the integrity of Myanmar's information environment?

The Myanmar media professionals and experts suggested ways that the international community could help to support the integrity of Myanmar's information environment. These include the following:

- **Support efforts to promote digital literacy.** The complexity of the modern information environment and the rise of social media can work to the advantage external actors like China. Moreover, disinformation has played a role in worsening internal conflict within Myanmar. Improving digital literacy in Myanmar would help to provide media consumers with the skills to identify and utilize reputable sources of news.
- **Provide financial support to independent media outlets.** Because most people in Myanmar now consume news and information for free online, many media outlets' revenues are down. The COVID-19-induced economic downturn is likely to further exacerbate the financial stresses that smaller, independent media outlets in Myanmar already face. Experts suggested that the international community could provide funding to support local independent media outlets. Reports by the Center for International Media Assistance provide useful resources for international donors looking for effective strategies for supporting independent media.
- **Partner with local media organizations to promote media development.** A 2019 UNESCO report concluded that Myanmar media practitioners should prioritize legal reforms, the right to information, gender and inclusion, and the development of local content promoting peace, democracy, and good governance. To support these local priorities, the international community could work with local media development and training organizations such as the Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI), the Center for Myanmar Media Development (CMMMD), and the Yangon and Mandalay Journalism Schools.

Sources: Discussions with Myanmar media professionals and experts, July 2020; McElhone, Jane Madlyn. *Mapping Media Development in Myanmar*. UNESCO Myanmar Office. 2019. Accessed Jul. 23, 2020. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373111>. The Center for International Media Assistance has published several reports exploring strategies for how to provide effective support for media development, see: <https://www.cima.ned.org/publications/>.

Chinese media lacks credibility. According to local media experts, “Chinese media is unsuccessful because Myanmar is focused on becoming a fully-functioning democracy.” They asked, “How can media from China, which does not have a free press, fit in Myanmar?” Furthermore, experts noted that PRC media mostly appears in state-run outlets in Myanmar, and that this content is clearly recognizable to most Myanmar people as propaganda. One expert said, “Readers recognize Chinese-sponsored content and can differentiate between propaganda and authentic ideas.”²²⁰

“Readers recognize Chinese-sponsored content and can differentiate between propaganda and authentic ideas.”

–Myanmar media expert

However, the COVID-19 pandemic may increase the resonance of pro-China narratives among audiences in Myanmar. According to one local media expert, “This is the right time [during the COVID-19 pandemic] for China to try persuading people in Myanmar” to believe PRC-promoted narratives.²²¹ This suggests that PRC efforts to position China as a key source of COVID-19 support to Myanmar may have had some success engendering goodwill toward Beijing.

3.2 Issues to watch

China has a substantial footprint in Myanmar’s media environment, but it has yet to overtake or crowd out other external sources of news, entertainment, and media-related aid. As China seeks to further its interests in Myanmar, including BRI-related projects such as the CMEC and the development of the Kyaukpyu port, it is likely to continue its efforts to shape Myanmar’s media. Some issues to watch include the following:

- **Evidence that PRC media is taking concrete steps to increase the reach and resonance of content targeted at audiences in Myanmar, including the following:**
 - Increasing joint production of content with local partners in Myanmar
 - Expanding content-sharing agreements with state-run and private outlets
 - Hiring local journalists
 - Developing Burmese-language programs at Chinese universities
 - Reporting on local events in Myanmar that do not involve China
 - Increasing direct radio and television broadcasting from China into Myanmar
- **Opportunistic Chinese investment in Myanmar media outlets.** In recent years, financial strain has forced many Myanmar media outlets to close and has left many others struggling to survive.²²² Local media experts have expressed concern that the

global economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate the financial pressures that local media outlets already face, creating more opportunities for PRC investment.²²³

- ***Coordinated online activity amplifying pro-China narratives in Burmese.*** China has demonstrated a willingness to engage in coordinated inauthentic behavior on social media. Beijing may employ this tactic in Myanmar, where it can take advantage of Facebook's popularity to promote its preferred narratives.
- ***The spread of disinformation by Chinese state-run media.*** Chinese state-run media has engaged in a disinformation campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic.²²⁴ CRI Myanmar's Facebook account, for instance, has posted Burmese-language videos implying that the US military is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. PRC media publication of blatant disinformation targeted at audiences in Myanmar warrants careful monitoring.

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Appendix A: China Radio International on Facebook

China Radio International (CRI) has a noteworthy presence on Facebook in the five Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam). CRI uses Facebook in each of these countries to broadcast content produced by Chinese state media outlets in local languages.

The reach of CRI to Facebook audiences is indicated, by follower numbers, in Table 8.

Table 8. China Radio International on Facebook in the Mekong countries

Country	Facebook account	Followers	Facebook page URL
Cambodia	CCFR Beijing (China-Cambodian Friendship Radio)	1,214,192	facebook.com/ccfrbeijing/
Laos	CRI-FM 93 Vientiane	1,185,992	facebook.com/crifm93/
Myanmar	CRI Myanmar	1,182,951	facebook.com/myanmar.cri/
Thailand	China Face	2,453,364	facebook.com/ChinafacecriThai/
Vietnam	Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc	1,961,314	facebook.com/criviet
Global	China Plus News	20,941,191	facebook.com/chinaplusnews/

Source: Facebook, CNA.

