



# **THE CHINA STORY: RESHAPING THE WORLD'S MEDIA**

---



IFJ RESEARCH REPORT ON CHINA AND ITS IMPACT ON MEDIA 2020

# Contents

2

SUMMARY

3

INTRODUCTION

3

JOURNALISM EXCHANGES AND TRAINING SCHEMES

4

UNION COOPERATION

5

MEDIA CONTENT SHARING AGREEMENTS

5

CASE STUDY: MYANMAR

6

CASE STUDY: PHILIPPINES

6

SPRUIKING THE BELT & ROAD PLAN

6

MEDIA PRESENCE & ACQUISITIONS

7

CASE STUDY: KENYA

8

CONCLUSION

8

RECOMMENDATIONS

## SUMMARY

A global survey of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) affiliate unions and journalist representative associations indicates the wide-ranging impact of China’s moves to extend its influence through global journalism unions and individual journalists. Beijing’s decade-long campaign to boost its global media presence seems to be escalating with almost two-thirds of respondents assessing China as having a visible presence in their national media.

The most widely reported form of Chinese outreach was journalistic exchanges, with half the unions surveyed saying journalists from their countries had participated in exchanges or training schemes sponsored by Chinese entities. Overwhelmingly these were described as a positive experience. One-third of the unions surveyed said they had been approached by, or were in discussion with, Chinese journalism unions or entities, and 38 per cent of those — 14 per cent of the total —had registered Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

*The most widely reported form of Chinese outreach was journalistic exchanges, with half the unions surveyed saying journalists from their countries had participated in exchanges or training schemes sponsored by Chinese entities.*

This is one part of Beijing’s attempts to embed itself in global news ecosystems and build its discourse power beyond its borders, but it reveals a sophisticated and systematic strategy to ‘tell China’s story well’. Its success is such that some unions are now raising concerns that their governments could import China’s media model wholesale. While there is a clear focus on countries involved in China’s grand infrastructure scheme, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing’s strategy shows clear signs of targeting journalists in developing countries with ineffective<sup>1</sup> or repressive<sup>2</sup> governments. Unions also described a recent emphasis on organizing Chinese tours for Muslim journalists, even from non-Muslim countries, with some being taken to the northwestern province of Xinjiang, where at least one million Uighurs are reported to be in political indoctrination camps, in an attempt to sway the global narrative.

A total of 58 journalism unions from 58 different countries and territories participated in the survey between September and October 2019 to gauge the extent of China’s global media outreach. All participating bodies were affiliates of the IFJ and were offered the option of anonymity in order that they might speak more freely. Data was collected across six regions including Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America and MENA which comprises the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Due to insufficient data,

this report will not draw any statistical conclusions on North America and MENA regions. In three countries – Kenya, the Philippines and Myanmar – journalists also participated in roundtable discussions to build a more detailed picture of the contours of Chinese outreach in their national media space.

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first such study measuring China’s global media outreach by surveying journalism unions worldwide. In 2009, Beijing spent USD 6.6 billion strengthening its global media presence, and this survey paints a more granular picture of how that international outreach effort is being implemented across the globe a decade later. The survey illustrates how China’s media is increasing its global footprint through cooperation agreements with global journalism unions, content-sharing deals and training programs that bring foreign journalists to China. The content shared includes Chinese language classes, cinematic films and documentaries, and Chinese-language soap operas dubbed into local languages. Survey responses also illustrate the ways in which Chinese entities are purchasing stakes in or setting up joint media ventures, including digital media outlets, in developing countries<sup>3</sup>. Trends show that China is conducting a media outreach campaign in almost every continent, equally targeting<sup>4</sup> the 31 developed and 27 developing countries that participated in the survey. Affiliates who received approaches from Chinese entities included unions in strategically important countries such as Kenya with its population of 49 million, as well as smaller countries such as Guinea-Bissau with its population of just 1.8 million. The level of involvement differs, with China showing a greater focus on larger nations<sup>5</sup> in all areas except for journalist exchange and content-sharing agreements, where the attention was roughly the same regardless of country size.

When asked whether China had a visible presence in their countries’ media, the unions and associations from larger countries were more likely to reply affirmatively; 74 per cent of respondents from big countries and 54 per cent from small countries confirmed a visible presence. No definition for ‘visibility’ was given, but the clear message is that China is playing a bigger role in media outside its own borders, whether that be through boosting Chinese state-owned media overseas, investing in or acquiring local news outlets or through increasing Chinese media input into local news organisations. Survey responses showed more Chinese activity over MOUs and media acquisitions in larger countries<sup>6</sup>.

