

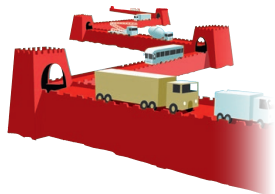


THE CHINA NETWORK

INSIDE CHINA'S GLOBAL MEDIA MISSION IN ASIA, AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA



AN IFJ CHINA PROGRAM REPORT



Contents

2	SUMMARY
3	SURVEY RESPONDENTS
3	THE CHINA CONTEXT
4	COMPARATIVE COUNTRY ANALYSIS
4	Managing Perceptions
5	Journalist Incentives
6	Wolf Warriors and Diplomat Influences
7	Influencing Through Media Funding
8	CASE STUDY: Examining China's infrastructure reach into Africa
9	CASE STUDY: Ethical journalism and editorial independence in the Philippines
10	CGTN's soft power media mission
11	Who's who in media: the major players
11	Pandemic Impacts
12	Vaccine Diplomacy
13	News vs Misinformation
14	RECOMMENDATIONS
14	ABOUT THE IFJ
15	ENDNOTES

THE CHINA NETWORK

INSIDE CHINA'S GLOBAL MEDIA MISSION IN ASIA, AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

MARCH 2022

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
Residence Palace, Bloc C
155 Rue de la Loi
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel- +32 2 235 22 00
Fax- +32 3 235 33 19
Email: ifj@ifj.org
http://www.ifj.org

IFJ Asia Pacific
245 Chalmers Street
Redfern, NSW 2016
Australia
Tel- +61 2 9333 0999
Email: ifj@ifj-asia.org
http://www.ifj.org/regions/asiapacific/

Editor: Jane Worthington
Project consultant:
Danielle Devery
Designed by: LX9 Design
Artwork: Simon Letch

Published IFJ Asia-Pacific
245 Chalmers Street,
Redfern
NSW 2016, Australia
No part of this publication
may be reproduced in any
form without the written
permission of the IFJ. The
contents of this report are
copyrighted and the rights
to use of contributions
rest with the authors
themselves.
IFJ: <http://www.ifj.org>

The IFJ retains full editorial independence on its publications. The views and contents expressed herein are those of the IFJ. This document has been produced with the support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

SUMMARY

In 2018, lawmakers added a feel-good-sounding phrase to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, "community of common destiny for mankind". The concept surfaced in top-level speeches throughout the 2010s, earmarking China's increasingly assertive role in global governance and infrastructure-led economic development. In recent years, China's playbook for expanding influence under the banner of "common destiny" is well known, with tactics ranging from 'soft power' incentive structures to 'wolf warrior' diplomatic brawls played out on the front pages of local newspapers. But how consistent is China's approach, especially against the backdrop of two years of pandemic disruption and a recalibrating global political environment?

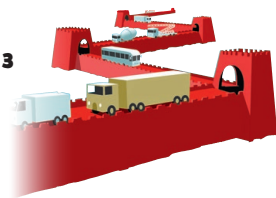
The purpose of this IFJ research project is to understand how the Chinese government and media apparatus attempt to influence the global narrative about China's role and place in the world. Since 2019, IFJ research has been gathered and compiled in collaboration with journalists' unions in countries including Myanmar, Tunisia, Serbia, Italy, Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines. Through a series of surveys, round table discussions, interviews and other types of research, data and information has been gathered to help inform understanding about China's approach to the media and its efforts to shape a global narrative on China before and after Covid-19.¹

Almost two-thirds of IFJ member union respondents said China had a visible presence in their national media and that the most widely reported form of outreach was Chinese-sponsored journalistic exchanges or training schemes.

This is the third IFJ survey measuring China's global media outreach – conducted with IFJ member journalists' unions worldwide. Previous research reports, including *'The China Story: Reshaping the World's Media'*² found escalations in China's decade-long campaign to expand its global media presence. Almost two-thirds of IFJ member union respondents said China had a visible presence in their national media and that the most widely reported form of outreach was Chinese-sponsored journalistic exchanges or training schemes. One third of unions surveyed said they had been approached by, or were in discussion with, Chinese journalism unions or entities, and 14 per cent had registered Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

Another report, *'The Covid-19 Story: Unmasking China's Global Strategy'*³ found that China successfully activated existing media infrastructure networks to disseminate positive narratives globally amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The report was based on findings of an international survey of journalists' unions to explore the impact and influence of China's global outreach strategy on the international media ecosystem.

This report, which surveys working journalists directly in China's high-priority investment and infrastructure locations (Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines), finds evidence that overt ambassadorial gestures and direct pressure on local journalists is not common. On the flip side, attempts to influence international perceptions via 'vaccine diplomacy' and investment in expanding Chinese media networks in international markets appears to be thriving.



SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A total of 418 journalists completed the 2021 survey. Of those, 39% were from Kenya, 34% were from Peru, and 27% were from the Philippines. Most of the journalists who completed the survey were from radio (29%), online (21%), and print (20%) media outlets. Television and multimedia were the least represented with 10% and 13% of all respondents working in these media, respectively (Table 1). The highest proportion of online journalists were represented in the Philippines, consistent with the country's sky-high ranking for internet density. In contrast, Kenya and the Philippines had more radio journalists than any other medium.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents by country and media type.

	Multimedia	Online	Print	Radio	TV	Other
Kenya	12%	10%	23%	34%	20%	1%
Peru	11%	21%	14%	26%	14%	14%
Philippines	16%	34%	20%	23%	6%	1%
Average	13%	21%	20%	29%	10%	6%

Most journalists who completed the survey worked for private media outlets (64%), while 18% worked as freelancers or for public media companies or state news outlets. There was a higher percentage of Kenyan journalists who worked for public media companies or state news outlets (32%, 14% higher than the sample average) (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of respondents by country and organisational affiliation.

	Freelance	Private media outlet	Public or State news outlet
Kenya	13%	54%	32%
Peru	25%	66%	9%
Philippines	16%	75%	9%
Average	18%	64%	18%

THE CHINA CONTEXT

As the Chinese government conducts a global campaign of media influence as part of its broader national strategy of asserting influence internationally, a significant part of Beijing's effort remains focused on developing countries which dovetail with the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the major foreign policy initiative under President Xi Jinping.

Kenya, Peru and the Philippines are each major beneficiaries of Chinese infrastructure investment and development aid programs. The flow of Chinese money, machinery and workers have steadily increased Beijing's presence in these countries over the last decade. Chinese influence is an ever-present topic in political debate during election periods, while political leaders at local and national levels in each country have staked their careers and personal legacies on promises of infrastructure-driven development.

Each country represented in the 2021 IFJ study is known as being a 'traditional ally' of the United States. But a combination of pro-China political leaders, a need for economic growth and foreign investment, and a diminishing US presence in each location has opened the door for the geopolitical balance in each country to tilt towards Beijing – the results of which are also playing out in each country's media.

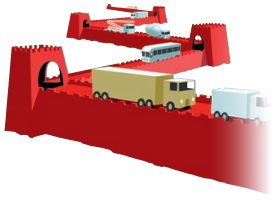
According to domestic trade data, China is the top trading partner for all three countries surveyed for this report. With the exception of Peru, both Kenya and the Philippines run a huge trade deficit with China. Kenya's trade deficit with China is particularly glaring, exporting just US\$150 million worth of goods to China against US\$4.48 billion worth of bilateral imports in 2019. In the case of the Philippines, the value of Chinese imports was roughly three times the export value. As a large exporter of commodities, Peru has a more balanced trade relationship with China, running a sizable surplus with Beijing. The following sub-sections provide brief context on the contemporary bilateral economic and media relationships between China and Peru, the Philippines, and Kenya.