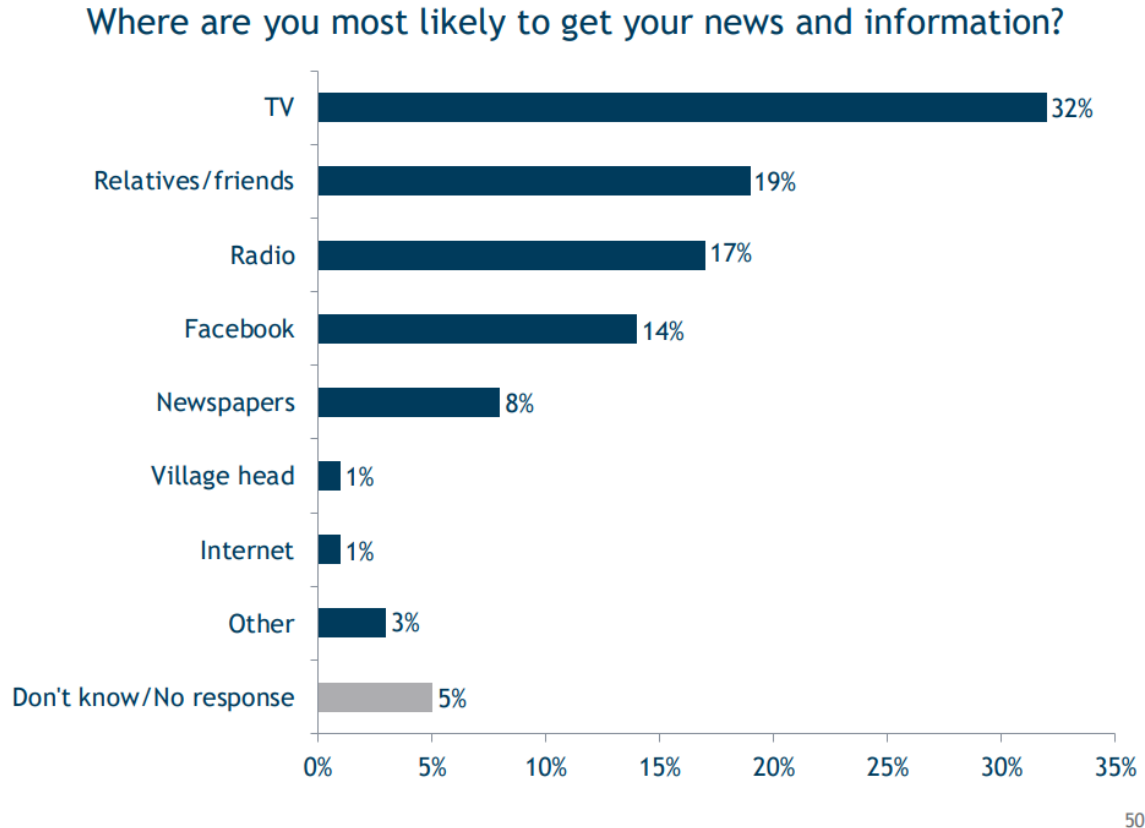
Appendix B: China's Global Narratives

<p>China is peaceful</p>	<p>China portrays itself as an inherently peaceful country that would never intentionally start a conflict.²²⁵</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 nonthreatening • 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."²²⁶</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 antipiracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, and disaster relief.²²⁷</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.²²⁸</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 United States 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.