*Trends show that China is conducting a media outreach campaign in almost every continent, equally targeting the 31 developed and 27 developing countries that participated in the survey.*

But the significant level of support offered to Guinea-Bissau shows the sophistication of China’s strategy. There the People’s Republic of China is seen as the largest funder of media companies, and Chinese support includes tangible help such as the donation of computers and tape recorders to the journalism union, as well as educational aid in the form of training programs for journalists. Almost half of all respondents – 44 per cent – said China’s role in their national media was positive, although some respondents expressed concerns about the increasing role of Chinese propaganda in the media ecosystems of their own countries.

## JOURNALISM EXCHANGES AND TRAINING SCHEMES

*“It was like a field trip just to show the good parts. It’s very impressive.”*

One surprising finding was the popularity and frequency of Chinese journalism exchanges and training schemes. Half the respondents indicated that journalists from their countries had been on sponsored trips or exchanges to China. These ranged in length from two weeks to ten months and were often themed to showcase one particular aspect of China, such as its economic progress, the modernity of its new cities or its technological prowess.

Analysis of the survey data showed that these trips overwhelmingly targeted developing countries with ineffective or repressive governments. In some countries, journalists from one political orientation are targeted, for example one Latin American nation reported that more than 50 journalists, mostly from leftist publications, had traveled to China for up to two months. Against the backdrop of Chinese accusations that global journalists have been brainwashed by Western values of journalism, these training schemes are designed to offer journalists with an alternative model of journalism to rival the tradition of the fourth estate.

Respondents overwhelmingly found these trips to be a positive experience. Three-quarters of those who reported such

### TELLING CHINA’S STORY: RESHAPING THE WORLD’S MEDIA

JUNE 2020

**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

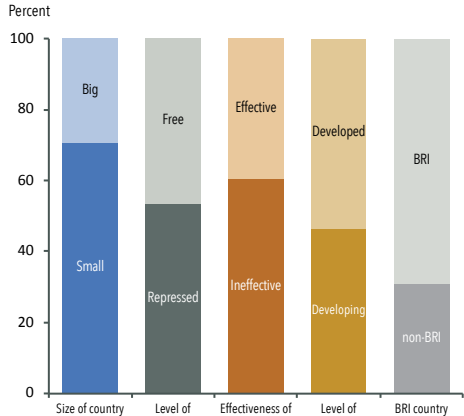
**IFJ Asia Pacific**  
245 Chalmers Street  
Redfern, NSW 2016 Australia  
Tel- +61 2 9333 0999  
Fax- +61 2 9333 0933  
Email: ifj@ifj-asia.org  
http://www.ifj.org/regions/asiapacific/

**Authors: Louisa Lim & Julia Bergin**  
**Editor: Jane Worthington**  
**Research consultant: Johan Lindberg**  
**Project consultant: Bryce Hartley**  
**Designed by: LX9 Design**  
**Artwork: Simon Letch**  
Published IFJ Asia-Pacific  
245 Chalmers Street,  
Redfern NSW 2016, Australia

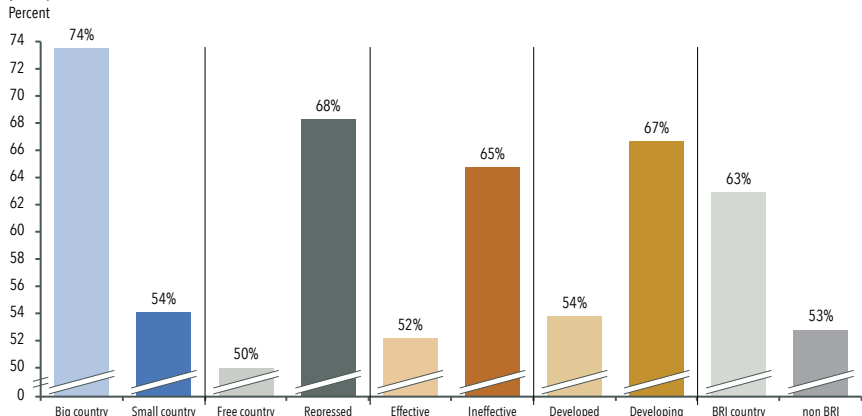
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the IFJ. The contents of this report are copyrighted and the rights to use of contributions rest with the authors themselves.