PERU: Mining and media investment

China is Peru's top trading partner, displacing the United States' prime position after a bilateral free trade agreement in 2010. The primary zone for Chinese commercial activity is the country's mining sector. After the UK, companies headquartered in China are now the largest investors in Peru's mining sector, with investments of more than US\$15 billion. Copper ore, refined copper, and iron ore are the leading export commodities. The country's biggest and practically sole iron ore producer is Shougang Hierro Perú, a subsidiary of Shougang Group. The company took control of the former state company Hierro Perú after privatisation in 1993 and produces 98% of Peru's iron today.⁴ Other major players are Aluminum Corporation of China Limited (Chinalco) and Zhongrong Xinda Group.

In 2016, the National Institute of Radio and Television of Peru (IRTP, in Spanish) signed two agreements - with China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, and with CCTV (now CGTN), emphasising joint collaboration in four areas: news exchange; co-production and non-newsworthy content swaps; technological cooperation; and, personnel training. Historically, the Chinese embassy in Lima has maintained close personal relationships with several well-known journalists, including editors-in-chief, television anchors, and opinion leaders, and are active in inviting journalists on free visits to China.⁵ As early as 2012, *Diario Oficial El Peruano*, the state-owned official newspaper, started to publish China specials with up to three paid publications inserted into the newspaper on any given day.

In 2016, the National Institute of Radio and Television of Peru (IRTP, in Spanish) signed two agreements - with China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, and with CCTV (now CGTN), emphasising joint collaboration in four areas: news exchange; co-production and non-newsworthy content swaps; technological cooperation; and, personnel training.



Under their agreement, IRTP has committed to assist CGTN in eventually setting up a permanent “delegation” in Lima, which would encompass a local news bureau and provide a base for executives charged with additional duties. Currently, CGTN’s only presence in Peru is an English-speaking freelance correspondent who reports to CGTN’s English-language news service in Washington DC, and Xinhua employs just five reporters, camera operators and photographers in Lima. The only other official Chinese media outlet in the country is *China Hoy* (China Today), which has been printed by the state-owned publishing corporation *Editora Perú* since 2009 and whose single representative in Peru also organises cultural events on behalf of the Chinese embassy. *China Hoy* has been successful in having op-eds of high-ranking Chinese officials published in the Peruvian press, including *El Comercio*.

THE PHILIPPINES: Building cooperation despite existential tensions

In recent years, the developing Southeast Asian nation has turned to China for much-needed infrastructure investment. The relationship is bumpy: unresolved and existential tensions from the South China Sea dispute continue to bubble in the bilateral compact. The Philippine government took China to the International Court of Arbitration and won a major international legal case over Beijing regarding the South China Sea disputes. However, President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration typically push these considerations down to a secondary position, where the primary interest is attracting billions of dollars of infrastructure capital, aptly named the ‘Build, Build, Build’ scheme. Flagship projects include the Binondo-Intramuros Bridge and a joint venture between the Chinese Communications Construction Company and MacroAsia, a local conglomerate. Additionally, China Telecommunications Corporation owns a 40 per cent stake in Dito Telecommunity Corporation, a revamped telecommunications and IT brand once known as Mindanao Islamic Telephone Company.

China has invested billions of dollars into promoting Chinese language educational exchange, media cooperation and culture. Most notable are ‘China TV Theater’ on the Philippine state-run broadcasting network People’s Television Network (PTV), Chinese entertainment shows aired on ABS-CBN and Global Media Arts (GMA), the two largest Philippine private broadcasting networks, and *Wow China*, a radio program produced through a collaboration between China Radio International and the Philippine Broadcasting Service, airing on the local radio station Radyo Pilipinas since mid-2018.⁶

KENYA: Grand infrastructure projects and media bureaus

Kenya played an early and prominent role in China’s BRI. A flagship BRI endeavour was the upgrading of the Mombasa Port, East Africa’s largest port, and the construction of a standard gauge railway connecting Nairobi to Mombasa. However, Kenya is consistently invoked as an example of the alleged ‘debt-trap’ designs behind very large, Chinese-led infrastructure projects. China is the nation’s biggest foreign creditor after the World Bank.⁷ Despite ongoing difficulty in implementing the nation’s large projects, Chinese capital continues to flow. A massive upgrade to Nairobi’s famously congested road network is now in

motion, with the China Road and Bridge Corporation managing the Nairobi Expressway.

China’s Xinhua News Agency boasts the largest foreign correspondent network in Africa and Xinhua’s regional office was transferred from Paris to Nairobi in 2006 upon realisation that Nairobi could be used as a launching pad into Africa.⁸ Other Chinese media companies based in Nairobi include the China Global Television Network (CGTN) African bureau headquarters, *China Daily*, China Radio International, and *Star Times*. Chinese investment in Kenya’s media industry has created 500 jobs and given many budding journalists opportunities to undertake training in China, according to Joseph Odindo, former editorial director at Kenya’s Nation Media Group (NMG) and Standard Group. The latter received ‘a supplement every fortnight, which would leave them open to publishing Chinese commentaries and other stories’, however this fell through after *The Standard* published an investigative report on Kenya’s SGR railway project funded by China.⁹

COMPARATIVE COUNTRY ANALYSIS

The IFJ research analysis is organised into five themes: perceptions; incentives; diplomats; funding; and, the Covid-19 pandemic. Perceptions reveal the views that local journalists hold of Chinese interests and institutions in their country, while incentives, diplomats, funding and the Covid-19 pandemic offer contextualisation for the perception insights by detailing the tools China typically deploys to shape narratives in domestic media landscapes.

Consistently low influence metrics across Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines indicate that China’s toolkit may be evolving from ‘wolf-warrior’ tactics and fulsome displays of largesse into more direct and investment-heavy initiatives to influence public perception in foreign countries. The form of these initiatives will be discussed in the following section.

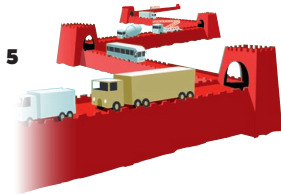
Managing perceptions

“Chinese technology firms, especially Huawei offers incentives like the latest gadgets (cell phones and smart watches) for media reviews. They also acknowledge work done by issuing presents during public or religious holidays like Christmas. This is so common and nothing remarkable at all.”

– KENYAN JOURNALIST

In Kenya and the Philippines, most respondents perceive China to have a ‘visible presence’ in their media (90% and 83%, respectively). This is significantly higher than the percentage of journalists who perceived that China had a visible presence in Peru (50%) (Table 3).

The higher perceived visibility of China in Kenya and the Philippines may relate to a longer timeline of bilateral efforts than in Peru. China’s decade of diversified infrastructure projects in Kenya and historic entanglement with Philippine commerce and society creates a more familiar environment than in Peru, where social and economic ties are relatively new. In the Philippines especially, a large diaspora built over centuries of trading networks has created a Chinese community with its



own press and business associations. These different experiences in trading and diplomatic relations create uneven levels of awareness in each nation’s respective media sector, indicating that Peruvian journalists will need extra capacity building assistance to adequately interpret the risks and opportunities to come with a deepening bilateral relationship.

Table 3: Responses to “Do you think China has a visible presence in your country’s media?”.

	No	Yes	Respondents (n)
Kenya	10%	90%	161
Peru	50%	50%	141
Philippines	17%	83%	110
Average	26%	74%	

Interestingly, when questioned about influence rather than visibility, respondents from the Philippines perceived Chinese influence on their national media as negative, significantly more than those from Peru and Kenya (88% versus 54% and 16%, respectively) (Table 4).

