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China's  
State Media  
in Latin  
America

# HEARTS & MINDS, VOTES & CONTRACTS

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*To André, who usually does not understand when I talk about China stuff but  
always does his best to pretend he is interested just to see me happy.*



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## Foreword ★

**XI JINPING LAUNCHED** his Belt & Road Initiative—an effort to build world-wide support for China through infrastructure lending—in 2013. Concern about China’s growing influence in what is now, uncomfortably, called the Global South grew slowly over the next decade. But it was only in 2023, after the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit in Johannesburg and after most developing nations declined to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or Hamas’ murderous raid on Israel that the United States woke to the full implications of China’s influence building campaigns in developing nations.

During the preceding decade of stupor, American attention on China’s pocketbook diplomacy and soft power strategies focused on Africa. China’s complex relations with the fifty-four nations of Africa still do not receive the attention they need from American scholars, political leaders, or corporations, but many in Washington see the continent as the primary arena for U.S.-China competition and know they must attend to African views of the rivalry.

Closer to home, meanwhile, China has built the China-CELAC Forum, strengthened partnerships made transformative promises of infrastructure investment and kept some of them, and attempted to win Latin Americans over to Beijing’s point of view. American policymakers have been vaguely aware of these developments, but have not focused on them.

Now we have Igor Patrick’s *Hearts & Minds & Votes & Contracts: China’s State Media in Latin America* to bring our attention to China’s targeting of the United States’ Latin American partners. As a Brazilian journalist with fluency in Mandarin, English, and Spanish, and as a scholar with years of experience in and an informed liking for China, Patrick is well-positioned to launch and lead a discussion of the goals and methods of China’s influence campaigns in the region.

Readers of *Hearts & Minds* will discover that China has been patient in Latin America, that it varies its methods to suit local conditions, that it adapts, and that its efforts to shape media are coordinated with its diplomacy

and investments. Some Chinese influence efforts have been ham-handed, but most have been determined and well-resourced. Spanish-language training programs are thriving in China after a long dry spell and the numbers of expatriate Chinese in the region is rising.

Not all of China's attention to Latin America is nefarious. Much of it is organic and some Chinese investment lending has benefitted local populations. Even projects that do not succeed fully may win friends for China in the absence of American options. China's open or surreptitious efforts to shape Latin America opinion through media, however, are unambiguous: their aim is to build support for the Chinese Communist Party's values, policies, and power.

As in Africa, this is a story not only of Chinese action but of American inaction and neglect. *Hearts & Minds* eschews polemics and tells these stories through well-researched case studies, interviews, and data. The Wilson Center and its Kissinger Institute on China and the United States are proud to have supported Igor Patrick's work and hope that it will bring overdue attention to these issues. We thank Mr. Patrick for educating us and look forward to watching his book deepen discussion of China-Latin American relations and their importance to the United States.

Robert Daly  
Director, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States  
The Wilson Center





## Abbreviations

<b>ACJA</b>	All-China Journalists Association
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>ANSA</b>	Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata [National Associated Press Agency]
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>AIL</b>	Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana [Latin American Informative Alliance]
<b>Band</b>	Rede Bandeirantes [Bandeirantes Network]
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BRICS</b>	Acronym for the group formed by Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa
<b>Caracol</b>	Cadena Radial Colombiana de Televisión [Colombian Radio and Television Network]
<b>CAC</b>	Cyberspace Administration of China
<b>CCF</b>	China-CELAC Forum
<b>CCP</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CCTV</b>	China Central Television
<b>CCTV-E</b>	China Central Television en Español
<b>CFR</b>	Council of Foreign Relations
<b>CELAC</b>	Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños [Community of Latin American and Caribbean States]
<b>CGTN</b>	China Global Television Network
<b>CMG</b>	China Media Group
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>CPPCC</b>	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
<b>CRI</b>	China Radio International
<b>CRIpor</b>	China Radio International's Portuguese Department
<b>CRTV</b>	China Radio and Television Corporation

<b>EBC</b>	Empresa Brasileira de Comunicação [Brazil Communication Company]
<b>FARA</b>	Foreign Agents Registration Act
<b>FCCC</b>	The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China
<b>FTC</b>	The US Federal Trade Commission
<b>IACHR</b>	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
<b>ICCC</b>	Instituto Cultural Sino-Chileno [Chile-China Cultural Institute]
<b>IFJ</b>	International Federation of Journalists
<b>IRIB</b>	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of China)
<b>NACO</b>	News Agencies World Council
<b>NAFTA</b>	North American Free Trade Agreement
<b>Observacom</b>	Observatorio Latino Americano de Regulación de Medios y Convergencia [Latin American Observatory of Regulation, Media and Convergence]
<b>OFCOM</b>	Office of Communications
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>PRI</b>	Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party]
<b>RT</b>	Russia Today
<b>RWB</b>	Reporters Without Borders
<b>TeleSUR</b>	Televisión del Sur [Southern Television]
<b>TRT</b>	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
<b>SBT</b>	Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão [Brazilian Television System]
<b>SMG</b>	Shanghai Media Group
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNECLAC</b>	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>USMCA</b>	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
<b>VoA</b>	Voice of America
<b>XMG</b>	Xiamen Media Group







# Executive Summary ★

**THIS RESEARCH WAS** carried out from November 2021 to October 2023. I evaluated the proliferation of Chinese media in Latin America, with a focus on the five largest economies in the region: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Below are my main findings:

★ Motivated by the perception of biased Western media coverage of China, Beijing has significantly invested in its overseas propaganda machinery. In recent years, media entities such as CGTN, China Radio International, Xinhua, People's Daily, and China Daily have been substantially funded by the state to enhance their operations and deliver content in various languages;

★ The West largely overlooked the globalization efforts of these media organizations and the spread of Beijing's narratives, dismissing them as amateurish and as having limited influence. Contemporary research has challenged this view, revealing the effectiveness and broad impact of Chinese propaganda, particularly in middle-income nations with strong diplomatic and economic ties to China;

★ The approach of these media outlets has evolved. Initially aiming to establish numerous global bureaus, they gradually learned to tailor their communication to international audiences. In Latin America, for example, CGTN and CRI leverage their bilingual journalists' skills, promoting them as social media influencers. These influencers usually begin their social media presence by blending everyday posts about life in China with cultural insights. Once established, they disseminate misleading information about Western practices, human rights issues in Xinjiang, and Taiwan;

★ Recognizing the competitive challenges in Latin American media, which has one of the world's highest media ownership concentrations, Chinese outlets have formed content-sharing partnerships with key regional players.

This research indicates that this propaganda is often published without clear origins, leading audiences to inadvertently assign credibility to it, akin to their trusted local sources;

★ When direct content distribution isn't feasible, Chinese media invest heavily in "advertorials," marketing content disguised as journalism. In Mexico, such agreements have even influenced editorial stances on China-sensitive topics. With shrinking media markets and profitability, newsrooms increasingly depend on these funds to meet financial and staffing needs. In Argentina and Brazil, some outlets have also dialed back on China-critical reporting after concluding agreements;

★ Newsrooms lack the expertise and language proficiency for autonomous reporting in China. China has capitalized on the challenging access to Chinese sources, the expense of stationing correspondents, and the arduous journalist visa process. This has been met with state-curated content satisfying the demand of these local outlets;

In light of these findings, I propose the following recommendations to Western democracies:

★ Support exchange programs and internships for Latin American journalists in newsrooms with a track record of reporting on China;

★ Fund specialized language courses to equip Latin American journalists with Chinese reading and communication skills;

★ Provide financial and institutional backing to think tanks and bodies advocating for independent journalism;

★ Share expertise and regulatory frameworks with local governments to improve transparency about Chinese media activities in their countries, ensuring freedom from censorship or bias;

★ Encourage initiatives that foster media literacy among citizens, enabling them to discern propaganda from legitimate journalism.





# Introduction

IN JANUARY 2018, on the occasion of the Annual Forum on Overseas Broadcasting Power, the deputy director of the News and Information Dissemination Bureau of the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), Sun Kai, was interviewed<sup>1</sup> by the People's Daily newspaper, the Communist Party's mouthpiece. Sun praised the achievements of Chinese state media, emphasized how important it was to use Western social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to "maximize the dissemination" of Chinese content, and stated that "the ultimate goal [of China's overseas communications effort] is to win the hearts and minds of the people."

The use of "winning hearts and minds", a phrase invented by a French general<sup>2</sup> was revealing but not exactly new among Chinese bureaucrats. The same newspaper published a long essay a few months before calling for the same goal, citing Xi Jinping's exhortations to build "an emblematic media apparatus, focused on international propaganda<sup>3</sup> and with a strong capacity for influence."

"Being late means being beaten, being poor means starvation, and being speechless means being scolded. This is a profound conclusion drawn from the history of modern China

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- 1 Du, Yina. "海外傳播力年度論壇：對外傳播就要直抵人心贏得人心 [International communication needs to reach people's hearts and minds]" *People's Daily*, January 30, 2018. <https://bit.ly/3MHsr4h>
  - 2 French General Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey called "winning hearts and minds" his strategy to win the support of the population on the Indochina-Chinese border during the campaign to contain the bandit group Black Flags in 1895
  - 3 The original term used is "外宣" (wài xuān), short for "外宣傳" (wài xuānchuán) roughly translated as "external publicity" or "external propaganda". The definitions of propaganda in Western and Chinese literature differ: in China, 宣傳 usually doesn't come with the negative connotation attributed in the West. For editorial and methodological the term will be used through all this research in its Western sense: manipulating public opinion for political purposes

(...). We've passed the ages of being beaten and suffering from famine, but the problem of 'being scolded' has not yet been fundamentally solved. The hostile forces in the West do not want China to become powerful. They deliberately put obstacles in our way, exert pressure, and make life difficult for us. China's opinion is often suppressed internationally. (...) The West uses its discourse system to interpret China, but the right to speak and explain China's development and progress must be firmly in our own hands<sup>4</sup>."

Inspired by what they see as a national duty and bucking the global trend, Chinese state media have large budgets and increasingly bigger audiences beyond the country's borders. In just four decades, Xinhua, the TV broadcasters CCTV/CGTN, and China Radio International have evolved from mere disseminators of communist ideology into a powerful media conglomerate with billions of dollars in investments that enable them to expand globally.

As the rest of the world struggles with ever-smaller newsrooms, shrinking newspapers, and radio and television stations floundering to find means to keep up with technological advances, the international communications sector in China is booming.

Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency (called by Reporters Without Borders "the world's biggest propaganda agency"<sup>5</sup>), has offices in 180 countries. It was founded in 1931 and employs more than 8000 people worldwide. By comparison, the Associated Press founded in 1846 has 280 bureaus; founded in 1851, Reuters has 200<sup>6</sup>.

China Central Television's (CCTV, rebranded CGTN in 2016 for international audiences) figures are also impressive. The broadcaster now has teams of journalists in 70 countries. It broadcasts its content in 171 countries

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4 People's Daily. "争取国际话语权是我们这一代媒体人的使命 [The pursuit of the right to speak internationally is the mission of our generation of media professionals]" *Xinhua Net*, December 29, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3Or73BD>

5 RSE. "Xinhua: the world's biggest propaganda agency" *Reporters Without Borders*, n.d. <https://bit.ly/41R745A>

6 Yang, Vivian. "How Chinese media is going global" *World Economic Forum*, August 10, 2015. <https://bit.ly/36uDfMD>



in all six official UN, currently covering 98% of the global territory<sup>7</sup>. Its reach and infrastructure are only comparable to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the world's largest TV network with bureaus and studios in 87 countries<sup>8</sup>.

Completing the list, China Radio International is available in 65 languages, making it the second-largest radio station in the world<sup>9</sup>. China Daily, an English-only newspaper, operates in Hong Kong, the United States, Canada, and countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America<sup>10</sup>, reaching a broad international audience and serving as a news source for ambassadors, politicians, journalists, and influencers worldwide<sup>11</sup>.

The expansion of China's state-owned media coincides with its post-2008 stance when the national government officially adopted a "go global" media policy, under which the government promised to invest billions to guarantee that China itself is the leading international source of China news<sup>12</sup>.

Using the Beijing Summer Olympics as a springboard, state media executives in China decided to internationalize their content to disseminate Chinese opinion on global affairs, popularize the image of a modern and prosperous China, and challenge hegemonic narratives conveyed by the Western media. Attending a conference in Denmark that year, CCTV Vice President Sun Yusheng told attendees that the station aims to become "a world-renowned broadcaster with an international news network. This will allow for global dissemination of Chinese culture and, I hope, also a better understanding of Chinese culture<sup>13</sup>."

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7 Turner, Graeme, and Jinna Tay. *Television Histories in Asia: Issues and Contexts*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2015

8 BBC Studios Distribution Limited. "Our Locations" *BBC Studios*, n.d. <https://bit.ly/3d0R2wK>

9 Huang, Kuo. "The 'going out' of China Radio International" In *China's Media Go Global*, by Daya Kishan Thussu, Hugo de Burgh and Anbin Shi, 332. London: 2018

10 Chen, Lily. "Reporting news in China: Evaluation as an indicator of change in the China Daily" *China Information* 26, no. 3 (2012): 303–329

11 Shirk, Susan L. "Changing Media, Changing Foreign Policy" In *Changing Media, Changing China*, by Susan L. Shirk, 225–252. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010

12 Sun, W., A. Yue, J. Sinclair, and J. Gao. "Diasporic Chinese media in Australia: A post-2008 overview" *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural* 25, no. 4 (2011): 37–41

13 International Media Support. "The Reform of Chinese Television" *The growth of media in China – and its impact on political and economic development in China*.

The development of China's media beyond the country's borders has been accompanied by Xi Jinping's efforts to "develop international communication resources, (...) focusing on Chinese stories and optimizing strategic layout, prioritizing the creation of an emblematic media with strong international influence<sup>14</sup>." At the first National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference he chaired as paramount leader in August 2013, Xi urged his Party comrades to find ways to "tell China's story well and properly disseminate China's voice<sup>15</sup>."

Since then, the motto "telling China's story well"<sup>16</sup> (Jiǎng hǎo Zhōngguó gùshi, 讲好中国故事) has been constantly cited by Chinese state media. Chinese journalists, Xi says, should "spread China's voice well, showing the world a multidimensional and colorful China, portraying China as a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development and an upholder of the international order, and making efforts to build a community of common destiny<sup>17</sup>."

The call for an uncritical media that acts as a political PR machine instead of analytical reporting amounts to the international promotion of a powerful propaganda strategy.

Beijing does not seem to be concerned about concealing its goals: to fight back against what the CCP considers unfair coverage of China affairs by Western journalists and promote radical changes in the global media order<sup>18</sup>. As the then-president of Xinhua, Li Congjun wrote:

"[Western media] use their powerful dissemination abilities to massively play up the 'China threat theory' and the 'China

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- 14 Copenhagen: International Media Support, 2008. 28  
Wang, Shucheng. "争取国际话语权是我们这一代媒体人的使命" [Striving for the right to speak internationally is the mission of our generation of media people]" *People's Daily*, December 29, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3jEhWi5>.
- 15 Bandurski, David. "Fable of the master storyteller" *China Media Project*, 29 September 2017. <https://bit.ly/3je0wsh>
- 16 Xinhua News. "President Xi urges new media outlet to 'tell China stories well'" *Global Times*, December 31, 2016. <http://bit.ly/3aaMncO>
- 17 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on December 18, 2020" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, December 18, 2020. <http://bit.ly/2LVQQGM>
- 18 Li, Congjun. "Toward a New World Media Order" *Wall Street Journal*, June 01, 2011. <https://on.wsj.com/42nzX9F>

collapse theory,' creating rumors to attack and vilify our country and party which harms our interests and national image (...) Overall, global opinions are still dominated by Western media outlets, and China's capacity to make its voice heard fails to match its international standing (...) We must continue to be creative in foreign propaganda efforts, tell China's story well, explain China's special characteristics, and proactively publicize the policies and positions of the Party and government<sup>19</sup>."

Western countries are learning how to deal with that. Scholars, public officials, and media watchdogs have resisted adopting tougher measures, fearing that restricting the reach or blocking access to Chinese state media would constitute a dangerous precedent for censorship.

The path Western decision-makers and politicians have taken so far is to force Chinese media outlets to be more transparent about their ties to foreign powers, to increase civil society's awareness of the issue, to pass laws that ensure the regulation of players in the media market, and to strengthen the work of the free and independent press as whole.

It may sound easy, but it is incredibly challenging given the erosion of democracy and attacks on press freedom observed worldwide in the past few years. Moreover, the Global South is particularly vulnerable to China's propaganda campaigns as developing countries' newsrooms struggle to overcome structural problems and strengthen the rule of law.

The general lack of knowledge about Chinese affairs among ordinary people and their respective political, economic, and intellectual elites in Latin America exacerbates these problems. While relations between China and the region have grown in scope and importance over the past two decades, there is not yet a corresponding increase in research, reporting, and public scrutiny by civil society.

So, it is not a coincidence that Latin American countries fared worse than the United States, Australia, and most European, and Southeast Asia democracies in a Freedom House report assessing the resilience of various countries

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19 Reuters staff. "Head of Xinhua says Western media pushing revolution in China" *Reuters*, September 04, 2013. <https://reut.rs/44HRATJ>

to potential disinformation efforts carried out by Chinese state media. Freedom House researchers point out that Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Peru will need to find answers to chronic vulnerabilities such as lack of transparency, few safeguards in media ownership laws, financial difficulties, and credibility crises of the local independent press<sup>20</sup>.

As China and the West become more disconnected from each other, navigating a bipolar world will demand informed decisions on topics often neglected by governments in that region. The goal of this study is to increase understanding of Chinese state media strategies toward Latin America. It is not intended to be a complete guide to all Chinese propaganda strategies in the region, as dynamism is one of the central characteristics of Chinese state media.

The first chapter is a brief bibliographic review of the origins of the Chinese state media's globalization strategy. I demonstrate how Chinese media have achieved global reach, their main editorial line, and how they shape the world's view of China.

The second chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the Chinese state media's performance in Latin America. It elucidates the functioning of media markets in the region, drawing a clear distinction between Hispanic Latin America and Brazil. The discussion then shifts to how media entities such as CGTN, CRI, and Xinhua are bridging the cultural divide between Chinese and Latin American audiences, capitalizing on the trustworthiness of well-established local media brands via content-sharing agreements. The chapter concludes with a detailed examination of the propaganda network propagated by Chinese state media journalists on social media. This is purportedly part of a campaign to harness the linguistic prowess and cultural understanding of these professionals, transforming them into local influencers on social media.

The third chapter focuses on five case studies: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, the leading economies and most prominent media markets in the region. The data was collected through interviews with journalists, academics, politicians, and business people in the aforementioned countries.

The paper ends with policy recommendations for Western democracies, Latin American governments, media, and civil society.

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20 Cook, Sarah, Angeli Datt, Ellie Young, and BC Han. "Beijing's global media influence: Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience" *Freedom House*, September, 2022. <https://shre.ink/nsh1>





# 1. China's Quest for a Global Voice ★

**AS FORMER PRESIDENT** of the National Intelligence Council and assistant secretary of defense and international security affairs during Bill Clinton's administration, Dr. Joseph Nye was already a well-known scholar when he proposed a theory that had a profound impact on the way states interact and think about their international influence: soft power.

The soft power concept sought to contain growing fears in academia and government of a possible American decline after the end of the Cold War and give an explanation of why the United States became a global powerhouse. Dr. Nye posited that the United States had become the greatest world power since Victorian England by balancing military leadership (hard power) and cultural leadership (soft power).

Hard power is defined as a form of power exerted through State's military and economic capabilities. This definition extends beyond the realm of armed conflict. The act of coercing another entity or inhibiting its decision-making process through an implied threat of force constitutes hard power. Displays of military might, such as parades featuring missiles, tanks, and troops, exemplify hard power. Economic sanctions and embargoes also fall under this category. Predominantly, it is a tool rooted in fear, the prospect of punishment, and the application of force. Since "the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force,"<sup>21</sup> the relationships forged through hard power are confined exclusively to state entities.

Soft power is defined as "the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion"<sup>22</sup>. It emphasizes the cultural, social, and ideological facets that are not necessarily tied to the state. It exerts control through allure, admiration, and the dissemination of values that are

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21 Weber, Max. *Politics as a vocation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1965

22 Nye Jr., Joseph. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004

perceived positively by others<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, it is less expensive and more persuasive than hard power<sup>24</sup>.

## 1.1 Beyond the American World Order

When Nye first introduced the concept of “soft power”, the United States was on the cusp of victory after enduring the Cold War for several decades. Since then, he has revisited the term numerous times, predominantly using the United States as a reference point, such as in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks, the invasion of Iraq, and the war on terror, among others. Despite Nye’s assertion that his concept is not exclusive to American entities, his theory often faces criticism from international scholars. They highlight contradictions and challenges in applying it to countries that do not adhere to Western liberal philosophy.

These criticisms hold some validity. The majority of Western research on soft power is deeply entwined with the global order established post-World War II, under the influence of American values. Nye and his proponents posit that the full-fledged development of soft power strategies necessitates a liberal democracy, which they perceive to be more equitable, stable, and less susceptible to armed conflict compared to other governmental systems<sup>25</sup>. Specifically in the United States, commendation for American soft power is juxtaposed with a stringent critique of Communist China, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union. The policies of these nations serve as cautionary examples of practices to avoid<sup>26</sup>.

These presumptions extend to the debate over which economic model is most conducive for nations aiming to bolster their soft power. Nye suggests

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- 23 A good illustration is the “American way of life,” an ideal crystallized in the 1930s. This concept assumes that democracy, development, faith, and patriotism are fundamental pillars of American society and key contributors to America’s success. Throughout the years, this notion has been consistently promoted by the media and Hollywood, reinforcing the United States’ status as a globally recognized leader
- 24 Armitage, Richard L., and Joseph Nye Jr. *A smarter, more secure America*. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007. <https://shre.ink/nshe>
- 25 Lynn-Jones, Sean M. “Why the United States Should Spread Democracy” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (Harvard Kennedy School)*, March 1998. <http://bit.ly/3cAll6q>
- 26 Rummel, Rudolph J. *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Nonviolence*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1997



that free trade fosters economic interdependence among countries, favoring cooperation over conflict. Consequently, an economy based on free trade will generate soft power, as it possesses the potential to draw others<sup>27</sup>. A flourishing liberal economy could spark an aspiration in other nations to emulate this model<sup>28</sup>.

The theory found support in the West but was criticized by theorists outside the American sphere of influence. As Yulia Kiseleva argues, “Nye’s firm belief in the power of American soft power perhaps also stems from the implicit messianic, or ‘civilizing’ character of the U.S. politics as a whole when one nation’s ideals are seen and promoted as a priori superior and noble<sup>29</sup>.”

She regards Nye’s understanding as an attempt to standardize the correct way for countries to influence others and establish a hierarchical relationship among nations that effectively divides the world into those with soft power and those unable to succeed. This stigmatization leads to empirical blindness: the inability to see non-liberal political values as potentially attractive<sup>30</sup>.

In China, too, Nye’s ideas were taken with a grain of salt. While eager to test new ways of consolidating its emerging influence, Beijing set out to develop an alternative theory, focusing less on individuals and more on the State. For China, soft power should work through the State rather than despite the State<sup>31</sup>, as Nye asserted.

The Chinese strategy may not have won over Western scholars, but it found favor with certain authoritarian Latin American elites who were keen to attain prosperity without relinquishing political control<sup>32</sup>. This approach

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27 Gomichon, Maxime. “Joseph Nye on Soft Power.” *E-International Relations*. March 2013. <https://bit.ly/3NxxpMf>

28 Some scholars contend that, in contrast, economic interdependence can instigate a coercive policy where the most affluent countries wield significant coercive power over the less prosperous ones. As a result, economic power can manifest as a traditional (and often harsh) method of hard power, frequently highlighting the disparity between the developed and developing worlds

29 Kiseleva, Yulia. “Russia’s Soft Power Discourse: Identity, Status and the Attraction of Power” *Politics* 35-3 (2015): 316-329. <https://shre.ink/nshr>

30 Kaczmarska, Katarzyna Barbara and Vincent Keating. “Conservative soft power” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22 (2019): 1-27. <https://shre.ink/nshb>

31 Kurlantzick, Joshua. “China’s Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 47 (2006): 1-7

32 Duarte, Pedro. “Soft China: the changing nature of China’s charm strategy” *Contexto*

aligns seamlessly with Beijing's novel method of global engagement, which involves challenging Western hegemony<sup>33</sup> and presenting its development model as a fresh alternative for others to emulate<sup>34</sup>.

## 1.2 Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics

While academic studies and strategies related to soft power are recent American inventions, some of their origins can be traced back to Chinese classical political and military theory. Since its imperial era, China has acknowledged the significance of cultural and philosophical values in forging partnerships and alliances.

The founder of Daoism, Lao Zi, underscored the importance of attraction when he stated, "A leader is best when people barely know he exists. Not so good when people obey and acclaim him. Worse when they despise him." Similarly, military strategist Sun Tzu advocated for the pursuit of security "through development, cooperation, and growth where everyone wins," suggesting that this was the optimal path to peace<sup>35</sup>.

Chinese culture also played a pivotal role in shaping the sociological, academic, political, and even family structures<sup>36</sup> in numerous countries in East Asia. Confucianism, the mainspring of the region's fundamental values, emphasized "social relations as opposed to the [Western] emphasis on individualism<sup>37</sup>." The Tang Dynasty impacted Asian writing systems, poetry, painting, and trade practices<sup>38</sup>.

These historical facts are crucial for understanding the classical Chinese political perspective on the matter, which significantly diverges from the

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*Internacional* 34-2 (2012): 501-529

- 33 Roque, Teresa. "China: A Threat to Western Democracies" *Observador*, May 10, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ctpZfA>
- 34 Tremblay, Mathieu. "L'émergence du soft power chinois" *Plateforme Québécoise de Journalisme Citoyen*, February 12, 2007. <http://bit.ly/3oyvf6>
- 35 Whyte, Leon. "Sun Tzu and the Art of Soft Power?" *The Diplomat*, March 31, 2015. <http://bit.ly/2YGM2Yx>
- 36 Liu, Zixuan. "The Influence of Confucianism on East Asian Countries" *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 232 (2018): 77-79
- 37 Yum, J. O. "The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in east Asia" *Communication Monographs* 55, no. 4 (1988): 374-388
- 38 Lockard, Craig. *Tang Civilization and the Chinese Centuries*. Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2000, 1999

Western approach to promoting soft power. While the U.S. government has been actively involved in, subsidized, or funded cultural initiatives to further its strategic objectives and propagate its own propaganda, it is generally not seen today as directly intervening in the censorship of the press, films, books, or TV shows. These entities exhibit little restraint in criticizing American policies, lending them an air of credibility and independence from the state.

Nye, along with scholars who align with his viewpoints, regard this as the standard for nations aspiring to enhance their soft power internationally. They contend that the most effective way to project a country's values to foreign audiences is without governmental intervention<sup>39</sup>.

In this context, Beijing's alternatives would be considerably constrained. The Party's dominance over cultural and intellectual life is firmly entrenched. The state holds the ultimate authority on the cultural products that China exports. Nye addressed this concern by stating that while China's rise in popularity is indisputable, it lacks credibility - an intangible asset that he deems incompatible with propaganda<sup>40</sup>.

“The Chinese Communist Party has not bought into the idea that soft power springs largely from individuals, the private sector, and civil society. Instead, it has clung to the view that the government is the main source of soft power, promoting ancient cultural icons that it thinks might have global appeal, often using the tools of propaganda. In today's media landscape, information is abundant. What is scarce is attention, which depends on credibility – and government propaganda is rarely credible. For all of China's efforts to position the Xinhua news agency and China Central Television as competitors of CNN and the BBC, the international audience for brittle propaganda is vanishingly small<sup>41</sup>.”

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39 Oğuzlu, Tarik. “Soft power and US foreign policy” *The Peninsula Qatar*, September 13, 2017. <https://bit.ly/2LI4FIW>

40 Nye Jr., Joseph. “China and soft power” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 19-2 (2012), 151-155

41 Nye, Joseph S., Jr. “The Limits of Chinese Soft Power” *Project Syndicate*, August 30, 2017. <https://bit.ly/45go8V7>

This perspective is reiterated by other scholars who assert that the “potential for Chinese seduction is restricted by the nature of a Communist State that still adheres to a 19th-century view on State sovereignty and the issues of non-interference<sup>42</sup>.” They underscore that China lacks a cultural industry as influential as Hollywood, credible non-governmental organizations, and despite making rapid progress, Chinese universities are yet to rival those in the United States. These elements are deemed crucial for enhancing soft power<sup>43</sup>.

As much as the CCP invokes ancient Chinese philosophy to buttress its current policies, they were initially much busier promoting ideological cohesion than necessarily exporting its influence beyond the socialist world.

During the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong once underscored the importance of cultivating a “cultural front” within the revolutionary apparatus, describing it as a “powerful weapon to unite and educate the people<sup>44</sup>.” However, his focus at that time was primarily domestic.

Due to the isolation brought about by the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976), a period when diplomats were summoned back home for “revolutionary re-education”, China’s interactions with the outside world were curtailed, resulting in Beijing “joining” the soft power discourse late. This was a time when the concept of soft power had transitioned from academic discussions to becoming a strategic priority in numerous countries worldwide.

Unsurprisingly, when China eventually engaged with the concept, it deviated from Nye’s liberal inclination and formulated an approach that aligned with its distinct political system and national interests. The initial analyses of soft power were undertaken in the late 1990s by Wang Huning, who was then a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai and currently serves as the chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Wang is frequently dubbed as Xi Jinping’s “ideology tsar.”

Acknowledging the shift in the nature of power in the post-Cold War era, Wang posited in his essays<sup>45</sup> on this subject that soft power emerged as “one

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42 Pan, Esther. “China’s Soft Power Initiative” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 18, 2006. <https://on.cfr.org/3fxY14D>

43 Duarte, Pedro. “Soft China: the changing nature of China’s charm strategy” *Contexto Internacional* 34-2 (2012), 501-529

44 Tiezzi, Shannon. “‘Moral Art,’ Mao Zedong, and the CCP’s Quest for Soft Power” *The Diplomat*, October 17, 2014. <https://bit.ly/3IwLVq5>

45 Wang, Huning. “作为国家实力的文化: 软实力” [Culture as National Power: Soft Power]

of the fundamental pillars of national power ... capable of not only enhancing citizens' unity and resolve but also augmenting the government's ability to address its domestic and international issues".

He argued that a nation's prowess in today's world is more influenced by aspects such as education, technology, and developmental milestones rather than traditional indicators like economic scale and military strength. As a result, he deduced, the examination of a country's cultural influence and its positive repercussions beyond its borders should be a critical focus for Chinese academia and government.

Other Chinese authors further elaborated on the notion of culture being central to social cohesion and as an instrument in international relations. Majie Zhu asserted that it is unfeasible to attain any outcomes without taking into account the cultural factor, which he described as "the spiritual, ethical, and economic basis of human life." For Zhu, culture forms the foundation for social and economic institutions and the decision-making process. It is the prevailing variable in international relations and is deemed crucial for global harmony<sup>46</sup>.

Research on this subject has significantly influenced policy-making among Chinese elites. At the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party in November 2002, Secretary-General Jiang Zemin explicitly advocated for reforms that could facilitate the internationalization of Chinese culture. He called for the advancement of "cultural undertakings and industry."

"We must continue to improve the policies and measures for the development of public cultural undertakings. (...) We should strengthen cultural infrastructure and boost various types of popular culture. (...) Developing the cultural industry is an important avenue to enriching socialist culture in the market economy and meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the people. It is essential to improve policies toward the cultural industry, support its development and enhance its overall strength and competitiveness<sup>47</sup>."

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*Journal of Fudan University* (1993), 23-28. <https://shre.ink/nshf>

46 Zhu, Majie. "Contemporary culture and international relations" In *Cultural Impact on International Relations - Chinese Philosophical Studies* by Xintian Yu, 23-40. Washington, D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002

47 Jiang, Zemin. "Build a Well-off Society in an All-round Way and Create a New

In line with this trend, the then-Secretary-General Hu Jintao emphasized the necessity to secure a “commanding point on the battlefield of cultural development” to gain “the upper hand in the fierce international competition”. He added that “the increase in China’s international status and its international influence should reflect both hard power (...) and soft power, as well as culture<sup>48</sup>.”

After such indications, the term “soft power” was added to the lexicon of Chinese leadership at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2007, when Hu’s report introduced the paradigm of “cultural soft power” and called for “enhancing culture as part of the soft power of our country better to guarantee the people’s basic right to culture.”

“In the present era, culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength, and the Chinese people have an increasingly ardent desire for a richer cultural life. We must keep to the orientation of advanced socialist culture, bring about a new upsurge in socialist cultural development, stimulate the cultural creativity of the whole nation, and enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and interests, enrich the cultural life in Chinese society, and inspire the enthusiasm of the people for progress<sup>49</sup>.”

Among the strategies proposed to enhance Chinese soft power were broadening internet access for the Chinese populace, fostering non-profit cultural initiatives, boosting investment in media, and “building cultural

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Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (III)” *Beijing Review*, December 12, 2002. <https://bit.ly/3cV8yW6>

48 McGiffert, Carola. *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*. CSIS Smart Power Initiative, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies (2009): 15-17

49 Hu, Jintao. “Full text of Hu Jintao’s report at 17th Party Congress (Promoting Vigorous Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture)” *China Daily / Xinhua*. October 24, 2007. <http://bit.ly/3p4TEyN>

facilities in urban and rural areas to guarantee basic cultural rights and interests of the people<sup>50</sup>.”

This suggests that the Chinese perspective on soft power significantly diverges from the Western viewpoint: it serves not only as a tool for fostering internal unity but also as a crucial aspect of the state's responsibilities. They contend that culture, values, and national governance need to “develop and prove successful” before they can be “admired” by outsiders<sup>51</sup>. This approach was designed to holistically transform political and economic values into attributes that appeal to both domestic and international audiences<sup>52</sup>.

Such a viewpoint does not conflict with the government's control over media and cultural production. In fact, for the CCP, the sought-after harmony between internal practices and external strategies can only materialize through strategic planning, with the Party playing a central role. The CCP is ultimately the entity that not only spearheads the national soft power policy but also determines the type of culture and values that China should project internationally.

The foundation of this approach was established during the Hu Jintao era, and its core principles have remained intact under Xi Jinping's leadership. Evidence of this continuity can be found in how Xi addressed the subject in his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party on October 18, 2017. He underscored the significance of enhancing cultural services, developing, managing, and operating internet services, improving public etiquette, and even advocating fitness programs and competitive sports as indicators of the effectiveness of China's cultural soft power.

“Our country's underlying values hold greater appeal than ever before, and the wave of positive energy felt throughout society is building. We, the Chinese people, have greater confidence in our own culture. China's cultural soft power

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50 Beijing Review. “Hu Jintao Calls for Enhancing ‘Soft Power’ of Chinese Culture” *Beijing Review*, October 15, 2007. <https://bit.ly/3rEhIdG>.

51 Fliegel, Michal, and Zdeněk Kříž. “Beijing-Style Soft Power: A Different Conceptualization to the American Coinage” *China Report* 56-1 (2020): 1-18

52 McGiffert, Carola. *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*. CSIS Smart Power Initiative, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies (2009): 15-17

and the international influence of Chinese culture have increased significantly. There is greater unity in thinking both within the Party and throughout society<sup>53</sup>.”