IFJ: <http://www.ifj.org>

Share of 58 countries that fall into each category (2019)



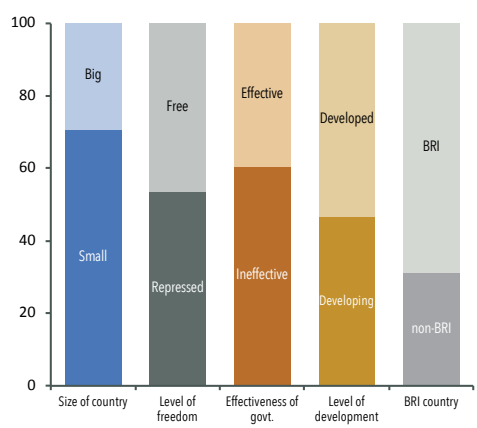
Q1: Percent of countries where China has a visible media presence, shown by category (2019)







Share of 58 countries that fall into each category (2019)  
Percent



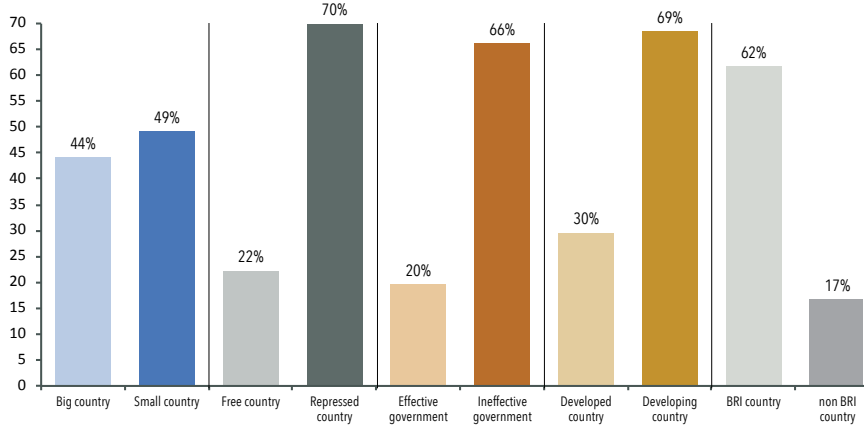
schemes in their countries believed them to be beneficial to their national media. Many commented on how well-organised and impressive the trips had been, noting the high levels of expenditure approvingly.

Several of the survey respondents and roundtable participants remarked on a recent Chinese interest in Muslim journalists. In some countries, the Chinese embassy has sought out journalists working for Islamic media, organising special media trips to showcase Xinjiang as a travel destination and an economic success story. One clear focus from the articles produced by journalists on these trips is to accuse the Western media of propagating “fake stories” about Xinjiang. These trips are designed to redirect attention from Western media reports of up to 1 million Uighurs being held in political indoctrination camps in the province. Entrepreneurs with large business interests in China have also acted as proxies by inviting senior journalists on trips to Xinjiang and introducing them to provincial leaders.

At the same time as targeting developing countries, Beijing also continues to make sustained efforts to offer sponsored trips to China for senior journalists from strategic developed countries. In Australia, the All China Journalist Association (ACJA) has organized a number of different programs including a partnership with the Australian China Relations Institute (ACRI) at University of Technology Sydney that has brought at least 28 Australian journalists to China since 2016. A collaboration with the Walkley Foundation for Journalism has led to two separate journalist trips to China in 2016 and 2018. The Australian Embassy in Beijing and the Melbourne Press Club have also run exchanges involving more than 50 Chinese and Australian journalists through the Asia Pacific Journalism Centre since 2013. These ‘look-and-learn’ trips to Beijing for many of Australia’s most influential journalists and editors have the capacity to tilt editorial and opinion coverage in respected publications.

The results have, in many cases, produced stories that faithfully echo Beijing’s position on issues ranging from the South China Sea to technological developments in China. For example, in July 2016 a piece written by an Australian journalist on an ACJA study tour, warned Canberra to ‘tread carefully’ on its stance of the South China Sea. Glenda Korporaal wrote in the Australian, “It would be naive to think the highly sensitive South China Sea issue could not spill over into potential damage in our economic interests. Particularly if Australia were to be goaded into action, such as speaking out even louder on the issue.” These views, which echo China’s talking points, are being repeated by many journalists from different countries, effectively changing the public opinion landscape towards China through local media.