Philippine journalists already operate in a hazardous environment. While the fourth estate is healthily populated and ranked by multiple indexes as one of the freest in Asia, the personal and professional risks are immense. Journalists who speak out against the established government position face credible threats to their physical safety, as well as sophisticated cyber-attacks from the Philippine state itself.¹⁰ When the Philippine government is aligned with the Chinese government, which is generally the case for infrastructure-led development and other economic growth questions, dissenting views are dealt with brutally.

Table 4: Percentage of responses to “How do you see the Chinese influence on your national media?” by country.

	Negative	Positive	Don't know	Respondents (n)
Kenya	16%	49%	35%	162
Peru	54%	46%	0%	78
Philippines	88%	12%	0%	75
Average	53%	36%	12%	

Journalist incentives

“Journalists are enticed by cash rewards and scholarships to study in China. Yet others are accorded trips to China. This lot publishes very positive news on China.”

– FILIPINO JOURNALIST

Until the pandemic, China was well-known for providing junkets, sponsorship, donations and career development opportunities to nurture and expand its reputation around the world. Some of these initiatives were broad and cohort-based, such as the Ministry of Education’s Chinese Bridge Competition, which at its peak, provided lucrative travel experiences and

tuition scholarships to high school students and university students from almost any country; some were more targeted, and involved tactical overtures to professional journalists in the hope of seeding favourable reporting outcomes.

The journalists in this survey had virtually no direct exposure to training or travel oriented incentivisation schemes. Only one of the journalists who completed the survey had participated in a training scheme or trips sponsored by Chinese partners. While anecdotal, the journalist reported that it was not beneficial to them and their journalism. The same journalist also said there were no restrictions on what they could report during or after the trip, but they admitted they did not publish any stories either. In the absence of actual training schemes and trips, tactics to engage with or influence local journalists were present in numerous responses, either as first-hand experiences or second-hand anecdotes.

A small portion of journalists noticed changes in the coverage of China from journalists who have participated in trips sponsored by Chinese partners. This was fairly consistent across the three countries, 6% of Kenyan, 3% of Peruvian, and 5% of Philippine respondents noticed changes (Table 5). One possibility for this result is that tourism and travel-based incentive mechanisms are only marginally effective. Another possibility is that the overarching strategy foresees long-term, rather than short-term, impact. Another is that consistent with China’s Covid-zero policy, all travel programs have evaporated over the last two years. Suggestions of the longer-term approach lie in comments from a Kenyan respondent who said: “The journalist who I interacted with, said he is promised to study postgraduate in China or can pass the chance on to his children. In general, China is pushing to have its narrative and even control the flow of information on platforms in exchange of free content (Xinhua), trips or individual gain”

Table 5: Responses to “Have you noticed changes in coverage of China from other journalists who have made similar trips to China?”.

	No	Yes	Respondents (n)
Kenya	94%	6%	126
Peru	97%	3%	140
Philippines	95%	5%	104
Average	96%	4%	

For short-term impact, responses from a small number of journalists suggest that other incentives are visibly deployed by Chinese actors to achieve positive media coverage. Ten respondents (3% of all respondents) reported that they had seen, or were aware of, colleagues in their country being offered incentives to report a China-related story in a certain way (Table 6). While this is a small number, it indicates that some tactics are in play in each country to manage the flow of information and potentially position Chinese firms and actors in a more flattering light. These results suggest that in a small proportion of cases, state initiatives to influence journalists’ coverage of China may succeed.

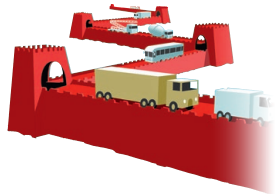


Table 6: Responses to “Have you ever seen or are you aware of colleagues in your country being offered incentives to report a China-related story in a certain way?”.

	No	Yes	Respondents (n)
Kenya	98%	2%	142
Peru	99%	1%	143
Philippines	95%	5%	109
Average	97%	3%	

“The journalist who I interacted with, said he is promised to study postgraduate in China or can pass the chance on to his children. In general, China is pushing to have its narrative and even control the flow of information on platforms in exchange of free content (Xinhua), trips or individual gain”

- KENYAN JOURNALIST

Wolf warriors and diplomatic influences

China’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomats have made headlines in many countries from Asia to Europe for their confrontational styles and unorthodox methods to handle media reporting of ‘sensitive issues’ and China’s grand visions. In Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines – all countries of geostrategic significance and highly relevant nodes on China’s global network of infrastructure development and investment – there appears to be little effort by the diplomatic missions to influence or even engage local journalists.

Jonathan de Santos, chairperson of IFJ affiliate *National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP)*, said that the Chinese Embassy in Manila appears to have ‘pruned its media contact list’ noting the last press release NUJP had received from them was in early 2021. ‘I am no longer invited to Embassy events and briefings...although this may also be because of safety protocols because of the pandemic,’ de Santos said.

Fewer than 1 in 14 (7% of all respondents) survey respondents had been invited to or attended press conferences held by the Chinese embassy in their country, only 2% of Peruvian respondents (Table 7).

Table 7: Responses to “Have you been invited or attended press conferences held by the Chinese embassy in your country?”.

	No	Yes	Respondents (n)
Kenya	88%	12%	162
Peru	98%	2%	143
Philippines	93%	7%	108
Average	93%	7%	

Biographic data suggests that Beijing’s lack of diplomatic engagement with local journalists is not a function of low bilateral importance of each country. According to the table below, Beijing’s most recent diplomatic appointments signal that Peru, the Philippines, and Kenya are still getting the nation’s top diplomats. The Ambassador to the Philippines, Huang Xilian, is one of China’s rising diplomatic stars, the Ambassador to Peru, Liang Yu, is an area specialist, and the Ambassador to Kenya, Zhou Pingjian, is a mid-career official. In Kenya, Zhou Pingjian replaced Wu Peng in June 2020, who was only one year into a typically three-year term. The appointments indicate that the Philippines has the most senior and politically significant ambassador out of the trio, as inferred from roles at the two top embassies – the United States of America, and Pakistan, China’s largest embassy.

The low journalist engagement rates by China’s diplomatic missions in all three countries suggests the embassies are scaling down local journalist engagement as they pursue other strategies.

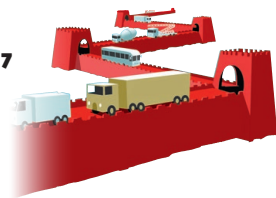
Embassies may have reduced their local media engagement, but cases of direct public criticism remain. Interestingly, 16 survey respondents from Kenya (10%) reported that their publication had been criticised by Chinese officials in their country, slightly higher than respondents from the Philippines (7, 6%) and Peru (3, 2%) (Table 8).

Criticism is usually transmitted by the Chinese ambassador in a speech, or in defensive opinion pieces in local media. The NUJP told the IFJ that although reactions to some stories are conveyed directly to upper management of media houses, some stories are also labelled as fake news or as stories intended to “create hatred and Sinophobia.” In other cases, government officials in the Philippines have taken positions similar to the Chinese Embassy. Members of NUJP have seen journalists scolded for their reports, such as coverage of the West Philippine Sea.

In Kenya, the source of current criticism is often Chinese frustrations over the positioning of the standard gauge railway project (famously characterised as ‘the railway to nowhere’), financing problems and the ‘debt-trap’ narrative, labour conditions on Chinese projects and China’s perceived intentions with the BRI. As an example, in 2018, as international criticism on the incentives and impact of the BRI reached a fever pitch, the then Ambassador in Nairobi published a curt opinion piece in local newspaper *The Daily Nation*, ‘No traps, prejudice in Belt and Road’¹¹ which stated:

“(Some people are too critical to be objective”. They label it as ‘not abiding by the rules’ when it does not accord with their double standard. They deem it as ‘discrimination and prejudice’ even if there is just some misunderstanding. And they claim that there is a ‘debt trap’ when they just see the word ‘loan’ . . . May I ask those who are full of anxiety and doubts: What could you bring to these countries and how could you help them out? The answer seems like as what an Asian economist puts it: ‘NATO’ (No Action, Talk Only)!”