Having assessed the importance of culture and internal cohesion to the Chinese view of soft power, it is now imperative to understand how China has been promoting these values beyond its borders. Here, Beijing's cultural and public diplomacy becomes vital to China's international strategy. Media lies at its core.

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, soft power enjoyed considerable financial backing and adhered to strict ideological editorial guidelines. Besides championing Chinese culture and history through media, these guidelines also made a concerted effort to discredit the West and create alternative narratives about global events.

### 1.3 Constructing a Global Megaphone

China has long recognized the importance of its media and combatting the “enemy in the information war<sup>54</sup>.” This recognition dates back to the fall of the Qing Empire and the establishment of the Kuomintang regime<sup>55</sup>. It centers on a prevailing belief among political elites that the country is often misunderstood and misrepresented by a prejudiced, biased, unreliable foreign press.

The strategies for amplifying China's voice have not always followed a consistent and linear path. Before the implementation of the reform and opening policies in the 1980s, China's state media primarily served as a tool for responding to and critiquing the international community.

During its formative years, the CCP lacked a long-term strategy for professionalization or expansion of operations. From 1949 and the late 1970s,

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- 53 Xi, Jinping. *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. Report delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Beijing: Xinhua, 2017
- 54 Varrall, Merriden. *Behind the News: Inside China Global Television Network*. Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2020
- 55 Brady, Anne-Marie. *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008



Chinese state media deliberately confined its influence to the socialist world and a select few developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America<sup>56</sup>. Xinhua and CRI generated content driven by political and ideological motivations, which were exported primarily through documentaries and reports broadcast to TV stations in communist countries.

During this period, Chinese media were simply an extension of the propaganda machine aimed at promoting Maoism in the “Third World” and presenting an alternative to capitalism to developing countries<sup>57</sup>, a classic information strategy from the Cold War era<sup>58</sup>.

Xinhua stands as the bedrock of the Chinese state media machinery, playing a pivotal role in China's foreign policy and governmental framework. Since its inception, it has served as a conduit for official information for the People's Republic of China and an informal diplomatic medium. In the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War and the ascension of the Communist Party to power, the news agency often functioned as an unofficial diplomatic envoy in nations and regions where Beijing lacked formal ties<sup>59</sup>.

Xinhua's expansion was intimately tied to the “open door” policy that was ushered in following the implementation of China's reform policies in 1978. It was during this period that the news agency endeavored to evolve from a solely propaganda-focused institution through a comprehensive rebranding initiative.

In the wake of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” being adopted as a fundamental political ideology during the 12th National Congress of the CCP, Xinhua rebranded itself as a “modernized and socialist world news agency with Chinese characteristics,” and proceeded to establish bureaus globally<sup>60</sup>.

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56 Zhang, Xiaoling. *Chinese state media going global*. Singapore: East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, 2009

57 Meng, Bingchun. *The Politics of Chinese Media: Consensus and Contestation*. New York: Springer, 2018

58 Li, Hongshan. *Image, Perception, and the Making of US-China Relations*. Maryland: University Press of America, 1998

59 Hoare, Jim, and Susan Pares. *A Political and Economic Dictionary of East Asia*. London: Routledge, 2005.

60 Hong, Junhao. “From the World's Largest Propaganda Machine to a Multipurposed Global News Agency: Factors in and Implications of Xinhua's Transformation Since 1978” *Political Communication* (Taylor & Francis) 28, no. 3 (2011): 377-393

**Figure 1:** Xinhua's logo at the Hong Kong branch (XNAHK/CC BY-SA 3.0)



The changes can be attributed to China's shift away from a planned economy and the implementation of pro-market reforms, which brought the country's media industry closer to the business standards of the Western press. A major turning point in this transformation occurred in 1987, when the State Science and Technology Commission classified newspapers and radio broadcasting as a "commodification industry," paving the way for the state media to evolve into a more commercially oriented press structure<sup>61</sup>.

The escalating budgets of Chinese state media, after this policy, were tied to Beijing's imperative to steer the narrative about China and alleviate the reputational harm inflicted by the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre<sup>62</sup>. In the face of allegations of violence and severe human rights abuses, China initiated a comprehensive public relations drive, disseminated through its overseas state media.

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61 Zhao, Yuezhi. "From Commercialization to Conglomeration: The Transformation of the Chinese Press Within the Orbit of the Party State" *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 2 (2006): 3-26

62 Zhang, Yongjin, and Barry Buzan. "The Tributary System as International Society in Theory and Practice." *Journal of International Studies* 5, no. 1 (2012): 3-36

Xinhua played a pivotal role in this, acting as the Chinese government's mouthpiece when China was ostracized by the international community. The agency's former head of public relations and later president, Zhu Muzhi, acknowledged the need to counter the influx of Western news (especially from the United States) and "ramp up the fight for global public opinion<sup>63</sup>."

It was not sufficient. Despite China's vigorous efforts to refute the Western account of events in Tiananmen Square, the striking images of tanks advancing against unarmed protesters remained vivid in the minds of people around the world, thanks to widespread broadcasting by CNN, ABC, BBC, and other international networks. To compete on the same level, a new player had to emerge, and they did just that, launching CCTV's global signal in the early 1990s and reopening the Foreign Propaganda Group right after<sup>64</sup>.

Originally aimed at the Chinese diaspora, CCTV-4's launch in 1992 was the first international Mandarin channel. Its creation marked the first step for an organization that would soon become global. It was followed by the launch of CCTV-9 in English in 2000<sup>65</sup>, Spanish and French in 2004, and in Arabic and Russian in 2009<sup>66</sup>, effectively covering all official languages of the United Nations.

Expansion was spurred by the 2008 Olympics. As the games approached, China's state media underwent technical upgrades in the hopes that the mega-event would improve the image of the new superpower. CCTV was expected to lead news coverage, bolstering its "communication capacity" (chuánbò nénglì 传播能力) to become "[a] world-renowned broadcaster with an international news network, allowing global dissemination of Chinese culture and [...] also a better understanding of Chinese culture<sup>67</sup>."

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63 Varrall, Merriden. *Behind the News: Inside China Global Television Network*. Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2020

64 Brady, Anne-Marie. *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008

65 Nelson, Anne. *CCTV's International Expansion: China's Grand Strategy for Media?* Washington, DC.: Center for International Media Assistance, 2013

66 Jirik, John Charles. *Making news in the People's Republic of China: The case of CCTV-9*. Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, May 2008

67 International Media Support. "The growth of media in China – and its impact on political and economic development in China" *International Media Support*. Copenhagen (2008): 1-26.

It was not to be. The Olympics did little to improve China's image worldwide, as research before and after the event has shown. A study conducted by Chinese and foreign scholars between August 2008 and August 2009 found that, out of 7,261 reports in nine countries, the overwhelming majority had a negative tone about China<sup>68</sup>.

Months before the Games began, the Sichuan earthquake and violent unrest in Tibet drew international attention to issues that China preferred to keep out of the news cycle<sup>69</sup>. Internally, international news coverage was perceived as evidence of Western bias against China's rise. This fueled bitterness among political elites, who believed that China's state media should consolidate itself as one of the most important voices on the world stage. They saw it as a means to counter narratives that the Chinese view was incorrect and to promote China's nature, culture, and society.

As *The New York Times*' David Barboza reported<sup>70</sup>, Chinese officials "sharply criticized foreign reporters over their coverage of the riots in Tibet, accusing them of biased reporting and preventing them from traveling to Tibet or neighboring provinces to report" on the unrest. As soon as the riots ended, Chinese officials took action to prevent such a media fiasco from ever happening again. Wanning Sun, a fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and professor of media and communication studies at the University of Technology Sydney, recalls:

"One unsavory incident followed another, starting with the deaths of several construction workers at the Bird's Nest Stadium, then Steven Spielberg's protest over China's position on Darfur, the persecution of the Falun Gong, and accusations that Chinese media was suppressing news of Tibetan riots. The Western media's coverage of these pro-Tibetan

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68 Guojun, Zeng, Frank Go, and Christian Kolmer. "The impact of international TV media coverage of the Beijing Olympics 2008 on China's media image formation: a media content analysis perspective" *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 12 no. 4 (2011): 39-56

69 McLaughlin, Kathleen E. "A bad omen: the anti-press upsurge in China following the rioting in Tibet isn't an encouraging sign as to how the news media will be treated during the 2008 Olympics" *American Journalism Review* 30, no. 3 (2008): 48

70 Barboza, David. "Pressed Over Tibet, China Berates Foreign Media" *The New York Times*, March 25, 2008. <https://nyti.ms/3NuFuH1>

riots was seen by the Chinese government to be decidedly anti-Chinese [...]. The lesson that the Chinese government has learned from the West's media reactions to these events is twofold. Firstly, China's ascent on the global stage as an economic and political power does not automatically bring about a more favorable perception of China in the international community; it has, in fact, given rise to a higher level of anxiety or even disapproval. Secondly, China cannot wait for the Western media to change its critical perspectives on China; it must be proactive, 'go global,' and push Chinese perspectives and voices into the international arena in order to contest the discursive power of the West<sup>71</sup>."

What followed was "an aggressive drive to transmit more media content within the shortest possible time, over the largest possible distance and to the largest possible audience [...] alongside numerous policy statements and major media organizations' accounts of their own exponential expansion [...] premised on a conviction that technological innovation is the key to realizing the CCP's vision for more, faster, and farther transmission<sup>72</sup>."

CCTV's website began to highlight its modern infrastructure and started promoting its satellite TV service "featuring 11 channels (...) [developed] to showcase China to English-speaking audiences<sup>73</sup>."

Today, CCTV uses at least ten transponders on eight satellites to transmit its content via cable networks. In the United States, the channel can be received by DirecTV, Dish Network, and Verizon subscribers. It has branches in Europe (London), Africa (Nairobi), and North America (Washington, DC.), as well as several distribution agreements, including those signed with the Venezuelan state network TeleSUR<sup>74</sup> and the Latin American Informative

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71 Sun, Wanning. "Mission Impossible? Soft Power, Communication Capacity, and the Globalization of Chinese Media" *International Journal of Communication* 4 no. 19 (2009): 58

72 Ibid, 59.

73 XNA. "China Launches Satellite TV Service in Asian Region" *Space Daily*, February 02, 2005

74 Zhu, Ying. *Two Billion Eyes. The Story of China Central Television*, The New Press: New York, 2014

Alliance (AIL)<sup>75</sup>, a group that brings together private media from 22 Latin American countries.

Similar to CCTV, China Radio International (CRI) has undertaken numerous initiatives to disseminate its content globally<sup>76</sup>. These include forming joint ventures, acquiring foreign local media content providers, increasing the number of overseas offices, and setting up content-sharing agreements with a multitude of radio stations. As a result of these endeavors, CRI currently broadcasts in 65 languages, making it the world's largest radio network.

In 2015, Reuters conducted a comprehensive investigation<sup>77</sup>, revealing the company's attempts to bypass laws that prohibit foreign partners from controlling media entities. To achieve this, CRI established shell corporations and enlisted Chinese expatriates to promote China's publishing interests on its behalf. During this period, Reuters' journalists identified 33 stations spanning the United States, Canada, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. Although none were officially associated with CRI, they dedicated significant airtime to broadcasting news programs favorable to China.

## 1.4 Promoting the Party and Countering the U.S.

Under Xi, China has adopted a more assertive tone toward the international order. This strategic reorientation has been reflected in the work of Chinese state media. He often stresses the need to “tell China's stories well” to justify the massive budget and scale of China's state media. Since his rise to paramount leadership in 2013, his media strategy has relied on one big assumption: only Chinese should tell China's stories.

Since newspapers, radio and TV stations are strictly supervised and censored, they guarantee that only the Communist Party has the right to shape

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75 Once Noticias. “Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana sella acuerdo con medios chinos para informar verazmente sobre la pandemia” *Once*, August 28, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3ndl76R>

76 Chen, Chwen Chwen, Cinzia Colapinto and Qing Luo. “China Radio International in the Digital Age: Propagating China on the Global Scenario” *Global Media Journal* 9 no 16 (2010): 1-15

77 Qing, Koh Gui and John Shiffman. “Exposed: China's Covert Global Radio Network” *Reuters*, November 02, 2015. <https://reut.rs/2TGMvGd>

the history and the concept of what “well” means. In Xi’s opinion, foreigners should be able to see that “China is peaceful, it does not seek hegemony; it does not encourage regime change, and it does not want to export its style of governance.”

During a rare inspection visit to the three major media outlets in Beijing, Xinhua, CCTV, and the People’s Daily in February 2016, Xi outlined his own idea of how the press should achieve this goal. He urged reporters and editors to pledge their allegiance to the Communist Party and follow the guidelines set by the national leadership. Standing alongside Liu Yunshan, former Politburo Standing Committee member and head of the Central Propaganda Department, and speaking under a banner reading “The Central Television’s surname is the Party,” Xi made the following statement:

“The media run by the Party and the government are the propaganda fronts and must have the Party as their family name. All the work by the Party’s media must reflect the Party’s will, safeguard the Party’s authority, and safeguard the Party’s unity. They must love the Party, protect the Party, and closely align themselves with the Party leadership in thought, politics, and action<sup>78</sup>.”

The state media swiftly responded, interpreting Xi’s speech and implementing his directives. A few days later, an essay in the China Daily argued that Party media should serve as “consensus builders,” as opposed to the diverse and fragmented opinions on the internet. The paper went on to say that the rise of social media could indicate a “lack of confidence in state-run media outlets,” which could ultimately lead to a “decline in the Party’s legitimacy<sup>79</sup>.”

Following the inauguration of the impressive CCTV headquarters in Chaoyang, ambitious plans were set in motion. Beijing made substantial investments in upgrading equipment and recruiting qualified foreign personnel to manage the internationalization of state media. In the same year,

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78 Wong, Edward. “Xi Jinping’s News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party” *The New York Times*, February 22, 2016. <http://nyti.ms/3b2nP4E>

79 China Daily. “State media should play due role in properly guiding public opinion.” *China Daily*, February 22, 2016. <http://bit.ly/3ba8YoX>

CCTV was officially renamed China Global Television Network (CGTN) for its international audience, primarily to avoid confusion with the English acronym for Closed-Circuit Television Camera.

CGTN did not initially have the immediate expertise to provide global coverage in multiple languages. Therefore, priority was given to hiring new staff and investing in the global marketing of the new brand. The channel lured Western journalists with attractive salary offers<sup>80</sup> and signed numerous infrastructure and content-sharing agreements with broadcasters around the world, utilizing its large newsrooms and luxurious headquarters in Beijing<sup>81</sup>.

The aim was to expand the global reach of the channel's content and move away from its traditional role as a "mouthpiece of the Chinese government". The focus was shifted to "cultural and social issues instead of China's political doctrine<sup>82</sup>." However, this goal has yet to be realized. From the beginning, CGTN was closely linked to the Chinese government and was often accused of spreading propaganda. As the station lacks journalistic independence, it focuses primarily on presenting China's point of view on issues that are crucial to the country's national interests.

**FIGURE 2:** CCTV headquarters in Beijing, as Seen in 2020 (Randy Rambo/  
Panoramio CC BY 3.0)



80 Di Stefano, Mark. "China's State TV Wants to Hire More Than 350 Journalists in London" *Buzzfeed News*, June 12, 2018. <https://bzfd.it/2Ah2t4X>

81 Lim, Louisa Lim, and Julia Bergin. "Inside China's audacious global propaganda campaign" *The Guardian*, December 20, 2018. <https://bit.ly/3u14nx3>

82 Lu, Sun. "Developments and New Approaches of Internationalizing China's Media: A Case Study of China Global Television Network (CGTN) in Witness Perspective" *Global Media Journal*, 2018.



Contrary to expectations, the new channel gradually established its editorial line as the benchmark for all other state media involved in internationalization efforts. In 2018, China made a significant move towards content consistency and reach by merging CGTN, China Radio International, and China National Radio into a single entity: the China Media Group (CMG). This entity is informally known as the “Voice of China,” seemingly referencing the “Voice of America,” the American radio broadcasting service established in 1942.

The impact extended beyond mere internal restructuring. Under an organizational plan proposed in 2001, CMG reports to both the State Council and the Communist Party’s Central Propaganda Department. This arrangement facilitates easier monitoring of published content by government officials<sup>83</sup>.

Xi celebrated the decision, proclaiming that the new organization would enable the world to “see a multidimensional and colorful China,” a “builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of international order<sup>84</sup>.” When the People’s Daily reported on the new company, it clearly stated its intention: to gradually counteract the negative narratives that America is disseminating about China globally. The newspaper reported in March 2018:

“The timing could not be better. The formation of the ‘Voice of China’ comes at a time when Western countries, including the United States, are amplifying the ‘China threat,’ underscoring the need for a ‘super voice’ to counteract the anti-China propaganda and provide people with a clearer understanding of China<sup>85</sup>.”

As the relationship between Beijing and the West became increasingly strained, the company’s news coverage is now more combative. While the

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83 Yip, Hilton. “China’s \$6 Billion Propaganda Blitz Is a Snooze” *Foreign Policy*, April 13, 2018. <https://bit.ly/495cX2T>

84 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. “Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, September 22, 2020. <http://bit.ly/3s5ewbl>

85 Stone, Curtis. “World needs a better understanding of China, ‘Voice of China’ can help” *People’s Daily*, March 22, 2018. <http://bit.ly/2LWN7c8>

promotion of China's image globally remains a priority, the media's focus has shifted towards challenging narratives presented by the West. Its reporting has become more assertive and confrontational, mirroring the contentious nature of Sino-Western relations.

CCTV has been remarkably forthright about challenging the U.S. stance and broadening the reach of its propaganda machine. In May 2022, the television network published a comprehensive accountability report in Chinese on its website<sup>86</sup>, outlining the achievements of its international channel, CGTN, in the previous year.

The document is replete with communist terminology and effusive praise for Xi Jinping. Media executives boasted about their coverage of events such as the Tonga disaster, the war in Ukraine, January 6th, and being “the sole foreign media outlet present at the Taliban’s inaugural press conference following the withdrawal of U.S. military forces, reaching an audience of over 7.3 billion viewers.” It also asserted to have scooped several news stories ahead of CNN, BBC, the Associated Press, Reuters, and *Agence France-Presse*.

CCTV highlighted the publication of “a series of stories” aimed at countering the primary narratives critical of China produced by the American press. For instance, to counteract the “Summit for Democracy” organized and hosted by President Joe Biden in 2021, CGTN aired “U.S. Democracy: A Reality Check” (qǐ dǐ měishì mínzǔ 起底美式民主), a two-part documentary accusing Washington of becoming “the world’s greatest threat, instigating wars, blatant political turmoil, causing a refugee crisis, [seeking] economic and technological hegemony (...) pursuing objectives that may be undermining democracy<sup>87</sup>.”

“We have continuously planned and published stories such as ‘How can American politicians talk about democracy and human rights when they cannot even protect children?’, ‘Watch American politicians explain the big lie they told about Xinjiang!’ and a variety of reports and commentaries exposing and criticizing America’s hypocrisy on human

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86 CCTV. “中央广播电视总台社会责任报告 (2021年度)” [China Central Radio and Television Social Responsibility Report (2021)] *CCTV News*, May 28, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3pclBe1>

87 CGTN. “Live: A reality check - Exporting war under the veil of democracy” *CGTN Replay*, December 10, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3LCTJHt>

rights from different angles and effectively countering the United States' malicious slanders<sup>88</sup>.”

In contrast to their approach towards the United States, Taiwan, Australia, and Southeast Asia — where China has been accused of initiating aggressive disinformation campaigns and using media outlets to meddle in domestic affairs<sup>89</sup> — Chinese state media in Latin America is less divisive.

It focused on highlighting the advantages of diplomatic relations, such as economic development, infrastructure projects, and more recently, the donation of medical supplies and vaccines to combat Covid-19. It portrayed China as a prosperous, peaceful, and cooperative nation.

The narrative can be simplistic, and the news segments may lack appeal, leading media experts to believe for several years that these efforts had minimal impact on enhancing China's image abroad. However, a recent study has indicated that this assumption was incorrect.

## 1.5 Is China's State Media Effective?

For many years, the global community largely ignored attempts by autocratic regimes to sway international public opinion through state-controlled media. That changed during the 2016 U.S. presidential election amid allegations of Russian interference.

Investigations by American intelligence agencies revealed evidence of data manipulation and disinformation campaigns by Russian state media outlets, including Sputnik News and RT. Once the strategies employed by Moscow were brought to light, researchers discovered similar instances of manipulation by these agencies in significant European elections, such as Brexit<sup>90</sup>, Catalonia's

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88 CCTV. “中央广播电视总台社会责任报告 (2021年度)” [China Central Radio and Television Social Responsibility Report (2021)] *CCTV News*, May 28, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3pclBe1>

89 Kurlantzick, Joshua. *Beijing's Global Media Offensive: China's Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World*. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2022

90 McGaughey, Ewan. “Could Brexit be Void?” *King's Law Journal* 29, no. 3 (2018): 331-34

independence referendum<sup>91</sup>, and the 2017 *Bundestag* election in Germany<sup>92</sup>, among others.

Russia succeeded in manipulating information and disseminating fake news by adeptly imitating the journalistic style of Western media. By using the same codes and mimicking certain professional practices, Kremlin-controlled media crafted believable narratives that addressed the concerns of societies where democracy has been under siege since the early 2010s. The critical question now is whether China can replicate this strategy, and if so, how effective it will be.

Only a handful of scholars have attempted to gauge the efficacy of Chinese state media in shaping international opinion. The few studies published on this topic have reached varying conclusions and typically focus on a limited set of countries.

However, a study conducted by researchers at Harvard, Yale, and Groninger universities has provided insights into this issue<sup>93</sup>. Contrary to the prevalent Western belief that authoritarian political models are unappealing due to the widespread acceptance of democratic values such as freedom of expression, researchers have sought to validate the following hypotheses:

★ Exposure to messages from Chinese state media that commend the high performance of the Chinese government can effectively generate support for China's economic and political model;

★ Considering the limited reach of Chinese state media, exposure to new information about China is more likely to shift international public opinion towards Chinese beliefs and values than information about the United States;

★ When faced with conflicting messages from democratic and autocratic countries, the public tends to favor the autocratic model;

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91 Voltri, Johannes. "2017 Catalan independence referendum: the projection of Russian strategic narratives by RT and Sputnik" Tartu: Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, 2018

92 Stelzenmüller, Constanze, interview by US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. *The Impact of Russian Interference on Germany's 2017 Elections* (June 22, 2017)

93 Mattingly, Daniel, Trevor Incerti, Changwook Ju, Colin Moreshead, Seiki Tanaka, and Hikaru Yamagishi. "Chinese State Media Persuades a Global Audience That the 'China Model' is Superior: Evidence from a 19-Country Experiment" *OSF Preprints*, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3NLIboS>

★ State media from authoritarian regimes tend to be more successful in developing countries

★ Chinese state media offer a fresh perspective on China and are thus particularly effective in boosting approval for the Chinese government, even though they fall short of convincing people of its democratic nature.

To test these hypotheses, the researchers analyzed 19,791 CGTN video segments posted on the broadcaster's YouTube channel. These were then categorized into 20 topics, such as China's economic and political models, international news, Chinese domestic news, Chinese culture, pandemic news, and so on.

For comparative purposes, the researchers also separated 1,117 videos published via ShareAmerica, a U.S. State Department platform, and categorized that content into topics such as American diversity, promotion of civil rights, criticism of autocratic governments for human rights violations, entrepreneurship and innovation, economic success, and freedom of speech and expression.

A total of 6,276 individuals from 19 countries<sup>94</sup> were then divided into four groups: The first group viewed videos from China, the second from the U.S., the third received a mixture of both, and the fourth served as a placebo/control group. The results were quite striking.

The researchers observed that exposure to Chinese state media increased global support for China's economic model from 16% to 54%. While American media was still effective, it consistently scored lower than its Chinese counterpart. Even though the effectiveness of Chinese state media decreased when exposed immediately after American-sponsored content, the overall effect was still an increase in viewer's preference for the China model. Lastly, the study demonstrated that Chinese state media are particularly successful in developing countries in Africa and Latin America.

As reported by *The Economist*:

“By the end of the study, a majority of people who viewed such messages said they preferred China's form of govern-

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94 Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom

ment to America's. The American propaganda had an impact, too, but less of one. In the group that watched videos from both countries, people moved towards China. The Chinese videos do not seem to have convinced people that the country is democratic. But they strengthened perceptions that the Communist Party delivers growth, stability, and competent leadership<sup>95</sup>.”

The West remains uncertain about how to respond to the potential allure that Chinese state media may generate within autocracies (and the consequent decline in global support for democracy). Thus far, the measures adopted have been rudimentary, ineffective, or even authoritarian.

In the United States, for instance, Chinese state media were compelled to register as “foreign agents” under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), a law originally enacted to restrict the activities of Nazi officials on American soil. The State Department mandated that five Chinese state media companies, including Xinhua and CGTN, must obtain special permission if they wish to acquire property in the U.S. These companies are now required to provide a comprehensive list of their employees, including those who are U.S. citizens<sup>96</sup>.

More recently, U.S. embassies began limiting the duration of visas for Chinese journalists based in America<sup>97</sup>, a move that has been criticized by press freedom organizations for not distinguishing between visa applicants and generally degrading the quality of information on U.S. affairs accessible to viewers in China.

In Europe, Ofcom (the U.K. media watchdog) announced it would penalize CGTN for its “partial coverage” of the Hong Kong protests in 2019<sup>98</sup>. It eventually revoked CGTN's license<sup>99</sup>, rendering the station unable to

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95 The Economist. “Chinese propaganda is surprisingly effective abroad” *The Economist*, February 16, 2023, <https://econ.st/3NV2tLZ>

96 AFP. “US tightens rules on Chinese state media over ‘propaganda’ concerns” *The Guardian*, February 18, 2020. <http://bit.ly/3jS75RE>

97 Al Jazeera. “US tightens Chinese journalists’ entry amid tensions with Beijing” *Al Jazeera*, May 09, 2020.

98 In its defense, the network said that protesters refused to speak to mainland Chinese state media.

99 Sherwin, Adam. “Ofcom bans China’s state-owned CGTN news channel after

operate in other European countries that permit broadcasting due to British authorization. CGTN was also fined £200,000 for “serious breaches of our fairness and privacy rules on its [...] services<sup>100</sup>.”

The situation is even more precarious in developing countries. Particularly in Latin America, virtually no precautions have been taken to monitor messages disseminated by Chinese state media. Cultural barriers and a highly concentrated media market hostile to new players have long prevented Chinese state media from gaining traction and prominence in that region but, as we will see next, Beijing has already found creative ways to address the problem, and Chinese propaganda is spreading with impressive momentum.

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ruling it is controlled by the Communist Party” *iNews*, February 4, 2021. <http://bit.ly/37eXu2k>

100 AFP. “U.K. watchdog fines banned Chinese broadcaster CGTN US\$274,000 for breaches of privacy rules” *South China Morning Post*, August 27, 2021. <https://bit.ly/491LKxV>

## INTERVIEW - JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

**JOSH KURLANTZICK**, a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), is the author of “Beijing’s Global Media Offensive: China’s Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World” [Oxford University Press, 2022]. This comprehensive investigative work delves into the power, scope, and implications of the internationalization of Chinese state media. Kurlantzick’s focus is on China’s relations and strategies related to both soft and sharp power, including efforts involving state-backed media and information. His work provides valuable insights into the dynamics of China’s global influence.



**In your book, you contend that Beijing has utilized the influence of its state-controlled media in Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and Australia to interfere in domestic politics and propagate disinformation. While it seems that many of these nations have developed a certain degree of resilience to these misleading narratives, do you think that countries in the Global South, such as those in Africa and Latin America, are sufficiently prepared to counter this information warfare?**

They are less prepared because there are fewer Chinese speakers and they are less used to dealing [with Chinese propaganda]. This is nothing new for Taiwan or the ASEAN countries, so they have a bit more experience in dealing with it. So no, I do not think most countries in Africa and Latin America are particularly well prepared. On the other hand, China is targeting them with positive propaganda, but not necessarily with the same extremes of disinformation yet. The issue here is that [in the Global South] there is generally less of a knowledge base [about China affairs], and some of these countries still have warmer feelings about them, in contrast to the trend in Europe and North America, Australia and Northeast Asia, where the public image of China is just terrible.



**Could this also be a question of financial resources? After all, many media outlets in Latin America and Africa may lack the necessary funds to establish bureaus or dispatch reporters to cover Chinese affairs from their unique viewpoints.**

At this point, most of the big European, North American, and Asian media companies that have this money also do not have reporters in China anyway because they have been kicked out. But that is certainly part of the problem. Even in Brazil, for example, the most powerful country in South America, there is only one Brazilian reporter who really works full-time in Beijing. That certainly hurts [the ability to respond to Chinese disinformation].

**Latin American editors and reporters, whom I interviewed for this research, expressed that it's difficult to find local experts studying China. They also mentioned a notable scarcity of Sinologists throughout the region...**

It makes sense that there are fewer China scholars there than in the United States or Europe. After all, China is not a strategic threat to these countries. That said, given the scale of investment and the creation of trade infrastructure, there should be more academic expertise in Latin America and Africa, perhaps not so much on strategic issues but on investment, trade, and aid.

Nonetheless, many local African publications in Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria have done an outstanding job of reporting on Chinese aid and investment, the good and the bad side. Maybe even better than most Latin American publications, even though the most prominent news outlets are much bigger and more powerful in comparison.

**In the meantime, what can be done to curb disinformation sponsored by China's state media in the Global South if or when it occurs?**

I think we can learn from countries like Australia, which has passed a law curbing foreign interference in the media and communications sectors. Foreign ownership of media companies is now monitored there as closely as ownership of things considered strategic, like the defense industry, aviation, or oil. Foreign donations to media companies should also be banned, allowing greater scrutiny of lobbying and politics. Officials should also monitor apps and other platforms from China and other authoritarian countries.



## 2 China's Media in Latin America ✨

**THE ADVENT OF BROADCASTING** technologies ushered in substantial shifts in the global media landscape. Media entities from non-Western nations started to pursue new audiences and broaden their reach, aiming to bolster their national images, engage in public diplomacy, and sometimes directly challenge the media dominance of Europe and America.

Beginning in the early 2000s, channels like RT from Russia, Al Jazeera from Qatar, IRIB World Service, HispanTV from Iran, and TRT World from Turkey became recognized media players available in dozens of countries.

The new companies' strategies to compete in a fierce market and capture viewers' attention vary. Al Jazeera — disparagingly referred to as “terrorist television” when it first started broadcasting in English — quickly emerged as a trusted global news source, applying high-quality standards to its award-winning journalistic productions. RT, IRIB World Service, and HispanTV took the opposite approach, portraying themselves as anti-hegemonic networks and actively challenging Western media coverage.

CCTV / CGTN is just one of the newest players in this battlefield for influence and attention, carrying out a hybrid mission to improve China's image and challenge Western narratives about the country.

### 2.1 Opportunities in the Global South

CGTN's primary goal is to correct what it sees as the misconceptions of the Western press in its coverage of China. The channel integrates broader efforts of Chinese diplomacy and it is instrumental in methods of international solidarity and foreign relations.

After years of dominance by American and British media, it's understandable that these emerging media outlets face challenges in reaching an international audience. They introduce a novel style of news presentation, which doesn't always align with the conventional professional practices of the Western press and often contests the viewpoints and opinions on global events covered by tra-

ditional media. These channels are gradually gaining popularity in developing countries. In some instances, they have integrated so seamlessly with the local culture and press that they are not even recognized as foreign<sup>101</sup>.

When determining how to deploy their media resources, Western and Chinese media set different priorities. For China, the primary target groups are the countries of the Global South, especially in Africa and Latin America. However, it is important to note that developing countries have their unique characteristics. The socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and communication markets in Africa differ from those in Latin America. These differences have a direct impact on how these target groups receive Chinese content and subsequently shape the overall perspective of China's strategy towards the two regions.

In Africa, the majority of countries lack the resources necessary for investing in TV broadcasting, with exceptions like Egypt, South Africa, and Nigeria. Most countries do not have local news agencies, and the fragmentation of languages poses a challenge to producing content that can reach the entire continent. Furthermore, the few available TV channels often lack the infrastructure to provide full-day programming and depend on acquiring copyrights for TV shows produced in other countries<sup>102</sup>. Consequently, these market conditions favor the operations of a Chinese TV network on the African continent.

The Latin American media landscape, however, is radically different. Not only does Latin America have predominantly democratic governments, but it is also dominated by huge media conglomerates scattered across different economic sectors and hostile to competitors (both domestic and foreign). Moreover, one must not forget that Latin America is under the influence of two "powerhouses", namely the former colonial masters (mainly Spain, Portugal, and France) and its most powerful neighbor, the United States.

In the region, defective democracies coexist with a highly concentrated media market characterized by the dominance of family dynasties that have

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101 Geniets, Anne. *The Global News Challenge: Market Strategies of International Broadcasting Organizations in Developing Countries*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016

102 Si, Si. *Expansion of international broadcasting: the growing global reach of China Central Television*. Working Paper, Oxford: The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014

almost always benefited from regulations and laws introduced by dictatorial governments. For historical reasons, Latin American countries provided fertile ground for the growth of media monopolies and oligopolies. Still weakened by decades of authoritarianism, regulatory mechanisms drove newly democratized states away from audiovisual production<sup>103</sup>. Neoliberal deregulation and privatization between the 1980s and 1990s led to the emergence of “media latifundium” that simultaneously explored the chains of production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of data, texts, audio, and images.

The results of neoliberal and deregulatory policies are evident in today’s media landscape. Reporters Without Borders (RWB) runs a report that quantifies media concentration in the region from time to time. The Media Ownership Monitor was produced by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and measures the risks to media diversity. It assesses ownership concentration and audience indices, media ownership regulations, and the level of transparency on ownership control of these companies<sup>104</sup>.

The latest report confirms the general perception: the Latin American media are under the control of corporate and business families linked to the economic and political elites of their respective countries. The owners of media companies establish monopolies to capitalize on their influence.

The report identified structural obstacles to the functioning of community and public media in Latin American countries. It is common for political parties or people directly involved in politics (especially elected politicians) to own media organizations, even though most media laws in these countries prohibit granting concessions to them. RWB also points out that it has become the standard business practice to transfer or lease the channels to religious institutions, violating the principles of the secular state.

Criteria for renewing or revoking broadcasting licenses in Latin America are unclear, granting presidents significant power to limit press freedom in these countries. It has become a common practice for presidents and congress-

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103 Moraes, D. de. “La mirada desde América Latina” *In Ley 26.522: Hacia un nuevo paradigma en comunicación audiovisual*. Buenos Aires: Autoridad Federal de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual, 2011

104 Reporters without Borders. “State sabotage” of radio station’s broadcasts” *Reporters without Borders*, September 2005. <http://bit.ly/3drmgQG>

sional members to condition the granting of licenses on political support. Current laws favor the dominance of a handful of media companies in the advertising market. Brazil's *Grupo Globo*, Mexico's *Televisa*, Venezuela's *Cisneros*, and Argentina's *Clarín* collectively account for 60% of total revenues from markets and audiences across the entire region.

Several countries allow cross-ownership of TV and radio broadcasting concessions. Cross-ownership is defined by a media organization simultaneously controlling radio and TV concessions, as well as newspapers, magazines, cable services, websites, and related businesses.