Q5: Percent of countries with journalists that have taken part in Chinese-sponsored training schemes, shown by country type (2019)  
Percent



## UNION COOPERATION

**“There is nothing much with engagement with them. It is all about program exchanges, and visits, and training.”**

The survey data makes it clear just how extensive Chinese outreach campaigns have been to global journalism unions, with 36 per cent of respondents reporting they had been approached by a Chinese entity to sign an MOU, and 14 per cent of respondents having signed an agreement. This included two countries in Asia Pacific, three in Africa and three in Europe. Signing MOUs with journalism unions is classic United Front strategy, a Chinese Communist Party tactic to coopt entities traditionally perceived as hostile or neutral.

The approaches often originate from the ACJA, which is a state-run body rather than an independent trade union. Sometimes journalist unions sign MOUs with the Xinhua News agency, or the National Radio and Television Administration, though these may focus on content sharing rather than journalist exchanges.

The content of such agreements is often protected by non-disclosure agreements, so there is very little transparency. But details shared with the IFJ indicate that the agreements signed with the ACJA often centre around journalistic exchanges between the two countries, encouraging the development of training programs and cooperation between journalism schools. They may specify the number of journalists in each delegation and the length of time they should spend in-country, as well as listing activities such as that they should conduct joint interviews and reporting projects.

In some cases, the journalistic union is required to take an active part in Chinese fora, such as the Belt and Road Forum of Journalistic Organisations. Digital outreach forms the focus of other MOUs, with Chinese entities asking their partners to organize events in-country, gathering bloggers together for networking opportunities and publicising Chinese-owned digital platforms.

In Africa, 42 per cent of journalism unions reported Chinese approaches. Of these eight countries, three have now signed agreements. 33 per cent of countries in Asia were approached but only 16 per cent reported the existence of an agreement. In Latin America, 16 per cent of countries have been approached or in discussion with Chinese journalist unions or entities, but no MOUs have been signed. While 55 per cent of European respondents reported Chinese approaches, the Europeans also signalled strong resistance to cooperation with the Chinese media. This is likely due to a long-established press, a tradition of

independence and widely-held liberal democratic values.

In the Philippines, the Philippine government’s own presidential communications team, the Presidential Communications Operation Office (PCOO), signed an MOU with China’s National Radio and Television Administration in 2019. Among the fields of cooperation was “news exchange, program production, technology R&D, industrial development and human resources construction”. But this has led to widespread concern that Beijing is successfully exerting influence over the Filipino presidential communications team.

## MEDIA CONTENT SHARING AGREEMENTS

**“There was a time, out of ten stories, six were from Xinhua.”**

More than a-third of the respondents reported that content-sharing agreements with Chinese outlets were in place in their countries. In some cases, Chinese state media content, such as Xinhua stories or CGTN footage, is offered for free, while in other cases companies are paid to carry advertising supplements. Such content is sometimes badged as generated by Chinese state-run media, but the sourcing was often less obvious on radio and television with many national news agencies and broadcasters using CCTV or CGTN footage without attribution. A response from the Afghan IFJ affiliate highlighted the extent of this cooperation in Afghanistan, where Xinhua News Agency has reportedly signed contracts with 25 to 30 Afghan media outlets including Rasad news agency, *Kabul Times*, 1TV, Saba TV, Aftab TV and Afghanistan TV.

China’s international television station – CGTN – shares programming with stations ranging from the state-owned GRTS in Gambia to Somalia’s National Television. CGTN news is broadcast every day on Afghanistan’s main news channel, and other channels carry Chinese state-approved non-news programming including Chinese language lessons and Chinese movies. This is also the case with the StarTimes satellite network in Africa, which runs a large variety of non-news Chinese content. These are designed to showcase China as a culturally rich and technologically advanced country, with the strategic intent of tipping the balance of positive to negative content and drowning out unfavourable political coverage.

Chinese-produced news content is also often positive and constructive, as befits the Chinese model, and to some Kenyan journalists who have become accustomed to Western journalism that focusses on African catastrophes, this has proved attractive. “One thing I like about Xinhua [is] most of their stories are positive,” a Kenyan journalist commented, “They have the best development and business stories and even analysis by Xinhua. You can find them even going to interview a tomato farmer in Nyandarua. It even inspires you to go into tomato farming.”

Respondents also report that some local news outlets share resources and co-create content with Chinese partners. One example is a partnership between Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and China Radio International sharing radio studios and programs. There are three Chinese-owned global radio networks, including G&E Studio in the US, Global CAMG headquartered in Australia and GBMC via Gbtimes in Finland, which follow the same co-creation model<sup>8</sup>. The *China Daily* is also printed across the globe and distributed as an insert by local newspapers.