Data from embassy public releases in 2021 shows Chinese diplomats have been active and eager to assert a softer, more collaborative role, with a focus on educational outreach about China’s history or its climate credentials as well as donations of vaccines.



Meet the wolf warriors




	Peru	The Philippines	Kenya
People's Republic of China Ambassador	Liang Yu 	Huang Xilian 	Zhou Pingjian 
Year Appointed	2019	2019	2020
Biography	<p>Director, Latin American & Caribbean Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006)</p> <p>Deputy Director, Foreign Affairs Bureau, General Office of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference (2010-2012)</p> <p>Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Bolivia (2017-2019)</p>	<p>Bachelor's degree from China's famed diplomatic training ground, Beijing Foreign Studies University & Masters, University of Manchester</p> <p>Former Political Counsellor in the United States of America (2008-2010) and Pakistan (2010-2012)</p> <p>Deputy Director-General, Department of Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014-2018)</p> <p>Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN (2018-2019)</p>	<p>Deputy Director, Africa Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Nigeria (2016-2018)</p>

Table 8: Responses to “Have you or your publication been criticised by Chinese officials in your country?”.

	No	Yes	Respondents (n)
Kenya	90%	10%	160
Peru	98%	2%	143
Philippines	94%	6%	110
Average	94%	6%	

This was particularly notable in Peru with the ambassador taking to media on several occasions in 2021. In one article in Peru's *El Peruano* newspaper, Liang Yu talked about development prioritisation, openness and tolerance as being “the true colours of China-Latin America co-operation” and how that co-operation to the people-centred principle conforms to the people's will. The activities of the Kenyan embassy have dropped sharply since 2019, which is likely due to the change in personnel at the ambassadorial level.

Influencing through media funding

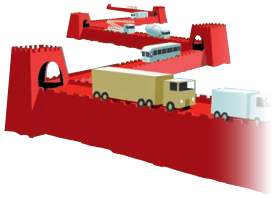
Chinese ownership and financial support to the media sector is a growing area of Chinese influence in Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines as evidenced with 5% of Philippine journalists and 16% of Kenyan journalists reporting their own media organisation is supported or funded by Chinese money. In most cases, ‘support’ traditionally looks like opportunities to individual journalists. However, as Beijing professionalises and invests more heavily into

The KUJ acknowledges that even though there has been a perceived ‘lull’ in media engagements over the past two years of the pandemic, Chinese media agencies are still active in Kenya, especially Xinhua that feeds local media with news.

the internationalisation of the Chinese media sector, investments, acquisitions, and strategic partnerships, countries like Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines are highly likely to increase in intensity.

Erick Odour, the secretary general of IFJ affiliate Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ), says that Chinese interests in Kenya continue to grow and now are focused on real estate. He notes particular ‘large-scale Chinese investment in construction of high rise residential buildings in upmarket parts in Nairobi and in the outskirts of the city’ and believes Kenya will see more Chinese involvement in the media to protect these investments in the real estate sector. The KUJ acknowledges that even though there has been a perceived ‘lull’ in media engagements over the past two years of the pandemic, Chinese media agencies are still active in Kenya, especially Xinhua that feeds local media with news.

In Kenya, 26 respondents (16%) reported that their media organisation was supported in some way by Chinese interests, which was much higher than Peru and the Philippines (2% and 5%, respectively). The support takes many different forms including monetary support, training programs, equipment and technical support, and content partnerships. Numerous respondents were aware of how support is given, either through direct or anecdotal experience. One respondent noted, “the Chinese government has supported my media organisation in acquisition of equipment e.g. transmitters.”



Another noted sponsored content: “My media house prints *China Daily* for circulation in East Africa region. My newspaper also carries sponsored content from Chinese publication.” Finally, one respondent observed a more comprehensive mix of support: “1. Training of producers. 2. Installation of equipment and upgrades especially technical aspects. 3. Providing us with content. Drama and documentary. 4. Advertising hence revenue earnings.”

Odour attests China is still using soft power to win over the trust of the Kenyan media and the public, as the report noted, by engaging state agencies and senior editors to push through its agenda.

While this mix of support was most vivid in the Kenya data, one respondent in the Philippines had a similar level of awareness of support channels at their news organisation: “Our publication literally has a China counterpart. Monetary support!”

As a journalist with firsthand-experience wrote in *Foreign Policy*,¹² large companies like the Nation Media Group in Kenya are eager to court Chinese collaboration opportunities to offer exclusive seminars and junkets to their employees but this can come at a price. A column written by the journalist discussing the persecution of more than 1 million Uighur Muslims in China’s Xinjiang province was subsequently spiked and his weekly column on neglected people around the world was cancelled. He wrote: “Given the ownership structure of *Independent Media*, with Chinese state-linked firms holding a 20 percent stake¹³, I understood when I wrote the column that it might rattle the *high-ups*. I didn’t expect the exorcism to be so immediate and so obvious. I had, it would appear, veered into a non-negotiable arena that struck at the very heart of China’s propaganda efforts in Africa.”

The output of these partnerships are positive stories of Sino-Kenyan collaboration in Chinese media, such as the *People’s*

CASE STUDY: Examining China’s infrastructure reach into Africa

Fact-checking in the public interest

KENYAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS (KUJ)

China has invested heavily in major infrastructure projects in Kenya with the Nairobi Expressway being the major ongoing construction work funded by the Asian giant. The China-financed four-lane dual carriageway, which is nearing completion, will run 27km through Kenya’s capital and beyond and provide passage to an estimated 85% of cargo destined for neighbouring landlocked countries like Uganda, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. While it is being promoted as a solution to the city’s chronic congestion, others argue it is only a road for those able to afford it. Either way, it is an important story.

However, laying bare the contracts for such huge infrastructure projects in Kenya and how they are raising public debts owed to China are key matters of concern for the public and the media. A lack of transparency has led to speculation and misinformation spreading online, about the costs and repercussions of such projects on taxpayers, who could be forced to surrender some of the country’s most valuable national assets which have been rumoured to have been used as collateral for the country’s loans from China.

The Standard Gauge Railway which connects the coastal town of Mombasa and the capital Nairobi is a case in point – as project costs kept rising, yet the agreement between Kenya and the Chinese government is yet to be made public. This secrecy generated a national debate around the possible seizure of the country’s major port in Mombasa if the debt is not paid and was a result of ‘unverified news’ claiming the port could be used as collateral for the Chinese loans.

Under the IFJ’s China program, the Kenyan Union of Journalists (KUJ) ran a crucial training session for journalists on fact-checking, with Chinese influence on Kenya as the focus. The training focused on giving participants the necessary tools to flag out misinformation and boost their capacity to remain professional while covering China’s interests and huge infrastructure projects being funded in Kenya.

Journalists at the workshop raised issues with operation of the railway, which is being supported by taxpayers, despite a

To deal with misinformation and national anxiety around Kenya losing its major assets, the KUJ has urged the members to use fact-checking tools to help identify unverified news on China, especially on the numerous investment projects rolling out in Kenya.

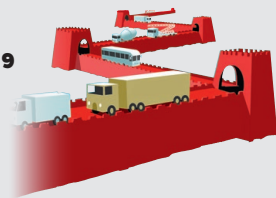
Chinese company managing ticketing and levying charges on cargo transportation from Mombasa to Nairobi. The media continues to report on the operations of the railway and ongoing efforts by the Kenyan government to take over its operations and management to reduce running costs - and the growing burden on the taxpayer.