These practices undermine freedom of expression by diminishing the diversity of information sources, encouraging the homogenization of genres and formats, consolidating a limited number of editorial lines, and fostering conflicts of interest that compromise information on sectors where media company owners have stakes (such as the banking system). Ultimately, these practices jeopardize the monitoring and action of civil society<sup>105</sup>.

By monopolizing citizen participation in democracy, these organizations act directly against the principle of representation, which requires ensuring a diversity of views and public accountability of government officials.

Media organizations also override the state's exclusive powers, as noted by the Latin American Observatory for Regulation, Media and Convergence (Observacom). In a civil report to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (IACHR), Observacom points out that "information and communication monopolies, duopolies or oligopolies [in Latin America] not only affect the plurality of information but by allowing the control of information and permeating public opinion, (...) they may also acquire even greater power than political institutions. Concentration creates powers to determine the public agenda<sup>106</sup>."

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105 Becerra, Martín. "Libertad de Expresión y Concentración de Medios" *Encrucijadas* 37 (2006): 1-3

106 Observacom. "Organizaciones sociales afianzaron la "Alianza por la Diversidad y el Pluralismo en la Comunicación" *Observacom*, October 7, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3u7fTrC>

**FIGURE 3:** Cross-media Ownership Concentration in Latin America (Media Ownership Monitor, 2015)



Given all these factors, it is not surprising that international media face considerable difficulties in Latin America. The few still operating there face chronic structural problems, such as much smaller audiences compared to domestic broadcasters. In general, only media outlets from countries with similar cultural affinities receive some public attention.

The few individuals interested in alternative perspectives often resort to established commercial brands, such as *CNN en Español*, making diasporas the primary consumers of TV or radio stations financed by foreign governments like Russia and China.

The emergence and consolidation of Latin media conglomerates also contribute to the concentration of revenues, thereby limiting the funds available to finance other players. Competing under these circumstances requires the willingness to spend exorbitant amounts of money with little guarantee of success.

## 2.2 Challenges to Prosper

Worldwide, at least 580 million people (or approximately 7.6% of the world's population) speak Spanish, 483 million as native speakers. Spanish is one of the main mother tongues on the planet in terms of the number of speakers, and it is also studied by almost 22 million people in 110 countries. Together, all 21 Spanish-speaking countries account for 6.9% of the world's GDP. Official estimates also indicate that the United States may become the second country with the largest number of speakers by 2060<sup>107</sup>.

The figures mentioned above shed light on why Spanish is a clear choice for media with cross-border ambitions. A player cannot truly achieve global status if they exclude one of the major global languages.

Foreign newspapers and magazines were the first to realize the potential for expansion among Latin American Hispanic countries. TV took a long time to follow. Considering the share of the Hispanic population in the U.S. demographic, it is not surprising that an American company was at the forefront of this movement.

*CNN en Español* was launched in March 1997. It broadcasts news 24/7 to Spanish speakers in the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean. The channel swiftly became a journalistic benchmark throughout the region, pioneering a new media market<sup>108</sup>.

Since then, the number of TV channels dedicated to Spanish speakers has multiplied. Celebrating the birth of the independence hero Simón Bolívar, *Televisión del Sur (TeleSUR)* went on air in July 2005. Its goal was to break CNN's monopoly<sup>109</sup> with a generous budget financed through partnerships between the governments of Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua<sup>110</sup>.

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107 Instituto Cervantes. *Yearbook of Spanish in the world 2019*. Madrid: Instituto Cervantes, 2019

108 CNN en Español. "CNN en Español celebra 20 años al aire" *CNN en Español*, March 15, 2017. <http://cnn.it/3k6KIO1>

109 TeleSUR was inaugurated with the slogan "Our North is the South", demonstrating its intention to focus coverage on the Global South countries, especially the Latin American region. The phrase can be interpreted as a criticism of CNN in Español, accused at the time by the Venezuelan government of "serving the interests of the North."

110 Headquartered in Caracas, TeleSUR was hit hard by diplomatic conflicts between



Russia also invested in creating a Spanish channel, establishing multiple RT bureaus in Miami, New York, Washington D.C., Mexico City, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Caracas and Havana<sup>111</sup>. France, with its France 24 channel, and Iran, with HispanTV, also implemented broadcasts in the language

China joined the trend, recognizing the importance of having Spanish as a major language for its international channels. Beijing had had offices in the Xinhua news agency and China Radio International<sup>112</sup> in the region for decades but had not entered the television market.

That changed with the inauguration of CCTV-E (now CGTN Español) in 2003, when CCTV International started recruiting Spanish speakers (mostly Latin Americans) to participate in a pilot project. Those hired, all proficient in Chinese and English, became responsible for dubbing and making live interpretations of news and press conferences from the documentary channel CCTV-9<sup>113</sup>.

In 2004, CCTV initiated experiments with broadcasting shows in Spanish. This channel, then known as CCTV-E & F, divided its schedule into 12 hours of Spanish and 12 hours of French programming. These were typically arranged in 4-hour blocks that alternated between the two languages to align with primetime in the target countries. Despite the signal rapidly reaching 36 countries, the strategy proved to be confusing, given the significant differences between French-speaking and Hispanic audiences<sup>114</sup>.

In 2007, the channel changed, thanks to the head of propaganda of the CCP, Li Changchun. Between March and April of that year, Li went on a grand tour

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Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and his South American counterparts. In 2016, Argentina decided to stop funding the broadcaster, a decision later followed by Uruguay, Ecuador and Bolivia.

111 Khalaf, Roula, and Arkady Ostrovsky. "Russia targets Middle East with Arabic TV channel" *Financial Times*, July 15, 2006. <http://bit.ly/3k6Khhf>

112 China Radio International (CRI) started operations in Latin America in 1981, with a bureau in Mexico City. In 1988, it expanded its operations with a new office in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in 1999, it opened a center in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Madrid-Morales 2015)

113 Madrid-Morales, Dani. "China's International Television Broadcasting and the Spanish speaking world" In *Global Media Worlds and China*, by Q. Luo, G. Svensson and L. Rydholm, 187-203. Beijing: Communication University of China Press, 2015

114 Ye, Peilei, and Luis A. Albornoz. "Chinese Media 'Going Out' in Spanish Speaking Countries: The Case of CGTN-Español" *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2018): 81-97

of four Latin American countries: Venezuela, Suriname, Mexico, and Venezuela. Although it is impossible to establish whether the visit triggered the change, shortly after the trip Beijing began preparations to dismember CCTV-E & F, creating a channel exclusively in Spanish, launched in October.

During the early years, there was almost no original production. The news segments were translations of broadcasts from CCTV's domestic channels and international English service<sup>115</sup>.

The channel today is more professional. Although most Chinese journalists working for the company do not have a bachelor's degree in Journalism or Media Studies, they are all fluent in Spanish and most of them have lived in a Hispanic country. The number of native Spanish-speaking journalists has also increased, although it still represents only about 25% of the total. A survey conducted by CCTV in 2015 found that more than 90% of respondents consider the channel to be their primary source of information about China and one of the main ways of reaching Chinese culture from abroad.

After the rebranding in 2016, when the channel was renamed CGTN Español the executive directors also implemented adaptations of the programming to correspond to Latin American cultural habits: the news programs now have segments dedicated to sports, and at least 19% of broadcasts are from Chinese soap operas, a popular genre across the Latin region<sup>116</sup>.

Still, the channel faces a chronic problem common to all counterparts within the CGTN network: low ratings. The company does not report credible global audience figures<sup>117</sup>, but it is reasonable to assume that most Latin Americans have never heard of the Chinese channel. Distribution is hampered by American operators (notably DirectTV) and by Latin media

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115 Ye, Peilei. *La internacionalización de la Televisión Central de China (CCTV) en España: un aporte a la diversidad cultural*. Madrid: Department of Journalism and Audiovisual Communication of the University Carlos III of Madrid, 2007

116 Ye, Peilei. "中央电视台西班牙语频道在西语国家的发展:文化接近、文化多样与传播效果 [Development of CCTV Spanish Channel in Spanish-speaking Countries: Cultural Proximity, Diversity, and Communication Effect]" *Global Media Journal (Chinese Edition)* 3-1 (2016): 52-66

117 Chinese state media executives interviewed off the record for part of this research speculated that audience figures are not released because they may be too low to justify the substantial investments in CGTN channels. Instead of publicizing its total audience, CGTN prefers to highlight its reach, which means how many people in the world the signal is accessible to

conglomerates operating the 30 or so satellites and preventing new competitors from entering the region's cable TV<sup>118</sup>.

Bad editorial decisions also limit the success of the initiative. Pablo Morales, a professor in the School of Media and Communication at the London School of Economics, has completed hundreds of focus groups with young Latin Americans since 2018 to assess the viability of Chinese state media in Latin America. His research is usually conducted at Mexican and Argentinian universities, where students are exposed to journalistic content produced by RT, HispanTV, and CGTN.

Morales found that most respondents considered CCTV-E / CGTN unreliable compared to the other two non-Western media competitors. Respondents mentioned that the content presented seemed superficial. They also pointed out that the channel “puts conflict aside and tends to focus on maintaining social balance,” a style that contrasts with the ostentatious Russian channel RT, which is known for its social media interactivity, bright colors, controversial interviewees, and heated, opinionated content. Many also pointed out that CGTN only quotes Chinese sources or studies, which contributes to the distrust of the information and reinforces the image of foreign government-linked media<sup>119</sup>.

The scholar has pinpointed a unique issue prevalent in Hispanic Latin America: the varied reactions to accents. While the Spanish language is frequently perceived as a monolith, it is influenced by diverse regional factors. This diversity can lead to distinct interpretations and responses to the language across different regions.

The indigenous vocabulary and idioms, which have evolved from interactions with various groups (African, European, and North American), along with the natural progression of the language, render the Spanish spoken in Argentina distinctly different from that spoken in Colombia, Mexico, or Chile. To bridge these differences, *CNN en Español* adopted the so-called “neutral accent”, a practice subsequently emulated by other broadcasters seeking international reach in the region.

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118 Fox, Elizabeth, and Silvio Waisbord. “Latin American Media: A Long View of Politics and Markets” In *Latin Politics, Global Media*, by Elizabeth Fox and Silvio Waisbord, 303-310. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002

119 Morales, Pablo S. “Could Chinese News Channels Have a Future in Latin America?” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 13-1 (2018): 60-80

In some of his focus groups, Morales noted an aversion to the neutral accent when used by Chinese state media. Respondents thought it sounded similar to the “condescending way the United States communicates its ideology,” an artificial Spanish associated with American imperialism.

Another variant occasionally utilized on CGTN, European Spanish, was met with disapproval by a Mexican participant due to “Spain’s colonialist history in Mexico.” Nuances like these are pivotal in comprehending Latin American subtleties and contribute to a negative perception of Chinese state media, which survey respondents characterized as “hypocritical and attempting to deceive viewers to gain legitimacy<sup>120</sup>.”

In theory, these dilemmas could be resolved relatively easily. However, management obstacles also contribute to the relative insignificance of the Chinese channel. Although referred to as “specialists,” foreign journalists do not hold management positions in CGTN’s organizational structure.

Except for the TV anchors, even experienced professionals at CGTN are given basic tasks such as translation, proofreading, and dubbing and cannot comment on content. Moreover, because of the editorial devotion to the goals of the Chinese state – which threatens the station’s independence and jeopardizes its credibility – CGTN does not offer what viewers want to see but what Chinese executives (who are often primarily concerned with their professional advancement) think they want.

## 2.3 The Distinctiveness of the Brazilian Media Market

Brazil shares significant cultural, anthropological, and historical similarities with its neighboring countries. However, it markedly differs from other Latin American nations in several aspects: the language (Portuguese), the unique paths of colonization, and even diverse diasporas. Overlooking or misunderstanding these aspects can lead to failure, particularly concerning media investments, an industry deeply ingrained in the cultural values of any nation.

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120 Morales, Pablo S. “Mind the (cultural) gap: International news channels and the challenge of attracting Latin American audiences” *Media, Culture & Society*, 2020: 1-16

CNN made this mistake once. The American company tried for several years to popularize *CNN en Español* in Brazil, even vetoing the Anglophone version of basic pay-tv plans to encourage the audience to consume the Hispanic channel's content<sup>121</sup>. They never succeeded: even though Spanish is similar to Portuguese, Brazilians still preferred the version in English. After many years of trying, the brand only managed to establish operations after signing a partnership agreement with local media executives and launching a version in Portuguese, today one of the most respected media outlets there<sup>122</sup>.

However, the Brazilian media concentration is much more severe compared to the rest of the region, and the market is way more hostile to new competitors. The primary responsibility for this problem lies with *Globo* Group, controlled by the powerful Marinho family.

*Globo* Group is currently the 19th largest media conglomerate in the world, with annual revenues of \$ 1.03 billion<sup>123</sup>. The Marinho family owns 37 TV channels, 3 daily newspapers, 14 weekly magazines, 49 radio stations, a news agency, two of the most accessed news websites in Brazil, a book publisher, and shares in cable TV companies. They also have equity interests in companies outside the media market, such as Rappi (Argentine start-up specializing in food delivery), Enjoei (marketplace for the sale of second-handed products), Órama (real estate brokerage), and tech-fit (mobile app for health tips).

As a result, according to Reporters without Borders, *Globo* reaches an audience more extensive than the second, third, fourth, and fifth-largest Brazilian media groups combined. The content produced by their media outlets reaches around 100 million Brazilians every day, almost 50% of the entire population. RWB's Media Ownership Monitor considers that Brazil presents the worst scenario of media concentration in the region<sup>124</sup>. Perhaps because of this, added to harsh legislation prohibiting media ownership by

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121 Grillo, Cristina. "Net retira CNN em inglês de pacote básico" *Folha de S. Paulo*, October 27, 1997. <http://bit.ly/3pFrllB>

122 CNN. "Pesquisas mostram que CNN é o canal de notícias mais imparcial do país" *CNN Brasil*, October 29, 2020. <http://bit.ly/2ZD6144>

123 Zenith Media. "Top Thirty Global Media Owners 2017" *Zenith Media*, 2017. <http://bit.ly/3k9Jvjq>

124 Reporters without Borders and Intervozes. "The World of Globo - Hegemony of limitless concentration" *Media Ownership Monitor*, 2017. <http://bit.ly/3sdjXoB>

foreign organizations, Brazil is still the frontier to be explored by transnational media initiatives in the developing world.

There are currently only a few of them in the country. Russia decided not to launch a Portuguese version of its RT channel, instead maintaining a modest newsroom in Rio de Janeiro with nine local journalists and one foreigner for the Sputnik News agency. However, it was forced to cease operations in March 2023<sup>125</sup> after sanctions from Europe and the U.S. limited its ability to meet financial obligations. The Spanish news agency EFE has a small team of Brazilian, Hispanic, and Spanish reporters in its Rio bureau, which is located in the city's Cervantes Institute. Italian news agency ANSA, French broadcaster Radio France Internationale, and Le Monde also have Portuguese-language offices, but none of them have a large audience or are particularly well-known.

China is an exception to this trend. Unlike other countries, the Asian nation has invested in developing its media in Brazil, which is justified by the solid relationship between the two countries. Brazil has the largest Chinese-speaking population in Latin America, and São Paulo is “home to a greater number of Chinese-speaking readers or Internet users than anywhere in the Western Hemisphere except for Southern California<sup>126</sup>.”

Geopolitically and economically, Brazil was the first developing country in the world to enter into a strategic partnership with Beijing. Brazilian support was crucial to China's ascension to the World Trade Organization in 2001, and both countries belong to the BRICS, one of the most significant geopolitical blocs for China's diplomacy. China is also the country's largest trading partner and the main importer of soybeans, Brazil's most important commodity. According to the Brazil-China Business Council, Brazil was also the recipient of the largest share of Chinese investment worldwide in 2021<sup>127</sup>.

The country is not a new territory for Chinese state media. Xinhua has been present in Brazil since 1961<sup>128</sup> and China Radio International since

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125 Rocha, Marcos. “Agência russa ‘Sputnik’ fecha filial no Brasil após sanções da EU” *Conexão Política*, March 14, 2023. <https://bit.ly/4236J00>

126 Stenberg, Josh. “An Overseas Orthodoxy? Shifting towards Pro-PRC media in Chinese speaking Brazil” In *Media and communication in the Chinese diaspora: rethinking transnationalism*, by Wanning Sun and John Sinclair, 48-68. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016

127 Cariello, Túlio. Chinese Investment in Brazil 2021? A year of recovery. Rio de Janeiro: CEBC, 2022

128 Originally, Xinhua only reported news about Brazil to China. However, since the

1999<sup>129</sup>. And yet, Beijing has never dared to open a Portuguese station. In 2010, CCTV chose São Paulo as the location for its Latin American base, citing the advantages of the city's infrastructure and geographical location, and Chinese journalists were sent to cover Brazil for Chinese news — but not to produce Portuguese content. This strategy began to shift in 2019, as we will explore in the next chapter<sup>130</sup>.

## 2.4 Bridging the Gap: Content-Sharing Agreements

For the mentioned reasons, both Brazil and Hispanic Latin America pose substantial challenges to the growth and acceptance of Chinese state media, especially when compared to other regions where they have achieved moderate success.

Executives of Chinese state media have struggled not only to operate in these regions but also to establish their brands. It's worth noting that while Hispanic America is often perceived as a homogeneous entity, each country possesses unique cultural, political, and economic traits. These differences necessitate tailored strategies for successful media market penetration.

While CGTN, CRI, Xinhua, and People's Daily persist in publishing content in Spanish and Portuguese, they have discovered an innovative approach to disseminate their messages: content-sharing agreements.

Historical records suggest that this strategy is relatively recent, initiated through forums and informal meetings conducted as side events of significant diplomatic conferences between China and Latin America. With the direct backing of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee, Xinhua hosted the World Media Summit in 2009, which was attended by numerous Latin American media groups.

These groups subsequently participated in other major conferences, such as the BRICS Media Forum in 2015, the Belt and Road Media Community,

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1980s, the agency has also produced content in Portuguese, supplying Brazilian and Portuguese media through newswires. In 2016, Xinhua also launched a new website that reports exclusively in Brazilian Portuguese

129 CRI has operations in Portuguese, but it does not only specialize in Brazil. In fact, most reports are still produced using European Portuguese, an accent that Brazilians are not used to and find difficult to understand.

130 See "3.2 Brazil"

and the CELAC-Latin America Media Leader's Summit in 2016<sup>131</sup>. The latter event was attended by several high-ranking members of the Chinese political hierarchy, including Wang Huning, Li Zhanshu, Yang Jiechi, and Xi Jinping himself (see 3.3 Chile). There, Xi emphasized the importance of elevating “Sino-Latin American media exchanges” to a new level.

Following this summit, Chinese state media expedited their cooperation projects in the region. Content-sharing agreements were signed in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Argentina, typically following a similar pattern: leveraging pre-existing commercial or political relationships, Chinese state media sought permission to reproduce local content on their platforms and reciprocally offered their content to partner companies.

According to several interviews conducted for this research, journalists and media executives reported that these agreements necessitate a minimum monthly usage of stories, photos, and videos provided by the Chinese to remain valid<sup>132</sup>. Some agreements also involve significant payments to the partner media<sup>133</sup>, with the Chinese purchasing TV airtime or newspaper and magazine space to republish content translated into the local language.

Even when financial terms are involved, these agreements prove advantageous for the Chinese. Local media outlets confer legitimacy to state-sponsored journalism by consenting to publish or broadcast their content. Some of these outlets are popular among their respective national audiences, boasting brands that have endured since colonial times. They wield influence not only over the general audience but particularly among political and economic elites.

As per Dr. Pablo Morales, this innovative approach directly addresses the cultural obstacles that have impeded the expansion of Chinese state media in the region.

“[Content-sharing agreements] try to bridge the gap by signing agreements with local media organizations. They

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131 Duarte, Luiza, Robert Albro, and Eric Hershberg. “Communicating Influence: China’s Messaging in Latin America and the Caribbean” *Center for Latin American and Latino Studies/American University*, February 2022.

132 In three interviews conducted in Chile and Argentina, sources reported that Xinhua required monthly reports showing what materials were reproduced by partner media outlets.

133 See “3.5 Mexico”



[the Chinese] know they cannot do it alone; they have to understand what is happening on the ground in different countries. And the best way to do that is by signing agreements with local media organizations because that way, they can publish content without really being recognized. In many cases, they just pass on the information, but the local audience in Chile or Colombia, for example, will only see what comes from their own local TV channels. Some people may realize that the news is not coming from Reuters or the main Western news agencies, but others will not pay attention to these details. What people may notice is that some channels report slightly differently about China. And these may be on the agreements they have signed<sup>134</sup>.”

Latin American media executives are aware of China's extensive censorship apparatus. Even in newsrooms lacking reporters with expertise in China affairs, most journalists understand that content produced by Chinese state media journalists is subject to direct interference from the government and the CCP. So, why would numerous media conglomerates risk their credibility and prestige to publish content known to be propaganda?

There are several answers to this question. As China's presence in the region has become more pronounced, media professionals interviewed for this study unanimously noted a surge in interest in news about China among Latin audiences over the past decade. Local media outlets initially responded to this demand by translating journalistic content from American or European news agencies, newspapers, and broadcasters. However, the outcome was often bland, with identical stories sometimes replicated verbatim across multiple outlets.

This situation presented a dilemma for these companies — possessing high-quality, diverse journalistic content about China became an urgent requirement to remain competitive and relevant. However, as they explored options, many editors encountered cultural, financial, and logistical challenges that were difficult to surmount. Chinese state media were quick to interpret the market and propose content-sharing agreements as a solution.

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134 Interview Pablo Morales by the author, September 30, 2022

Below, I will outline some of these challenges. Some of them are typical of media in developing countries, such as the need for skilled staff and financial hardships. Others, such as the decline in visa issuance for journalists, rising hostility toward foreign media, and cultural difficulties in dealing with Chinese people, are common hardships for any journalist there, regardless of where they come from.

#### 2.4.1 Lack of training, language skills, and cultural awareness

Latin American journalists interviewed for this study underscored a pervasive lack of knowledge on the subject. Reporters in the region who cover international affairs seldom speak Mandarin, and most are unfamiliar with the workings of China's political system.

Language proficiency is often deemed an indispensable skill for any journalist covering a foreign country. Besides mitigating potential resistance from interviewees, language skills facilitate a deeper understanding of how a country or society functions, as they enable access to information without the need for translation and the use of primary sources (reports, documents, etc).

For decades, English has essentially been the *lingua franca*. For many media companies, it is far easier to find professionals fluent in English than in any other language. Furthermore, in many Western European countries, proficiency in English as a second language is relatively high, which can incentivize Latin American media to dispatch correspondents there and allow them time to learn the local language while temporarily working in English.

Conversely, the learning curve for Mandarin is much steeper. Mandarin is considered one of the world's most complex languages and has another deterrent factor: the variant taught in schools, Standard Mandarin (pǔtōnghuà 普通话), is an artificial language that many Chinese are not fluent in<sup>135</sup>.

Even if a journalist invests considerable time in mastering Putonghua and becomes capable of conducting interviews with locals in this language, their knowledge may prove futile depending on where they travel in China. Some

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135 Moser, David. *A Billion Voices: China's Search for a Common Language*. Sydney: Penguin Australia, 2016

dialects and accents are so divergent from what is learned in classrooms that they don't even sound like the same language.

Brazilian journalist Cibele Resckhe, formerly an editor on the international desk of Brazil's *Globo News*, is one of the few professionals proficient in Chinese in Latin American mass media, in addition to holding a master's degree in China Studies from Peking University.

One of her primary motivations for investing so much time and money in learning about China was recognizing how much the role of the correspondent has evolved in recent years following the advent of the internet. In the past, Resckhe analyzed, they were primarily eyewitnesses to news abroad, but with the advent of the Internet, their mere physical presence is no longer justified. "For media outlets to invest in foreign bureaus and hire correspondents, they must have access to exclusive information and conduct in-depth interviews on the ground. Twitter is faster than most journalists for breaking news these days," she said<sup>136</sup>.

Daigo Oliva, international desk editor at the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, concurred. Oliva emphasized that being able to speak the local language is essential "to have a minimum level of familiarity [with the country] so that the reporting does not become too superficial." He mentioned that his newspaper has sent correspondents to Beijing in the past, but "one would always need a translator to navigate the country, which not only results in poorer reporting but also escalates the final cost of foreign assignments."

"Because of the language barrier, our newspaper now relies largely on media outlets such as the South China Morning Post and the Global Times to report as accurately as possible what the Chinese think on a given issue. This is not because these are the best media there, but because they publish in English. I have a person on my team who is learning Mandarin, but it is expensive and time-consuming. Based on my understanding and following our competitors, my impression is that the local Chinese news coverage is, unfortunately, quite amateurish<sup>137</sup>."

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136 Interview Cibele Resckhe by the author, May 2, 2023

137 Interview Daigo Oliva by the author, April 28, 2022

Despite the inherent difficulty of the language, Mandarin courses are scarce in Latin America. Confucius Institutes often serve as the primary, and sometimes the only, option. Besides their direct affiliation with the Chinese state (highlighted as a concern by some sources consulted for this research), they are predominantly located in major cities, and many only offer elementary and intermediate levels.

The lack of Chinese language skills is not only a hurdle for sending journalists to China but poses an even greater challenge for those reporting on the country from afar. Reporters and editors lamented the difficulty of securing Chinese sources for interviews, particularly if they lack a personal connection with the interviewer.

Keila Cândido, a business journalist and one of the pioneers in covering Chinese companies in Latin America, recalled her experience when attempting to contact sources in China. She noted that “people were generally pleasant, but for them to say anything to you as journalists, it takes months, if not years, of trust-building<sup>138</sup>.” She also highlighted that, unlike standard Western practice, Chinese businesses seldom have a public relations office, so access to board members, managers, and CEOs heavily relies on personal contacts.

Cibele Reschke emphasized the significance of these personal connections when she explained how she managed to secure exclusive information during the early stages of the pandemic in Wuhan. She stated that she heavily relied on acquaintances she had made prior to joining *Globo News*. “Censorship plays a significant role because people hesitate to speak to you unless they know you personally. In general, everyone in China filters everything they say to others. Even in everyday conversations, people do not feel at ease expressing their thoughts, not just to journalists.”

#### 2.4.2 Financial constraints

In line with a global trend, revenues for Latin American mass media have significantly declined in recent years. Newspapers and magazines are still grappling with the transition to the Internet, where they vie with pervasive social media for attention and advertising. Concurrently, radio and television stations are contending with a growing lack of interest and the shift of younger audiences to foreign streaming platforms.

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138 Interview Keila Cândido by the author, April 25, 2022

A smaller audience and reduced funding necessitate prudent allocation of resources. Expenses for correspondents and foreign bureaus, paid in US dollars have led to a drastic reduction in the number of professionals working abroad in recent years.

Daigo Oliva posited that even if the media manages to find some financial flexibility to dispatch correspondents abroad or pay for superior stories, it's unrealistic to expect reporters to invest the time required to build relationships and adapt to the new professional routine, as was the norm in the past. He stated, "Money is tight and you can hardly afford to lose it with adjustment time. If we are hiring a China reporter, I need that person to sit in their chair and immediately start producing news in the most efficient way possible."

### 2.4.3 China's increasing restrictions on foreign press

If a media outlet can find a Mandarin-speaking journalist who fits within its budget, it faces an even more formidable challenge: China's escalating hostility towards foreign media, irrespective of their origin. This is one of the most effective strategies used by Beijing to limit independent journalistic reporting and control international media coverage of China.

As condemned by the International Federation of Journalists, "China is employing a multi-faceted strategy to reshape the information landscape to its advantage," restricting journalistic access through visa denials, hostile working conditions, limited access, and excessive bureaucracy.

"This had the effect of creating a vacuum in China coverage, creating a demand for stories from China, which could then be filled with state-sponsored content already available through content-sharing agreements (...), increasing the global media's dependence on China for content, whether that be news stories or softer cultural content<sup>139</sup>."

Current rules imposed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to issue journalist visas make the process incredibly bureaucratic and expensive, for example:

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139 International Federation of Journalists. "The Covid-19 Story: Unmasking China's Global Strategy" *IFJ*, May, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3BFR67Q>

★ The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs mandates that media outlets establish a physical bureau in the country, resulting in newspapers and TV stations having to shoulder the cost of renting commercial property<sup>140</sup>;

★ Chinese law prohibits the employment of freelance translators and assistants. The so-called “news assistants”<sup>141</sup> must be permanent employees, necessitating additional salaries. Given that proficiency in Mandarin does not guarantee the ability to interview locals, these professionals are often indispensable;

★ Chinese law disallows journalists from working on a freelance basis, a common practice in most countries. Consequently, even if there are journalists already in China willing to collaborate, Latin American media cannot employ them;

★ Customs regulations make it difficult to ship equipment such as camcorders, microphones, lighting, etc. Even for short-term coverage, it is necessary to provide extensive documentation, including the serial number of the equipment;

★ Strict capital flow controls impose additional taxes and bank fees on money transfers from abroad to China;

★ Formalizing foreign correspondents' residency in China requires medical appointments and numerous visits to police stations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, making it impossible for reporters to start sending news immediately upon arrival;

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140 Some journalists are exempt from this obligation and authorized to register the headquarters of the media they represent in their own homes. As this does not seem to be the general rule and the sources consulted for this research (including official Chinese sources) provided differing information, this item has been retained in the list

141 Chinese nationals cannot work as reporters for foreign media bureaus in China and can only serve as “researches” or “assistants.” In practice, many Chinese are full-time journalists for companies such as the New York Times and CNN, but the legal ban prevents their names from appearing in the bylines

★ Visa issuance takes a long time. The local Chinese embassy must approve the application and recommend the journalist to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has no fixed deadline for considering the application. Visits to the local embassy are often required, incurring additional travel costs;

★ Applicants must wait outside of China for their visa applications to be reviewed and issued. This effectively prevents journalists who are already in China for other reasons (business, tourism, study) from quickly converting their status into a permanent media residence permit.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) released a report in 2023<sup>142</sup> indicating that as of January of that year, at least 52% of foreign media bureaus affiliated with the association were still awaiting visa approvals to send foreign correspondents to China.

The FCCC also reported that journalists who had already obtained permission to work in China faced numerous challenges. These included harassment and detention of sources by police forces, harassment of their Chinese colleagues by security officials, cancellation of internal work trips due to government pressure, and systematic denial of accreditation cards for official events.

## 2.5 Chinese Reporters on Social Media: The Influencer Strategy

While content-sharing agreements currently form the cornerstone of China's state media presence in Latin America, a more subtle, cost-effective, and efficient strategy is being implemented.

CMG recognized the invaluable international experience that many Chinese professionals working in state media possess. They have gained insights into various cultures through academic and professional exchanges, and it became clear that this expertise could be leveraged to produce content tailored for different countries.

As a result, since 2020, the media group has been proactively investing in positioning its Chinese state media reporters as social media influencers.

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142 Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. "Zero Covid, Many Controls: Covering China in 2022" *FCC*, March 1, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3MoNeZ2>

This approach targets audiences on a more personal level, fostering stronger engagement and resonance with Chinese content.

This concept was initially tested in Africa and Southeast Asia. Similar initiatives were subsequently launched in Europe, the United States<sup>143</sup>, and finally, Latin America. This research identified at least four Facebook accounts, maintained by CMG professionals, that help amplify the reach of reports disseminated by Chinese state media; two are in Spanish and two in Portuguese.

### 2.5.1 Hispanic Latin America

“A Chinese influencer with a Latin American heart.” This is how Peru’s *Capechi* magazine described<sup>144</sup> Li Yu, better known on the internet as Jimena. A graduate of Hispanic Philology from Beijing’s Capital Normal University, Jimena has carved out a prominent online presence through her popular Facebook page, “Jimena a tu clic” (Jimena a click away), boasting an impressive following of over 380,000 likes<sup>145</sup>.

Li Yu typically conducts daily live streams during the night in China (which corresponds to the afternoon in Latin American countries). The topics she covers are diverse and predominantly non-political, focusing mainly on culture and gastronomy. Occasionally, she discusses the benefits of China’s relations with various countries in the region.

She is fluent in Spanish, and her experience working in countries like Colombia, Argentina, and Peru enables her to incorporate puns and jokes into her content. Although her affiliation with China Media Group was indicated, *Capechi* Magazine did not mention that her social media pages are part of a sophisticated network created by CMG to promote its bilingual journalists as local influencers.

The second page in Spanish, “Viva Studio,” managed by Deng Ying, a reporter for CGTN Español, has amassed an impressive one million likes. In addition to cultural content, Deng often tackles more sensitive topics.

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143 Seitz, Amanda, Eric Tucker, and Mike Catalini. “How China’s TikTok, Facebook influencers push propaganda” *Associated Press*, March 30, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3O-sadVK>

144 Millones, Sonia. “Jimena Li Yu: La ‘Influencer’ China con Corazón Latino” *Capechi Trade* 10 (2022): 50-52. <https://bit.ly/3M92oBu>

145 All numbers mentioned throughout this section were audited in May, 2023



For instance, in March 2021, when commenting on the meeting between Chinese and U.S. government officials in Alaska, she published a post on her page quoting Yang Jiechi, former director of China's Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission: "The U.S. does not qualify to talk to China in a superior position because bullying does not work for the Chinese people" (see Figure 4).

Referring to President Tsai Ing-wen's April 2023 visit to the United States (whom he labels a "Taiwanese separatist leader"), Ding accused Washington of "provoking Beijing." "The secessionist [Tsai] continued her controversial escalation to seek support and tout Taiwan's so-called independence. As expected, she received a special welcome in New York," Ding said in a video released on April 6, 2023<sup>146</sup>. The video goes on to show Chinese protesters in the city labeling Tsai a "failure" and American nationals shouting at her through megaphones, "Get out of our country and stop selling your war against China, they are not our enemy."

**FIGURE 4:** Deng Ying reports on the meeting between U.S. and Chinese delegations, warning that "bullying does not work with Chinese people"



146 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3044667769162391>

More recently, Deng has produced a series of videos and live streams showcasing villages and towns in Xinjiang province, where China has allegedly been conducting a campaign of persecution against the Uyghur ethnic minority since 2014. The content maintains a positive tone and attempts to depict an alleged peaceful coexistence between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, as well as promote local cuisine. Her posts did not mention the international controversy surrounding human rights violations in Xinjiang.

### 2.5.2 Profiles in Brazilian Portuguese

Considering the cultural and market differences between Brazil and Latin America, there are also two profiles in Brazilian Portuguese. The most prominent is “Luana em Pequim” (Luana in Beijing), with more than 1.6 million likes, managed by the reporter “Luana Xing”.

Before joining CMG, Luana was an exchange student at the University of Aveiro in Portugal. In 2019, she initially founded the page “Estúdio da Luana” (Luana’s Studio), where she recorded covers of fado, a traditional Portuguese musical style. Although it has been inactive since October 2021, the page gained traction and had more than 100,000 likes. Her latest updates are reposts from a second page maintained by the journalist, “Luana em Pequim”, primarily aimed at the Brazilian audience.

The creation of this second Facebook page in January 2021 coincides with Luana’s debut as a reporter for the TV show “Mundo China,” an editorial partnership between CMG and the media conglomerate *Grupo Band* that airs in prime time on Brazilian television (see 3.2.3.2 *Grupo Band*). She follows similar editorial choices to her colleague Jimena and avoids getting embroiled in controversy: Her content focuses on Chinese culture, with occasional selfies at tourist monuments in China and trivia with Brazilian expats living in Beijing.