Despite the lower amounts of reported influence, six European nations have content sharing agreements with Chinese-state media and four of these host Chinese purchased media or



## CASE STUDY: MYANMAR

**“I have been to China nine times.”**

Each of the nine journalists present at a Myanmar roundtable discussion had been on at least two sponsored tours to China, and one had visited China nine times. While the reporters had been impressed by the outlay of expenditure, they were skeptical that Beijing’s largesse would influence their reporting. “They treated us like students,” was one comment, while another journalist remarked, “They just kept talking about how strong Myanmar and China’s bilateral relations are, but the fact of the matter is that’s not true on the ground.”

China is a major backer of Myanmar diplomatically, economically and militarily, and has in recent years escalated its media outreach campaign in the country. The turning point was in 2011 when Myanmar suspended the construction of the Chinese-funded Myitsone hydroelectric dam, for environmental reasons. After this, Beijing escalated its media outreach in Myanmar, presumably to achieve strategic objectives.

This has not gone unnoticed by Myanmar’s journalists. One commented, “China always invited Myanmar media to their country only when they have a controversy with other countries and want to know if Myanmar media stand with them. At that time, South China Sea controversy was on fire.” More recently, the emphasis has shifted to positive publicity for China’s BRI.

China has directly funded a number of Burmese media companies include Mingalar magazine and the Pauk Phaw newspaper, which is published by the Dehong local government in neighbouring Yunnan province. The latter also has a content-sharing agreement with Myitkyina News Journal. This shows how bilateral agreements are being struck on national, provincial and local levels, creating a network of ties at every level of government. Similarly, the Myanmar Journalists Association (MJA) has signed MOUs with both the Yunnan Journalist Association (YJA) and the ACJA.

Content from Chinese state-run radio regularly runs on Myanmar International Radio. But China’s outreach in Myanmar does not stop at news content, it has attempted to push Chinese propaganda through other platforms including putting messages in Myanmarese health-and-wellness Facebook groups and running Chinese film festivals along the route of the Shwe gas pipeline. These are operated by the state-owned China National Petroleum Corp and organized by the company of Chinese-Australia businessman, Tommy Jiang, who started CAMG Myanmar Cherry 89.3FM in 2014. The journalists who participated in the roundtable had no doubts about Beijing’s long-term goals in their country, with one saying, “They set a solid long-term plan to influence Myanmar through media as well as other sectors. If Myanmar is not fully aware of that, we will definitely be in China’s hand in fifty or sixty years.”





## CASE STUDY: PHILIPPINES

***“It is a phenomenon that nobody can stop.”***

Since President Rodrigo Duterte took power in 2016, Beijing has built close ties with the PCOO, which oversees the state-run PTV4, Philippine News Agency and Philippine Information Agency. Many staff have taken part in educational schemes, sponsored trips and fellowships in China, often for months at a time. In the journalistic community, there's a consensus view that this training is having an impact. “The way they write their stories now, they reflect the way how Xinhua or how the state media in China is writing their stories,” one journalist said, “It's normally propaganda.” Another commented, “Instead of getting insights on journalism from free countries like the US, UK, Western Europe and even Japan, they are learning state control.”

Given the skeptical reception among a press that has a tradition of independence, some journalists voiced suspicions that Beijing's ultimate aim was to influence the Filipino government itself. “I don't think there is a great intent to influence local media, I think the one they are trying to influence is the government,” one journalist concluded. Given the Duterte government's hostility to the media, they feared it might be tempted to import China's media model wholesale. “If our government picks up the Chinese line and says this is also our line, that's our problem,” one journalist commented.

This is already starting to play out in the partnership between China's National Radio and Television Administration and the PCOO which one journalist described as producing “brazen propaganda and even disinformation”. In 2017, PNA even reposted a Xinhua op-ed which criticized as “ill-founded” the Permanent Court of Arbitration's decision in July 2016 to side with the Philippines against China over contested areas of the South China Sea. “If our government media has been influenced in such a way that it cannot even filter what they carry... it's basically co-opted,” one journalist concluded.

There is a cooperation agreement between the flagship government television network People's TV and CGTN, and in 2017 PTV started simulcasting CGTN programs, after PTV staff visited CGTN facilities in China. In 2018, PTV co-produced a BRI special working with Chinese and Laotian staff.

China now dominates the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines with more media members than any other country. One journalist remarked that this stunning expansion offered the ideal opportunity to engage more fully with individual Chinese journalists and try to educate them on Western journalistic norms. However, some Filipino journalists expressed fears that the Chinese media was being used as a surveillance and research tool by Beijing; one noted that the Chinese media were already investigating presidential candidates for the 2022 election. “They like Duterte,” the reporter said, “I think China is making sure that the next president would have the same mindset.”