To deal with misinformation and national anxiety around Kenya losing its major assets, the KUJ has urged the members to use fact-checking tools to help identify unverified news on China, especially on the numerous investment projects rolling out in Kenya.

Participants in the KUJ workshops agreed that the training was eye opening and will go a long way to improve the quality of their reports and skills in flagging information that is misleading.

Out of this work, it was agreed that KUJ should conduct its own study on Chinese interests and impact on the Kenyan media for the purposes of documenting reporting over the past decade, including huge infrastructure projects funded by the Chinese government in Kenya. It is hoped that such a study could delve into the extent to which China’s influence has penetrated the Kenyan media, while also examining some of the content that Chinese representatives have flagged as being ‘offensive to Beijing’.

This work has been mainly about understanding the tools that can be used by journalists to verify the authenticity of news, not necessarily about China but news in the public interest. •



CASE STUDY: Ethical journalism and editorial independence

A hedge on 'soft power'

NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS, PHILIPPINES (NUJP)

Even before the 2016 national elections that installed Rodrigo Duterte as president, journalists in the Philippines had already noticed increased levels of Chinese engagement — with both government and the country's media. While this has continued through the Duterte administration, it has not been seen to directly affect media workers.

The key in the course of journalists' work, however, is the difficulty of getting information on government policies on China projects and details of any deals and agreements.

As the Philippine government pursued a foreign policy to foster warmer relations with China and other non-traditional allies like Russia, it has tended to dispute reports and discredit media coverage of infrastructure and development loans as well as of policies in the West Philippine Sea — the part of the South China Sea within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and continental shelf.

In 2019, President Duterte announced he had entered into a verbal agreement with China on fishing in disputed waters. At the time, the Palace advised the agreement was confidential and binding, but by 2021, it said that there was no such arrangement.

Although some amount of secrecy is understandable in issues related to national territory and foreign relations, the lack of transparency has made scrutiny of projects difficult.

The Philippine government has also, at times, directly accused journalists of trying to undermine relations between the Philippines and China in their reports. For example, a July 2021 report on Chinese ships dumping sewage in the waters off the Spratly Islands was dismissed by China's embassy and by the Philippines' foreign affairs and defense ministers as "fake news". As one of the major archipelagos in the South China Sea (which complicates governance and economics), the Spratlys are strategic shipping lanes for the region and home to rich fishing grounds.

The same month, the Palace spokesperson called out a BBC producer over a story on fishing boats trying to enter Scarborough (Panatag) Shoal – a disputed territory claimed by the Philippines – and claimed, over a live news briefing, that the reporter was trying to embarrass the government with the report.

Given the ongoing issues over the West Philippine Sea and anxiety over the coronavirus, disinformation researchers have logged a tendency for reporters — possibly in response to the government's friendly relations with Beijing — to lapse into racism and Sinophobia. Some politicians have helped fan anti-Chinese sentiment as a political talking point in the run-up to the 2019 elections, while too many in the media have helped spread these in their reports and stories.

The pandemic saw an increase in news reports about bad behavior by Chinese nationals as well as racist stereotyping such as reports that Chinese nationals in the Philippines were eating bats and spreading the virus. This, alongside distrust for Chinese vaccines and test kits, added to the anxiety of readers and viewers in a country where citizens of Chinese descent have historically been mistrusted.

While skepticism and critical reporting about the government's dealings with China is expected of journalists – as with its dealings with other foreign governments – falling into racism has come too easily for some.

Guidelines for media workers

In this context and against the backdrop of the upcoming national elections in May, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) set out to prepare a brief primer for journalists covering issues related to China and its engagement with the Philippines.

The guidelines, which are available for download from the NUJP website, have been distributed by email to newsrooms in the Philippines, seeking to help journalists as they navigate reporting on China and on Chinese-funded projects. They are intended to help guide journalists to take a professional journalism approach; without simply amplifying the government's narrative or creating sensationalist reportage on China-related issues that sows seeds of Sinophobia with audiences. On this issue, the guidelines advise: "Filipinos have a long history of cultural exchange with the Chinese and while frustration over sovereignty and sovereign rights is understandable, this is no excuse for racism and racist speech."

The guidelines also seek to remind journalists of a more fundamental need to amplify the voices of marginal communities who may be more directly affected by infrastructure projects. For example, Chinese loans are funding dam projects in the Philippines and it is important for journalists to look into how these will affect the communities living in the project sites, as well as those who will pay for the funding of those projects through taxes.

The key themes addressed in the guidelines for journalists include:

- ★ Promoting transparency and accountability
- ★ Giving editorial space to marginalised sectors
- ★ Avoiding racist reporting
- ★ Maintaining editorial independence
- ★ Reporting on the West Philippines Sea issue

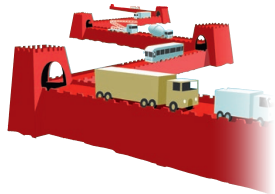
While NUJP and the journalism community have seen increased Chinese media engagement through reporting trips and training programs, these efforts have generally been coured through individual newsrooms and practitioners. To date, the union has not seen a need to amend policies or its constitution to address these practices as yet.

Decisions on partnerships and projects are put through the union's executive committee and its board of directors and continue to be evaluated according to the same standards as other partnerships — though possibly even more stringently in cases of engagement through the Chinese Embassy.

NUJP recognises that 'soft power' campaigns pose challenges to editorial independence and fair coverage but also accepts that these programs give Filipino journalists training and travel opportunities that a resource-strapped media industry might not be able to offer. A balance must be struck.

The best approach then as the union sees it, would be for capacity-building and training that promotes ethical journalism and editorial independence in the Philippines in the face of increased engagement with China.

Read the NUJP's "Guidelines on Reporting China" at:
<https://nujp.org/guidelines-on-reporting-on-china/>



Daily. One example from 2019 features a journalist for *The Nation* (part of the Nation Media Group) who writes enthusiastically about the growth and development opportunities Chinese investment in Kenya has provided: “The railway line has continued the good feeling in Kenya that has existed since the end of the colonial administration, despite some people being swayed by Western opinion that the government made a mistake in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Beijing to execute the goals of the BRI. One thing those chastising Kenya’s decision fail to comprehend is that since the project was completed, the country has welcomed more investment, and since bilateral ties between Kenya and China have deepened, the country has welcomed many Chinese tourists, with Kenya Airways opening a direct flight from Nairobi to Guangzhou.”¹⁴

This result is interesting given the relatively low perception from Kenyan respondents that Chinese influence on their national media is negative (16% versus 88% for the Philippines and 54% for Peru). It suggests that organisational support may reduce negative perceptions of Chinese influence on the national media.

Out of the three locations, Kenya is likely the country that Beijing has been the most sustained at driving partnerships and nurturing networks in the local media landscape. What began as a relatively gentle approach has evolved into what some commentators call an “aggressive, methodical, and well-funded” attempt to deepen engagement and influence.¹⁵ For example, Xinhua opened a bureau in Kenya as early as 1986, which upgraded into the African regional headquarters in 2006, China Radio International opened an office in 2006, CGTN in 2012, and China Daily in 2013. This suggests the Chinese state media see Kenya as a nationally and regionally significant node for disseminating their narrative.

A plausible strategy for Chinese-led media influence efforts in the near future is through driving and owning the narrative on well-resourced, Chinese-owned media platforms. For example, in 2019, CCTV announced the launch of China Media Group’s Asia-Africa Language Program Center.¹⁶ The initiative dedicates entire work departments to local language media, with the overarching

CGTN’s soft power media mission

The efforts of CGTN, a much-emphasised part of China’s soft power mission, has only established itself in one of the surveyed countries: Kenya.