Luana also garnered considerable attention when she collaborated with Brazilian influencer Mohamad Hindi, a former contestant in the renowned culinary reality show “Masterchef Brasil” in 2014 (also broadcast by *Grupo Band*). He is now an internet celebrity known for his gastronomy YouTube channel. Hindi has 2.84 million subscribers on YouTube alone and equally popular accounts on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook.

The collaboration between the two began in July 2021, six months after the Facebook page “Luana em Pequim” appeared. In her debut video, Hindi

introduces Luana as his “China correspondent.” I was able to verify and confirm that a professional CMG team shot all the content she produced for his channel.

Brazilian law requires that videos featuring Luana in a paid partnership be marked as “advertising.” However, there is no such label on Hindi’s videos<sup>147</sup>. It is unclear if or how much Chinese state media paid for him to publish their content, but Hindi has given interviews claiming substantial profits from advertising on his channel and social media profiles<sup>148</sup>.

Luana was virtually unknown to the Brazilian public when she began appearing on his channel, and it is unlikely that these videos were published there for free. Nevertheless, the partnership was fruitful: no less than 19 videos, divided into two seasons, which together have more than 2.84 million views. The series’ second season ended in January 2023.

During this research, I invited Luana for an interview about her work in social media. She asked me to email her the questions in advance as she needed “clearance from her bosses at CMG.” I asked how the idea of promoting her on social media came about, the reach of her pages, and the relationship between her public persona and her work for Chinese state media. After 11 days, she replied that she “did not know how to answer the questions” and ignored my further attempts to contact her.

Even after admitting in our messages that she would need CMG’s permission to talk about her Facebook page, she says something different when addressing her audience. The Chinese influencer denies any association between her social media profiles and Chinese state media. In a video posted on July 8, 2021, she comments on the “China state-controlled media” label that Meta, Facebook’s parent company, applied to her two pages.

“In the last few days, Facebook has tagged my page and Instagram account with a very interesting label: ‘China’s state-controlled media.’ I saw this last week. I had no idea what that was, but I knew it was a Facebook action. My first

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147 Mr. Hindi’s agent was contacted for this research but did not respond to our interview request

148 Lucro #51. “De cozinheiro rebelde a youtuber de sucesso: Mohamad Hindi usou a fama a seu favor” *CNN Pop*, March 23, 2023. <https://bit.ly/41OiVRs>

reaction [was to think], ‘What a strange thing.’ This page is mine, and mine only; the initiative to create accounts on social media so that more Portuguese-speaking people can follow my life here [in China] was mine. (...) I thought of several possibilities [for this label], and I think it’s because of my profession. As you know, I am a journalist and have many opportunities to attend and report on official events. Did they give me this label because of my profession? I do not know,” Luana said in the video, without mentioning her affiliation with the Chinese state media.

The second Facebook page in Portuguese is “Reporter Olivia Yang,” managed by CGTN journalist Yang Tanli (or Olivia, as she is known in Brazil). Established in July 2020, the page had garnered 93,000 likes by May 2023. Yang pursued a Bachelor’s degree in Portuguese Language and Literature, viewing it as a “shortcut to job openings offered by Chinese state oil, soy, and energy companies.” However, unlike most of her peers, she chose to focus on the Brazilian variant of the language from the outset, banking on the growth of relations between China and Brazil.

Her career trajectory shifted towards communication when she served as an interpreter for a team of journalists from the Brazilian television station *SBT* during the 2008 Olympics while still in college. After graduating from the Communication University of China in 2010, she quickly assumed the role of an administrative assistant at CCTV. The following year, Yang assisted in establishing a bureau for the channel in Angola. In Africa, she worked as a reporter for the Chinese network in Mozambique and Kenya before relocating to Brazil in 2013.

After spending five years in Rio de Janeiro, she was transferred to the CGTN office in Washington. However, she was expelled in March 2020, along with 60 other colleagues, amidst tightening Sino-American relations<sup>149</sup>.

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149 The then-Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, rationalized the decision by stating that China had been “imposing increasingly severe surveillance, harassment, and intimidation” against foreign journalists operating in China. He expressed hope that Beijing would reassess its treatment of the U.S. and foreign press following the expulsion of the journalists. In a response that came two weeks later, China expelled 13 American reporters from *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *The*

Yang told me<sup>150</sup> that creating a Facebook page was a means of maintaining contact with her Brazilian followers, continuing to practice Portuguese, and “clarifying xenophobic narratives about the Chinese people that were prevalent on Brazilian social networks at that time due to Covid-19.”

“After the pandemic outbreak, the relationship between China and Brazil, which had always been stable and mutually beneficial, began to deteriorate. Some of my Chinese colleagues received attacks on social media, either for negative or untrue reports about Chinese eating habits or for speeches promoted by U.S. government officials, for example. One of them had depression, and her medical condition worsened considerably. (...) So my only intention [in creating the page] was to educate and show the truth about what was being published.”

Yang is not one to shy away from addressing sensitive topics. In the past, she has reported on a range of issues including China’s relations with the Taliban, the Taiwan issue, China’s stance on Russia’s conflict with Ukraine, and the Chinese political system, among others.

Yang asserts that she selects topics based on what her followers request and makes it clear in her videos when the views expressed align with those of the Chinese government. As of the completion of this research in October 2023, her content had not been labeled as “China state-controlled media.” But she has expressed dissatisfaction with how this label has been applied to her colleagues at CMG.

“The problem with these platforms is that they treat Chinese speech and media as a single entity. As I wrote for [the Chinese version of] *The New York Times*<sup>151</sup>, when

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Washington Post

150 Interview Yang Tanli (Olivia Yang) by the author, May 22, 2022

151 Yang, Tanli. “拜登上台后, 中美“媒体战”能否走出阴影? [Will the “Media War” between China and the U.S. Come Out from the Shadows After Biden Takes Office?]” *The New York Times (Chinese Edition)*, January 27, 2021. <https://nyti.ms/41R3bwT>

I lived in Africa and Brazil, I was judged by the quality of my content, not by my nationality or where I worked. Generally, my audience understood that just because I work for a Chinese state media does not mean I am just reflecting what my government wants. But in America, it is entirely different. They think that the government orders everything we say and that there is no genuine concern about the veracity of our stories. I am not hurting anyone and am entitled to my voice. So, I think this [China state-controlled media label] is not fair.”

Despite her content often aligning with the well-known arguments of the Chinese government, Yang maintained that the initiative is personal and that she has never experienced interference from her superiors regarding her posts.

Yang was relocated to the CCTV bureau in Thailand in the summer of 2022, but she continues to sporadically produce stories for “Mundo China,” a TV news segment co-produced with Brazil’s *Grupo Band*. Her Facebook page in Portuguese remains active, and she has broadened her social media presence to TikTok<sup>152</sup>. She created an account in February 2023, which has amassed 37,000 followers in just three months. This demonstrates the significant impact and reach of these new media strategies.

### 2.5.3 Figures

The Facebook pages of CMG journalists targeting Latin American audiences share a common trait: they have amassed a significant number of likes, surpassing many local celebrities and established journalists.

However, these Chinese influencers remain largely unknown to the general public, and their accounts on other social media platforms tend to have much smaller followings. For instance, as of May 20, 2023, Deng Ying (Viva Studio) had over 1 million likes on Facebook but only 435 subscribers on YouTube. Jimena had garnered 380,000 likes on Facebook and a mere 158 subscribers on YouTube.

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152 <https://www.tiktok.com/@reporteroliviayang>

One could attribute these discrepancies to a strategic focus on a single platform, but a closer examination of these pages suggests another factor: the use of “like farms,” companies known for selling fake followers and artificial engagement.

In 2016, Meta released the CrowdTangle Intelligence Report, a tool designed to assist journalists and researchers in tracking trends, processing data from pages of public interest, and monitoring user posts on social media. I used CrowdTangle to audit the four pages mentioned in this research — “Jimena a tu clic,” “Viva Studio,” “Luana em Pequim,” and “Reporter Olivia Yang.” The timeframe for this audit spans from the creation date of each page to May 20, 2023. The complete reports can be found in Appendix 2.

The first criterion analyzed was the interaction rate. CrowdTangle defines interactions as the sum of reactions, comments, and shares<sup>153</sup>. To calculate a page’s interaction rate, the tool adds up the interactions of all posts (accounting for weights), divides this by the number of posts, and then divides this again by the average account size (followers/page likes) over the timeframe<sup>154</sup>.

Applying this formula, the page “Luana em Pequim” has an interaction rate of 0.13%, “Viva Studio” 2.14%, “Jimena a tu clic” 2.05%, and “Reporter Olivia Yang” 3.89%. Since Meta does not publish global average figures for any of its indicators, it is impossible to infer from official statistics what the ideal interaction rate for Facebook pages is and what can be considered normal.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the temporal evolution of these rates on each page reveals an unusual pattern. Interaction rates often spike and then plummet within very short periods. This behavior is typically observed when a post goes viral — users consume a particular video or photo, for example, but do not interact with other posted content, resulting in negative rate fluctuations. In typical situations, this should be the exception, but it has been the rule on these Chinese journalists’ pages since their accounts were created.

The second criterion observed was followers. CrowdTangle can generate a graph that shows the growth of Facebook pages in terms of the number of followers, week by week since their creation. The main outliers were as follows:

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153 Fernández, Elena. “CrowdTangle Glossary - Definitions for common CrowdTangle metrics and filters” *CrowdTangle*, n.d. <https://bit.ly/3WCtbvb>

154 Fernández, Elena. “How is interaction rate calculated?” *CrowdTangle*, n.d. <https://bit.ly/45iETPc>

★ “Viva Studio” grew exponentially between August 22 - December 18, 2022, reaching 1 million likes. Since then, the page has stagnated, with weekly variations never bigger than 1% (and sometimes even negative);

★ “Jimena a tu clic” recorded considerable growth between November 8 - December 5, 2020, February 7 to 20, 2021, December 12 to 25, 2021, and February 20-June 4, 2022. The rest of the time, there is essentially near-zero growth;

★ “Luana em Pequim” had a modest but steady growth between January 24, 2021, when the page was created, and October 23, of the same year. But between October 24 and December 18, 2021, the page grew fast, doubling its size (100.20%) from October 31 to November 6 of the same year. After that, the only episode of significant growth, albeit smaller than before, was reported between July 3, 2022, and February 25, 2023;

★ From July 25, 2020, when it was created, to March 4, 2023, the “Reporter Olivia Yang” page recorded weekly growth between -0.182% and 5.86%. Between April 2 to 29, 2023, there was strong growth after two of her videos went viral: in the first one, Yang compares Brazil and China’s development patterns (581k views)<sup>155</sup>, and in the second, she explains why Asian women are so skinny (3.1 million views)<sup>156</sup>.

When content doesn’t organically go viral, spikes in growth are typically attributed to paid campaigns. However, according to the Ad Library, a database that lists all active and inactive ads ever paid for by Facebook pages, the profiles mentioned in this research had only a few paid campaigns, and these were not active during the growth spikes identified by CrowdTangle.

“Luana em Pequim” was the page that invested the most in paid promotion. The first campaign, active from October 27 to 29, 2021, was a post about the greenhouse effect. The boost cost is between US\$100 - US\$199<sup>157</sup>,

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155 <https://www.facebook.com/reporteroliviayang/videos/923681648984282/>

156 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=547443960873561>

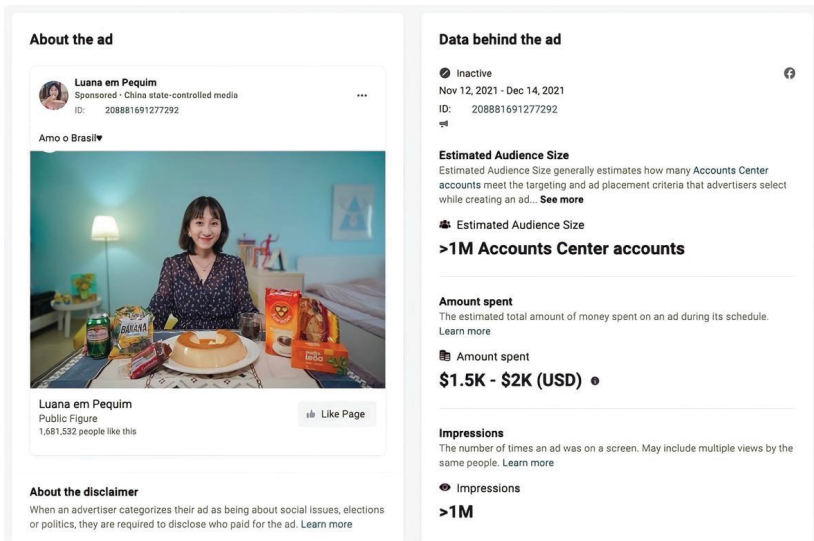
157 Facebook only shows the amounts it has received at intervals, making it impossible



reaching between 35,000 and 40,000 impressions. Interestingly, the target audience for this campaign was Portugal, not Brazil.

The first ad targeting the Brazilian audience wasn't published until November 12, 2021, and remained active until December 14 of the same year. It simply featured the caption "I love Brazil," a photo of Luana surrounded by traditional Brazilian food products, and a button to like the page. This ad was repeated nine more times, with a total expenditure of between US\$3,000-US\$3,500 to reach over 1 million impressions. This demonstrates the strategic use of social media to expand reach and influence.

**FIGURE 5:** The first ad on the "Luana em Pequim" page targeted the Brazilian audience.



As of the completion of this research, the page had two active ad campaigns that began on May 18, 2023. However, Facebook only discloses the amount spent and the number of users reached after an ad campaign has ended, so no specific figures were available here.

"Viva Studio" and "Jimena a tu clic" were the least reliant on paid promotion. "Viva Studio" has only published one ad since the creation of the page,

to know exactly how much money was invested in total

between March 07 and 8, 2023. The post — a video by journalist Deng Ying advocating for the importance of the ecological transition to the Chinese development model — cost less than US\$100 and garnered 10-15k impressions.

“Jimena a tu clic” began using paid promotions on May 14, 2023, and had four active ads. All ads featured the caption “Hola, soy Jimena, una influencer con el corazón de América Latina. Precio lo bello de la vida cotidiana. Sígame por explorar más belleza”<sup>158</sup> followed by her photo, with no reference to China.

The “Reporter Olivia Yang” page never paid for any paid boosts on Facebook<sup>159</sup>.

### 2.5.4 What can these numbers mean?

Exponential increases in followers that do not correspond to growth in interaction rates are one of the most straightforward indicators of fake or paid followers. Online services offering to inflate a Facebook page’s popularity using “like farms” (also known as “honeypots”) that generate likes and followers on demand are not hard to find<sup>160</sup>. Some packages, costing between US\$150 and US\$340 per 10,000 followers, even allow the purchase of real followers by geographical location and the delivery of likes over an extended period, thereby circumventing anti-fraud measures and avoiding the risk of having pages blocked.

The practice has become so sophisticated that detecting it is increasingly complex. However, there are still some telltale signs. Abrupt fluctuations in growth and engagement rates, as observed on three of the four Facebook

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158 In English, “Hi, I’m Jimena, an influencer with the heart of Latin America. I appreciate the beauty of everyday life. Follow me to explore more beauty”

159 Ad Library also displays the number and location of admins for each Facebook-hosted page. “Reporter Olivia Yang” is the only one of the four pages here with only 1 administrator, based in Thailand (the geolocation matches Yang Tanli’s new post in Bangkok). “Viva Studio” and “Jimena a tu clic” have 7 and 8 admins, respectively, all based in China. “Luana in China” has 9 admins in China, 4 in the United States, and 1 in the United Kingdom

160 De Cristofaro, Emiliano, Arik Friedman, Guillaume Jourjon, Mohamed Ali Kaafar, and M. Zubair Shafiq. “Paying for Likes? Understanding Facebook Like Fraud Using Honeypots” *ArXiv (Cornell University)*, September, 2014. <https://bit.ly/3WlrzFM>

pages<sup>161</sup> examined in this research, are the most common, as fake followers provide an immediate numerical boost but no consistent engagement. Also, selling followers is usually a separate service from selling interactions (charged per post), which is why many Facebook pages have a high follower count and very few reactions and comments on posts.

Chinese state media is no stranger to this deceptive practice. In 2019, The New York Times published a story<sup>162</sup> showing how Devumi, the first U.S. company to specialize in selling fake social media followers<sup>163</sup>, reportedly received undisclosed sums to provide Xinhua with “hundreds of thousands of followers and retweets” for the news agency on Twitter.

Whether it’s a coincidence or not, this influencer strategy is primarily focused on Facebook, whose API allows little transparency and effectively prevents independent third-party audits of company page metrics. Until Meta provides public access to follower demographics and percentages of bots, further investigation will be needed.

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- 161 The exception is “Reporter Olivia Yang”, the only one not yet labeled by Meta as “China state-controlled media” and whose growth patterns appear to be organic
- 162 Confessore, Nicholas, Gabriel J.X. Dance, Rich Harris, and Mark Hansen. “The Follower Factory” *The New York Times*, March 4, 2019. <https://nyti.ms/3MrEbGG>
- 163 The US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) later settled with Devumi’s CEO, German Calas, requiring him to pay a \$2.5 million fine. The FTC also issued an administrative order directing the company to cease what it considered “illegal activities.”

## INTERVIEW – PABLO MORALES

**DR. PABLO MORALES** is a Fellow in Media and Communication at the London School of Economics (LSE), Department of Media and Communication. His research interests focus on the impact of globalization on international media flows and journalistic cultures in the Global South. He is currently one of the main scholars around the world investigating China's growing communication engagement in Latin America and its impact on the region and beyond.



**CGTN has been well-established in Africa for some time and has achieved some relevance in the media landscape there. However — despite various initiatives in Latin America, including CGTN Español, CRI, and Xinhua — they have not been able to replicate this success, at least not as quickly as in Africa. Why is that, and how do you think China's media strategy differs in these regions?**

I think it is due to a combination of two aspects. One has to do with China's priorities, and the other has to do with culture, as there are strong cultural ties between Latin America and the rest of the Western world. Geopolitically, Africa has been a priority for China for many years now, much more than Latin America.

Furthermore, in the Latin American media and journalistic tradition — it may be that most of Latin America has a common language, [which makes the region] much more intertwined. Brazil speaks Portuguese, of course, but it is also very well connected with its neighbors. That makes Latin America much more uniform, and that is why foreign players in the audiovisual sector generally do not have an easy time getting a foothold there.

As far as journalism is concerned, there is a very long tradition in Latin America, mainly based on models from the U.S. and Europe. Perhaps this is why I was able to confirm through my research that audiences in Latin America generally prefer audiovisual products from the West.

We also need to consider that most Latin American countries have been independent for 200 years, so they have had more time to develop as independent entities, whereas, in Africa, decolonization happened mainly in the 20th century.

**Do you consider the strategy to popularize Chinese state media as well developed in Latin America as it is in Africa or other countries of the Global South?**

One of the big obstacles I think CGTN faced was that it was not necessarily coherent. Their strategy lacked investment or a bit more planning in terms of the platforms they would distribute the channel. At least in Mexico and Argentina, very few people know that there is a Spanish-language channel from China. That is because CGTN is distributed on Satellite TV, which is not widely available in the region. Also, if you have cable TV, you have maybe 30 channels, and if one of them is Chinese, you can still find it. On satellite, however, one can access hundreds of channels, so the competition is tougher.

In addition to TV, there is an active goal to expand to other platforms. They have been trying to open radio stations or invest in radios from different countries for more than a decade now, but have also encountered resistance from local governments. In Mexico, they were able to buy a station in Tijuana<sup>164</sup> at some point, but they wanted to do the same in Argentina and the local legislation did not allow it.

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164 Morales refers to Rádio AM 1470, which was bought by the Chinese in 2010, becoming the first subsidiary of China Radio International in Latin America. For more, see “3.5 Mexico”



## 3 Case Studies ★

### 3.1 Argentina

China state media's first steps in Argentina followed the familiar pattern of cooperating with media that are ideologically aligned with the PRC. Although it is possible that other agreements were signed earlier, the first one identified by my research was signed by Xinhua with Argenpress.info in March 2006.

However, it was only following the economic downturn of the South American nation and its ensuing issues with American creditors that Chinese media began to wield more influence there. Xi Jinping effectively managed to engage Buenos Aires and present China as a feasible alternative to Argentina's conventional alliances with the West. He signed a comprehensive strategic partnership with then-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, which not only paved the way for increased Chinese investment but also facilitated a substantial presence of Chinese state media.

Chinese media managers also demonstrated astuteness in recognizing political shifts, capitalizing on the momentum of diplomatic rapprochement to initially engage with media outlets that were favorable to Fernández de Kirchner. Following the conclusion of her term, they established partnerships with outlets that had previously opposed her government.

As we will explore further, this strategy has proven to be so successful that today, Chinese entities have established robust partnerships with nearly all major traditional Argentine media outlets. Their influence is so extensive that in most newspapers, television broadcasts, and radio programs, readers and viewers can encounter stories that are directly reproduced from content originating from Chinese propaganda sources.

### 3.1.1 Argenpress.info: A Well-Known Strategy

Argenpress.info was founded by Emilio J. Corbière<sup>165</sup>, a lawyer and journalist whose family, a group of French Freemasons, emigrated to Argentina in the 19th century. Corbière was a member of the Socialist Youth of the Democratic Socialist Party and in the 1960s-1970s edited communist publications such as *Nueva Izquierda* (New Left) and *Argentina Socialista* (Socialist Argentina). From 1973, he worked for several traditional print media, including *La Nación* (The Nation), one of the most important Argentine newspapers.

He did not start his own company until 2002. Argenpress.info defined itself as “an informative exercise that dissociates the voice of these globalized interpreters from public opinion, from the many other voices that are separated from this agenda<sup>166</sup>.” Its mission was to “defend people threatened by imperialist globalization, which is a neo-fascism generated by finance capital, and to protect and deepen freedom of information against monopolies and economic interests<sup>167</sup>.” The agency operated under a cooperative-like system whose ownership was entirely “in the hands of the journalists who worked there<sup>168</sup>.”

Emilio died in 2004, but his work outlived him. Aligned with the Argentine left-wing and very close to social scientists, labor movements, and trade unions, Argenpress.info signed cooperation agreements with several media outlets in Germany, Bolivia, Cuba, Russia, Venezuela, and Vietnam, almost all of which are associated with socialist media groups/communists. In 2006, it entered into a partnership with Xinhua, one of the first content-sharing agreements with Chinese state media in the format we know today.

At the time of the agreement, the agency’s editors described the partnership with Xinhua as “a new step in the task of achieving broader freedom of information [...] by consolidating its sources of information to produce daily news<sup>169</sup>.”

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165 Tarcus, Horacio. “CORBIÉRE, Emilio J. - Abogado, periodista e historiador socialista, de activa militancia masónica” *Diccionario Biográfico de Las Izquierdas Latinoamericanas*, n.d. <https://bit.ly/3KfPPo3>

166 Amado, Oscar and Corbière, F. “Argenpress.info cumple cuatro años” *Voltairenet*, June 27, 2006

167 Amado, Oscar. “Diez años de Argenpress.info” *Rebelión*, June 26, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3YgfdQ4>

168 Ibid.

169 Voltairenet. “Acuerdo de ARGENPRESS.INFO y la Agencia XINHUA de la



The partnership consisted of republishing the Chinese agency's content free of charge and, in return, making the Argentine agency's content available to Xinhua's audience in China. There is currently little information available about the terms of the agreement and much of the Xinhua content republished by the company was lost when Argenpress.info ceased operations in 2015. The website disappeared without explanation and former employees could not be located for this monograph.

In its heyday, the company had an average of 200,000 monthly readers, a number well below that of commercial media groups in the country. Moreover, Argenpress.info operated within a political and ideological spectrum similar to that of other left-wing media outlets with which Chinese media cooperated during the Maoist years, a *modus operandi* less consistent with the post-2008 Olympics globalization strategy.

### 3.1.2 Partnership with Argentine public media: The *Télam* case

In March 2011, Xinhua signed a new content-sharing agreement, this time with *Télam*. Unlike the previous partnership, the reach of Chinese content was significantly increased due to *Télam*'s importance and viewership.

Founded in 1945 and subordinated to the National Secretariat of Media and Public Communications, it is Argentina's largest and most important state news agency. It broadcasts nationwide on television and radio, and its reports are frequently quoted by local newspapers and news websites.

The agreement with Xinhua was signed by the president of the World Council of News Agencies and vice-president of *Télam*, Sergio Fernández Novoa, and by the then-director of Xinhua in Buenos Aires, Feng Junyang. In an interview on March 31 of the same year, Novoa said:

“An agreement that allows us to have a closer relationship with the Xinhua agency is very beneficial for us. It is an agency with a large number of clients that plans to establish offices in various very important locations around the world. Also, [the agreement] has a geopolitical significance. As

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República Popular China” *Voltairenet*, March 31, 2006. <https://shre.ink/aScH>

they continue to grow outside the framework of traditional agencies, they will certainly enrich the flow of news that circulates around the planet. I therefore believe that the role of the Xinhua agency is crucial<sup>170</sup>.”

In the same interview, Feng referred to *Telám* and Xinhua as “sister agencies” and said in an interview that the signing of the agreement was the completion of a cooperative relationship that began “many years ago<sup>171</sup>.” He mentioned the establishment of a photo distribution service and announced the creation of a video platform in Spanish “intended exclusively for customers in Latin America.”

“In recent years, China and Latin America have greatly strengthened their relations not only economically but also diplomatically. On many issues of international relations, China and Latin America have similar views and we in our agency believe that mutual understanding is very important. So, as a source of information, our agency can contribute a lot to improving this understanding between Latin America and China<sup>172</sup>.”

In addition to signing the content-sharing agreement, Novoa also invited Xinhua to join the News Agencies World Council (NACO), a forum for cooperation among news agencies, of which he was president at the time.

Recognized as a prominent media professional during the signing of the agreement with Xinhua, Novoa emerged as a key figure in the battle spear-headed by then-President Cristina Fernández against Argentina’s dominant commercial media. He was already esteemed for his contributions to public communication and was instrumental in crafting the Argentine media law introduced in 2009. This law sparked significant political debate, paving the way for Chinese media to strengthen its presence in Argentina<sup>173</sup>.

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170 *Telám*. “*Telám* amplió su acuerdo con la agencia de noticias china Xinhua [Video]” *YouTube*, March 31, 2011. <https://shre.ink/aSOI>

171 *Ibid.*

172 *Ibid.*

173 Koziner, N. S. “La judicialización de la Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audio-

### 3.1.3 Instability in Argentina: An Opportunity for Beijing

The new media law underwent debate for five years before it was finally approved during a prolonged session of Argentina's Congress in September 2009<sup>174</sup>. The law imposed a ban on “cross-ownership” between communication entities and mandated owners of diverse media channels — including newspapers, radio, and TV stations — to divest their significant and influential assets. This move provoked the wrath of media executives, leading to substantial negative coverage of Fernández's administration, which in turn affected her approval ratings.

These tensions, combined with Argentina's macroeconomic challenges, most notably its declaration of sovereign debt insolvency in 2014, provide context for Buenos Aires' growing rapport with Beijing. This set the stage for an increase in content-sharing agreements between Argentine and Chinese media outlets.

Argentina and China elevated their relationship by signing a strategic partnership in November 2004. This move was a part of then-President Nestor Kirchner's initiative to align with burgeoning Asian markets. Since 2002, Argentina has enjoyed a trade surplus with China. Just before enhancing their bilateral ties, both nations solidified several pacts in areas like civil aviation, health, culture, and agriculture. They also pledged mutual support in multilateral venues concerning territorial disputes in Taiwan and the Malvinas/Falkland Islands<sup>175</sup>.

Choosing not to run for a consecutive term, Nestor paved the way for his wife, Cristina Fernández, who won the presidential election in 2007 and secured re-election in 2011. Her administration furthered her husband's legacy of intensified trade relations with China. This led to China investing heavily in sectors like oil and gas exploration, space research, public transportation development, and the agricultural sector, especially soybean production.

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visual. Derrotero del conflicto entre el Gobierno argentino y el Grupo Clarín por la adecuación a la norma” *Studia Politicae*, 41 (2017), 5–44. <https://shre.ink/aSci>

174 Arantes, Silvana. “Sob protesto opositor, Câmara argentina aprova lei de mídia” *Folha de S. Paulo*, September 17, 2009. <https://shre.ink/aSoV>

175 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. “Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Argentine President” *FMPRC*, November 17, 2004. <https://shre.ink/aSge>

Argentina's bond with China became crucial in 2014. Buenos Aires had been grappling with a financial restructuring process since 2001, following a crisis caused by diminishing confidence in exchange rate policies.

In 2010, Fernández proposed a deal to Argentina's creditors, offering a 75% reduction on the outstanding amount in return for a fixed long-term interest payment. Although 93% of the bondholders accepted the restructured offer, the remaining 7% — mainly hedge funds headed by Aurelius Capital Management LP and Elliot Management Corp.'s NML Capital Ltd. — sought legal redress against Argentina in a New York court<sup>176</sup>.

In 2012, Judge Thomas Griesa of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York ruled in favor of these funds. Despite contesting this ruling and even appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court (which declined to review the case)<sup>177</sup>, the Fernández administration, unable to broker a compromise, declared a default in late July 2014<sup>178</sup>.

The administration asserted that without complete endorsement of the restructuring plan, they would also be incapacitated in compensating those who had consented to a settlement.

Facing the risk of being cut off from international capital, Argentina sought a financial safety net just days before acknowledging its impending debt default. In the third week of that pivotal month, Xi Jinping traveled to Buenos Aires. Together with Fernández, he inked a three-year, \$11 billion swap arrangement between their respective central banks.

This deal permitted Argentina to settle its Chinese import bills using the Chinese yuan<sup>179</sup>. It not only bolstered Argentina's dollar reserves but also furnished a safeguard against potential currency crises, positioning Argentina to adopt a firmer stance against its holdout creditors in the U.S.<sup>180</sup>.

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176 Miyashiro, Andreas K. "Argentina vs. the Hedge Funds: The 2014 Argentinian Bond Default" *Seven Pillar Institute for Global Finance and Ethics*, August 2, 2017. <https://shre.ink/aSEU>

177 Hurley, Lawrence and Marsh, S. "Supreme Court rejects Argentina appeal in bond fight" *Reuters*, June 16, 2014. <https://shre.ink/aSDP>

178 BBC. "Argentina defaults for second time" *BBC News*, July 31, 2014. <https://shre.ink/aSDS>

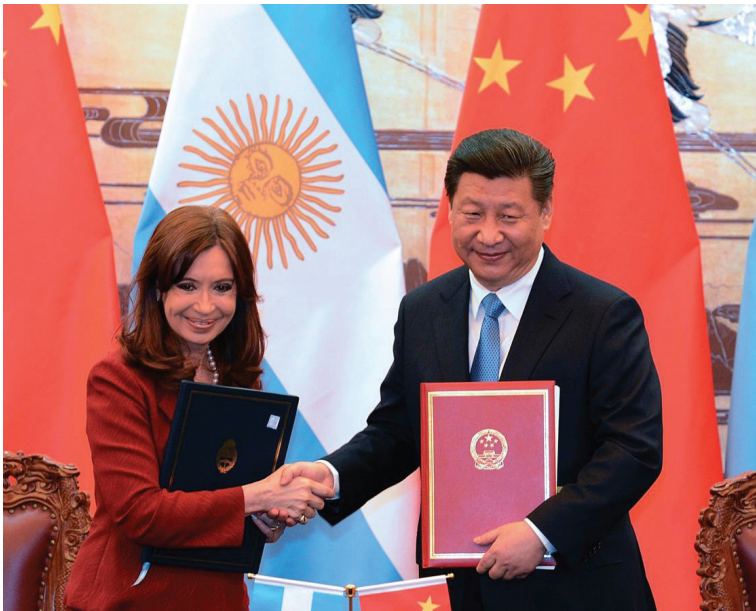
179 Reuters. "China deals with Argentina" *Deutsche Welle*, July 19, 2014. <https://shre.ink/aS08>

180 Yanran, Xu. *China's Strategic Partnerships in Latin America: Case Studies of China's Oil Diplomacy in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, 1991–2015*. Lanham:

Fernández praised the agreement, highlighting its role in maintaining stable exchange rates during a period plagued by “speculative attacks by vulture funds.” She declared this event as “a day that we can define as fundamental for relations between our two countries.” This financial backing marked a new chapter in Sino-Argentine diplomacy. During Xi’s visit, both countries agreed to enhance their relationship to the level of a “comprehensive strategic partnership,” a term often used by Beijing to denote significant diplomatic allies.

The agreement penned by the two heads of state underscored that, following “frequent high-level exchanges” between the two nations, they had fostered “mutual political trust and substantive cooperation in numerous fields.” Their collective vision was to craft an “international system that is more equitable [...] for both countries and all developing countries<sup>181</sup>.”

**FIGURE 6:** Xi Jinping and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner meet in Buenos Aires (Casa Rosada, 2015)



Lexington Books, 2016

181 Cancillería Argentina. “Declaración Conjunta sobre el Establecimiento de la Asociación Estratégica Integral entre la República Argentina y la República Popular China” *Biblioteca Digital de Tratados*, July 18, 2014. <https://shre.ink/ak1E>

Xi and Fernández also fortified the Strategic Dialogue on Economic Cooperation and Coordination and the Permanent Binational Commission — twin apex platforms fostering multifaceted engagement between Buenos Aires and Beijing.

The improvements in the bilateral relationship, termed as “upgrading” by Xinhua<sup>182</sup>, led to a surge of Chinese capital across various sectors such as gas, mining, agriculture, nuclear energy, cultural initiatives, infrastructure, and finance. However, this development was not without its fair share of skepticism.

Argentina’s mainstream media, already critical of Fernández due to earlier cited reasons, keenly observed the burgeoning ties with Beijing and its ramifications domestically. *Clarín* and *La Nación*, two dominant newspapers typically associated with Argentina’s center-right factions, frequently published critiques. They insinuated that deepening Sino-Argentine ties and resultant agreements were to Argentina’s detriment (see 3.1.5 Overcoming Opposition).

### 3.1.4 Chinese media boom in Argentina in 2014-2016

In this evolving diplomatic landscape, *Diario del Pueblo*, the Spanish counterpart of the Chinese state-run People’s Daily, inaugurated a pioneering bureau in Buenos Aires on November 25, 2014. The media entity, under the direct aegis of the Chinese Communist Party, was registered with a declared share capital of US\$45 million.

It aimed to offer “multiple internet services that cover and focus on news and information, building a world-class, multimedia, globalized and multilingual cultural company.” However, local media observed its arrival at a pivotal juncture marked by numerous commercial agreements with Beijing, casting a shadow of public distrust<sup>183</sup>.

As diplomatic relations intensified, Chinese state media started forging partnerships with the Argentine press — a recurring theme in other case

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182 Xinhua. “China, Argentina upgrade ties to comprehensive strategic partnership” China.org.cn, July 19, 2014. <https://shre.ink/ak1Z>

183 Stella, J. M. “El desembarco del Diario del Pueblo chino en la Argentina” *Informador Público*, May 23, 2015, <https://shre.ink/akzN>

studies. Initially, only pro- Fernández media outlets welcomed the Chinese overtures, but they were soon followed by those who had been suspicious of China's burgeoning influence.

Veintitrés' *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper was at the forefront. In 2015, it entered a content-sharing agreement that resulted in the weekly feature China Watch, a quartet of pages of China-centric news handpicked and refined by the editorial staff of China Daily (which had made similar deals with other English-language media in the past<sup>184</sup>).