The close links between the Chinese embassy and key daily papers like the Manila Bulletin and the Manila Times was another cause for concern. Reporters commented on the embassy's intense level of activity, remarking that it is extremely active in sending out press releases and inviting local journalists to events.

China's outreach is even targeting local and community papers, with their journalists being taken on impressive trips to China to visit high-tech zones and state-of-the-art factories. One journalist remarked that the Mindanao media, where the population is predominantly Muslim, were taken to Xinjiang, where they mainly wrote stories about the province's natural beauty, as well as “stories praising China for cracking down on terrorists.” The journalists were worried that Beijing's momentum in the media sector was now unstoppable.

joint media ventures – the highest regional concentration of ownership. In Portugal for example, the two oldest newspapers, *Diário de Notícias* and *Jornal de Notícias*, TSF radio station, *O Jogo* sports newspaper, and other magazines are all owned by Chinese-state, Global Media Group.

## SPRUIKING THE BELT AND ROAD

***“Connecting nations, bridges, airports, to them it's a primary top-of-the-line priority. For the first time now, you're seeing journalists covering connectivity and Belt and Road.”***

One grand motivation is to create more positive coverage of China's global infrastructure scheme, the BRI. Almost 70 per cent of respondents were from countries that are signatories to the scheme. Africa was the most well-subscribed, where only three of the 19 respondents were from non-signatory countries. In the Asia Pacific region, where three-quarters of the respondents were from BRI signatories, the efforts to amplify a message appear to revolve heavily around BRI objectives. In particular, Sri Lanka reported China had aggressively intervened to influence the government decisions on Chinese-backed infrastructure projects.

Journalists from BRI countries can take advantage of special training schemes which offer ten months of journalism education at elite Chinese institutions, at the same time as being able to conduct reporting inside China, although the reporting is heavily organized and monitored by state-run bodies. Of the 29 countries that participated in training programs, 26 of these were BRI nations.

One example of how positive messages surrounding BRI can be channeled through visiting journalists can be seen through a trip by Australian journalists in July 2016. A number of very senior business journalists published very favourable coverage of China's BRI scheme, echoing Chinese talking points. Ross Gittins, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* urged Australian companies to take part, “There is scope, however, for Australian banks and other financial institutions to help facilitate the funding of infrastructure projects.” If not, he warned, other countries would be pleased to profit, writing, “Not to worry. There are Japanese and South Korean firms who'll be happy to eat the Chinese lunch we don't fancy<sup>9</sup>.”

## MEDIA PRESENCE AND ACQUISITIONS

***“Not only physical presence in numbers, they are buying a lot of media outfits.”***

Overall almost two-thirds of respondents reported a ‘visible’ Chinese media presence in their country. This takes on different forms in different countries, showing a tailored approach towards China's overseas media presence. Beijing's strategy whereby state-approved propaganda is diffused into existing systems is known as ‘borrowing a boat to reach the ocean’. Survey responses show that Chinese companies are more and more ‘buying boats’ or ‘building’ them by taking stakes in existing legacy companies or setting up digital joint ventures overseas. China is also moving to control the nodes of transmission in particular in Africa, where its StarTimes satellite television has become a key player dominating the transition from analogue to digital television. China's increasing influence in every stage of media from the

means of production to the means of transmission allows greater possibilities to exert control over content, whether through outright censorship or more indirect methods such as pushing cheap satellite packages that include free Chinese state-run channels.

Respondents from nine countries reported that Chinese companies had either purchased media outlets or set up joint media ventures. This included four countries from Europe, two from Asia-Pacific, two from Africa and one from MENA regions. In some cases, those companies linked directly to the state, in other cases Chinese-run companies appear to be acting as state proxies.

The responses indicate a pattern whereby Chinese companies are more likely to buy or invest in media, including digital outlets and legacy media, in developing countries. One example mentioned was the UC News app, owned by Jack Ma's Alibaba, which publishes news, entertainment and sports news in Indonesian (Bahasa). It also publishes in Hindi and 15 other regional Indian languages including Malayam, Marathi, Telugu and Gujarati. Alibaba has also invested in legacy media, buying Hong Kong's oldest English-language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post*, in order to allow readers a “fair chance” to understand China.

Some purchases have led to increased restrictions on speech, for example the 2013 purchase by a Chinese investor of a 20 per cent stake in Independent Media, the second largest media group in Kenya. In 2019, columnist Azad Essa had his Independent Media column discontinued after writing about the plight of the Uighur minority.