Kenya is likely the most straightforward media market to enter, with a lively and competitive local scene (compared to the family-run conglomerates in Peru and the state-owned structures in the Philippines). Kenya’s double role as a regional headquarters for CGTN’s Africa-wide content adds to its value proposition.

The implication of these uneven local market dynamics is that Chinese media is more likely to rely on partnerships and licensing agreements in Peru and the Philippines rather than entering as a wholly owned new player. The table below shows that CGTN is yet to enter the market in Peru or the Philippines. In the Philippines, CGTN will face competition from a well-established media operator: CNN Philippines, a locally-owned entity operating under a licensing agreement with Turner Broadcasting Corporation, a US media conglomerate part of WarnerMedia.²²

A spotlight on the organisation and responsibilities of China’s state-run media reveals a vast ecosystem with increasingly political leadership appointments. CGTN, known inside China as CCTV, infamously operates with line management and resourcing from the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Propaganda Department, as does China Radio International, Xinhua, and the People’s Daily.²³ The Propaganda Department operates as the administrative arm of the government.

Understanding the career trajectories and ambitions of key leaders is crucial for making realistic predictions on the path of Chinese media organisations overseas. The leadership of China Media Group (previously known as CCTV) is a coveted position, with career progression into ministerial-level leadership and Politburo appointments a logical next step.

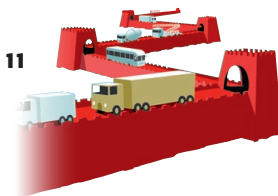
The politicisation of the role is a relatively new trend: the appointment of immediate past CCTV President (2015-2018), Nie Chenxi, broke almost 30 years of tradition by appointing a politician rather than a senior journalist.

	Kenya Population: 54m	Peru Population: 33m	Philippines Population: 111m
CNN	CNN Africa 700k followers	No presence	CNN Philippines 5.5m followers
CGTN	CGTN Africa 4.5m followers	No presence	No presence

Power by Facebook: Contrasting CGTN and CNN influence on the social media giant.

A spotlight on the organisation and responsibilities of China’s state-run media reveals a vast ecosystem with increasingly political leadership appointments.

Steering China’s contemporary state media ecosystem today is an intensely political pursuit. It is no surprise that the CMG’s President now enters the role with experience in provincial and/or national publicity and propaganda departments. CMG’s current President, Shen Haixiong, took up the position directly from his tenure as chair of the propaganda department in Guangdong, China’s populous southern province and home of megacities Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Nie Chenxi is now the party secretary and director of the powerful National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and vice-minister of the CCP Central Committee’s Publicity Department. In his current role at the NRTA, Nie serves not only as the media regulator, but as the shaper of content and direction, ensuring alignment to the ideology of the party. Evidently, CMG is a crucial player in these efforts, and any internationalisation strategy will be very closely designed and monitored by China’s senior politicians. •



WHO'S WHO IN MEDIA: THE MAJOR PLAYERS

	KENYA	PERU	PHILIPPINES
MEDIA GROUPS	Nation Media Group Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) (state-owned)	Grupo El Comercio Grupo La Republica Grupo ATV Instituto de Radio y Televisión del Perú and Empresa Peruana de Servicios Editoriales (state-owned)	ABS-CBN Group GMA Network TV5
PRINT MEDIA	The Nation The Standard	Grupo El Comercio	Philippine Daily Inquirer Inquirer Libre The Philippine Star Manila Bulletin Manila Times
RADIO	173 licensed stations in 2019, many broadcast in local languages other than English or Swahili Full-time FM relays of the BBC World Service are on the air in Nairobi (93.9), Mombasa (93.9) and Kisumu (88.1).	Corporación Radial del Perú (Zavala family) RPP Group (Delgado Natchigall family) Corporación Universal (Capuñay family)	Radio Philippines Network (now CNN Philippines) DZBB (Owned by GMA Network) Manila Broadcasting Company (DZRH) Radyo ng Bayan (state-owned)
TELEVISION	Citizen TV	América Televisión-Canal 4 (El Comercio and La República) Latina-Canal 2 (Enfoca) ATV-Canal 9 (Ángel Gonzalez)	People's Television Network Incorporated (PTNI) (state-owned) The Intercontinental Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) (state-owned) GMA Network TV5

goal of raising public awareness of China in Asia and Africa, namely to “hear, see and understand China in the new era”. A work-group with local language capability is dedicated to serving the Philippines market.¹⁷ This is an especially potent tool for the projection of China’s media narrative and soft power when there is a relative lack of interest in Western coverage of African issues.

An overview of each country’s local media landscape, however, reveals that China’s moves in the domain of owning or backing local operations will be a complicated process. Kenya’s media scene across print, television, and radio is competitive, while Peru’s media remains dominated by powerful, family-owned conglomerates. In the Philippines, the media industry is mostly dominated by conglomerates although government media has been gaining influence, mostly through social media channels. Some ‘block-time’ and content-sharing arrangements have also amplified government messaging.¹⁸

Pandemic impacts

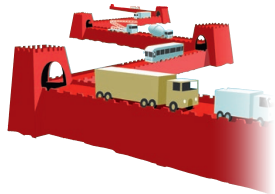
China’s efforts to directly influence public perception via local media channels is clearly evolving. In some cases, China appears to be retreating, swapping more ostentatious gestures for subtle tactics. However, efforts to position China as a good global citizen throughout the pandemic, especially in the

The IFJ’s research indicated that Peru has received the lion’s share of embassy-distributed aid and pandemic support compared with the Philippines and Kenya.

global South, indicates that Beijing still values influence and is willing to make large investments into vaccine diplomacy.

Globally, Covid-19 triggered an uptick in negative media coverage about China due to speculation about the origins of the pandemic. Chinese public officials, including diplomats, are now countering with a range of initiatives, including strategic communications about China’s success in managing the virus, displays of generosity through donations of personal protective equipment, testing kits, vaccines and support to public health infrastructure. The IFJ’s research indicated that Peru has received the lion’s share of embassy-distributed aid and pandemic support compared with the Philippines and Kenya.

Zuliana Lainez Otero, president of the *National Association of Journalists of Peru* (ANP), highlighted the significance of a Sinopharm vaccine incident which clearly demonstrated the influence of China on Peru’s media. Lainez relayed ‘there was a strange vaccination scandal involving politicians and officials, among others, and the Chinese Embassy in Lima was



clearly responsible as it had irregularly registered a batch of vaccines and refused, until recently, to reveal the recipients of the particular batch of vaccines.' The silence of many media platforms on the issue was stark, she said. The journalist leader believes there was a decision not to implicate Chinese diplomats in Peru in the scandal, despite the facts.

State-owned enterprises and private companies are also running their own aid-styled efforts, providing public health and logistics support to their extensive in-country workforces. In Africa in particular, technology giants such as Huawei and Tencent are investing heavily in public good projects. As foreshadowed by Wu Peng, former Ambassador to Kenya and now head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of African Affairs, Chinese enterprises are transitioning from "going to Africa" to "taking root in Africa"¹⁹, and co-operation throughout the toughest challenges of the pandemic is a priority.

News vs misinformation

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, around 1 in 3 survey respondents noticed more coverage on China. Interestingly, a relatively high percentage of respondents from the Philippines reported that the government has been disseminating news of Chinese origin (46% compared to 17% for Peru, and 9% for Kenya). This could indicate that large Chinese media organisations are making more efforts to produce content for international syndication. The data from Kenya shows this trend is not unique to the Philippines, 52% of Kenyan respondents reported that there was

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, around 1 in 3 survey respondents noticed more coverage on China.