The collaboration with *Veintitrés* spanned various platforms. In May, Xinhua also clinched a deal, supplying *Tiempo Argentino* and CN23 news channel with comprehensive global news in Spanish, along with visual content and a dedicated TV show<sup>185</sup>.

The partnership was ceremoniously unveiled at a lavish hotel in the upscale Recoleta district of Buenos Aires. The event, which was endorsed by the Chinese embassy, featured numerous speeches from both Chinese diplomats and Argentine officials, all lauding the media collaboration. Ambassador Yang Wanming<sup>186</sup> described the partnership as "very significant," and further elaborated during his speech:

"The strengthening ties between China and both Latin America and Argentina encourage all involved to broaden their understanding. This agreement serves to provide more insight to the public. Enhanced mutual understanding fosters societal friendships, which are crucial for a robust bilateral relationship<sup>187</sup>."

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184 Meade, Amanda. "Nine Entertainment newspapers quit carrying China Watch supplement" *The Guardian*, December 8, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3DS9iaD>

185 Xinhua en Español. "ESPECIAL: Grupo Veintitrés de Argentina celebra acuerdo con agencia Xinhua" *News.cn – XinhuaNet*, May 30, 2015. <https://bit.ly/3OAJy0j>

186 As we will discuss shortly, the Chinese media leveraged the expertise acquired from agreements with Argentine groups to duplicate the successful strategy with the Brazilians. Yang's time in Brazil was also characterized by the so-called "wolf warrior diplomacy," a period when Chinese officials adopted an overtly aggressive posture on social media. In Brasilia, he found himself embroiled in public disputes with Brazil's then education minister and the sons of President Jair Bolsonaro

187 Ibid.

Sergio Szpolski, *Veintitrés*' Executive Vice-President, believed the media collaboration “empowers us as a medium and product” and perceived it as a bridge to a nation with escalating significance to Argentina<sup>188</sup>.

Szpolski's reputation in Argentina is contentious. Embroiled in a myriad of legal entanglements spanning labor fraud, tax evasion, and more, his affiliation with Fernández provided a temporary lifeline for his ventures.

Under his and partner Matías Garfunkel's leadership, the *Veintitrés* Group garnered a whopping 815 million Argentine pesos (around \$81 million at that time's conversion rate, \$2.8 million in current terms) in advertising revenue from the Argentine government from 2009 to 2015<sup>189</sup>. In exchange, they instructed their media outlets to broadcast favorable coverage of the Fernández administration<sup>190</sup>. Szpolski leveraged his governmental ties and the traditional media's critical stance on Chinese matters to solidify his deals with Xinhua.

The collaboration was dissolved swiftly after opposition presidential candidate Mauricio Macri triumphed over Daniel Scioli, Fernández's nominee, in the November 2015 elections. This political shift paved the way for the unearthing of numerous tax and labor fraud cases involving company executives later that year<sup>191</sup>.

Some media entities like CN23, *El Argentino*, and *Vortex* were acquired by *Grupo Indalo* in 2016. This group not only upheld the prior agreements but also extended them to other channels in its portfolio.

*Grupo Indalo*, established in the early 2000s, is a relatively new conglomerate overseen by Cristóbal López. López amassed his wealth predominantly from transportation, casinos, gambling, and petroleum ventures. It wasn't until 2010 that the conglomerate ventured into media. It currently boasts ownership of 5 radio stations, a TV channel, four news websites, two newspapers, and three audiovisual production entities.

Before assimilating assets from the *Veintitrés* Group, Chinese media executives were acquainted with Indalo. On November 12, 2015, one of

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188 Ibid.

189 Redacción Perfil. “Grupo 23, de Szpolski y Garfunkel: el fin de la era K con deudas y despidos” *Perfil*, January 16, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3DVczWG>

190 Noticias. “A la izquierda de los K está medio país” *Noticias Perfil*, January 12, 2012. <https://bit.ly/3OALv4d>

191 Crettaz, José. “Szpolski-Garfunkel: la implosión del mayor grupo kirchnerista de medios” *La Nación*, January 17, 2016. <https://bit.ly/4563fLI>



Indalo's newspapers, *Ámbito Financiero*, cemented a content collaboration agreement with Xinhua.

The primary aim, as declared during the announcement, was to “establish an informative conduit bridging both cultures [Argentina and China], eventually leading to the release of diverse content” that could “grant readers access to political, economic, and societal updates from one of the world's superpowers<sup>192</sup>.”

During the inauguration of this partnership, the group's then-CEO, Argentine journalist Francisco Mármol, expressed optimism that this would herald “the inception of a fruitful content exchange, enhancing our media's content portfolio<sup>193</sup>.” From 2021 onwards, this alliance has broadened to include joint ventures between video production companies under Indalo's umbrella and China Media Group.

Ignacio Vivas, Indalo Group's vice-president, and Idalo Media's CEO, revealed in an interview<sup>194</sup> for this study that CGTN executives reached out to him via LinkedIn in 2020. According to Vivas, these Chinese state network representatives mentioned an upcoming visit to Buenos Aires with plans to “initiate discussions with various media companies to establish connections.”

Vivas recognized the approach but expressed concerns when “they insisted on signing a data-sharing agreement which required broadcasting at least one of their segments monthly.” He declined this proposal, stating it did not align with their audience's preferences. Following his refusal, the interactions halted until the Chinese party reestablished contact, this time suggesting a content co-production contract for CGTN Español.

“It is more like freelancing. At Indalo, we suggest topics and potential interviews to them. Once they approve the plan and we agree on how many interviews to do and how long each one should be, we start production. We then put together a small team and they work on it.”

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192     *Ambito BIZ*. “Grupo Indalo cierra acuerdo con la agencia china de noticias Xinhua” *Ámbito Financiero*, November 12, 2015. <https://bit.ly/3OSInBN>

193     *Ibid.*

194     Interview Ignacio Vivas by the author, March 21, 2023

The contract stipulated the production of 24 stories by *Grupo Indalo* over a year, a commitment that has been renewed annually. In 2023, for instance, Indalo created pieces for CGTN on topics such as political unrest in Peru, the constitutional referendum in Chile, Argentina's application to join BRICS, and the CELAC summit held in Buenos Aires.

Vivas believes that the partnership is beneficial for the Chinese, stating, "If you produce the content locally, leveraging local journalists and the expertise of a seasoned company, it tends to be perceived as more credible than if produced elsewhere." He refuted claims of agreeing to the Chinese's republication stipulations in return for a contract with the national TV network.

"They consistently send us news segments, but we don't use them due to our audience's preferences. They are generally indifferent to occurrences in China... Here in Argentina, our viewers are predominantly focused on domestic events, happenings in neighboring Latin American nations, the U.S., and possibly Europe."

Post-contract, Chinese state media has often referred to Vivas as an advocate for cooperative endeavors between Beijing and Latin American media. For instance, in 2021, he agreed to Indalo Media's affiliation with the China-Latin America Media Action Project.

This initiative, steered by China Media Group, encompasses over 30 countries and emphasizes co-producing films, talk shows, and documentaries "to intensify collaboration, consolidate efforts, and establish a unified media perspective"<sup>195</sup> (see 3.4 Colombia).

In a video commentary, Vivas conveyed his firm's intent to "fortify ties with [Chinese] media agencies via this venture, broadening the scope of knowledge exchange and bolstering collaboration in documentary, news, and other content production"<sup>196</sup>.

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195 CGTN. "CGTN et les médias latino-américains publient conjointement l'initiative 'Action médias Chine-Amérique latine'" *CGTN-Français*, December 2, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3ORQ6Ai>

196 El Universal Mundo. "Profundizar la cooperación, unificar la fuerza y fomentar el consenso - CGTN de CMG y medios de comunicación latinoamericanos lanzan conjuntamente la iniciativa 'Acción de Medios China-ALC'" *El Universal*, December

### 3.1.5 Overcoming Opposition

After forging commercial ties with Indalo, Veintitrés, and Telám, the Chinese media adopted a more audacious strategy. Up until 2015, they had capitalized on a government that was amicable to their interests and on business figures connected to Fernández. But with the decline of her political faction, their advantageous position was waning. Consequently, it became essential to engage with media outlets associated with the president-elect, Mauricio Macri.

#### 3.1.5.1 *Grupo América*

The initial outreach was to *Grupo América*, which, akin to *Clarín* and *La Nación*, had been critical of the Kirchner government following the implementation of the Media Law. In March 2016, *Grupo América*, Argentina's second-largest media conglomerate, consented to publish the "China Watch" supplement in the print edition of *El Cronista*. At the time, *El Cronista* was Argentina's leading business newspaper, boasting a daily circulation of approximately 150,000 copies.

The partnership eventually extended to other media controlled by the company, such as the newspaper *La Capital*, based in the city of Rosario, and *Diario Uno*, which not only maintains an exclusive section for the Chinese supplement in its digital version to this day but also publishes China Watch in its printed versions distributed in the provinces of Mendoza, Entre Ríos and Santa Fe<sup>197</sup>.

*El Cronista* announced the deal with a celebratory op-ed<sup>198</sup>. In the article, published without attribution, the newspaper praises China Daily as "one of the most important journalistic groups in Asia" with "branches in the main cities of China and abroad, such as New York, Washington, London, and Kathmandu."

No mention was made of the fact that it is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department. However, the director of *El Cronista* gave hints about the motives behind the agreement. He is quoted

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2, 2021. <https://shre.ink/atfm>

197 Embassy in China. "Launching Ceremony of China Watch" *Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship*, May 16, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3OyVe15>

198 El Cronista. "China Watch, las noticias que ilustran el crecimiento del gigante asiático" *El Cronista*, March 16, 2016. <https://bit.ly/3DYr2RC>

in the article as saying that *Grupo América* wanted to “improve exchanges between the two countries; the furrow that had already been torn open by businessmen who wanted to do business with China, this powerful economy.”

Whether intentional or not, his quotes indicate a desire for the media group’s owners to expand their business with China beyond their newspapers. That’s because media is only a fraction of *Grupo América*’s two partners, Daniel Eduardo Villa and José Luis Manzano businesses<sup>199</sup>. The two are founders of *Andes Energía*, a multinational energy company involved in the exploration, development, and production of oil and gas, and they intended to attract Chinese capital.

Manzano is also one of the main shareholders of Integra Capital, a fund that invests in the technology, lithium, copper, and uranium mining sectors, as well as in large wineries and olive groves that are of great interest to Chinese investors in the country. Since opening the doors to the Chinese media, he has been one of the most enthusiastic Argentine media magnates in working with the Chinese. He has participated in media forums organized by Beijing and often refers to himself as a “friend of China<sup>200</sup>.”

In 2018, Manzano became one of the main sponsors of the “Casa de la Cultura China” (House of Chinese Culture)<sup>201</sup>, the first translation center for Chinese books and texts in Buenos Aires<sup>202</sup>. It publishes in Spanish some of the works of China Intercontinental Press, a publishing house that reports directly to the Cabinet Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China.

Hernán de Goñi, the current director of journalism at *El Cronista*, said in our interview<sup>203</sup> that the republication of the China Daily supplement was a decision made by the newspaper’s shareholders, not the editorial board.

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199 In 2017, Andes Energía merged with Petrolera El Trebol to create a new holding, Phoenix Global Resources. El Trebol is a subsidiary of Mercuria, one of the largest hydrocarbon trading companies in the world, which has been operating in China since 2004, including a holding company with the state-owned oil company Sinopec

200 Télam “Medios argentinos participan en un foro virtual con China” *Télam Digital*, November 02, 2011. <https://shre.ink/nDON>

201 Manzano, José Luis. “Who is José Luis Manzano?” *Medium*, August 26, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3OT2dNf>

202 News China TV. “Buenos Aires opens first center for translation of Chinese texts” [Video] *YouTube*, January 30, 2018. <https://youtu.be/hQXFikRk1so>

203 Interview Hernán de Goñi by the author, April 20, 2023.

Goñi acknowledged that the link between *Grupo América* media companies and China Daily “had to do with opening a door that [the Argentine partners] could eventually use to do business. They wanted to reach out [to Chinese businessmen] and say, ‘Look, we have a newspaper that publishes things about China,’ something that would serve as a reference if necessary to use that connection.”

“We [in the newsroom] were somewhat aloof during the negotiation [of the agreement with China Daily] and to this day, our team doesn’t influence these contents in any way. They’re provided to us at no cost. *El Cronista* simply publishes, in its print edition and only once a month, a four-page supplement that we receive in Spanish as a PDF. As soon as that file reaches my system, we release it. Essentially, the primary intent seems to be maintaining an institutional connection with the Chinese more than anything else.”

Goñi mentioned that the dissemination of Chinese content is now restricted because since signing the agreement, *El Cronista’s* business strategies have evolved. The newspaper has shifted its focus towards becoming primarily a digital news platform, aiming to establish itself as the leading source of economic news in Spanish globally. Given that the agreement with China Daily pertains only to the print edition — whose circulation plummeted from 150,000 copies in 2016 to 10,000 in 2023 — he assured that the content reaching the bulk of their readership remains unaffected by Chinese propaganda.

The newsroom also has free access to the Xinhua newswire, “a service we only rarely use,” according to Goñi. He further noted that the agreement hasn’t directly influenced *El Cronista’s* editorial approach to reporting on China, emphasizing that “unlike our competitors, we don’t concentrate heavily on broad international news.”

“If we need something, we have exclusive rights to reproduce the Financial Times, which essentially means we often mirror their world perspective. From Xinhua, we use photos or when something happens in China, as a source, let’s just say,

of ‘alternative information.’ We would never publish a news story from Xinhua verbatim, but on topics such as the Beijing Olympics, they have offered us a generous photo package at no cost. Xinhua also has very solid news from Latin America, not just China, so every now and then we republish that too.”

### 3.1.5.2 The *Clarín* and *La Nación* cases

If, in the case of *Grupo América*, the rapprochement with the Chinese was facilitated by the commercial interests of the main shareholders, *Clarín* and *La Nación* could theoretically pose a greater challenge.

*La Nación* has established itself in the Argentine media landscape as a representative of conservative voices. Founded in 1870 by then-President Bartolomé Mitre, the newspaper has always been close to oligarchs who controlled the agricultural export sector, some sectors of the Catholic Church, and the Argentine armed forces. Throughout history, the newspaper became notorious for supporting military coups and taking a firm stance against progressive issues such as abortion<sup>204</sup>.

*Clarín* was founded in 1945. It was also a staunch supporter of the 1976 military coup that overthrew Isabel Perón, Argentina’s first elected female president. In return, it received perks from the military junta: together with *La Nación* and the now-defunct afternoon newspaper *La Razón*<sup>205</sup>, *Clarín* was authorized to buy *Papel Prensa S. A.*, to this day the only Argentine company producing newsprint.

The circumstances of the purchase remain unclear to this day: the rightful owners at the time, the family of banker David Graiver, were allegedly tortured by the military and forced to sell the company to the aforementioned newspapers<sup>206</sup>.

Thanks to this monopoly, *Clarín* became Argentina’s best-selling newspaper in 1978 and subsequently the largest Spanish-language newspaper

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204 Reporters Without Borders. “La Nacion” *Media Ownership Monitor – Argentina 2018*, n.d. <https://shre.ink/atyp>

205 *Clarín* controls *Papel Prensa* and owns around 49% of the shares. 22% belongs to *La Nación* and 27% to the Argentine state

206 678informes. “*Clarín* y la oscura historia de *Papel Prensa*” [Video] *Youtube*, April 7, 2010. <https://youtu.be/hA6nl3QX3eE>

in the world. After the end of the military dictatorship in 1983, its shareholders used their leadership to create a diversified media conglomerate, which included the purchase of *Rádío Miter* in 1985 and *Canal 13* in 1989. *Grupo Clarín* also expanded by buying cable TV providers and telephone companies.

Given their ideological positioning, both media groups were expected to be staunch opponents of Nestor Kirchner and his wife and successor Cristina Fernández. This indeed happened, but instead of seeking to pacify relations, as is common in Argentine politics, Fernández went one better and launched a war against these newspapers, especially *Clarín*.

In 2008, after the newspaper's criticism of the way Fernández led a strike by agricultural producers, Buenos Aires was covered with posters reading "Clarín Miente" (Clarín Lies), "Clarín Contamina" (Clarín Contaminates) and "TN: Todo Negativo" (TN: Everything Negative<sup>207</sup>). To this day, there are suspicions that the government itself financed the campaign, counting on the help of activists close to the Kirchners.

With the approval of Argentina's media law in 2009, Fernández also ordered *Clarín* to sell 213 of its 237 pay-TV licenses and transfer control of three free-to-air television stations, one cable television channel, and a radio station<sup>208</sup>.

A year later, a report prepared by its internal trade secretary, Guillermo Moreno, accused *Clarín* and *La Nación* of committing crimes against humanity in the purchase of *Papel Prensa*<sup>209</sup>. The court later dismissed the complaint due to lack of evidence<sup>210</sup>.

The climate of hostility between the Argentine press and the Fernández government at the time certainly had an impact on the way journalists in these media reported on the rapprochement between Buenos Aires and Beijing. The main criticism focused on the government's lack of transparency

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207 TN was a TV station controlled by the Clarín Group

208 The case was not fully settled until 2014 when all appeals were decided in favor of the government and Grupo Clarín and the Federal Authority for Audiovisual Communication Services (AFSCA) finally agreed on a plan to liquidate the assets Clarín. "Otra denuncia oficialista contra Papel Prensa" *Clarín Política*, July 8, 2010. <https://shre.ink/atNP>

210 *La Nación*. "Papel Prensa: sobreseyeron a Bartolomé Mitre, Héctor Magnetto y Ernestina Herrera de Noble" *La Nación*, December 16, 2016

regarding the agreement signed with Beijing to establish a space research base in the province of Neuquén, in Argentine Patagonia.

The base, built on a 200-hectare plot of land leased to China for 50 years, was also supposedly hosting People's Liberation Army military operations<sup>211</sup> (these suspicions were later confirmed by the press in 2019<sup>212</sup>, following leaks of a classified memo signed by Xi and Fernández during the same visit by the Chinese leader in July 2014).

*La Nación* gave wide publicity to the case, expressing fears that Argentina was “losing sovereignty to China” in a venture whose benefits to Argentines were “insignificant”<sup>213</sup>. The newspaper also criticized the extensive tax exemption Buenos Aires had granted to Chinese companies involved in the base's construction and questioned the military nature of the project.

In turn, *Clarín* highlighted that in exchange for the investments promised when signing the comprehensive strategic partnership with the Chinese, the Fernández administration had made a “pact with the devil” and ceded sovereignty over the Neuquén territory to a base it had brought with it. “Secrets that will never be revealed”<sup>214</sup>.

The Chinese Embassy was skilled in dealing with the two newspapers and chose to wait. Around the end of the Fernández de Kirchner term, TV ratings and the number of newspapers sold by the two media groups began to decline, directly affecting advertising revenues.

Seizing a potential opportunity, Ambassador Yang Wanming initially met with the general and the editor-in-chief of *La Nación* to “discuss potential media collaboration between the two countries.” Several months later, in June 2015, Ambassador Yang, People's Daily President Yang Zhenwu, and *La Nación*'s CEO Guillermo Rivaben inked a content-sharing agreement with the Spanish edition of the Chinese newspaper<sup>215</sup>.

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211 CNN. “CNN Dinero: La economía del dragón - 3 de febrero, 2015 [Video].” *You-Tube*, February 4, 2015. <https://shre.ink/ak1g>

212 Wiñazki, Nicolás. “Los documentos secretos que revelan para qué se usará la base china en Neuquén que inquieta a EE.UU.” *Clarín*, February 11, 2019. <https://shre.ink/ak19>

213 Dinatale, Martin. “Polémica por una estación espacial de China en el Sur” *La Nación*, September 3, 2014. <https://shre.ink/ak1S>

214 Niebieskikwiat, Natasha. “La base china en Neuquén, otra herencia para el próximo gobierno” *Clarín*, November 11, 2015. <https://shre.ink/ak1t>

215 *La Nación*. “Acuerdo con el Diario del Pueblo, de China” *La Nación*, June 14, 2015.



**FIGURE 7:** Chinese Ambassador Yang Wanming (Marcelo Camargo/Agência Brasil)

*La Nación* executives were invited to the One Belt, One Road Media Collaboration Forum in Beijing. That September, the Chinese Embassy sponsored a supplement in *La Nación*, commemorating the anniversary of the PRC’s foundation. Riding this wave, Chinese companies became regular advertisers in the newspaper<sup>216</sup>, especially during an economic downturn that saw many local advertisers re-evaluate their investments.

This trend eventually extended to *Clarín*. Although the newspaper hadn’t formalized any content-sharing agreement with Xinhua, China Daily, CGTN, or People’s Daily, it had a thriving business partnership with the Chinese.

In June 2021, the Chinese Embassy in Buenos Aires sponsored a supplement in *Clarín*, celebrating the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party. While the four-page print version adhered to high standards for such inserts — a distinct page layout from the regular newspaper and a disclaimer indicating sponsored content — the same meticulousness was absent in its digital counterpart.

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<https://shre.ink/atNk>

216 Cardenal, Juan Pablo. “How to win friends and influence people – the Beijing way” *Equal Times*, April 20, 2020. <https://shre.ink/atN8>

*Clarín* consolidated all the articles onto one page on their website<sup>217</sup>, without indication that the content was sponsored by the Chinese Embassy, making it appear as if crafted by independent journalists. This content was also featured on the Argentine newspaper's Twitter (now known as X) account, devoid of any source attribution.

This pattern was evident again in February 2022, when Chinese Ambassador Zou Xiaoli penned a sponsored editorial<sup>218</sup> celebrating the half-century-long relationship between China and Argentina. Yet again, the digital version by *Clarín* failed to mention that the content was sponsored, though the print version bore the label "Producido por IDM Media" (Produced by IDM Media) atop its front page.

Of greater concern was *Clarín's* categorization of the Chinese-sponsored content on its "Topics" page. The "Partido Comunista Chino" (Chinese Communist Party) tag<sup>219</sup> pooled original articles by the paper's journalists with those sponsored by the Chinese Embassy or China Media Group. This mingling meant independent articles about the party were interspersed with sponsored ones.

★ El PCCh proporciona esperanza para el progreso común de la humanidad, según jefe de Partido Comunista de Alemania (CCP provides hope for humanity's common progress, Head of Germany's Communist Party says) – July 6, 2021;

★ "*Vale la pena aprender de la experiencia de gobierno del PCCh*", dice vicepresidente partido polaco ("Learning from the CCP's governing experience is worth it," Polish party vice chairman says) – July 6, 2021;

★ "*El milagro chino*" demuestra el éxito del socialismo con características chinas ("The Chinese Miracle" demonstrates the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics) – July 7, 2021.

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217 Zou Xiaoli. "El código secreto del éxito de un Partido Centenario" *Clarín*, June 30, 2020. <https://shre.ink/atmy>

218 Zou Xiaoli. "China y Argentina: la íntima amistad borra la lejanía" *Clarín*, February 19, 2022. <https://shre.ink/atmC>

219 Clarín. "Partido Comunista Chino" Clarín, n.d. <https://shre.ink/atm1>

★ *China: Una democracia que funciona* (China: Democracy that works)  
– December 14, 2021;

★ *Los esfuerzos continuos de China para seguir el camino ecológico* (China's continued efforts to follow a green path) – March 11, 2022.

Not every article carries the “sponsored content” label, despite all being paid pieces. Those that do bear this label fail to disclose the advertiser, a detail some readers have inquired about in the comments section.

The reports, crafted by CMG, aim to “disseminate the issues that are important for Beijing, often making use of official talking points. The themes that dominate are those that extol the virtues of the CCP and Chinese model, including the success in eradicating poverty and the regime’s cooperation with the developing world<sup>220</sup>.”

The absence of clear demarcation raises concerns. Less-informed readers might mistakenly assume these propaganda articles were penned by *Clarín*’s editorial team, lending undue credibility to the paid content.

The *La Nación* and *Clarín* cases serve as evidence of Beijing’s ability to sway and exert influence over entities, even those most skeptical of China’s ascendancy and impact in Latin America. Nowadays, *La Nación*’s critiques of China have become “rarer than before, while positive coverage (or soft news) about China and its enterprises takes the limelight<sup>221</sup>.”

The Chinese ambassador has secured prominent platforms to broadcast Chinese perspectives, having been interviewed by journalists from both publications and invited to author multiple opinion pieces. As Spanish journalist Juan Pablo Cardenal observed:

“Given the challenges that many media outlets face, even those with well-earned journalistic reputations run the risk of having their editorial independence compromised. The Chinese regime has the ability to engage with journalists

220 Ellis et al. “Measuring the Impact of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Propaganda in Latin America” *Global Americans*, October 28, 2021. <https://shre.ink/atme>

221 Cardenal, Juan Pablo. *El ‘poder incisivo’ de China en América Latina y el caso argentino*. Buenos Aires: Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL), 2018. <https://shre.ink/atm0>

and editors of democratic media through its ‘people-to-people diplomacy,’ which often includes financially promising ‘cooperation’ agreements with Chinese media. In addition, the ability to buy advertising campaigns, whether through paid supplements or advertising campaigns from Chinese companies, is another influencing factor. (...) The combination of a personal, one-on-one relationship with the lure of predictable financial gain can potentially benefit China at a time when traditional media face undeniable challenges<sup>222</sup>.”

## 3.2 Brazil

While Brazil boasts considerable cultural, anthropological, and historical ties with its neighbors, it markedly diverges from other Latin American nations. Brazilians, generally speaking, don’t feel particularly affiliated with the broader Latin American landscape.

Several historical factors contribute to this sentiment: the linguistic divide (Portuguese sets Brazil apart from its Spanish-speaking neighbors), differing colonization models, and the cultural imprints of immigrants from nations not closely tied to Hispanic countries, such as Africans and Japanese.

Overlooking or misunderstanding this distinction can lead to significant missteps, particularly in sectors like the media industry, which are deeply embedded in a country’s cultural fabric. CNN offers a case in point. The American network endeavored for years to push *CNN en Español* in Brazil, even sidelining the English-language version on basic pay-TV channels in hopes of steering Brazilian viewers towards its content in Spanish<sup>223</sup>.

Their efforts fell flat. While Spanish shares similarities with Portuguese, Brazilians largely favored the English broadcast. CNN only managed to gain traction in Brazil after partnering with local media leaders, eventually emerging as one of the nation’s most esteemed media outlets<sup>224</sup>.

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222 Ibid.

223 Grillo, Cristina. “Net retira CNN em inglês de pacote básico” *Folha de S. Paulo*, October 27, 1997. <http://bit.ly/3pFr1lB>

224 CNN. “Pesquisas mostram que CNN é o canal de notícias mais imparcial do país” *CNN Brasil*, October 29, 2020. <http://bit.ly/2ZD6I44>

Moreover, the Brazilian media landscape has unique characteristics that set it apart from the broader Latin American media milieu, potentially deterring new entrants. As alluded to earlier, a handful of families dominate Brazilian media. Among them, none wield as much influence as the Marinho, proprietors of the *Globo* Group.

Currently, the *Globo* Group ranks as the world's 19th largest media conglomerate, boasting annual revenues of \$1.03 billion<sup>225</sup>. The Marinho dynasty oversees 37 TV channels, three daily newspapers, 14 weekly magazines, 49 radio stations, a news agency, two of Brazil's top news websites, a book publishing arm, a record label, and stakes in cable TV companies. Their portfolio extends beyond media, with investments in businesses such as Rappi (an Argentine food delivery startup), Enjoei (a second-hand product marketplace), Órama (real estate), and Tech-Fit (a health-focused mobile app).

Reporters Without Borders noted that *Globo* commands an audience larger than the viewership of the second, third, fourth, and fifth biggest Brazilian media conglomerates combined. Daily, its content reaches 100 million Brazilians, nearly half the nation's population. Based on this, the Media Ownership Monitor contends that Brazil presents the most extreme case of media concentration in the region<sup>226</sup>.

This media landscape, coupled with Brazil's comparatively modest economic and diplomatic clout, as well as stringent laws barring foreign entities from owning media outlets, means the country remains largely uncharted territory for international media endeavors.

At present, there are only a handful of such initiatives in Brazil. While Russia hasn't launched a Portuguese version of its RT channel, it maintains a modest newsroom in Rio de Janeiro, staffed by local journalists for its Sputnik News agency<sup>227</sup>.

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225 Zenith Media. "Top Thirty Global Media Owners 2017" *Zenith Media*, 2017. <http://bit.ly/3k9Jvjq>

226 Reporters without Borders and Intervozes. "The World of Globo - Hegemony of Limitless Concentration." *Media Ownership Monitor*, 2017. <http://bit.ly/3sdjXoB>

227 The Russian news agency announced it would cease operations in Brazil in March 2023, citing difficulties in meeting its financial and legal obligations after its bank accounts were frozen due to sanctions related to the invasion of Ukraine. Sputnik Brazil continues to exist, with Portuguese-speaking staff working from the Moscow headquarters.

Spain's *EFE* news agency operates out of Rio with a mix of Brazilian, Hispanic, and Spanish journalists, based within the city's Cervantes Institute. Although the Italian news agency *ANSA*, the French radio station *Radio France Internationale*, and *Le Monde* offer content in Portuguese, they've yet to achieve significant audience figures or prominence in the country.

### 3.2.1 Chinese Presence in Brazil: An Outlier

In stark contrast to other nations, China has made substantial investments in both capital and effort to cultivate its media presence in Brazil. This dedication from China can be linked to the strong relations that exist between the two nations.

Brazil boasts the largest Chinese-speaking population in Latin America. São Paulo is believed to have a larger Chinese-speaking readership and internet user base than any other location in the western hemisphere, with the sole exception of Southern California<sup>228</sup>.

On the geopolitical front, Brazil was the inaugural developing nation to forge a strategic alliance and the premier Latin American country to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership with China. Since 2009, China has been Brazil's principal trading ally and the top importer of soybeans, Brazil's primary commodity.

Brazil played a pivotal role in aiding China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. Both nations are integral members of the BRICS, a coalition of paramount importance to China's diplomatic initiatives. Xinhua has maintained a presence in Brazil since 1961<sup>229</sup>. China Radio International began its operations in 1999<sup>230</sup>. Over the years, the Portuguese Department

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228 Stenberg, Josh. "An Overseas Orthodoxy? Shifting towards Pro-PRC media in Chinese-speaking Brazil." In *Media and communication in the Chinese diaspora: rethinking transnationalism*, by Wanning Sun and John Sinclair, 48-68. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016

229 Originally, the focus was on delivering news about Brazil to the Chinese domestic audience. However, from the 1980s onward, the agency began creating content in Portuguese, catering to both Brazilian and Portuguese media. By 2016, Xinhua had launched a dedicated website, presenting reports exclusively in Brazilian Portuguese

230 CRI broadcasts in Portuguese, but its content isn't exclusively tailored for Brazil. Notably, a significant portion of their reports are delivered in European Portuguese,

of China Radio International (CRIpor) entered broadcasting agreements with multiple Brazilian radio stations<sup>231</sup>.

To name a few, *Brasília Super Rádio FM*, headquartered in the national capital, and *Rádio Guaíba* both aired daily five-minute news bulletins crafted by the Chinese<sup>232</sup>, highlighting major events in China. Additionally, CRIpor established a collaboration with Rádio Manchete, a station broadcasting in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro<sup>233</sup>.

The Portuguese Department of China Radio International (CRIpor) maintained retransmission contracts with several radio stations in Brazil<sup>234</sup>, such as *Brasília Super Rádio FM*, based in the country's capital, and *Rádio Guaíba*, from Porto Alegre<sup>235</sup>, both broadcasting daily five minutes news bulletins prepared by the Chinese with the main news from China. CRIpor also had an agreement with *Rádio Manchete*, which operates in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

### 3.2.2 Printed media (Brazilian Newspapers and Magazines)

Recently, Chinese media entities have begun venturing into Brazilian print media. Since 2014, the Hanban Institute, in collaboration with São Paulo State University, has been issuing the *Revista Confúcio* (Confucius Magazine). Additionally, the China International Publishing Group, in association with local publishers *Segmento* and *Go East Brasil*, brings out the magazine *China Hoje* (China Today) in Portuguese<sup>236</sup>.

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- 231 an accent unfamiliar to Brazilians and challenging for them to comprehend  
Although neither party has announced it, all the three contracts mentioned here appear to have been terminated
- 232 Carvalho, Carlos Rubens Oliveira de. "Rádio internacional da China - A interação no radiojornalismo das ondas curtas" *UFJF*, January, 2005. <https://bit.ly/48ahCAG>
- 233 Departamento de Português da Rádio Internacional da China. "Sobre Dep" *China Radio International*, August 18, 2017. <https://bit.ly/3Z51psq>
- 234 Although neither party has announced it, all the three contracts mentioned here appear to have been terminated.
- 235 Carvalho, Carlos Rubens Oliveira de. "Rádio internacional da China - A interação no radiojornalismo das ondas curtas" *UFJF*, January, 2005. <https://bit.ly/48ahCAG>
- 236 The collaboration was facilitated by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China via the Consulate in São Paulo. Distributed bimonthly, the magazine is available in a PDF version, sent by email to subscribers for free. Its content isn't just a direct

An exposé by The New York Times highlighted that *Brasil de Fato*, a leftist Brazilian publication established in 2003 by activists of the Landless Workers Movement, had accepted funds for disseminating Chinese propaganda, financed by activist Jodie Evans<sup>237</sup>. Evans, a billionaire linked to officials of the Chinese Communist Party, has bankrolled Chinese propaganda initiatives not just in Brazil, but also in the U.S., U.K., South Africa, and India.

Echoing patterns seen in Argentina, Chinese media outlets have aggressively pursued avenues to bolster their influence in Brazil through collaboration with legacy newspapers. Since January 2022, CRIpor initiated a content partnership with *Diário de Pernambuco*, the main paper in northeastern Brazil.

The collaboration, which also encompasses Xinhua<sup>238</sup>, was initiated with the coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics and subsequently broadened to span the newspaper's social media handles and YouTube channel.

Currently, this agreement is so far-reaching that *Diário de Pernambuco* scarcely publishes original content related to Chinese affairs. An online visitor clicking on the “China” tag on the newspaper's site will be inundated with articles crafted by CRIpor and Xinhua, without any clear disclosure that these pieces are backed by the Chinese government.

This influence is palpable in the publication's editorial slant. For instance, a headline penned by CRIpor staff in August 2023 proclaimed, “Xi Jinping pede mais força para construir uma bela Xinjiang” [Xi Jinping calls for added vigor to craft a picturesque Xinjiang]<sup>239</sup>. This article rendered a skewed account of Xi's visit to the province; his speech during the visit was, in actuality, largely interpreted by sinologists and independent experts as an indication of escalating suppression of the region's ethnic minorities<sup>240</sup>.

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translation from the English or Chinese editions; it includes significant contributions from Brazilian columnists and reporters

237 Hvistendahl, Mara, et. al. “A Global Web of Chinese Propaganda Leads to a US Tech Mogul” *The New York Times*, August 05, 2023. <https://nyti.ms/44CeOZO>

238 Xinhua has a website hosted on *Diário de Pernambuco*'s page. Available at <https://shre.ink/2NPH>.

239 CRI Português. “Xi Jinping pede mais força para construir uma bela Xinjiang” *Diário de Pernambuco*, August 31, 2023. <https://bit.ly/45XDZYb>

240 Davidson, Helen. “Xi urges more work to ‘control illegal religious activities’ in Xinjiang on surprise visit” *The Guardian*, August 28, 2023. <https://bit.ly/44C28SZ>



Other narratives cast aspersions on the U.S.'s diplomatic overtures to Taiwan<sup>241</sup>, propounding a misconstrued conception of human rights<sup>242</sup>, and emitting subtle threats against Western nations<sup>243</sup>.