Appendix C: IRI Public Opinion Poll

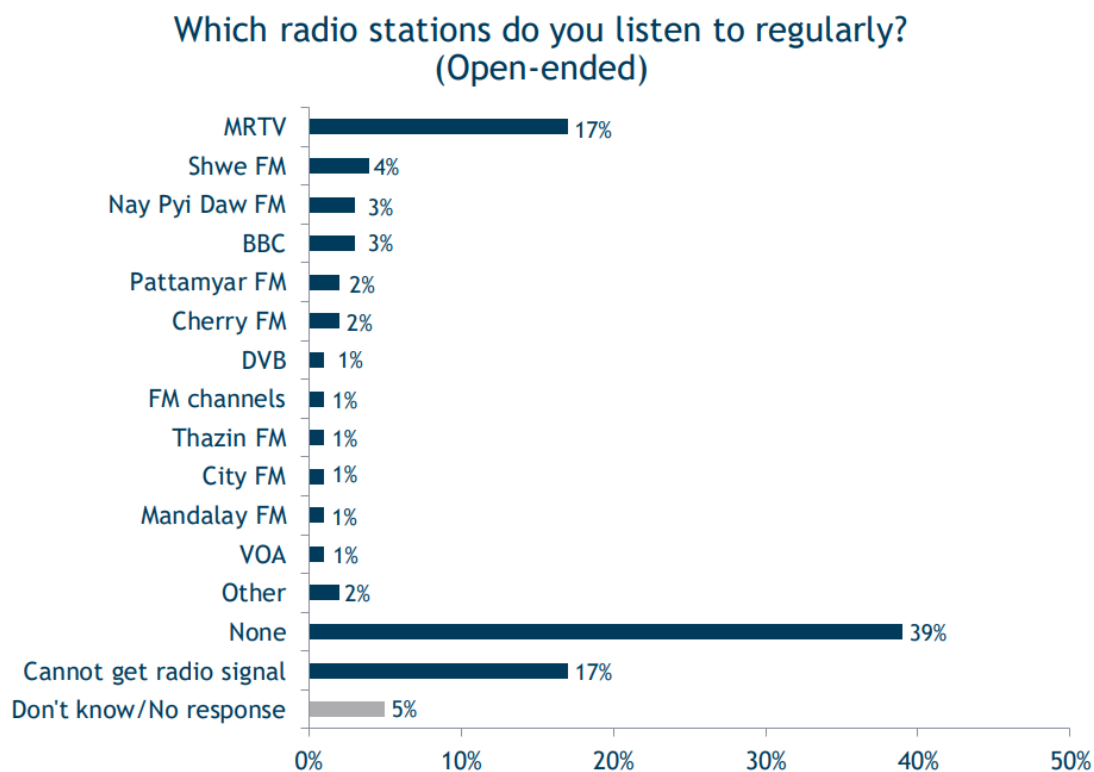
Figure 24. IRI poll of Myanmar audiences “most likely” media for news and information



Source: Center for Insights in Survey Research, *Survey of Burma/Myanmar Public Opinion: March 9 – April 1, 2017*, accessed Jan. 2020, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/8.25.2017_burma_public_poll.pdf.

Note: The Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) is a project funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI).

Figure 25. IRI poll of Myanmar audiences radio stations of preference



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Source: Center for Insights in Survey Research, *Survey of Burma/Myanmar Public Opinion: March 9 – April 1, 2017*, accessed Jan. 2020, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/8.25.2017_burma_public_poll.pdf.

Note: The Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) is a project funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI).

Abbreviations

AP	Associated Press
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANI	Asia News International (India)
ANN	Asia News Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CIMA	Center for International Media Assistance
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CRI	China Radio International
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EAP	East Asia and Pacific
FB	Facebook
FDI	foreign direct investment
ICT	information and communications technology
IMS	International Media Support
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISP	internet service provider
MDN	Myanmar Digital News
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MI	Myanmar International (Radio)
MNTV	Myanmar National TV
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MPC	Myanmar Press Council
MPT	Myanmar Posts & Telecommunications
MRTV	Myanmar Radio and TV
MTC	Ministry of Transport and Communications
NHK	Japan's national broadcasting organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NPE	News and Periodicals Enterprise
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PPEL	Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RFI	Radio France International
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
RSF	Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans Frontières)
RTA	Radio and Television Association
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service (Australia)
SCIO	State Council Information Office guidance
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
VOA	Voice of America

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- ²¹⁵ Roundtable with Myanmar media experts, 2020.
- ²¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²¹⁷ S. M. et al. Tang, *The State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report*, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute and the ASEAN Studies Center, 2020.
- ²¹⁸ *Ibid.*
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- ²²⁰ Roundtable with Myanmar media experts, 2020.
- ²²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²²² McElhone, “The State, the Military, and the Market: Capture in the New Burmese Media Landscape.”
- ²²³ Roundtable with Myanmar media experts, 2020.; “Dying Myanmar Media Face Great Challenges.”
- ²²⁴ Taussig, “The Kremlin’s Disinformation Playbook Goes to Beijing.”
- ²²⁵ For example, China’s 2019 national defense white paper also asserts that China would “never seek hegemony, expansion, or spheres of influence,” arguing that “the Chinese people have suffered from aggression and wars” and “will never inflict such sufferings on any other country.” See “Facebook Pages Stats in Myanmar.”
- ²²⁶ During his speech to the 14th Group of 20 Summit in Osaka, Xi Jinping told other world leaders that “China will work in the spirit of peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation with all other countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind and to tirelessly pursue a brighter future of the global economy.” Gilbert, *World Radio TV Handbook*.
- ²²⁷ Chinese Central Military Commission Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang’s speech at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue offers an example of this narrative. See Liu Hanzun and Sun Haoran, “Chinese Military Always a Force for Peace and Justice,” *Global Times*, October 20, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1167417.shtml>.
- ²²⁸ For example, Chinese officials and media often contrast China’s diplomatic efforts to resolve South China Sea territorial disputes with US military activities in the region. Liu Yang Guo Yuandan, “U.S.

Military Aircraft Carrying Journalists to ‘Make a Show’ over South China Sea Warned, Expert: If They’re Uninvited, Can We Not Shout?,” *Global Times*, August 11, 2018, <http://world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2018-08/12693613.html>. This report was translated into English and posted on the official English-language website of the *PLA Daily*, China Military Online. “Former Defense Spokesman: U.S. Military and CNN Jointly Make Show in S. China Sea,” *China Military Online*, Aug. 13, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-08/13/content_9250952.htm.

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