Vaccine diplomacy

In the Philippines, Sinovac is the leading vaccine supplier, with over 54 million doses in-country as of November 2021 (next was Pfizer at nearly 35 million, and AstraZeneca at 16 million).²⁴ In Peru, Sinopharm was the first vaccine deployed in the country²⁵, but there are greater numbers of Pfizer and AstraZeneca. In Kenya, the vaccination rate remains below 10%, with an equal distribution of vaccines on offer.²⁶

But is the charm offensive working on media workers?

Survey respondents from the Philippines perceived that local media coverage of China was more negative since the Covid outbreak (53%), this was much higher than Kenya (31%) and Peru (38%). Negative local media coverage in the Philippines could be due to the government's own tardy response to the virus and perceived prioritisation of Chinese partners over its own people: "Despite the Philippine government's full accommodation of China, Beijing has yet to deliver on promised aid and investments worth billions of dollars."²⁷

As Southeast Asia scrambled to prepare for the first waves of the virus in early 2020, the Philippines announced a donation of 1.4 million face masks to Wuhan, and sold over 3 million masks to China later that month.²⁸ Two months later, the Philippines were handling domestic shortages of personal protective equipment and mitigating the fallout from faulty Chinese testing kits.

In Kenya, which had the lowest percentage of negative China coverage generally, respondents reported the highest rates of "Covid-19 cover-up" as the leading China narrative.²⁹ For the Philippines, which reported the highest volume of negative China stories, the "Covid-19 cover-up" narrative was the lowest out of the three countries (34% as compared to 45% for Peru and 53% for Kenya). These findings indicate that negative stories about China are not necessarily linked to China's role as the likely origin of the virus, suggesting infrastructure, aid and investments stories are a higher priority.

Table 11: Responses to "How has China's coverage of your country changed since the Covid outbreak?"

	More negative	No change	More positive	Respondents (n)
Kenya	31%	40%	29%	163
Peru	38%	39%	23%	142
Philippines	53%	25%	23%	110
Average	41%	34%	25%	

Table 12: Percentage of responses to "What is the dominant narrative in your national media around China's response to Covid 19?"

	China's cover-up of the initial outbreak is the reason for the global nature of the outbreak	China's fast action against Covid 19 has helped other countries as has its medical diplomacy	Both or neither	Respondents (n)
Kenya	53%	27%	20%	163
Peru	45%	25%	31%	143
Philippines	34%	20%	46%	111
Average	44%	24%	32%	

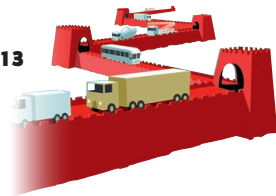


Table 13: Responses to “What kind of changes have you seen regarding China’s media coverage in your country since the Covid outbreak? (as many as applicable)” by country.

	Kenya	Peru	Philippines	Average
More coverage on China	32%	34%	33%	33%
My government has been disseminating news of Chinese origin	9%	17%	46%	24%
More misinformation likely coming from Chinese sources	17%	25%	27%	23%
More news emanating from Chinese sources, i.e. Xinhua in its domestic media	52%	26%	37%	38%
More opinion articles by Chinese officials	8%	10%	14%	10%
Other	6%	8%	4%	6%

more news emanating from Chinese sources, such as Xinhua, in its domestic media (compared to 26% for Peru and 37% for the Philippines) (Table 13).

Almost 1 in 4 respondents reported that since Covid there was more misinformation ‘likely coming from Chinese sources’. Journalists believed the Philippines’ relatively high perception of Chinese misinformation is potentially linked to multiple findings of large-scale sophisticated influence and information operations taking place on Philippine social media, driven by Chinese teams.

In September 2020, Meta (Facebook) reported the removal of two separate disinformation networks, one in China, and one in the Philippines, that violated the platform’s policy against foreign or government interference.²⁰ Meta announced, “We removed 155 accounts, 11 Pages, 9 Groups and 6 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against foreign or government interference which is ‘coordinated inauthentic behaviour’ on behalf of a foreign or government entity. This activity originated in China and focused primarily on the Philippines and Southeast Asia more broadly, and also on the United States.”

The investigation uncovered a network of accounts that promoted pro-Beijing narratives on the South China Sea and Hong Kong, supported Duterte, and seeded belligerent criticism of Rappler (an independent and investigative news media organisation). In the report, Meta noted the Chinese network was based in Fujian Province, an eastern province situated directly opposite Taiwan. While the report stopped short of linking the network to China’s vast state security infrastructure, the location is telling. Fujian Province is famously saturated with government listening posts and is an intense site of intelligence-gathering activity, owing to its proximity to Taiwan.

The fragility of the Philippines’ digital platforms and vulnerability to privately-funded and state-backed disinformation operations is receiving intense and escalating attention.²¹ This activity is likely to escalate with accelerating fervour in the lead up to the general election in May 2022. A more detailed post-mortem of Meta’s findings, and a comprehensive review of other examples of recent coordinated inauthentic behaviour, will be helpful to arm journalists in-country with an up-to-date guide for navigating an increasingly fractious information environment.

“We removed 155 accounts, 11 Pages, 9 Groups and 6 Instagram accounts for violating our policy against foreign or government interference ... this activity originated in China ...”

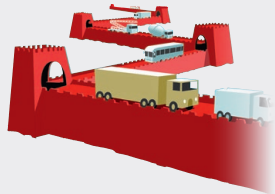
– META (FACEBOOK)

CONCLUSION

Media engagement and influence is not a new strategy. It remains a popular tool deployed by many major powers globally. But compared to its international peers, China’s approach is idiosyncratic and subject to unpredictable pivots. For journalists and media workers, this fast-changing approach by China presents critical professional challenges.

The task of assessing the potential risks and channels of influence is one that requires closer evaluation by journalists, the unions that represent them, the media outlets that employ them and also governments in understanding and navigating media ownership, power and impacts.

China’s grand strategy may be a moving feast, but it can be made sense of through a thoughtful assessment of policy signals from Beijing. The governance structure of China’s sprawling and well-funded media sector creates a hierarchy of highly visible leaders who are incentivised to make regular public comments. The highest-level signals on China’s international media push will be articulated by Xi Jinping, but the statements of key leaders like Shen Haixiong and Nie Chenxi require close and careful review to understand precisely how and why China intends to nurture influence in Kenya, Peru, the Philippines and countries like them.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA

The IFJ research shows that China's ambitions and approach in Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines are going through significant shifts. As older influence tactics give way to new methods, the IFJ believes journalists must be supported to identify and mitigate risks intended to influence or pervert professional and ethical journalism.

★ **Develop a country-specific resource list for journalists on China's government policies on media internationalisation.** China operates on a 'call and response' system of signals transmitted from the highest levels of power, regularly in the public domain. Media and journalist unions can provide members updates on statements issued from key Central Committee officials and Ministry of Foreign Affairs leaders.

★ **Deepen research on China's media-sector leaders.** The statements of leaders of entities such as the China Media Group, and its regulator, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) are frequently released into the public domain and provide a clear insight into the future directions of China's evolving public relations machine, including future efforts to internationalise its media apparatus.

★ **Build capacity for local media to investigate and discuss organised foreign influence and misinformation campaigns in targeted countries of influence.** Journalists are becoming increasingly aware of massive information and influence campaigns run on social media platforms, especially

in the Philippines. These campaigns, which in some cases are state-linked or state-adjacent, can adversely affect the integrity of local news and actively target local journalists. Significant efforts should go into building widespread digital literacy to diagnose fraudulent or misleading content in the local media landscape.

★ **Exchange of journalist national experiences in regional dialogues.** Journalists and their representative organisations should discuss and share experiences on changing media influences and impacts and develop collective responses.