CRIpor also boasts a dedicated playlist on *Diário de Pernambuco's* YouTube channel, featuring numerous video segments subsequently uploaded to the newspaper's other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Disturbingly, none of these platforms clearly label the origin of the content or disclose potential financial incentives behind their publication.

Determining the financial gains media entities garner from such expansive partnerships is challenging, given the discretion that typically surrounds their financial dealings. There's a prevailing lack of transparency concerning these agreements.

Nonetheless, a 2020 State Department document shed some light on the issue. That June, U.S. officials unveiled a spreadsheet<sup>244</sup> submitted by China Daily in line with the Foreign Agents Registration Act. It revealed that the Chinese firm paid nearly \$79,000 to *O Globo*, one of Brazil's premier newspapers, for advertising. The document also indicated that between 2016 and 2020, China Daily inked paid content agreements worth several thousand dollars with two other major Brazilian dailies: *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Correio Braziliense*.

In contrast to what has been observed in similar Argentine cases or even at *Diário de Pernambuco*, however, there has been no sign of significant change in the way these newsrooms in Brazil report on China.

Interestingly, unlike patterns observed with Argentina's media or even with *Diário de Pernambuco*, there hasn't been a discernible shift in these Brazilian outlets' coverage of China. In 2020, *O Globo* positioned its first correspondent in Beijing after a hiatus of over five years<sup>245</sup>. After this move, the paper

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241 CRI Português. "China critica passagem de dirigente de Taiwan pelos EUA" *Diário de Pernambuco*, August 31, 2023. <https://shre.ink/2NPC>

242 CRI Português. "Comentário: Fórum sobre direitos humanos realizado em Beijing mostra que o Ocidente não é o 'juiz' dos direitos humanos" *Diário de Pernambuco*, June 23, 2023.

243 CRI Português. "Nenhuma nação é forte ou frágil para sempre" *Diário do Povo*, June 26, 2023. <https://shre.ink/2NPE>

244 NSD/FARA Registration Unit. "Amendment to Registration Statement Pursuant to the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 – Registration Number 3457" *U.S. Department of Justice*, June 1, 2020. <https://bit.ly/480C2Mo>

245 *O Globo*. "Direto de Pequim, jornalista Marcelo Ninio estreia coluna no Globo" *O*

didn't shy away from spotlighting topics sensitive to Chinese diplomacy, such as the Xinjiang humanitarian crisis, rampant censorship, and instances of police misconduct. Similarly, *Folha* has continued its independent daily coverage of China and announced in 2023 its plans to dispatch its inaugural correspondent to Taipei, Taiwan<sup>246</sup>.

### 3.2.3 Partnerships on TV

Historically, China had abstained from producing Portuguese content for Brazilian television or even inaugurating a Portuguese branch for its flagship broadcasters like CGTN or CCTV. The probable rationale is the formidable challenge and expense of breaking into an already saturated market.

However, 2010 saw CCTV select São Paulo as its Latin American hub, emphasizing the city's robust infrastructure and strategic location. Initially, the station employed Chinese journalists to cover Brazilian news tailored for its domestic audience in China. This strategy began evolving in 2019.

During an October visit to Beijing by then-president Jair Bolsonaro, Brazilian Minister Osmar Terra proposed a streaming platform for BRICS audio-visual content. Hailed as the "BRICS' Netflix" by the Brazilian media, this platform would be co-funded by all five member countries, each contributing 20% of the budget<sup>247</sup>.

Subsequently, Brazil hosted the 11th BRICS Summit in November, welcoming the leaders of Russia, South Africa, India, and China. The lead-up to the summit featured the 4th BRICS Media Forum in São Paulo, drawing over 100 delegates from 55 major BRICS media entities. The forum concluded with an action plan emphasizing collaborative reporting, balanced global perspectives, and enhanced bilateral ties, particularly between China and Brazil.

Preliminary discussions broached the concept of a dedicated paid-TV channel spotlighting Chinese-Brazilian content<sup>248</sup>, "producing compre-

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- 246 *Globo*, October 14, 2020. <http://glo.bo/45TQ2pd>  
 Folha de S. Paulo. "Folha volta a ter correspondente na Ásia com posto em Taiwan" *Folha de S. Paulo*, February 25, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3EqNIdL>
- 247 Fernandes, Maria Cristina. "Governo brasileiro discute com China criação de canal de streaming dos Brics" *O Globo*, October 23, 2019. <https://shre.ink/aICj>
- 248 Urupá, Marcos. "Brasil e China celebram acordo de intercâmbio audiovisual" *Tela Viva*, November 19, 2019. <http://bit.ly/3s7Euuw>

hensive reports capable of objectively reporting on the development of the BRICS countries in economy, trade, science and technology, and environmental protection, continuing to strengthen collaboration in the stories and maintaining a balanced international opinion<sup>249</sup>.”

Following the summit, Brasilia and Beijing ratified a memorandum, facilitated by Brazil’s Ministry of Citizenship and the CMG, emphasizing cultural and audio-visual exchanges.

Although this idea hasn’t yet materialized, largely due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent electoral events, two agreements in tandem with the memorandum have propelled China’s media agenda in Brazil.

### 3.2.3.1 *Grupo Globo*

After the 2019 media summit, the CMG established a broad partnership with Brazil’s media titan, the *Grupo Globo* (Globo Group). At the inaugural event, CMG’s president, Shen Haixiong, and *Globo* board member, Roberto Marinho Neto, resolved to leverage 5G technology for diverse content production.

Marinho Neto emphasized the potential of these platforms for enhanced collaboration, encompassing co-production, content sharing, and technological advancements while underlining the importance of media personnel exchanges<sup>250</sup>.

*Globo*’s legacy is rooted in its autonomous stance and its award-winning journalism. It infrequently airs third-party content during its prime hours, making exceptions for networks like the BBC and CNN, primarily when original reporting for the Brazilian viewership is untenable. Yet, a significant deviation was witnessed in 2020.

In March, following Brazil’s confirmation of its maiden Covid-19 case, *Globo News* aired a CGTN America documentary titled “Epicenter: 24 Hours in Wuhan” in its entirety. This documentary profiled the frontline efforts in Wuhan, featuring healthcare professionals and affected individuals.

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249 Xinhua. “Fourth BRICS Media Forum adopts action plan” *News CN*, November 01, 2019. <https://bit.ly/44w6riE>

250 CGTN. “CMG signs memorandum with Brazil’s Grupo Globo to deepen cooperation” *CGTN*, November 13, 2019. <http://bit.ly/2ZztdXN>

**FIGURE 8:** A scene from “Epicenter: 24 Hours in Wuhan”, a CGTN documentary broadcasted by *Globo* and *TV Cultura* (CGTN America)



While *Globo*'s social media profiles flagged the CGTN origin<sup>251</sup>, it underplayed the channel's state affiliations. When showcasing the documentary teaser, *Globo News* presenters lauded its “rare insight” into the pandemic's onset and its “stellar production,” albeit noting the absence of critical aspects like the early whistle-blower Dr. Li Wenliang's censorship and death<sup>252</sup>.

First aired on March 1, 2020, the film resonated so profoundly with viewers that it was rebroadcast the following morning. Recognizing its impact, *TV Cultura*, a public channel subsidized by the São Paulo state government, secured broadcasting rights for the documentary, airing it a fortnight later. The promotional teaser alone, shared on its YouTube channel<sup>253</sup>, garnered over 1 million views<sup>254</sup>.

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251 *Globo News*. “Equipe de TV estatal chinesa acompanha o esforço para conter o avanço do novo coronavírus na cidade onde a doença surgiu” *Globo News Facebook Page*, March 02, 2020. <https://shre.ink/2Ny9>

252 *Globo News*. “Documentário 24h em Wuhan’ mostra a realidade da cidade chinesa onde surgiu o coronavírus” *Globo News Documentário*, March 02, 2020. <https://shre.ink/2NyX>

253 *Jornalismo TV Cultura*. “Epicentro - 24h em Wuhan | Documentário” [Video], *YouTube*, March 16, 2020. <https://shre.ink/2NyL>

254 Given the popularity of the documentary, *TV Cultura* acquired the rights to a second CGTN production about Wuhan, this time showing what quarantine was

In prior research<sup>255</sup>, I endeavored to discern the reaction of certain *Globo* viewers towards the CGTN film. When exposed to the documentary's teaser, promoted by *Globo News*, 56% of participants deemed the documentary either "reliable" or "highly reliable" due to its association with the trusted *Globo* brand.

Upon learning that it wasn't an original *Globo* production, but a piece crafted by Chinese state media, 55.57% maintained their trust in its authenticity, while 29.56% expressed diminished confidence and 14.78% felt increased trust. These findings underscore the strategic advantage Chinese media entities can attain by aligning with well-regarded local brands.

Days after the "24 Hours in Wuhan" telecast, *Globo News* showcased a CGTN feature examining the effect of Covid-19 on that year's Chinese Valentine's Day<sup>256</sup>. To date, this remains the last complete broadcast of CGTN content on the channel.

By and large, the channel's leadership appears hesitant to extensively feature content from Chinese media. According to three staff members interviewed for this research, the channel has recurrently declined overtures from the Chinese Embassy for on-site reporting in China, citing concerns over editorial independence.

One former editor interviewed for this book shared that *Globo News* journalists typically lean on Western outlets like Reuters and the Associated Press when covering China. Footage from CGTN or CCTV is only aired when these independent Western sources don't offer analogous content to their clientele.

### 3.2.3.2 *Grupo Band*

In the same week it reached an agreement with *Globo*, CMG was also able to strike another big deal with the third-largest Brazilian media conglomerate: *Grupo Band*, controlled by the Saad family.

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like in the early days of Covid. The documentary, "Wuhan - A City in Lockdown", was broadcast in April 2020

255 Silva, Igor Patrick. "在巴西的中国媒体: 国家媒体作为软实力的工具" [Chinese Media in Brazil: The role of national media as a soft power tool] (Unpublished master's thesis), *Peking University*, Beijing, May, 2020.

256 G1. "Após ter casamento adiado por epidemia do novo coronavírus, enfermeiro reencontra noiva em hospital de Wuhan; VÍDEO" *G1 Mundo*, March 06, 2020. <https://shre.ink/2NaP>

*Grupo Band* includes two free TV channels, six cable TV channels, a “Band International” channel (whose signal is currently distributed to the United States, Angola, and Paraguay), three national radio networks, one local radio network, and nine others in the United States, as well as a daily newspaper, image marketing agencies, content distribution, and a cable TV operator<sup>257</sup>.

Andre Basbaum, *Band's* Director of Journalism, noted<sup>258</sup> that his station had been accessing CCTV+, a video service offered by China's CCTV to global companies, since 2012. Upon assuming his current role, João Saad, one of the media conglomerate's owners, approached Basbaum. Given the Saad family's businesses in agriculture and close connections with Chinese agribusiness figures, Saad remarked on the underutilized Chinese media service and its potential utility for technological, agricultural, and infrastructure insights.

“He said, ‘We have this Chinese media agency here, but no one uses it much. We don't need to use it to publish what the Chinese president has said to become the official voice of China in Brazil, but there is information for us on technology, agriculture, infrastructure... Why don't you use it? That stuck in my head and we started using it more.’”

In November 2019<sup>259</sup>, a comprehensive content-sharing agreement solidified *Band's* association with the Chinese. This pact was orchestrated by Caio Carvalho, the *Band's* General Director of Journalism in São Paulo, and officially endorsed by João Saad. Key Chinese media representatives attended the ceremonial event, including the head of the China Media Group, Shen Haixiong, the president of CGTN, Teng Yunping, and the director of CCTV in Latin America, Li Weilin.

The initial outcome was the airing of “Xi Jinping's Classical Quotes” on *Arte1*, a *Band* channel catering to São Paulo's elite. Basbaum estimates viewership at 100,000 to 120,000, clarifying that CMG didn't finance the broadcast. Following this, the news segment “Mundo China” was launched,

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257 Reporters without Borders and Intervozes. “Saad Family” *Media Ownership Brazil*, 2017. <https://bit.ly/3pBKQ3F>

258 All related quotes from Interview André Basbaum by the author, March 24, 2023

259 Sá, Nelson de. “Band fecha acordo com TV estatal chinesa” *Folha de S. Paulo*, November 06. 2019. <http://bit.ly/3bEHVmb>

developed by CCTV's Chinese-Portuguese journalists in partnership with *Band's* Brazilian team.

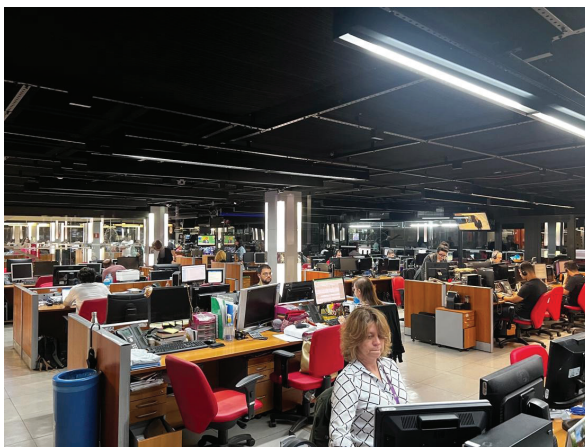
Starting in 2020, the segment was featured in *Band News* TV's bulletins. On weekdays, Brazilian anchors presented, while the weekends saw Chinese anchors at the helm.

Basbaum clarified that the inception of "Mundo China" wasn't part of the initial agreement but *Band's* independent decision.

"We do 'Mundo China' because we understand that China is an important news topic. Before, China only appeared in the news here in Brazil as 'look at this flood in a Chinese city' or 'the Chinese GDP will grow by X%'. We wanted to escape these stereotypes. The show has [news segments about] traditional China, contemporary China, culture..."

He emphasized the shared editorial vision between him, Fernando Rodolfo Schneider (Director of Content), and João Saad, which views China as a significant ally to Brazil, suggesting Brazil doesn't necessarily need to align with the U.S. or Europe. While Basbaum maintained that the Chinese partnership hasn't swayed *Band's* journalistic integrity, research indicates an increasingly positive portrayal of China.

**FIGURE 9:** *Band* Newsroom (Photo by the Author)



A study<sup>260</sup> by researchers Paulo Menechelli (University of Brasilia) and Pablo Morales (London School of Economics and Political Science) analyzed *Band's* China reports from November 2019 to December 2021, comparing them against five competitors (*SBT, Record, TV Brasil, CNN Brasil, BBC News Brasil*). Findings revealed a 15.2% reduction in negative reports post-launch of “Mundo China” and a 6.3% increase in positive coverage. Excluding “Mundo China” from the sampling, positive coverage dominated, accounting for 57.1%, with only 14.8% negative reports.

Compared to its competitors, *Band* has had a lower percentage of reports pointing to China as a threat since the signing of the agreement: 20.5%, while the average for other channels was 26.2% (notably *CNN Brasil* 38.5%, *SBT* 31.5%, *Record* 26.7%).

Basbaum acknowledged the editorial shift but attributed it to the Jair Bolsonaro administration's antagonistic posture towards China, not the partnership with CMG. “If there is a government that is hostile to its main trading partner, I have to try to improve that relationship, do not I?”, he said.

In this sense, one episode attracted attention and made Brazilian headlines. In March 2020, Eduardo Bolsonaro, São Paulo's representative in the House and son of then-President Jair Bolsonaro, got into an argument with Yang Wanming, the Chinese ambassador to Brasília.

Eduardo accused the Chinese government of being responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic. He claimed that China preferred to “hide something serious” rather than expose itself to “an effort that would save countless lives.” “Anyone who has seen [HBO's show] Chornobyl will understand what happened. Replace the nuclear power plant with the coronavirus and the Soviet dictatorship with the Chinese one. Once again, a dictatorship has preferred to hide something serious instead of exposing it, but it would save countless lives,” he wrote on his social media<sup>261</sup>.

Yang reacted to the comments, calling them “a nasty insult to China and the Chinese people. Such blatant anti-China stance does not fit your status as a federal deputy nor your position as a special public figure.” The ambassador

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260 Morales, Pablo, & Menechelli, Paulo. “Mundo China: The media partnership reframing China's image in Brazil” *International Communication Gazette*, 85-1 (2023): 63-79. <https://bit.ly/3Ult1sV>

261 UOL. “Eduardo Bolsonaro diz que culpa de pandemia do coronavírus é da China” *UOL Coronavirus*, March 18, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nuSF>



added that “the Chinese side vehemently rejects your words and demands that you immediately retract them and apologize to the Chinese people<sup>262</sup>.”

*Band* intervened in this public dispute by having its main anchor read a harsh editorial against Eduardo Bolsonaro. He was called “irresponsible,” while the Brazilian chancellor at the time, Ernesto Araújo, was classified as an “idiot.” Both were accused of “putting Brazil into conflict with its largest trading partner<sup>263</sup>.”

This overt stance intrigued many since the Saad family, *Band*'s proprietors, had previously backed the right-wing coalition that brought Jair Bolsonaro to power. Basbaum disclosed in our discussion that *Grupo Band* felt it imperative to champion Brazil's interest in China.

He said that, after the public fight, *Band* intentionally amplified positive news on China, acting against the government's casual belligerence. “Brazil could not fight in such a childish, amateurish way with its biggest trading partner. Then the *Band* struck a blow against the chancellor and his downfall began”, Basbaum revealed.

This assertive move, as Basbaum said, indirectly led to Araújo's resignation a year later, given the mounting pressure to enhance trade relations with China. Ernesto Araújo resigned as Minister of Foreign Affairs a year later, facing pressure from Brazilian congressmen in favor of increasing trade relations with China.

### 3.2.3.3 Backlash on Other Media

*Band*'s collaborative initiative has brought news about China every day to an audience that usually knows little or nothing about Chinese affairs. Although the “Mundo China” brand strategy on social media looks disorganized and unprofessional (e.g., the page frequently republishes videos from CGTN or People's Daily in English or Spanish, without Portuguese subtitles), its Twitter profile has already more than 3300 followers.

Both *Globo* and *Band* partnerships did not go unnoticed in the political debate and among media watchdogs. One of the main news websites by the

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262 Folha de S. Paulo. “Embaixada da China reage a acusações de Eduardo Bolsonaro sobre coronavírus” *Folha Mundo*, March 18, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nuSB>

263 Stycer, Maurício. “Editorial pesado da Band sinaliza mudança de humor em relação ao governo” *UOL Splash*, March 21, 2020. <https://bit.ly/46uzip6>

Brazilian far-right (and often shared by former President Jair Bolsonaro and his sons), *Jornal da Cidade*, wrote that *TV Band* had become “a Brazilian public concession with a hidden owner, the Chinese government.”

The so-called “digital newspaper” has also been, since 2019, fueling conspiracy theories about the Chinese government buying Saad’s editorial group, which is “why the channel would be in favor of Beijing and CMG news reports.”

“*Band*, which was about to go bankrupt, was saved by a Chinese media group, China Media Group — the media arm of the Chinese Communist Party-CCP. They have been looking to buy editorial opportunities and set up financial and content partnerships with media outlets in ‘operational’ difficulties in various parts of the world<sup>264</sup>.”

*Globo* was not exempt from the online backlash either. An article published in April 2020 by the website *RelevanteNews* accused *TV Globo* of “succumbing to the influence of the Chinese state-owned media company.” This article garnered 112 thousand views and numerous commentators demanded the initiation of a parliamentary investigation into the conditions of the signed agreements.

“Free TV frequencies in Brazil belong to the State and are temporarily granted to broadcasters through a public concession contract. To be the owner of a channel, the broadcaster must fulfill a series of prerequisites - such as having at least 70% of its capital in the hands of Brazilian shareholders. If the State finds that a broadcaster has used the channel for nefarious purposes, it may refuse to renew the concession<sup>265</sup>.”

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264 Bessow, Alfredo. “Jornalista denuncia: China detém o controle da Band e “dono” chinês determinou ataques a Bolsonaro” *Jornal da Cidade*, April, 2020. <http://bit.ly/3SpJWYt>

265 Oliveira, Viviane. “Globo e Band cedem domínio à estatal chinesa de comunicação ligada ao partido comunista” *RelevanteNews*, April 03, 2020. <http://bit.ly/3pzShsp>

Debates of this nature stir up tempers and divide the Brazilian audience. Studies to understand the effectiveness of these CMG initiatives in Brazil practically do not exist.

### 3.3 Chile

Chile has long been at the forefront of forging ties with China, even preceding the official diplomatic relations between the two nations. From the imperial era to modern times, Santiago has been a key initiator of cooperative ventures, often serving as the primary bridge between Chinese communists and South America.

As elaborated below, Chile paved the way for diplomatic and cultural collaboration with China. They recognized Communist China before both the United States and the United Nations. Intriguingly, even during the military dictatorship of the staunchly anti-Communist and pro-Washington Augusto Pinochet, Chile managed to broaden its alliances with Beijing.

In the democratic age, Chile championed China's bid for the World Trade Organization. It was the first Latin American nation to acknowledge China as a market economy and the inaugural country globally to ink a free trade pact with Beijing.

By 2016, ties between the two nations were uplifted to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," laying a robust foundation for the inception of Chinese state media in Chile. Various content-sharing accords have since been gradually transforming the way the Chilean media covers China-related topics.

#### 3.3.1 Brief History of Sino-Chilean Relations

Chile's interactions with China began as early as 1845 when Gideón Nye Jr. was appointed as consul to further Chilean trade interests in Guangzhou. Recognized by the Chinese imperial authorities, he enjoyed privileges similar to those extended to European powers after the 1842 Nanjing Agreement<sup>266</sup>.

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266 Gutiérrez, Hernán and Chou, L. "Relations between the Republic of China and the Republic of Chile" *Occasional Papers/Reprint Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, 1 (1995), 15–31. <https://shre.ink/nUTS>

Following the Qing Dynasty's collapse in 1911, Santiago quickly initiated dialogue with the newly formed Republic of China. This was, in part, to safeguard the rights of roughly 3,000 Chinese descendants residing in Chile, many of whom had previously fought alongside the Chileans during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883).

In a sign of strengthening ties, the Kuomintang Party dispatched a consul to Santiago in 1923, followed by an ambassador in 1947, a distinction as he was the sole Asian diplomat with that rank in the Chilean capital<sup>267</sup>. Meanwhile, Chile reciprocated with an ambassadorial presence in Beijing from 1947 to 1949. However, after the Communist victory in 1949, Chile, like many nations, severed ties with mainland China, aligning instead with Taiwan<sup>268</sup>.

Full diplomatic disengagement was averted. By 1951, China's cultural outreach body extended an invite to renowned Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, setting in motion a broad spectrum of cultural exchanges<sup>269</sup>.

Neruda's affinity for China catalyzed the creation of the Chilean-Chinese Cultural Institute (Instituto Cultural Sino-Chileno, or ICCC), a trailblazing institution in Latin America. This facilitated the participation of Chinese envoys in the Continental Cultural Congress and ushered in the Chinese diplomatic strategy of fostering ties through cultural collaboration<sup>270</sup>.

By 1954, the ICCC helped organize a Chilean delegation led by Salvador Allende, a prominent socialist figure in South America, to visit China to discuss trade alliances with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.

In China, Allende promised to recognize the mainland should he win the next Chilean presidential election. While Allende's 1958 presidential bid was unsuccessful, his election in 1970 saw Chile emerge as the pioneer South American nation to formally recognize Communist China<sup>271</sup>.

However, this diplomatic progress was ephemeral. In 1973, Allende's government was unseated in a U.S.-backed coup<sup>272</sup>. His successor, dictator Augusto

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267 Ibid.

268 Ibid.

269 Zhang Yuchen. "Remembering a great poet and his love of China with a statue and a reading" *China Daily USA*, November 17, 2014. <https://shre.ink/ncU7>

270 Chou, Lin. "The Diplomatic War Between Beijing and Taipei in Chile" *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, 3 (2001): 16-56. <https://shre.ink/ncrx>

271 Ibid.

272 Steenland, Kyle. "The Coup in Chile" *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no. 2 (1974): 9-29. <https://shre.ink/nc7q>

Pinochet, though aloof, retained diplomatic channels with Beijing. A substantive shift materialized in the late 1980s when China's global stance solidified after joining the UN Security Council, and Pinochet's regime was waning.

The turning point in Chile-China relations came in the late 1980s. With China solidifying its global influence after joining the UN Security Council, and the Chilean regime under strain<sup>273</sup>, Pinochet, internationally isolated, started fostering connections with nations that refrained from censuring Chile's human rights record<sup>274</sup>.

Propaganda campaigns distinguished Beijing from Moscow, highlighting China's non-expansionist stance, in contrast to Russia's perceived threats. Government officials appeared on television programs and in newspapers and emphasized that the Chinese, unlike the Soviets, had no expansionist aspirations<sup>275</sup>.

Pinochet greenlighted the establishment of China's Great Wall Station in the Chilean Antarctic, winning Beijing's support for Chile's territorial claims. By 1987, both sides instituted a landmark joint venture between Chilean and Chinese companies, focusing on copper mining<sup>276</sup>.

Chile transitioned back to democracy in 1990. After a brief dip in bilateral trade, possibly due to political shifts, trade ties between Chile and China flourished. While copper remained central to their trade, exports broadened to encompass wood, cellulose, fish, and minerals, including molybdenum<sup>277</sup>. By 2000, China ranked as Chile's third-largest trade ally, trailing only Mexico and Brazil.

Diplomatically, the democratic transition in Chile facilitated high-profile exchanges. Chinese President Yang Shangkun's 1990 visit to Chile<sup>278</sup>, part of a wider South American tour, was reciprocated by Chile's President Patricio

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273 Ampuero Ruiz, Pablo Ignacio. "Diplomacia En transición. La República Popular China Frente a La Dictadura cívico-Militar En Chile" *Estudios Políticos*, 49 (2016), 35-54. <https://shre.ink/nck5>

274 Wilhelmy von Wolff, Manfred and Lazo Rodríguez, R. "La política multilateral de Chile en Asia-Pacífico" *Estudios Internacionales* 30 no. 117 (1997): 3-35. <https://shre.ink/nc7m>

275 Soto Alvarez, Augusto. "Chile mira hacia China: relaciones en una nueva era" *Estudios Internacionales* 31-121-122 (1998): 37-53. <https://shre.ink/nc8T>

276 Ibid.

277 Montalva, Juan Diego and Navia, P. "Chile and China: Building Relations Beyond Trade?" *China - Latin America Task Force*, March 6, 2007. <https://shre.ink/nctB>

278 Neagle, John. "Chinese President Yang Shangkun Visits Chile" *Xinhua*, May 29, 1990. <https://shre.ink/nckT>

Aylwin in 1992<sup>279</sup>. Aylwin's successor, Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, intensified these diplomatic efforts<sup>280</sup>. Chile led the way by supporting China's World Trade Organization bid in 1999<sup>281</sup> and, in 2004, recognizing China as a market economy.

By 2005, the two countries initiated and eventually inked a groundbreaking free trade agreement, effective from 2006. In 2016, China became Chile's top trade partner, and the relationship was elevated by Xi Jinping to a "comprehensive strategic partnership."

### 3.3.2 New Diplomatic Status and an Ambitious Media Plan

Just as in Argentina, the signing of the memorandum that transformed the Sino-Chilean relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership marked a significant event that led to the influx of Chinese state media in Chile.

Tracing the activities of Chinese media in Chile prior to this is challenging. Earlier studies have indicated that Chile became a more prominent topic in the Hispanic version of Xinhua agency headlines, correlating with the rise in trade and diplomatic cooperation since 2008. Yet credible data about any significant effort to generate content specifically for Chilean audiences before 2015 is scant.

In 2015, Xinhua inaugurated its branch in Santiago. While a comprehensive list of Chilean media outlets partnered or under commercial contracts with this Chinese news agency at that time is elusive, our study pinpointed at least one associate during this nascent phase: the business magazine *América Economía*. This publication continues to feature Chinese media content (see 3.3.3.1 *América Economía*).

In November 2016, marking the decade since the inception of the Sino-Chile Free Trade Agreement, Xi Jinping made a state visit to Santiago.

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279 Lee, Yun Tso and Hongying, W. Chile y China: Cuarenta años de política exterior - Una trayectoria de continuidad y perseverancia. Santiago: Ril Editores, 2011

280 Chile joined APEC in November, 1994, on the eve of the summit hosted by Indonesia that year

281 Subsecretaría de Relaciones Económicas Internacionales. "Análisis de las relaciones comerciales entre Chile y China en el marco del tratado de libre comercio" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile*, August, 2015. <https://shre.ink/nckx>

Alongside then-President Michelle Bachelet, Xi announced the elevation of their relationship from a “strategic partnership” (established in 2012) to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”<sup>282</sup>.

Throughout the visit, Xi and Bachelet ratified 11 agreements and treaties<sup>283</sup>. Yet, a pivotal event transpired not within the walls of *La Moneda* Palace, the president’s official residence, but at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) headquarters.

This UN-affiliated institution in Santiago was selected as the venue for the inaugural China-Latin America and Caribbean Media Summit on November 22, 2016. This was a highlight of the Chinese leader’s trip.

The Chinese government funded the travel of over 80 Latin American media professionals, encompassing senior news executives and editors. Alongside them, 25 representatives from Chinese state media were present, joined by diplomats, Communist Party officials, and other distinguished guests<sup>284</sup>.

Addressing this congregation, Xi Jinping emphasized that media exchanges are “an integral facet of China-Latin America relations” and serve as a robust platform for “cultivating friendship between our peoples”<sup>285</sup>.

Xi further remarked that the Chinese and Latin Americans “echo similar sentiments and values, enabling mutual appreciation regardless of the miles separating us”, before unveiling his three propositions for enhancing cooperation.

“First, we must support each other and work together to strengthen the influence of Chinese and Latin American media, to present a more authentic and vibrant China and Latin America to the world, and to raise our voices together on important issues such as world peace and development.

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282 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile. “Chile and China establish a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile*, November 22, 2016. <https://shre.ink/ncGQ>

283 Ibid.

284 Andina. “Presidente de China inaugura Cumbre de Medios en la que participa la Agencia Andina” *Andina – Agencia Peruana de Noticias*, November 22, 2016. <https://shre.ink/ncGI>

285 Wang, Jinye and Huo, X. “习近平出席中拉媒体领袖峰会开幕式 [Xi Jinping attended the opening ceremony of the China-Latin America Media Leaders’ Summit]” *Xinhua*, November 23, 2016. <https://shre.ink/ncS4>

Second, we must firmly believe in and jointly help practical cooperation between China and Latin America achieve new development, strengthen both sides' enthusiasm and confidence in cooperation, and promote innovative cooperation models. Third, we need to learn from each other and promote media exchanges and cooperation between China and Latin America to a new level. China is announcing the establishment of a China-Latin America News Exchange Center and inviting Latin American media reporters to work and study in China. China will also train 500 media professionals for Latin American and Caribbean countries over the next five years to achieve common prosperity in the media industries of both sides.” [originally in Chinese, translated by the author]

Greeted with applause by the media representatives in attendance, Xi gave the floor to the leaders of China's primary propaganda instruments: the People's Daily and Xinhua.

**FIGURE 10:** Michelle Bachelet, the President of Chile, and Alicia Bárcen, the executive secretary of UNECLAC, at the inauguration of the Media Leaders' Summit (Chilean Government)





Lu Xinning, the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the People's Daily, initiated her speech with a lyrical reflection on the vast geographical expanse separating Latin America and China. She then echoed Xi's sentiments, saying, "Mountains and seas never part hearts with shared dreams."

Lu expressed that both the Chinese and Latin Americans possessed "a kindred stance towards intrusions from the Western sphere", further stating, "In today's international relations, true justice and equality remain elusive<sup>286</sup>."

Segueing to the achievements of the People's Daily, Lu extolled its attributes. She highlighted that the official Communist Party publication had a storied history spanning seven decades and proudly bore the moniker of "China's foremost newspaper." She added, "Since its debut on the stock market in 2012, its market capitalization has eclipsed that of the New York Times<sup>287</sup>."

Lu unveiled an enterprising strategy tailored to the media needs of Latin America. She acknowledged that linguistic barriers posed a significant hurdle to collaboration, due to the scarcity of media professionals proficient in Mandarin. To bridge this gap, she proposed dispatching her reporters, fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, to contribute to Latin American newsrooms.

Conversely, the People's Daily was keen to back any of its journalists who could deepen their understanding of China, whether through engagement with Confucius Institutes or direct travel to the country<sup>288</sup>.

Lu extended an invitation to a translation crowdsourcing platform developed by the Global Times. This nationalist offshoot of the People's Daily is notorious for its aggressive critiques of the West. However, it was her third proposition that most captivated the media moguls present and ultimately saw the greatest traction within the region.

"We need to present readers with expanded news and enhance our content collaboration. At present, a significant portion of Chinese coverage of Latin America leans heavily on analyses from Western media, and the scenario is mir-

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286 Hou, Lulu and Yan, H. "I Cumbre de Medios de Comunicación de China-América Latina: Diario del Pueblo pide ampliar el entendimiento mutuo y la cooperación, a través de la comunicación social" November 25, 2016. <https://shre.ink/nçTr>

287 Ibid.

288 Ibid.

rored in Latin America regarding China. While Chinese media have amplified their coverage of Latin American events, many Latin American outlets haven't equally spotlighted major Chinese stories. They often default to content from the Associated Press and EFE. I'd like to underscore that today, People's Daily stands as the media entity with the most extensive reach and is the top news content producer in China. We offer a tailored news service for international media, curating China-related news based on individual requirements. Various media organizations, both from Latin America and elsewhere, have shown interest in this service, and we're open to any Latin American media wanting to utilize it. We also encourage everyone to engage with news about China through the Spanish and Portuguese channels of 'Pueblo en Línea' [the Spanish online version of the newspaper]. This platform has the potential to serve as a news exchange medium with primary digital outlets in Latin America. Additionally, we're keen on featuring high-quality stories penned by our Latin American peers on our platform. This would pave the way for mutual understanding through collaborative content<sup>289</sup>."

The speech elucidates the purpose behind the content-sharing agreements across Latin America: China was uneasy about Latin American media companies using independent Western news services. In response, China proposed a partnership. If embraced by the attendees, this would supply news content meticulously screened by Chinese censors via its primary state media channels.

Cai Mingzhao, Xinhua's president at that time, echoed Lu's objectives. At the conference, he expressed, "With more than 50 years of presence in Latin America, [Xinhua] is prepared to play a more relevant role in building a China-Latin America community of common destiny<sup>290</sup>."

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289 Ibid.

290 Xinhua. "Xinhua dispuesta a profundizar intercambios con medios de comunicación de América Latina" *Xinhua Español*, November 26, 2016

Cai emphasized the agency's eagerness to strengthen ties with Latin American journalists. He proposed to "conduct joint interviews and cooperate in the coverage of major informative events and personnel exchanges<sup>291</sup>." and championed the significance of this endeavor for China, noting that:

"News dissemination and information through the media helps consolidate the friendship between the people of China and Latin America, laying a solid foundation for the healthy development of bilateral ties (...) Today, the "cooperation between Xinhua News Agency and the Latin American media enjoys a solid foundation and new opportunities. Let's work together to lead Sino-Latin American relations to a better future<sup>292</sup>."