The survey data shows that approaches are being made by Chinese counterparts at national, provincial and even city levels, building strategic networks of ties that bind global journalists to China. The engagement is more intense in countries on China's periphery, where Chinese provincial and even county governments are setting up joint ventures in neighbouring and border countries spanning television, radio and online. Examples include Myanmar, where the neighbouring Dehong prefectural government in Yunnan province has media investments, and Cambodia whose interior ministry worked with the neighbouring Guangxi provincial government to set up Nice TV.

China is also using satellite networks to broaden its reach across Africa. The Chinese-owned StarTimes satellite network is headquartered in Kenya, from where it oversees eight countries including Tanzania and Uganda. In Tanzania, StarTimes and Tanzanian Broadcasting have been running a joint venture since 2010, StarMedia (Tanzania), which is a key player in digital television, and allows the broadcast of Chinese content on satellite television channels.

In some countries, the large number of journalists working for Chinese media is further tilting the whole media ecosystem. In Cameroon, for example, dozens of correspondents for Chinese media often request priority information about matters of Chinese interest and focus their reporting on Cameroonian perceptions of the Chinese presence.

There are marginally higher perceived levels of Chinese media presence in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa, compared to Latin America and Europe. Many unions reported concerns about the impact of increased Chinese state-run propaganda inside their own news eco-systems. Even in Europe, which reported the lowest level of Chinese presence, Beijing has pushed particular editorial lines. One example is the recent campaign in Sweden over the case of the detained Swedish publisher Gui Minhai, which included paid advertisements, op-ed articles and Chinese embassy statements designed to



## CASE STUDY: KENYA

***“It is not only Kenya they are targeting but the wider Eastern Horn of Africa.”***

One of China's biggest media plays in Africa is through the Chinese owned StarTimes satellite, based in Kenya, which boasts 25 million subscribers in more than 30 African countries. It has penetrated deep into remote rural areas, offering cheap packages to regions that cannot afford premium channels. “They don't want to reach the elite, the politicians only,” one Kenyan journalist said, “They want their message to resonate with the common person.” In playing a major role in the continent's switch from analogue to digital, Chinese companies are making themselves indispensable. As one journalist put it, “We can't progress in the media industry without this infrastructure. Concerns were raised about Beijing's ultimate aim, with one journalist commenting “When you control the media, you control a huge chunk of the population.”

China's international television network CGTN has its African regional headquarters in Kenya, employing large numbers of local journalists on higher than average salaries. “The pay is good, the grass is really greener,” commented one journalist approvingly, “They have not come here to be like our local media houses, paying our journalists peanuts for doing a lot of donkey work. That is a thumbs-up for China.” In terms of content, some journalists commented that the state-run Chinese stations' bias towards producing inspiring stories on Africa is refreshing, with one commenting, “Xinhua goes to great lengths to bring out the positives in Kenya.”

The most important Kenyan players have content-sharing deals with Chinese entities, including the Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation which has a state-of-the-art studio built with Chinese funding, and the Dunia Wiki Hii weekly program largely comprised of stories from China's state-owned Xinhua news agency. The biggest newspaper, the National Media Group, has signed an agreement with Xinhua, while a Chinese company has a stake in the second largest, Independent Media Group. Many Kenyan journalists have been on trips to China, sometimes for as long as six months. It was noted that there had been a recent emphasis on taking journalists from Islamic media to China for training. In-house technical staff were also reported to have been to China for training and purchase of equipment for Kenyan infrastructure.

Some Kenyan journalists fear China's long-term agenda, noting emphasis is directed towards gaining a positive perception of Chinese projects in Africa. One journalist put it plainly, “How can we define China's media presence? It is their products.” Another said, “They are very strategic in how they want to be covered. Largely the way the media has covered them is through infrastructure projects they are doing or through the products and services that they market to us.” Consistent amongst this messaging was an attempt to defend Chinese projects from critical coverage from the independent Kenyan press and reinforce economic opportunities for Kenyans.