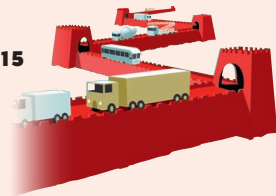
★ **Production of training, workshops and practical, actionable guides.** The IFJ research reveals that the modes of Chinese media influence are diversifying. Rather than collapsing all strategies under the banner of 'Chinese influence', journalists should receive briefings on how the incentives and tactics will differ between diplomats, officials, company executives and investors.

★ **Mentoring advice to local journalists.** As more and more career opportunities emerge in Kenya, Peru, and the Philippines to work for Chinese media organisations, including state-run media, journalist organisations have a role to play to provide targeted advice to journalists to more accurately assess and manage the risks, benefits, opportunities and challenges of working for Chinese media and organising workers within Chinese media operations. ■

ABOUT THE IFJ

The IFJ, the world's largest organisation of journalists, represents 600,000 media professionals from 187 trade unions and associations in more than 140 countries. Established in 1926, the IFJ is the organisation that speaks for journalists within the United Nations system and within the international trade union movement. First established as the Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ) in 1926 in Paris, the IFJ:

- ★ Organises collective action to support journalists' unions in their fight for fair pay, decent working conditions and in defence of their labour rights.
- ★ Promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free, and independent trade unions of journalists.
- ★ Fights for gender equality in all its structures, policies, and programmes.
- ★ Opposes discrimination of all kinds and condemns the use of media as propaganda or to promote intolerance and conflict.
- ★ Believes in freedom of political and cultural expression.
- ★ Does not subscribe to any given political viewpoint, but promotes collective action to defend human rights, democracy, and media pluralism.
- ★ The IFJ supports journalists and their unions whenever they are fighting for their industrial and professional rights.



ENDNOTES

- 1 The research proposal was submitted to the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee for approval, the Committee was satisfied that the project met the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australia). All participating bodies were affiliates of the IFJ and were offered the option of anonymity in order that they might speak more freely. The survey was delivered to respondents online via Survey Monkey. Participants in Kenya and the Philippines received the survey in English, Peruvian respondents received the survey in Spanish.
- 2 Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, *The China Story: Reshaping the World's Media*, The IFJ, June 2020, https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IFJ_Report_2020_-_The_China_Story.pdf
- 3 Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, *The Covid-19 Story: Unmasking China's Global Strategy*, The IFJ, March 2020, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/publications/article/the-covid-19-story-unmasking-chinas-global-strategy.html>
- 4 Bnamericas, *Major Peru mining projects advancing*, October 2021, <https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/major-peru-mining-projects-advancing>
- 5 Juan Pablo Cardenal, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, National Endowment for Democracy, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Chapter3-Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Peru.pdf>
- 6 Jason Hung, *China's Soft Power Grows in the Philippines*, *The Diplomat*, February 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/chinas-soft-power-grows-in-the-philippines/>
- 7 David Herbling, *Kenya Resumes China Debt Repayment with \$761 million*, *Bloomberg*, August 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-31/kenya-resumes-china-debt-repayment-with-761-million-remittance>
- 8 Chrispin Mwakideu, *Experts Warn of China's Growing Media Influence in Africa*, *DW*, January 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/experts-warn-of-chinas-growing-media-influence-in-africa/a-56385420>
- 9 Chrispin Mwakideu, *Experts Warn of China's Growing Media Influence in Africa*, *DW*, January 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/experts-warn-of-chinas-growing-media-influence-in-africa/a-56385420>
- 10 Danilo Araña Arao, *Press Freedom is No Joke in the Philippines*, *East Asia Forum*, November 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/11/07/press-freedom-is-no-joke-in-the-philippines/>
- 11 H.E. Sun Baohong, *No Traps, Prejudice in Belt and Road*, *Daily Nation*, August 2018, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceke/eng/zkgx/sbjw/t1582606.htm>
- 12 Azad Essa, *China is Buying African Media's Silence*, *Foreign Policy*, September 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/14/china-is-buying-african-medias-silence/>
- 13 James Myburgh, *How Independent is Independent Media?*, *politicsweb*, December 2015, <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/how-independent-is-independent-media>
- 14 Victor Onyango, *BRI a Catalyst for Kenya's Infrastructure and Industrialization*, *People's Daily Online*, April 2019, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/0422/c90000-9570695.html>
- 15 Gerrit Wiesmann, Joseph Odindo on *China's Influence on African Media*, *MERICs*, January 2021, <https://merics.org/en/interview/joseph-odindo-chinas-influence-african-media>
- 16 Tian Hong, *Establishment of the Head Office of the Asia and Africa Language Program Center*, *CCTV*, August 2019, <http://www.cctv.com/2019/08/02/ARTIZfrIU6sSG7P7AhwCvdAv190802.shtml>
- 17 Tian Hong, *Establishment of the Head Office of the Asia and Africa Language Program Center*, *CCTV*, August 2019, <http://www.cctv.com/2019/08/02/ARTIZfrIU6sSG7P7AhwCvdAv190802.shtml>
- 18 Gaby Baizas and Pauline Macaraeg, *Quiboloy's SMNI Fuels Disinformation, Online Attacks on Gov't Critics*, *Rappler*, February 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/technology/social-media/apollo-quiboloy-sonshine-media-network-disinformation-attacks-government-critics/>
- 19 China Africa Business Council, *Market Power and Role of the Private Sector: Chinese Investment in Africa*, August 2021, <http://enimg.cabc.org.cn/uploads/2021/08/30/1630295758.pdf>
- 20 Nathaniel Gleicher, *Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour*, *Meta*, September 2020, <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/09/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-china-philippines/>
- 21 Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Vincent A Cabanes, *Architects of Network Disinformation*, *The Newton*, 2018, <http://newtontechfordev.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Architects-of-Networked-Disinformation-Executive-Summary-Final.pdf>; Anastasia Kapetas, *Southeast Asia on the Forefront of Disinformation for Profit and Power*, *The Strategist*, May 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/southeast-asia-on-the-forefront-of-disinformation-for-profit-and-power/>; Scott W. Harold, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media*, *RAND Corporation*, 2021, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z3.html
- 22 *Media Ownership Monitor*, *CNN Philippines*, accessed February 2022, <https://philippines.mom-rsf.org/en/media/detail/outlet/cnn-philippines/>
- 23 Wang Xiaowei, *Unveiling of the China Media Group*, *Xinhua* (via *Wenming*), April 2018, http://www.wenming.cn/bwzx/dt/201804/t20180419_4660236.shtml
- 24 Statista, *Number of coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine doses that arrived in the Philippines as of January 26, 2022*, by brand, February 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1244046/philippines-coronavirus-covid19-vaccines-by-brand/>
- 25 canalN, *COVID-19: Primer lote de 300 mil vacunas de Sinopharm llegó al Perú*, February 2021, <https://canaln.pe/actualidad/vacunas-peru-este-domingo-llegan-primeras-dosis-contracovid-19-n431046>
- 26 Google News, *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Kenya*, accessed February 2022, <https://news.google.com/covid19/map?hl=en-AU&state=7&mid=%2Fm%2F019rg5&gl=AU&ceid=AU%3Aen>
- 27 Sheena A. Valenzuela, *"Diplomacy" with China Made the Philippines a COVID-19 Hotspot in Southeast Asia*, *East-West Center*, December 2020, [https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/"diplomacy"-china-made-the-philippines-covid-19-hotspot-in-southeast-asia](https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/)
- 28 Sheena A. Valenzuela, *"Diplomacy" with China Made the Philippines a COVID-19 Hotspot in Southeast Asia*, *East-West Center*, December 2020, [https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/"diplomacy"-china-made-the-philippines-covid-19-hotspot-in-southeast-asia](https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/)
- 29 'Covid-19 cover-up' refers to the unproven narrative that the pandemic was a direct result from a 'lab leak' in Wuhan, China, and has been deliberately covered up by authorities.