Spanish journalist Juan Pablo Cardenal posited that the focus on "mutual knowledge" to justify allocating funds for collaborative journalistic initiatives and fostering content exchange at the summit had a distinct aim: "to produce free journalistic and audiovisual content (...) that presents a skewed, yet amiable, portrayal of the Chinese regime (...) and also to temper critical media with the allure of financial benefits<sup>293</sup>."

Cardenal further assessed that Chinese investments catered to the needs and apprehensions of media entities grappling with acute financial downturns in their respective nations. He characterized this as the "master key for media penetration [of the Chinese media]."

"Though Chinese narratives frequently carry undertones of the West's colonial past, its involvement in wars, and the imposition of its values, the predominant message geared towards Latin America tends to paint the communist regime in a favorable light, portraying China as a benevolent and accountable nation. Ironically, while China makes

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291 Ibid.

292 Ibid.

293 Cardenal, Juan Pablo. "China seduce a golpe de talonario a las élites de América Latina" *El País*, September 05, 2018. <https://shre.ink/nD7X>

inroads into the media of democratic countries, its own media landscape remains largely off-limits to outsiders. This approach by Beijing aims to rectify the ‘adverse perceptions’ stemming from China’s rapid ascent on the global stage. It also seeks to counter what Chinese leaders perceive as a dominance-driven discourse from the Western media, one that pushes Western interests while casting China in an unfavorable light<sup>294</sup>.”

Drawing upon the insights of sinologist Martin Hála, Cardenal pointed out that the initiative seeks to win over local elites who either lack familiarity with China or show diminished concern towards issues like human rights violations. These elites, in turn, propagate a narrative that “normalizes a dictatorship and morphs it into a benign economic behemoth, extending myriad opportunities to its allies<sup>295</sup>.”

The response from the summit attendees underscores this point. While Chinese proposals might raise concerns regarding editorial autonomy, trustworthiness, and factual accuracy of Latin American journalism, the remarks by Xi, Lu, and Cai garnered positive feedback from media magnates.

Miguel Wiñazki, a senior executive at the Argentine newspaper *Clarín*, left the conference expressing his company’s intent to bolster its collaboration with Chinese media. He saw Xi’s speech as a “very optimistic indicator of the potential for media partnership<sup>296</sup>.” As detailed in this monograph, the newspaper eventually began featuring content endorsed by the People’s Daily (see The *Clarín* and *La Nación* cases).

Olman Manzano, at the helm of the Honduran news portal *La Tribuna*, echoed many of the Chinese propaganda’s talking points. He noted that “under Xi’s leadership, [China] is collaboratively crafting with Latin America a community of shared destiny.” Moreover, he “agrees with the Chinese leader’s positive outlook on the flourishing collaboration between China and Latin

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294 Ibid.

295 Ibid.

296 People’s Daily. “Líderes de medios latinoamericanos elogian discurso de Xi y se muestran optimistas sobre cooperación mediática con China” *Pueblo En Línea*, November 24, 2016. <https://shre.ink/nDre>

America in the media and communication sector<sup>297</sup>.” As referenced by the People’s Daily, Manzano stated:

“As President Xi said, more and more Latin American media professionals should go to China so that Latin American people can see a real and vigorous China through the eyes of the media and experience the development of the vitality and prosperity of the world’s second-largest economy<sup>298</sup>.”

The enthusiastic praise was echoed by media entrepreneurs from Nicaragua, Mexico, and Colombia. Initiatives presented by Xi Jinping during the summit have all been executed over the next few years.

In the year after the summit, the China Public Diplomacy Association formally initiated the China-Latin America News Exchange Center. This center invites dozens of journalists to partake in training courses spanning from a few weeks to an entire academic year, beginning in 2019.

These participants study the Chinese language and engage in courses on Chinese politics, economics, culture, and international affairs. The curriculum further comprises press briefings with Chinese governmental representatives, as well as excursions to tech firms, educational entities, and rural poverty mitigation projects<sup>299</sup>.

There is no clear application process. Journalists embark on these journeys as invitees of the Chinese embassies in their home countries, adhering to criteria that are not always consistent<sup>300</sup>.

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297 Ibid.

298 Ibid.

299 The Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs. “Director-General of the Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Zhao Bentang Meets with the Journalists of the Third Phase of China-Latin America Media Exchange Center of China International Press Communication Center” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China*, July 18, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nDPm>

300 Participants consulted for this study offered varying accounts of the selection process in their respective countries. Some indicated that their local embassy aimed to invite professionals who were highly regarded by the domestic audience, irrespective of their ideological leanings. Conversely, others reported that in certain regions, invitations were extended exclusively to journalists who demonstrated sympathies toward the Communist Party and were typically employed by Chinese or China-friendly media outlets in their home countries

Correspondents are “encouraged” to chronicle their experiences for their respective media outlets. However, they are often advised against straying from official sources and provided press releases. Additionally, they are routinely captured on camera and featured in documentaries by CGTN and CRI.

These outlets harness the journalists’ rapport with their native audiences to showcase tourist spots and disseminate governmental policies on platforms like YouTube and other social media<sup>301</sup>. In 2023, the program saw the participation of 19 journalists from 16 Latin American nations<sup>302</sup>.

Content-sharing agreements burgeoned swiftly across various Latin American nations, amplifying Beijing’s preferred narratives regarding China’s affairs. Still, even though the media summit emphasized the format so much, collaborations in Chile required some time to take off.

### 3.3.3 Chinese State Media in Chile and the “Wolf Warrior”

Despite Xi’s visit and the assurances, the presence and influence of Chinese media in Chile remain relatively inconspicuous when compared with other case studies here. The reasons for this are still unclear and challenging to comprehend.

Journalists and scholars referenced in this study pointed out factors that are challenging to quantify. These include the lingering U.S. influence in Chile even after Pinochet’s fall, the nation’s relatively stable economy compared to other South American countries (which could potentially lessen the media’s reliance on foreign funding), and the dominance of media outlets with a more liberal inclination, making them less aligned with China’s perspective.

My study couldn’t pinpoint specific Chinese media campaigns aimed at Chilean audiences, nor any prior content-sharing arrangements with the press before 2015. That year marked Xinhua’s establishment of an office in Santiago and its collaboration with the business magazine, *América Economía*.

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301 Yuan, Yuan. “China-LAC dialogue aims to promote high-quality partnership” *Beijing Review*, September 09, 2022. <https://shre.ink/nDuC>

302 The Department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs. “北京中拉文化交流中心举办中拉新闻圆桌茶话会 [Beijing’s China-Latin America Cultural Exchange Center Hosts News Roundtable and Tea Gathering]” 聚焦拉美 [Focus on Latin America], August 07, 2023

However, substantial collaboration between these two media entities only saw a significant uptick in 2019.

Nevertheless, factors such as the pandemic, the appointment of a contentious ambassador aligned with the “wolf warrior diplomacy,” and the economic and health challenges presented by Covid-19 have been pivotal in legitimizing the presence of Chinese media in Chile, which has been progressively making its mark in the nation.

### 3.3.3.1 América Economía

*América Economía*, a business magazine, was the first Chilean media outlet known to sign a content-sharing agreement with the Chinese. However, this arrangement was enacted in an informal and nebulous manner.

Established in 1986 by local entrepreneurs, the magazine primarily spotlights business news in Latin America and the United States. It occasionally covers the European Union and Asia as well. During its peak years, it maintained offices in Buenos Aires, Lima, Bogotá, Mexico City, São Paulo, and Miami, in addition to its central office in Santiago. Moreover, the magazine gained prominence for its extensive network of correspondents and freelancers who relayed business events globally, but with a unique Latin American nuance.

Gwendolyn Ledger, one of the magazine’s editors, said during our interview<sup>303</sup> for this study that she was hired in 2017 to oversee coverage of Asian affairs, notably those related to China. According to her, the company’s director selected her due to her notable experience in business journalism and proficiency in English.

Ledger mentioned that the agreement with Xinhua was formalized “some-time in 2015”. Since she often wrote about Asian subjects she was unfamiliar with, she frequently relied on Xinhua as a primary source, even though she was aware that the Chinese government, being a state entity, was often portrayed by Chinese media as flawless and beyond reproach.”

Subsequently, the volume of content sourced from Xinhua on the *América Economía* website increased. This caught the attention of Xinhua’s management in Santiago, which then reached out to the newsroom. It was only at

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303 All related quotes from Interview Gwendolyn Ledger by the author, March 15, 2023

that point that Ledger realized the original agreement had been somewhat casual, and the new operations manager was unaware of any formal partnership.

“One of the recurring issues with Xinhua in Chile is the frequent turnover in leadership. When there was a change in leadership at that point, they didn’t inform us. The new manager reached out after realizing we were publishing their content without compensation. He wasn’t aware that the content had previously been provided at no cost,” Ledger explained.

Upon being informed by Ledger’s superiors about the original agreement rooted in “fostering goodwill with Latin American countries”, the Chinese representative backed down from insisting on payments. This episode, however, heightened the team’s vigilance concerning potential commercial and legal pitfalls in using Xinhua’s content. Consequently, the agency was “largely sidelined” from the newsroom’s repertoire of newswire services for close to two years.

By mid-2019, the Santiago branch of the Chinese agency had another management change. The new director reached out to *América Economía*. As Ledger recounted, this new director expressed regret that the magazine had stopped using Xinhua’s content and proposed to renew the partnership.

Under the new terms, *América Economía* would have unrestricted access to any material produced by the agency (videos, infographics, photos, etc.). In exchange, the magazine would “pledge to republish a minimum of five Xinhua articles in their entirety on its website.”

Ledger posits that this move was designed to position the magazine as a “media envoy for Xinhua,” aiding the Chinese agency in mitigating skepticism from other mainstream media entities in Chile regarding similar collaborations. “Their request was simple: ‘All we seek is acknowledgment. So, if you use our material, just give us credit.’ We didn’t see any issue with that,” Ledger reflected.

This collaboration emerged as a silver lining for the magazine. Faced with declining ad revenues, dwindling subscriber counts, and falling print sales, management measures included cost-cutting, journalist layoffs, and termination of pricier subscriptions from some major Western news agencies. The Xinhua pact, in this backdrop, served as a vital mechanism, enabling the magazine’s consistent online content updates.

The onset of the pandemic further exacerbated the magazine’s fiscal woes. The print version was discontinued, and a majority of the journalists, including



those covering Asia, were laid off. The sole exception was Gwendolyn Ledger, who now singularly shoulders the responsibility of reporting on Asian affairs.

She mentioned that the accumulation of tasks, once shared among several of her colleagues, leaves her with no time to produce original articles or even to revise the Xinhua content that the magazine republishes. As a result, the Chinese articles are presented verbatim on the magazine's website.

For clarity, she consistently attaches an "Author: Xinhua" note to the conclusion of each piece. However, she acknowledges that an occasional reader "might find it challenging to differentiate between their articles and ours. The layout for both types of content is identical. The sole addition we make is their byline."

Ledger conveyed that, despite the lack of time to tailor the content for her readership or to temper any overstatements, she endeavors to select articles with less potential for controversy. Since the rekindling of the partnership, Xinhua articles on China, as mirrored by *América Economía*, consistently adopt a tone commending Chinese governance, celebrating Chinese cultural aspects, and championing Beijing's strategic priorities. Examples:

★ *La literatura china llega al español* [Chinese literature is now in Spanish] – Published on December 06, 2019;

★ *Hubei, la cuna del coronavirus en China, relaja su cuarentena* [Hubei, epicenter of coronavirus outbreak in China, eases quarantine measures] – Published on May 01, 2020;

★ *Aliados en Latinoamérica defienden postura de China sobre Taiwán* [Allies in Latin America defend China's position on Taiwan] – Published on August 10, 2022;

★ *Xi pide a pueblo chino esfuerzos mancomunados para realizar revitalización nacional* [Xi calls on Chinese people to make joint efforts to achieve national rejuvenation] – Published on October 17, 2022;

★ *Latinoamericanos buscan nuevas oportunidades de cooperación en tecnología de la nube China* [Latin Americans seek new opportunities for cooperation in Chinese cloud technology] – Published on May 31, 2023.

The majority of Xinhua articles featured in the Chilean magazine, however, aren't focused on China. Given that the Chinese agency maintains bureaus worldwide, its newswire service offers coverage from locations where their correspondents are stationed.

Ledger said that “when articles don't touch upon Beijing's primary interests, Xinhua's coverage is often objective and well-crafted, mirroring the quality of Western counterparts such as AP, AFP, and Reuters.” Since the content-sharing agreement doesn't dictate specific subjects for the obligatory five reports, *América Economía* tends to prioritize stories about other Latin American nations.

As the pandemic evolved, with China emerging as Chile's principal ally in battling Covid-19 (marked by Beijing's donation of masks, PPE<sup>304</sup>, and, later, the primary vaccines<sup>305</sup>), Ledger recounted Xinhua's eagerness to broaden their collaboration.

In the initial months after the virus's arrival in Chile, Ledger received an email written in English from a Xinhua correspondent named “Nian” who proposed content beyond the standard newswire offerings. Nian mentioned having exclusive access to in-depth reports on the Communist Party, the Two Sessions (China's paramount legislative event), expert interviews, and more.

Ledger's attempts to verify Nian's identity were inconclusive. While Xinhua's Santiago branch verified the legitimacy of the communications, they did not allow a direct meeting between the two, citing prevailing social distancing guidelines. Still, Ledger opted to send queries to her presumed Chinese counterpart, primarily to identify sources within China.

“I couldn't determine whether she was located in Chile or China; she would respond promptly to my emails regardless of the time. (...) It became routine for me to reach out to her whenever I was covering a Chinese topic, inquiring, ‘Can you assist me? Could you perhaps interview someone from

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304 Urdinez, Francisco. *La Improvisada Diplomacia de las Mascarillas de China en Chile*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nDt7>

305 Rolnick, Jilly and Voss, G. “In China We Trust: Field-testing CoronaVac in Chile” *Weekly Asado/Wilson Center*, July 23, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nDtp>

a Chinese university about the current subject?’ And she invariably delivered.”

Post-pandemic, the demand for these specialized reports on China dwindled. However, Ledger mentions that the practice has firmly established itself, and now she only gains access to Chinese sources through the Chinese agency.

“Xinhua newswire proves indispensable since, throughout my journalistic career, I’ve never been able to secure an interview with anyone from the Chinese embassy here in Chile (...) They [the diplomats] remain unresponsive to outreach, and I’m never invited to their events. Colleagues from the Chamber of Commerce have informed me that the Chinese generally avoid engaging with the media. I’ve come to accept this reality.”

This scenario underscores how Chinese media entities can act as *de facto* gatekeepers when it comes to information about China. The nature of their relationship with local partners and their ability to ensure exclusive access to otherwise unreachable sources and press briefings can limit independent journalists.

Furthermore, Ledger clarified that since the initiation of the agreement, there’s been no direct censorship or coercion from the Chinese Embassy regarding content removal from the website. However, an individual with ties to the embassy did question her about “why she publishes so many news stories regarding the Taiwanese government and its interactions with Paraguay<sup>306</sup>.”

“They are not officially employed by the Embassy, but I know they are close because this person owns a Chinese-Spanish transcription and translation company. They approached me and said something like, ‘If someone from the Chinese embassy or government sees you posting news about Taiwan on your website, they might get angry or refuse to give you an interview.’ I explained to them that my job was to report the news and, you know, Paraguay has business with Taiwan because it does not recognize China. If our mission is to

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306 Paraguay is the largest country in the world (and the only one in South America) to still keep diplomatic relations with Taiwan instead of the People’s Republic of China

report on Latin American countries, and one of them has such a distinctive and diplomatic trade relationship, it is my duty to write about it.”

She mentioned that after this encounter, she faced no similar situations and made no changes to the content. She did contemplate whether the Chinese Embassy in Santiago purposefully overlooked her consistent outreach efforts due to disagreements with her work.

In March 2023, *América Economía* was purchased by a consortium of Peruvian entrepreneurs and investors. The new proprietors opted to preserve the existing relationship with the Chinese news agency.

### 3.3.3.2 “Wolf Warrior” Xu Bu, *El Mercurio*, and *La Tercera*

Although Chinese media made significant inroads in various countries in the region, its presence in the Chilean market only surged with the appointment of a somewhat contentious new ambassador. After completing a three-year tenure as Beijing’s representative to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Xu Bu was posted to Santiago in January 2018.

During his inaugural public appearance, in an interview with CGTN America’s Joel Richards, Xu dropped hints about his envisioned leadership approach for the Chinese mission in Chile. He expressed criticism toward tariffs introduced by the Donald Trump administration and refuted the prevailing regional sentiment that American trade constraints might favor Latin America.

“When trade tensions between the U.S. and China become very serious, undoubtedly Latin American countries will also be affected because a lot of Latin American countries rely a lot on free trade, they rely a lot on economic and trade cooperation, rely a lot on the proper management of the world trade system,” Xu articulated<sup>307</sup>.

Xu’s tenure as ambassador was marked by his assertive engagement with the media and proactive use of social media platforms. A notable instance was in April 2019, when he penned an opinion column critiquing then-Secretary

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307 Richards, Joel. “An interview with China’s new ambassador to Chile – Xu Bu” *CGTN America*, August 12, 2018. <https://shre.ink/nDas>

of State Mike Pompeo. This came after Pompeo's visit to Santiago, during which he attempted to persuade the Chilean government to exclude Huawei from 5G infrastructure citing potential espionage concerns.

In his commentary, Xu labeled Pompeo a "hypocrite" and charged him with undermining "the lawful operations of China's high-tech firms under the guise of security concerns." Xu further pointed out that individuals like Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, and Edward Snowden, an ex-employee of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), had exposed the United States' propensity to leverage "tech firms for espionage, jeopardizing the national security of other nations"<sup>308</sup>.

A few months subsequently, Xu found himself amidst another public figure. This was triggered by a meeting between Chilean legislators, led by deputy Jaime Bellolio, and Joshua Wong, a prominent pro-democracy activist and a recognizable figure from the Hong Kong protests.

Xu responded with fervor, making appearances on television shows and contributing articles to local dailies, chastising the lawmakers who met with the activist. In one opinion piece, he branded Wong as a "societal thug" and "a radical extremist"<sup>309</sup>. During a TV interview, he remarked that:

“(...) Both Taiwan Island and Hong Kong are inalienable parts of Chinese territory, and a certain congressman from Chile, at the invitation of Taiwan independence activists, paid a visit to Taiwan while promoting Hong Kong independence activities. Such actions are unacceptable and unfortunate<sup>310</sup>.”

On both occasions, Xu's articles were first published by *Diario El Mercurio*, Chile's premier newspaper. Established in 1900, *El Mercurio* has been known for its advocacy of conservative agendas and its affiliation with right-

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308 Xu, Bu. "El señor Pompeo está totalmente equivocado" *Economía Y Negocios Online*, April 14, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nDCF>

309 Xu, Bu. "La democracia no es igual a la violencia" *El Mercurio*, April 04, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nDCZ>

310 El Mostrador. "Conflicto de Hong Kong se instala con todo en Chile: Joshua Wong acusa a embajador chino Xu Bu de mentirle a los chilenos" *El Mostrador País*, September 09, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nDJ8>

wing parties. It prominently backed the military coup that ousted President Salvador Allende in 1973.

The paper's founder, French-Chilean Agustín Edwards Eastman, collaborated closely with the White House and American intelligence services to sway public sentiment in Augusto Pinochet's favor. Throughout the Chilean dictatorship era<sup>311</sup>, the newspaper routinely published editorials criticizing economic frameworks and politicians aligned with the Soviet Union and China.

However, the opportunity to feature articles penned by the ambassador in 2019 proved financially advantageous for the newspaper. While *El Mercurio* didn't formalize a content-sharing agreement with Chinese media, it did authorize the allocation of eight pages in its September 29, 2019 issue to articles promoting Beijing's views.

This "special edition" highlighted the merits of Sino-Chilean ties<sup>312</sup>. In December, the newspaper ran another embassy-sponsored advertisement: a festive message from Xi Jinping extending Christmas greetings to the Chilean people<sup>313</sup>.

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese media ramped up their collaboration with the newspaper and its affiliate entities. *Emol*, a digital offshoot of *El Mercurio*, featured numerous sponsored sections with Spanish translations of articles originally crafted by China Radio International, CGTN, and Global Times<sup>314</sup>.

In February, just as the health crisis in Wuhan was escalating, *Emol* streamed a 23-minute live interview with Xiaoming Song, a journalist from China Media Group. During the segment, Song echoed the official Chinese narrative on strategies employed to curb the then-mysterious virus<sup>315</sup>.

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311 Kirnbluh, Peter. "Agustin Edwards: A Declassified Obituary" *National Security Archive*, April 25, 2017. <https://shre.ink/nDCG>

312 These articles are no longer available online, but the index with the titles of the published texts can be found at <https://shre.ink/nDC7>

313 Hanning, Sascha. "Chile: The Door to China's Influence in Latin America?" *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe*, February 09, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nDCA>

314 Hanning, Sascha and Han, B. *Chile In: Beijing Global Media Influence*. Washington: Freedom House (2022). <https://shre.ink/nDCe>

315 Emol TV En Vivo. "Periodista grupo de medios de China y Covid-19: 'No es una etiqueta para los chinos y orientales'" *Emol*, February 17, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nDCg>

In April, amid the global spread of the new coronavirus and ensuing criticisms of Beijing's pandemic management, *El Mercurio* showcased two paid inserts sourced from China Radio International.

The first, titled “Medios estadounidenses: la Casa Blanca encontró una gran cantidad de ‘chivos expiatorios’ para transferir las críticas internas” [American media: The White House has identified numerous “scapegoats” to deflect internal criticism]<sup>316</sup>, lambasted Donald Trump for his handling of the crisis, attributing his censure of China as a diversion tactic<sup>317</sup>. The second<sup>318</sup> accused the United States of concealing the true Covid-19 death toll.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, *El Mercurio* continued to feature paid content by the China Media Group, discussing topics such as the Falkland Islands sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the U.K. and China's poverty alleviation strategies (the latter became the third most-read article on the newspaper's site that day).

Another Chilean newspaper, *La Tercera*, *El Mercurio*'s primary competitor, also derived financial benefits from embassy or CMG-sponsored advertisements. Established in 1950, *La Tercera* was initially opposed to the Pinochet regime and had affiliations with the Radical Party of Chile, a political faction inclined towards socialist ideologies.

*La Tercera* had exclusive interviews with Ambassador Xu Bu, including a reflection on his first year in Santiago<sup>319</sup> and subsequent discussions about his remarks on Mike Pompeo<sup>320</sup>. In May 2019, the newspaper also spotlighted

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316 CRI. “Medios estadounidenses: la Casa Blanca encontró una gran cantidad de ‘chivos expiatorios’ para transferir las críticas internas” *CRI es.*, April 11, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nDCI>

317 Mowla, Wazim et. al. *Measuring the Impact of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Propaganda in Latin America - Identifying Sources, Patterns, and Networks Propagating Foreign Disinformation Campaigns*. New York: Global Americans, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nD90>

318 A screenshot of this story, titled “US Investigation: Surprised! A large number of the dead from Covid-19 were quietly buried”, can be found here: <https://shre.ink/nVWc>

319 Guerrero, Francisco. “Embajador de China en Chile: ‘No tenemos ninguna intención ni posibilidad de controlar los recursos de Chile’” *La Tercera*. February 10, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nD9X>

320 Guerrero, Francisco. “Xu Bu, embajador de China en Chile: “El Sr. Mike Pompeo ha perdido la cabeza y ha llegado demasiado lejos”” *La Tercera*. April 14, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nD9F>

an op-ed by the ambassador, discussing a visit by then-Chilean President Sebastián Piñera to Beijing<sup>321</sup>.

In January 2020, *La Tercera* heralded the commencement of a collaboration with the China Media Group, vowing to deliver pertinent tales of Chinese culture. Dubbed *Conexión China*, this initiative premiered with a video illustrating the imprint of Chinese culture in Chile. It might have eluded casual viewers that this video was curated by *La Tercera's* Brand Content Laboratory, a commercial arm of the newspaper that specializes in bespoke content for brands (akin to “advertorials”).

*Conexión China* was the brainchild of the marketing division, not the journalistic team. Yet, the initial article unveiling the venture failed to elucidate this distinction or elaborate on the CMG's alignment with the CCP's external propaganda strategies.

Its dedicated web page<sup>322</sup> merely contained a disclaimer: “a project in alliance with,” followed by a diminutive CMG logo. Below, a statement read, “*Conexión China* is dedicated to showcasing Chinese culture in Chile during the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations. It stems from a partnership between China Media Group and *La Tercera*.”

Though these pieces occupied a separate section on their website, another quandary arose: their tagging system. By labeling *Conexión China* content under the tag “China,” the advertorials intermingled with the original news, blurring the lines for readers.

This commercial pact with CMG spanned from January 1st to September 30th, 2020. Its culmination, right before the anniversary of the People's Republic of China's foundation, featured write-ups from notable figures, including past presidents, a former Chilean ambassador, and Ambassador Xu Bu.

During its nearly ten-month run, *Conexión China* had 63 pieces, predominantly centering on Chinese culture, tourism promotions, technological advancements, purported advantages of Sino-Chilean ties, and complimentary articles on the Belt and Road Initiative. Conspicuously, it eschewed contentious narratives, contrary to Ambassador Xu's typical media outreach.

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321 Xu, Bu. “La importancia de la visita del Presidente Piñera a China” *La Tercera*. May 18, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nD9G>

322 Articles available at <https://www.latercera.com/categoria/conexion-china>.



In an interview conducted for this study<sup>323</sup>, Fernando Fuentes, the international news desk editor at *La Tercera*, clarified that neither he nor his team were consulted or involved in the “Conexión China” initiative. He emphasized the newspaper’s stringent separation between its newsroom and advertorial unit, both physically separated within the building.

In response to questions regarding the indistinct boundary between the two segments during *Conexión China*’s tenure, Fuentes suggested that such a blurred distinction was probably specified in the agreement. “I suspect that the contractors mandated a subtle demarcation between the commercial and journalistic content. Still, it’s worth noting that all of this content was produced by a dedicated unit within the newspaper. These are essentially sponsored contents,” Fuentes elucidated.

He emphasized the continued endeavors of the Chinese media to secure a presence in the Chilean landscape, especially propelled by Xu Bu, who exited Chile in 2020, and his successor, Niu Qingbao. Fernando remarked, “Both have consistently been in the limelight, contributing op-eds and regularly engaging in interviews. Collectively, they have a robust media footprint.”

### 3.3.3.3 *Radio Cooperativa*

The pandemic undeniably accelerated the expansion and influence of Chinese media in Chile’s leading media channels. With the world’s eyes on China, combined with the limited expertise of Chilean journalists regarding the country, challenges in sourcing reliable contacts, and financial constraints plaguing these organizations, the CMG discovered a conducive environment for forging partnerships with prominent media entities.

Yet, even before the onset of Covid-19 and the consequent surge in the Chilean audience’s appetite for news from China, another media organization had already initiated steps to solidify ties with the Chinese.

Also based in Santiago, *Radio Cooperativa* holds the distinction of being the inaugural Chilean radio station to air news in 1941. Initially favorable to the military coup, post-1977, with mounting evidence of human rights

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323 All related quotes from Interview Fernando Fuentes by the author, March 17, 2023

abuses perpetrated by the Pinochet regime<sup>324</sup>, it pivoted to become a staunch critic of the Chilean dictatorship.

In subsequent years, the radio station solidified its position as a prime Chilean radio station. As of 2022, a study by Kantar IBOPE Media disclosed that 8.4% of Chileans tuned into *Cooperativa* every day, with an additional 3% accessing it online, ranking it as the country's fourth most popular station<sup>325</sup>.

*Cooperativa* initiated its partnership with CMG in 2015, albeit unconventionally. That year, the radio collaborated with the Confucius Institute of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, the National Youth Institute, and the *Cruzando El Pacifico* Foundation, a non-governmental organization that claims to have already trained more than 200,000 young Chileans in the Chinese language<sup>326</sup>, to promote the “88 Frases Te Invita a Tu Primer Viaje a China” (88 Phrases Invites You to Your First Trip to China) contest.

The initiative featured a series of videos and audio lessons on the 88 essential Mandarin phrases for anyone visiting China. *Cooperativa* aired daily lessons and dedicated a section on its website for all the videos<sup>327</sup>. After the course, listeners could submit a video demonstrating their learning to compete for a trip to China, fully sponsored by the Confucius Institute. With over 1600 entries and 13,000 voters, three Chilean youth, aged between 18 and 29, journeyed to Beijing<sup>328</sup>.

Given the success, the contest turned annual, strengthening the ties between *Cooperativa* and Chinese state media. In May 2019, *Cooperativa's* marketing coordinator, Fabián Pizarro, attended the International Seminar on Radio and TV Broadcasting Technology in Beijing upon an invitation from CRTV International Media Co<sup>329</sup>.

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324 Rivera Aravena, Carla A. “La Verdad Esta En Los Hechos: Una Tensión Entre Objetividad Y Oposición – Radio Cooperativa En Dictadura” *Historia (Santiago)* 41-1 (2008): 79-98. <https://shre.ink/nVg8>

325 TGI. “100 años de Radio en Chile” *Kantar IBOPE Media*, August 18, 2022. <https://shre.ink/nLxw>

326 Pérez, Karina Pinã. “Aportes a la historia del aprendizaje de China en Chile” *La Tercera*, p. 52-53, October 01, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nLEY>

327 Available at <https://shre.ink/nLhF>.

328 Cooperativa.cl. “Ganadores de “88 frases” viajan este martes a China” *Radio Cooperativa*, July 04, 2016. <https://shre.ink/nLDD>

329 China Radio and Television Corporation for International Techno-Economic Cooperation, a direct subsidiary to the China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television. It is a parent company of CCTV.

Pizarro said in an interview<sup>330</sup> that a journalist from China Radio International contacted him during the trip to explore the possibility of “doing a journalistic project in Chile to publicize the work they do in terms of promoting Chinese culture, but also about international relations, trade, among other topics.” He explained why he accepted the proposal:

“China has become a trading partner for Chile, but they have also approached us in areas that go beyond trade. One example is the number of cultural institutions in our country. Ten years ago, it was very difficult to find places to learn Mandarin, but today it is much easier. The topic of China is much bigger than it seems, and this is evident from the number of people we have met. More and more people are interested in this topic. This shows that the relationship between the two countries goes beyond trade. We now have a growing interest in technology, but also in culture, which leads us to believe that it’s an interesting topic to explore, and that’s what we are doing<sup>331</sup>.”

This collaboration birthed “Efecto China” (China Effect), a five-episode series co-produced by *Cooperativa*, *Cruzando El Pacífico*, and China Radio International. The episodes touched upon cultural nuances, business opportunities, Chinese classical music, and more.

*Cruzando El Pacífico* director, Karina Pinã, highlighted that the project commemorated the 50th anniversary of Chile-China diplomatic relations<sup>332</sup>. Hosted by journalist Rafael Pardo, the episodes aired on five consecutive Sundays and included another contest offering a Santiago-Beijing all-expenses-paid trip<sup>333</sup>.

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330 Observatorio Parlamentario. “Efecto China demuestra que las relaciones van más allá de lo comercial” *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile*, December 02, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nLBs>

331 Ibid.

332 Observatorio Parlamentario. “Nuevo programa radial analizará la relación con China” *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile*, November 24, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nLwD>

333 See “Concurso Efecto China” at <https://shre.ink/nL5v>

The first season figures satisfied *Cooperativa*, exceeding expectations in terms of the number of listeners. Therefore, at the end of 2020, Pizarro announced that *Efecto China* would have another season and a much more extensive audiovisual platform.

“It has been great for us to work with them because they [CMG] are highly qualified professionals and also have a very good knowledge of our country and Latin America. We are in daily and fluent contact, and despite the distance and the time difference, our collaboration has not been affected so far. It should be noted that this agreement has already been in the works since 2019, after my trip to Beijing in May of that year. We did the first season in collaboration with CRI en Español, and the doors were open for a continuation. The evaluation from China was very positive and so we were able to quickly reach a second agreement<sup>334</sup>.”

From 2021 onward, *Efecto China* expanded its digital footprint with a dedicated website<sup>335</sup> featuring videos, photos, and stories provided by CMG. An exclusive section showcases op-eds from the Chinese ambassador to Chile, Niu Qingbao. Instead of only Sunday morning broadcasts, the radio show shifted to Monday evenings at 9:00 pm and Saturday mornings at 11:30 am, with content repurposed into a widely available podcast.

*Efecto China* has since emerged as the principal media collaboration between China and Chile. During the pandemic, the platform regularly featured exclusive updates on vaccine acquisition deals between Chile and Beijing, supplemented with interviews with Ambassador Niu.

In June 2023, *Cooperativa* inked a fresh content collaboration with Xiamen Media Group (XMG), overseen by the Xiamen government in Fujian province. The announcement ceremony was attended by *Radio Cooperativa*

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334 Observatorio Parlamentario. “Efecto China” comenzó su segunda temporada como proyecto multimedia” *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile*, November 08, 2020. <https://shre.ink/nL3H>

335 Available at <https://shre.ink/nL12>.

journalists, XMG executives, the Xiamen Communist Party’s communication director, and the Chinese ambassador to Chile<sup>336</sup>.

### 3.3.3.4 Independent China Journalism

While ties between the Chinese state media and traditional media in Chile have grown, it hasn’t deterred the local press from reporting on Chinese affairs critically and independently. Even after the embassy partnership, *La Tercera* has frequently highlighted human rights violations in Xinjiang, issues surrounding the Belt and Road Initiative, and diplomatic disagreements between Santiago and Beijing.

A few days prior to our interview, *La Tercera*’s Fernando Fuentes mentioned that he had recently published an in-depth article about the challenges tied to the Belt and Road Initiative projects in Latin America. He expressed that he “had been waiting for a call from the embassy criticizing the content.” But such a call never came.

*Diario Financiero*, another Chilean newspaper, has initiated a project inviting independent scholars from Chile and abroad to dissect pressing Chinese matters. This initiative, named “Conexión a China” (Connection to China), was pitched by journalist Marcel Oppliger to his editor in 2020.

“I was like, ‘This is a business paper, we have regular stories on China because of China investments here. It seems logical to have a section that specializes a little more on China.’ We can’t afford to have a China section, like the Financial Times, but maybe we can do it under my wing in the opinion pages. So, I pitched her the idea of having a biweekly, every 15 days, opinion page just on China. My idea was ‘I’m going to look for a pool of writers from various expertise and ask them to write about China-related stuff with a focus on business and economy, of course, but not exclusively’<sup>337</sup>.”

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336 Cooperativa.cl. “Radio Cooperativa y Xiamen Media Group, de China, estrechan lazos de cooperación” *Radio Cooperativa*, June 12, 2023. <https://shre.ink/nLL2>

337 All related quotes from Interview Marcel Oppliger by the author, March 16, 2023.

He emphasized that their newspaper staunchly adheres to a policy of not accepting “any money from governments” and that there hasn’t been any overture from the Chinese embassy in this regard. “They know perfectly well what we are doing. I’ve interviewed the ambassador a couple of times; he’s aware of my identity. I’m informed that he peruses our page, as occasionally when others meet him, they mention he’s been reading my column.”