There is also a lack of trust over China's motives with the Kenyan government. “The danger here is that these Kenyan party leaders may adopt the position taken by the Communist Party of China to clamp down on journalists who do not dance to the tune of the government that is in power,” one journalist remarked. Others expressed concerns that Beijing is angling to play a neocolonial role in Africa, “They would like to dislodge Western countries and want to tighten their grip in Kenya and African countries where their presence is felt ... They want to be seen that they are the current masters.”



shut down Swedish reporting on the case. A recent statement by Sweden's private and public sector representative Utgivarna called for urgent government action against the Chinese embassy's repeated assaults on the Swedish press. It said journalists had been denied visas and editors had been inundated with threatening emails and phone calls, "Time and again, China's ambassador Gui Congyou has tried to undermine the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression under the Swedish constitution with false statements and threats." Sweden was one of just two European countries – the other being Russia – to report Chinese pressure on journalists and journalist organizations.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Beijing is running an extensive and sophisticated long-term outreach campaign which cuts across the developed and developing world, focusing on both legacy and digital media. This is a strategic, long-term effort to reshape the global news landscape with a China-friendly global narrative.
- Through foreign media acquisitions and large-scale telecommunications ventures, China is increasing its share in critical information infrastructure overseas. In this way, Beijing is moving to build control over the messaging infrastructure, as well as subsidising the messaging through content-sharing and reprogramming the messengers through training schemes.
- Through journalism tours and education, Beijing is cultivating a cadre of third-party supporters, outsourcing its influence operations to individual journalists. There is a more pronounced focus on journalists from developing countries with repressive and ineffective governments.
- To this end, Beijing is also leveraging global journalism bodies to serve its ends, contracting cooptation through MOUs, a classic United Front strategy. One corollary of the journalism exchanges is the exportation of a different model of journalism than that practiced in the West.
- China is offering concrete aid in the form of technical support, equipment and training to journalism organisations depending on need. The perception towards China's outreach is generally positive.
- Beijing's key objective is boosting coverage overseas that aligns with its policy priorities, in particular gaining favourable media for its Belt and Road Initiative and deflecting attention from the 1 million Uighurs in political indoctrination camps in Xinjiang. China's overall strategic objectives are the same across the board, but its ability to achieve these goals is dependent upon the responsiveness of respective governments and the media's commitment to a free press.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Unions can play a greater role in educating and preparing journalists participating in Chinese-funded trips. For example, unions could provide information and training on China's global media strategies, the impact these have on independent journalists, how bodies such as the ACJA operate and what key differences exist between it and independent trade unions.**
- **IFJ and its affiliates can provide training for journalists on the impact of content sharing agreements to reduce the likelihood of unmarked content being published.**
- **Unions could introduce media literacy programs to better educate the general public on how to detect influence operations.**
- **Increasing numbers of Chinese journalists working globally provides opportunities for greater professional engagement and understanding of media issues in both the China space and global media operations.**
- **IFJ has the capacity to discuss MOUs with journalist representative bodies and provide talking points, specifically on core issues such as working conditions, wages and professional practice.**
- **More work is necessary to understand the extent of Chinese outreach in North America and MENA regions.**
- **More in-depth quantitative and qualitative research is needed to examine the impact of journalism exchanges on coverage about China and Chinese projects overseas. In particular, framing studies and research on valence framing could be applied to see the impact of journalism exchanges on coverage over time in a specific country.**

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Effective governance was measured by the World Bank's 'govt effective' index. A country with an effective government has a 'govt effective' index of more than 0.
- 2 Freedom vs repressive was measured by the World Bank's 'voice and accountability' index. A free country has a 'voice and accountability' index of more than 0.1.
- 3 Developed status was measured by the UN Human Development index. A developed country was categorised by a 'human development index' of more than 0.7.
- 4 Chinese acquisition in developing nations came out only one per cent behind that of developed nations.
- 5 Country size was measured according to World Bank data. A big country was categorised by a population of more than 40 million people.
- 6 41 per cent of big to 30 per cent of small countries reported they had been approached or were in discussion with Chinese journalist unions or entities, and 35 per cent of big to seven per cent of small reported Chinese media purchases.
- 7 Glenda Korporaal. *The Australian*. "Let's Tread Carefully on South China Sea Ruling." July 12, 2016. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/lets-tread-carefully-on-south-china-sea-ruling>. Participated in an ACRI Australia-China Journalist Exchange July 2016.
- 8 John Shiffman and Koh Gui Qing. Reuters Investigates. "Beijing's covert radio network airs China-friendly news across Washington, and the world.", November 2, 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-radio/#article-voice-of-china>.
- 9 Ross Gittins. *Sydney Morning Herald*. "Australia not part of China's Silk Road Expansion of Trade, for now." July 31, 2016. <https://www.smh.com.au/business/australia-not-part-of-chinas-silk-road-expansion-of-trade-for-now>. Participated in an ACRI-ACJA Exchange July 2016.