Opplinger clarified that their aim isn’t to be anti-China, but “to provide an independent platform for both sides.” He believes his work fills a gap, shedding light on significant issues that other Chilean outlets often overlook. “Whenever there is a void, someone will fill it. Typically, topics like human rights, Taiwan, disputes in the South China Sea, and China’s military base constructions are not covered locally. I usually find such information in foreign media.”

### 3.4 Colombia

While Chile pioneered the establishment of Latin American ties with the People’s Republic of China, Colombia charted a distinct course. Unlike many of its neighbors, Bogotá only recognized the One-China principle and severed ties with Taiwan in 1980, primarily for economic reasons.

This reluctance can be attributed to Colombia’s close ties with the United States, stemming from the “Respite Polum Doctrine” (or “Look Toward the North”), which was implemented by President Marco Fidel Suárez who governed the country from 1918 to 1921.

Over the years, Colombians have consistently prioritized their relationship with Washington above others, even over those with their South American neighbors. This was also evident in their delayed engagement with Beijing.

However, this doesn’t imply that China hasn’t made significant inroads in recent times. While the United States remains Bogotá’s primary ally and the Chinese diaspora in Colombia is relatively small<sup>338</sup> compared to other regional nations, China’s influence in Colombia’s economic and political spheres has been steadily growing.

The increasing significance of trade interactions has been complemented by diplomatic overtures, leading to a broader presence of Chinese media

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338 Fleischer, Friederike. “La diáspora china: un acercamiento a la migración china en Colombia” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 42, 2012: 71-79. <https://shre.ink/nsg9>

in the country. In recent times, local TV channels have entered into content-sharing deals with Chinese entities, and mainstream newspapers have made room for editorials from the Chinese Embassy as well as advertorials by the China Media Group.

### 3.4.1 U.S. Influence and Sino-Colombian Relations

“The north of our foreign policy must be there, in this mighty nation that more than any other, exerts a decisive pull on the people of America.” Using these words, former Colombian conservative president Fidel Suárez articulated Colombia’s firm alignment with Washington’s foreign policy<sup>339</sup>.

This stance wasn’t simply taken out of unbridled admiration for the United States. Before his presidency in Bogotá, Colombia found itself at odds with the Americans. This was mainly due to the U.S.’s direct role in the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902).

The strife saw Colombia liberals and conservatives clashing, their motivations deeply rooted in issues persisting since independence. The result of this conflict was the secession of Panama, then a Colombian province of immense strategic value to the U.S., which wanted to build a canal there.

Washington dispatched its troops there, forcing an end to the hostilities. Subsequently, the U.S. backed the Panamanians diplomatically, acknowledging Panama as a sovereign entity in 1903. This war wreaked havoc on Colombia’s economy, rendering it incapable of any attempts to reclaim Panama.

Recognizing these power dynamics, Fidel Suárez adopted the philosophy: “If you can’t beat them, join them.” Prior to his presidency and even before leading the delegation that finalized peace with Panama, Suárez contended that Colombia’s best move was to ally with the U.S. Hence, the *Respice Polum* doctrine emerged.

Upon taking office, Suárez championed this belief, steering Colombia’s foreign policy in sync with Washington. This alignment, while diminishing

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339 Torres, César Augusto Bermúdez. “La Doctrina Respice Polum (‘Mirar Hacia El Norte’) En La Práctica de Las Relaciones Internacionales de Colombia Durante El Siglo XX.” *Memorias* 12, 2022: 189–222. <https://shre.ink/nsCU>

Colombia's global influence, ensured an influx of American investments into sectors like mining, oil, and the cultivation of coffee and bananas<sup>340</sup>. His doctrine gained traction and was upheld by his successors. Contrary to what many anticipated, even leaders from different political backgrounds sustained close ties with the U.S. post the Conservative Party reign<sup>341</sup>.

Colombia's unwavering loyalty to Washington impacted its diplomatic outreach to China. While Bogota had ties with Japan since 1908 (severed with the onset of World War II), it only began relations with China in 1947<sup>342</sup>. Following in the U.S.'s footsteps, Colombia also refused to acknowledge Mao Zedong's victory and the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949<sup>343</sup>.

Bogotá maintained its distance from Beijing in subsequent years. For instance, in 1950, Colombia contributed 5,100 soldiers to the Korean War, siding against Communist China. From 1954 to 1971, echoing the U.S. stance, Colombia persistently opposed Taiwan's removal from the UN.

In October 1971, when the General Assembly adopted Resolution 2758, acknowledging the People's Republic as China's only legitimate government, Colombia abstained<sup>344</sup>. Despite then-President Carlos Lleras Restrepo's assertion that global peace was impossible without the People's Republic, Colombia sided with the U.S., opposing Taiwan's exclusion.

The Colombian standpoint only shifted after vigorous lobbying by the Asociación de Amistad Colombo-China (Sino-Chinese Friendship Association), an NGO tied to the Maoist-leaning Colombian Independent Labor Movement.

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340 Sarmiento, Jorge L. "Consolidating Power: The Making of Modern Colombia After the Panama Debacle" *Ezra's Archives* 3-1 (2013): 93-111. <https://shre.ink/ns96>

341 Arango, Carlos Camacho. "Respite polum: las relaciones entre Colombia y Estados Unidos en el siglo XX y los usos (y abusos) de una locución latina" *Historia y Sociedad* 19 (2010): 175-201. <https://shre.ink/ns9K>

342 Maggiorelli, Lorenzo and Cepeda-Ladino, Julio-César "Las relaciones de Colombia con Asia-Pacífico y sus principales canales de interacción" *拉丁美洲經貿季刊* 40 (2020): 23-44. <https://shre.ink/nsWm>

343 Barbosa, Fernando. "Colombia-China: Contradicciones y ambigüedades" *RAI Revista Análisis Internacional* 4, 2011: 203-220. <https://shre.ink/nsqk>

344 United Nations. "Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations" *United Nations Digital Library*, October 25, 1971. <https://shre.ink/nshv>



Its initiatives began in 1977 with a photo exhibit, followed by the welcoming of a Chinese soccer team delegation in 1978<sup>345</sup>. It then coordinated with the Colombian Ministry of Communications to secure an operating license for Xinhua, which dispatched two correspondents, Wu Hui Chang, and Chiu Ling, to their new office that same year<sup>346</sup>. The association also facilitated trips for prominent Colombian figures to China, one of whom was Conservative Party leader, Bertha Hernández de Ospina. Upon her return, she expressed support for fostering diplomatic ties with Beijing.

These endeavors bore fruit. In that year, Colombia's ex-ambassador to the UN, Julio César Turbay Ayala, clinched the presidential win. Leading up to his swearing-in, he conveyed his intent in interviews to cultivate diplomatic relations with Communist China, eyeing potential trade prospects.

When Turbay Ayala welcomed a Chinese delegation in 1979, he set forth a single condition. As recounted by attendees, the Colombian president stated, "If China purchases Colombian coffee, there will be no problem in forging diplomatic ties<sup>347</sup>." Beijing heeded this message, subsequently initiating imports of Colombian coffee. By 1980, diplomatic ties were established, with Colombia endorsing the One-China principle and acknowledging Beijing as the official Chinese government.

### 3.4.2 Anemic Engagement and Impact on Perceptions

From 1980 to 2004, Colombian exports to China surged, growing on average by 31% annually, predominantly in core industrial sectors like iron, steel, copper, and crude oil<sup>348</sup>. However, despite this upswing, the two nations only

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345 Araujo, Diana Marcela Morón. *Análisis Del Proceso De Establecimiento De Relaciones Diplomáticas Entre Colombia Y La República Popular China* [Monografía de Grado]. Bogotá: Universidad Colegio Mayor de Nuestra Señora del Rosario, 2008. <https://shre.ink/nsRu>

346 Ibid.

347 Obando, Patricia Castro. "China no está tan lejos para los colombianos" *El Tiempo*, April 03, 2005. <https://shre.ink/nsRf>

348 Arroyo, Augusto Cesar Colón. *Relaciones Comerciales de Colombia y China: Un análisis desde las Reformas Económicas de China y su ingreso a la Organización Mundial del Comercio* [Tesis de Maestría]. Barranquilla: Universidad del Norte, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nsoX>

formalized cooperation agreements in 2005 during then-President Álvaro Uribe's trip to Beijing.

Throughout this period, and continuing today, political engagements haven't matched the brisk pace of trade growth<sup>349</sup>. Bogotá was always candid about its perspective, seeing Sino-Colombian ties largely through the lens of commerce and investment attraction.

While Colombia backed China's bid to join the World Trade Organization in 2001<sup>350</sup>, it stopped short of awarding China a "market economy" status, conditioning its recognition on "when measures are taken to prevent and/or punish unfair competition [promoted by Chinese] companies<sup>351</sup>." Additionally, Bogotá has steered clear of major Chinese global ventures like the Belt and Road Initiative.

In 2011, the then newly-elected President Juan Manuel Santos invoked the "China threat"<sup>352</sup> to hasten the approval of a U.S. free trade agreement, initially signed in 2006, which had been languishing in the U.S. Congress.

Santos, a self-proclaimed "very pro-America" president, underscored Colombia's intent to diversify its alliances. He told *The New York Times* that China was emerging as an option for the United States and that Chinese delegations were arriving in Colombia "almost every week" with trade and investment offers<sup>353</sup>. This narrative was widely seen as a tactic to gain Washington's notice. It achieved its aim: The U.S. Congress ratified the agreement within seven months of Santos's remarks about China.

On the other hand, China's proactive engagement has also been relatively muted. Although every Colombian leader since 1996 has toured China, by 2023, Colombia had only played host to two high-level Chinese visits:

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349 Olmos, Jaime Rafael Ahcar, and Osorio Medina, E. "Incrementando Las Relaciones Comerciales Entre Colombia y China." *Estudios Gerenciales* 24-109 (2008): 127–65. <https://shre.ink/nsgN>

350 Vélez, Guillermo Ricardo. "Thirty Years of Friendship with a Thousand-Year-Old Civilization" *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia*, November, 2010. <https://shre.ink/nssH>

351 Borda Guzmán, Sandra, and Paz Berger, M. "Relaciones Bilaterales China y Colombia: 1990-2010" *Colombia Internacional* 75 (2012): 83–129. <https://shre.ink/nspn>

352 Armony, A. C. "A View from Afar: How Colombia Sees China" *The China Quarterly* 209 (2012): 178–197. <https://shre.ink/ns0T>

353 Romero, Simon. "President Santos of Colombia Seeks Wide-Ranging Changes" *The New York Times*, March 06, 2011. <https://shre.ink/nsEd>

Premier Zhao Ziyang in 1985 and Xi Jinping in 2009, during his tenure as vice-president. Furthermore, Beijing has withheld the “strategic partnership” designation from Bogotá, a title it has granted to multiple Latin American nations<sup>354</sup>.

The effects of this mutual lack of trust have been chronicled in several surveys over the years. A study<sup>355</sup> in 2015, involving more than 20,000 Latin Americans across 18 countries, aimed to decipher their perception of global powerhouses.

The findings revealed that while 41% of Colombians expressed a “positive or very positive” view of China, 54% of them had “little or no” confidence in China’s ability to solve Latin American problems. In a similar vein, the 2021 AmericasBarometer unveiled that only 35% of the nearly 3,000 Colombians surveyed placed their trust in the Chinese administration, whereas 60% exhibited confidence in the U.S. government<sup>356</sup>.

“Colombia is the most important security partner that the Americans have in the region. I think that has some influence on the population, and that is because of the kind of content they consume, particularly the kind of news media. The news coverage here is pretty pro-U.S. and China is not portrayed in a very positive way. Colombia has also been late to engage with China compared to other countries, especially its immediate neighbors. Taken together, these two factors help explain the rather negative perception toward China<sup>357</sup>.”

Based on these figures, one could think the potential trajectory for Chinese media in Colombia was very limited. That didn’t prevent China from

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354 Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela all have “comprehensive strategic partnerships”, while Bolivia and Uruguay are considered “strategic partners”.

355 Estevadeordal, Antoni, et. al. “Made in Chi-Lat” *Integration & Trade Journal* 40, June, 2016. <https://shre.ink/nshP>

356 Lupu, Noam, Mariana Rodríguez, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister. *Pulse of Democracy 2021*. Nashville: LAPOP, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nsh6>

357 Interview Parsifal D’Sola by the author, March 13, 2023

trying. While their operations remain modest compared to endeavors in other Latin American nations, Chinese media outlets are progressively broadening their Colombian footprint, forging ties with local television broadcasters and newspapers.

These developments align with the recent advancements in Sino-Colombian relations. After the election of Gustavo Petro in 2021, the first left-leaning Colombian president in decades, Bogotá has indicated potential interest in joining the Belt and Road Initiative<sup>358</sup>.

Since 2020, China has dispatched two ambassadors with profound expertise in Latin American affairs<sup>359</sup> and a knack for media relations. This has fostered positive press coverage and strengthened ties between the two nations.

### 3.4.3 Partnerships with Local Media

Colombia boasts the third-largest media market in Latin America, trailing only Mexico and Brazil. Despite a plethora of regional media outlets, the country has a limited number of platforms with a national scope. There are just four newspapers — two of which specialize in business news — one news agency, two private television stations, and three public broadcasting channels<sup>360</sup>.

In the realm of print journalism, Colombia mirrors a global trend that has emerged since the advent of the Internet: leading newspapers are losing favor among the public<sup>361</sup>. According to a 2022 Reuters Digital News Report survey, 86% of Colombians predominantly get their news online, yet few are willing to pay for professional journalism. For instance, *El Espectador*, a major national newspaper, reported a mere 100,000 online subscribers<sup>362</sup>. Additionally, 55% of respondents indicated that television also serves as a news source for them.

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358 Castrillon, David. "Colombia: China's New Amigo?" *The Diplomat*, May 14, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nsh3>

359 Ellis, Evan. "Colombia's Relationship with the PRC" *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, November 10, 2022. <https://shre.ink/nshq>

360 Reporters without Borders. "Media Consumption Colombia" *Media Ownership Monitor*, n.d. <https://shre.ink/nXAq>

361 Semana. "El poder de la comunicación" *Semana Medios*, November 27, 2004. <https://shre.ink/nXIC>

362 Perdomo, Víctor García. "Colombia" *Reuters Digital News Report*, 2022. <https://shre.ink/nXyY>

This landscape poses challenges for Chinese media, which find themselves with limited options in Colombia. Print outlets have generally declined content-sharing agreements, although they have recently become more receptive to publishing advertorials. Therefore, China's primary initiative has centered on a significant partnership with the leading Colombian TV station, *Caracol*, and the Latin American Information Alliance (Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana, or AIL), which is headquartered in the same facilities.

### 3.4.3.1 *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador*

*El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* are Colombia's two major newspapers, both based in Bogotá but with differing ideological stances.

Founded in 1911 by Alfonso Villegas Restrepo, a businessman aligned with the conservative coalition *Unión Republicana*, *El Tiempo* predominantly champions liberal economic policies, such as deregulation, privatization, and minimal state interference. Currently controlled by Luis Carlos Sarmiento, the country's wealthiest person and owner of business conglomerate *Grupo Aval*, the paper generally supports Colombia's diplomatic alignment with the United States.

In contrast, *El Espectador* is noted for its progressive leanings and focus on human rights issues. Established in 1897 by Liberal Party activist Fidel Cano Gutiérrez, the newspaper has transitioned to a more centrist editorial policy, positioning itself as a "media of proposition rather than opposition." It falls under the umbrella of *Grupo Valorem*, which also owns Colombia's primary TV broadcaster, *Caracol*.

The two newspapers' interactions with Chinese media diverge markedly. *El Espectador* has largely refrained from extended cooperation and does not maintain an active content-sharing agreement with Chinese outlets. It has, however, consented to publish op-eds by Lan Hu, the then-Chinese ambassador to Colombia.

Meanwhile, *El Tiempo* rejected a content-sharing agreement with Xinhua not due to editorial differences, but because the partnership would not be free of cost and the amounts demanded by the Chinese agency were high<sup>363</sup>. Notwithstanding its historical endorsement of the U.S.-Colombia alliance, *El Tiempo* has been open to publishing Chinese advertorials.

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363 Interview Carolina Urrego-Sandoval by the author, July 06, 2023.

In 2016, *El Tiempo* welcomed a delegation from the All-China Journalists Association (ACJA), an entity founded in Shanghai in 1937 and later overseen by the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party. Experts note that the ACJA functions to “reinforce discipline and control” within Chinese society and serves as a key institution for ensuring political and ideological compliance among Chinese journalists<sup>364</sup>.

Roberto Pombo, the Editorial Director of *El Tiempo*, conveyed to the delegation that “as China’s international prominence grows, interest in Chinese news is escalating. We look forward to enhancing our communication and information exchange with Chinese media in the future<sup>365</sup>.”

Three years after this visit, *El Tiempo* commemorated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 2019, by publishing a series of “special reports.” The content gave no overt indication that it was externally sourced, nor did it disclose the financial sponsor behind it.

The only subtle clue pointing to its advertorial nature was a discreet logo situated above the photo on the index page of the reports: “+contenido”. This tag represents the department within *El Tiempo*’s marketing team responsible for generating advertorials. However, there was no accompanying explanation or hyperlink that directed readers to the “+contenido” commercial page (see Figure 11).

Upon clicking the articles, readers are directed to pages that are stylistically indistinguishable from the newspaper’s regular journalistic content. Unlike the index page, the tag “+contenido” is conspicuously absent, making it exceedingly difficult for readers to discern that they are viewing a marketing initiative rather than editorial content.

One article portrays China as “a good friend that adheres to principles of equality, mutual respect, and shared benefits for all countries, regardless of size<sup>366</sup>.” Additional pieces emphasize the “trifecta of success” underpinning the Chinese economy, which they attribute to “investment, human talent, and

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364 China Media Project. “The ‘Everything App’ for China’s Journalists” *Tracking Control*, July 04, 2023. <https://shre.ink/Uq7O>

365 All-China Journalists Association. “海外传媒观察 | 带你了解一下古巴、哥伦比亚主流媒体 [Overseas Media Observation | Learn about mainstream media in Cuba and Colombia]” 中国记协 [微信], June 13, 2016. <https://shre.ink/Uq79>

366 *El Tiempo*. “Las virtudes traen buenos amigos” *Política*, October 01, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nX9S>

government support<sup>367</sup>.” The articles also lauded the Chinese government’s “commitment to fostering cultural and creative industries<sup>368</sup>.”

**FIGURE 11:** Cover of the special web page “70 años de la República Popular China”



The project included opinion pieces by key figures such as Xu Hu, the *chargé d'affaires* at the Chinese Embassy in Colombia, who extolled the “flourishing of the Chinese people under the auspices of the Communist Party<sup>369</sup>.” Similarly, Carlos Holmes Trujillo, who was then Colombia’s Chancellor, contributed an op-ed that praises Beijing’s accomplishments in “economic modernization, anti-corruption efforts, and poverty alleviation<sup>370</sup>.”

In February 2021, *El Tiempo* partnered with Huawei and the *Asociación Colombo China* to host a live-streamed event titled “China: Globalización, Mitos y Realidades” (China: Globalization, Myths, and Realities)<sup>371</sup>.

367 El Tiempo. “Inversión, talento humano y apoyo gubernamental, la triada del éxito”, *Tecnología*, October 01, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nX9B>

368 El Tiempo. “Apoyar industrias culturales, una de las claves del desarrollo chino”, *Cultura*, October 01, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nXqi>

369 Xu, Hu. “Una etapa de progresos dio paso a la nueva China” *El Tiempo*, October 01, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nXqr>

370 Trujillo, Carlos Holmes. “Relaciones promisorias: balance del canciller Carlos Holmes Trujillo” *El Tiempo*, October 01, 2019. <https://shre.ink/nXdn>

371 El Tiempo. “Foros El Tiempo | China: Globalización, mitos y realidades [Video]” *YouTube*, February 24, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nXJ4>

Moderated by a columnist from the newspaper and featuring a distinguished panel of experts, the virtual forum included Xu Sitao, Chief Economist at Deloitte China; Alicia Puyana, a researcher at the Latin American Institute of Social Sciences; Laura Valdivieso, Colombia's Deputy Minister of Trade; and Zhou Cong, Secretary-General of Huawei Colombia. Over the two-hour discussion, panelists extolled the virtues of the Chinese economic model, critiqued U.S. policies, and emphasized the “mutual benefits” stemming from China-Colombia trade relations.

A week after the event, *El Tiempo* ran an advertorial that encapsulated the remarks made by the panelists. The article underscored “the effectiveness of China's response to the economic repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic” and scrutinized the West's decoupling from China, which Alicia Puyana described as resulting from “a utopian, politically charged discourse” designed to “hinder China's rise due to a miscomprehension of its culture<sup>372</sup>.”

In 2022 and 2023, the newspaper continued to publish numerous advertorials focused on China. Many of these pieces lacked transparent information regarding their funding sources and occasionally featured text lifted verbatim from Chinese publications.

For instance, on March 7, 2023, *El Tiempo* published a report titled “China inicia ‘dos sesiones’ para campaña de modernización” (“China Opens ‘Two Sessions’ with Confidence for New Modernization Drive”)<sup>373</sup>, which was an exact reproduction of an article that had appeared the previous day on the Spanish-language Xinhua website<sup>374</sup> (see Figure 12).

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372 El Tiempo “Las relaciones con China: Un mundo de oportunidades” *El Tiempo - Contenido Patrocinado*, March 01, 2021. <https://shre.ink/nXCz>

373 Available at <https://shre.ink/nXdB>

374 The Spanish version derived from a Xinhua report originally published in both English and Chinese by the State Council of the People's Republic of China on March 05, 2023. Besides *El Tiempo* in Colombia, the same advertorial was also published by Argentina's “Clarín” and Chile's “El Mercurio”, although both of these newspapers categorized the piece as “content sponsored by Xinhua.”



**FIGURE 12:** Advertorial published by *El Tiempo* in March 2023 and the original article; a piece published by Xinhua just one day earlier.



**Titulares de Xinhua: China inicia "dos sesiones" con confianza para nueva campaña de modernización**

spanish.news.cn | 2023-03-06 19:04:15 |

BELING, 6 mar (Xinhua) -- El máximo órgano asesor político de China inició el día 4, sábado, su sesión anual, marcando la apertura de las "dos sesiones", en un año crucial en el que China reúne fuerzas para construir un gran país socialista moderno.

### 3.4.3.2 *Caracol* and ALL

As previously noted, *El Espectador* and the television network *Cadena Radial Colombiana de Televisión S.A.*, commonly known by its acronym *Caracol*, are both owned by the same holding company, *Grupo Valorem*. While *El Espectador* remains cautious about broadcasting content produced by Chinese media, *Caracol* stands as one of CCTV/CMG's most enduring partners in Colombia.

The collaborative relationship between the Bogotá-based broadcaster and Chinese media dates back to 2011, making it one of the longest-standing partnerships of its kind in Latin America<sup>375</sup>. In that inaugural year, *Caracol*

375 Morales, Pablo Sebastian. "China's Communication Strategy in Latin America:

secured access to CCTV+, a video-on-demand service that offers content produced by CCTV teams globally.

Since then, *Caracol* has been receptive to further collaboration with Chinese entities. In 2016, the station hosted the same delegation from the All-China Journalists Association that had visited *El Tiempo*. The delegation was welcomed by Gonzalo Córdoba Mallarino, the CEO of *Caracol Internacional*. Mallarino noted that, under the 2011 agreement, his network utilized approximately “30 hours of special content and documentaries from CCTV annually.” He expressed a desire to “deepen collaboration with Chinese media in areas such as culture and environmental protection” and indicated willingness to dispatch reporters to China for special coverage<sup>376</sup>.

*Caracol* also serves as the linchpin in a broader partnership between CMG and the Latin American Information Alliance (Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana, or AIL). Initially formed in 2005 when *Caracol* teamed up with other regional broadcasters to share costs and joint reporting on the death of Pope John Paul II and the subsequent papal conclave, AIL has since evolved into a significant platform for collaborative content-sharing among broadcasters in 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as Spain and the United States (see Figure 13).

In 2007, *Caracol* extended its satellite transmission infrastructure to AIL, facilitating the launch of a groundbreaking, complimentary news distribution service featuring content produced by its members. After the U.S. network CBS joined the Alliance in 2014 and licensed its NewspathNow platform to AIL, the organization professionalized its content-sharing system, cementing its status as the largest media consortium in Latin America.

Since its inception, AIL's headquarters have been located on *Caracol's* premises in Bogotá. Juan Carlos Isaza Montejo, who coordinated the Vatican coverage in 2005, has overseen AIL's operations since the beginning.

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From External Actor to Close Partner” In *China's International Communication And Relationship Building*, ed. Xiaoling Zhang and Corey Schultz (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2022), 47-62

376 All-China Journalists Association. “海外传媒观察 | 带你了解一下古巴、哥伦比亚主流媒体 [Overseas Media Observation | Learn about mainstream media in Cuba and Colombia]” 中国记协 [微信], June 13, 2016. <https://shre.ink/Uq79>

**FIGURE 13:** AIL Members in 2023

The longstanding relationship between *Caracol* and CCTV facilitated a comprehensive content-sharing agreement between AIL and CMG, which was officially signed during the X General Assembly of AIL in the Dominican Republic in April 2016. This summit also saw the participation of representatives from Voice of America (United States), European News Exchange (Luxembourg), and Tazpit Press Service (Israel)<sup>377</sup>, organizations with which AIL had previously entered into cooperation agreements.

The CMG-AIL agreement significantly extends the global reach of Chinese media, particularly CCTV/CGTN. AIL members, who are predominantly leaders in television journalism in their respective markets, contribute nearly 40,000 reports every year, supplemented by multiple features made by CGTN and other partners. Although exact statistics are not available, Chinese content is disseminated across dozens of countries.

While the partnership encourages bilateral content-sharing, Juan Carlos Isaza Montejo, in an interview conducted for this study, revealed that content flows are largely one-sided. He stated, “They almost never request content from us. On rare occasions, CGTN has made specific inquiries to the Alliance, and we have accommodated these, but predominantly they supply us with content originating from China<sup>378</sup>.”

Moreover, the collaboration is not limited to stories directly related to China. For instance, during the devastating Hurricane Irma in 2017, AIL

377 Martínez, Ninoska. “Concluye XV asamblea AIL celebrada esta semana en República Dominicana” *Noticias Sin*, April 29, 2016. <https://shre.ink/Uqer>

378 All related quotes from Interview Juan Carlos Isaza Montejo by the author, March 14, 2023

requested that CCTV reporters cover the impact in Cuba, a country with substantial Chinese media representation but a limited presence of Latino correspondents. This coverage received commendation from Chinese academics as an exemplar of the reach and capability of China's state media.

“An unprecedented scene emerged, with reporters with Chinese faces on the screen of Latin American TV broadcasters, reporting local news in Spanish. The story was also repeatedly broadcast on other TV stations members of the Alliance (including El Salvador, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Puerto Rico, etc.), becoming a successful practice of reporting local news in Latin America from a Chinese perspective<sup>379</sup>.”

Isaza Montejo emphasized that the collaboration serves an important function: giving Latin Americans access to a Chinese viewpoint on globally significant issues. He highlighted the coverage of the origins of Covid-19 as one such example of the benefits reaped from the CMG-AIL agreement.

“When the pandemic disaster occurred, originated in China, the Latin American media were naturally very interested in seeing how China would handle the situation. Therefore, there are common topics that are not foreign to Latin America. There are Chinese environmental issues that are of great interest to Latin America, stories about the economy, and the whole Belt and Road project. (...) I think it is clear to the whole world the geopolitical importance of China. China obviously has a clear stance on issues like Taiwan or the war in Ukraine, and regardless of how much one agrees or disagrees, it is still very interesting for Latinos to know what the Chinese are thinking about them (...) Despite our distance and cultural differences, China cannot be ignored.”

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379 Li, Weilin. “拉美主流电视媒体对华合作需求分析与对策 [An analysis of Latin American mainstream television media's cooperation demands with China and its solutions]” 国际传播 [Global Communications] 3 (2018): <https://shre.ink/UquU>

The partnership received a fresh boost in December 2021 during the third ministerial meeting of the China-CELAC Forum (CCF) in Mexico. In front of Chinese diplomats and representatives from over 30 Latin American and Caribbean countries, CMG announced the China-Latin America Media Action Initiative.

Described as a “virtual media forum, a documentary co-production initiative, and film and television exhibitions,<sup>380</sup>” this project was publicly endorsed by CMG President Shen Haixiong. Shen invoked pledges of cooperation made by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the 2016 Media Forum in Chile while presenting the proposal to AIL members and Latin American media outlets more broadly.

“The Initiative consists of launching the CGTN’s China-LAC online media forum to deepen exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and Latin American civilizations in the field of communication; to jointly produce documentaries on China and Latin America to emphasize the interest of both sides in important issues; to organize the CGTN’s China-LAC film and TV tour to present Chinese and Latin American worlds through artistic works; launching the youth talk show ‘Café de CGTN’ to learn the ideas of new generations about China-Latin America exchanges; and launching a public service short film campaign in the media to undertake the historical mission entrusted to us by the community with a shared future between China and Latin America and the Caribbean. Looking ahead, we are committed to joint development and extensive exchanges with Latin American and Caribbean media organizations. We will firmly uphold the values of fair and objective information and expand the channels of exchange and cooperation, all with the aim of further contributing to the expansion of China-LAC relations<sup>381</sup>.”

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380 CGTN Español “Diplomáticos destacan que la iniciativa ‘Acción de Medios China-ALC’ impulsa el conocimiento mutuo” *Iberoamérica*, December 05, 2021. <https://shre.ink/Uqb1>

381 CGTN. “CGTN launches China-Latin America Media Action project” [Video] *YouTube*, December 03, 2021. <https://shre.ink/UqOS>

Isaza Montejo expressed his approval of the initiative in a video message broadcast by CGTN, stating that the Latin American alliance would commit to “share informative content that brings China and Latin America closer [...] as we ratify the commitment of friendship and professionalism to continue working together toward this great goal<sup>382</sup>.” The project also received backing from other TV broadcasters in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.

Originally, the initiative aimed to co-produce documentaries between CMG and AIL. However, Isaza Montejo said in our interview that most Alliance members lacked the expertise in documentary production. Consequently, the workaround was to air content supplied by the Chinese side.

As an example, the initiative produced a documentary exploring “the successes of the Chinese rural revitalization process.” Promoted by CGTN as a model for Latin America to emulate<sup>383</sup>, the documentary, segmented into three episodes and featuring young Latin American nationals based in China, was broadcast either in part or in its entirety across several AIL member stations.

#### 3.4.3.3 RCTV and *Telepacífico*

Apart from collaborating with *Caracol*, Chinese media entities have also formed partnerships with Colombian public television channels. In July 2020, *Radio Televisión Nacional de Colombia* (Colombia’s National Radio and Television, or RTVC) publicized a new alliance with Classic Media Films China Latina. This subsidiary is part of a Chongqing-based media company.

As an initial venture under this agreement, *Señal Colombia*, a channel under the umbrella of RTVC, aired the TV series “La leyenda de Bruce Lee” (李小龙传奇). Directed by Li Wenqi. The series originally premiered in China in 2008.

In September of the same year, the channel went on to broadcast another series titled “Xi Jinping’s Governance Strategies.” The three-part show

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382 CGTN Español. “Medios de comunicación latinoamericanos apoyan la iniciativa ‘Acción de Medios de China y ALC’ [Video]” *YouTube*, December 03, 2021. <https://shre.ink/UqcY>

383 CGTN. “Documental del CGTN Español muestra el modelo de revitalización rural de China del que América Latina puede aprender” *CGTN China*, October 12, 2022. <https://shre.ink/Uqcj>

— comprising episodes on “People’s Feelings,” “China’s Governance,” and “Welcome All Aboard” — was framed as an exploration of various facets of Chinese society, culture, and economy. It aimed to “glimpse at the society, culture, and economy of China from local and international perspectives (...) [showing] how in recent years the Asian giant has been working on culture and economy to make it — as it is today — one of the world powers<sup>384</sup>.”

“China speaks softly but its global advances roar like the dragon. The Chinese government has been able to recognize the opportunities that globalization offers, emphasizing a multipolar order driven by its institutions. Some people say that the 21st century will be China’s century and this is absolutely correct (...) [China has] the aim of achieving benefits and profits for humanity<sup>385</sup>.”

In February 2022, *Señal Colombia* aired a special performance titled “China-Colombia Friendship,” marking the 42nd anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Produced by Shanghai Media Group (SMG), the show was watched by approximately 80,000 Colombians<sup>386</sup>.

In another development, *Telepacífico*, a public television station based in Cali — one of Colombia’s most populous cities — also agreed to use content from Chinese media.

This arrangement was put together by Lan Hu, the Chinese Ambassador to Colombia, in association with the Chinese Ministry of Education’s International Cooperation Center for Language Education, the Cali Municipal Government, and Univalle, a local university<sup>387</sup>.

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384 Sarmiento, David Jáuregui. “¿Cómo llegó China a ser una potencia mundial?” *Señal Colombia RCTV*, September 28, 2020. <https://shre.ink/Uqtu>

385 Classic Media China Internacional. “Documentales de China - por SEÑAL COLOMBIA [Video]” *YouTube*, December 03, 2020. <https://shre.ink/Uqtc>

386 华人头条-秘鲁 [Headlines China-Peru]. “‘中哥友好 — 来自上海的问候’ 惊艳哥伦比亚国家电视台 [‘China-Colombia Friendship: Greetings from Shanghai’ amazed Colombian national television]” *Fujian Ruiven 52hrtt*, February 09, 2022. <https://shre.ink/Uqtx>

387 People’s Daily Overseas Network. “中国哥伦比亚开展中文教育、影视节目交流合作 [China and Colombia collaborate on Chinese language education, film, and television programming initiatives]”, *Baidu Baijiahao*, September 30, 2022. <https://>

“We consider that culture has no borders, culture is transition and exchange. (...) Through the agreement with *Telepacífico*, we hope that more people can learn about the culture and history of one of the oldest countries in the world”, Lan Hu said<sup>388</sup>.

### 3.5 Mexico

If the United States’ influence in Colombia’s diplomatic affairs poses a significant barrier to the expansion of Chinese media, this situation is even more evident in Mexico, where the geographical closeness and robust economic and political connections with the U.S. have historically impeded China’s cultural and media influence.

Despite growing ties between Mexico and China, a trade imbalance persists, favoring China and fueling Mexican concerns about competing for the U.S. market. Consequently, Chinese media activities in Mexico have been largely confined to entertainment exchanges, with Mexican telenovelas gaining some popularity in China. Yet, this trend is rapidly evolving.

Beijing saw in Mexico, particularly the border city of Tijuana, a strategic point to reach Hispanic communities in the U.S., establishing China Radio International’s inaugural Latin American station there.

“China Today” magazine, a pioneer in Chinese media globalization, initiated its Spanish language editions with a branch in Mexico City in 2004. Moreover, Chinese outlets are intensifying collaboration with Mexican print media, securing spaces for their sponsored content in prominent newspapers such as *Reforma*, *Milenio*, and *El Universal*.

In television, partnerships are in place with leading Mexican networks Televisa and TV Azteca, as well as with public broadcasters and smaller channels like *Canal ONCE*, *Canal 6*, and *MexiquenseTV*.

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shre.ink/Uk2T  
388 Prada, Cindy Paola Gómez. “China amplía su presencia en la region” *Campus Universidad del Valle Edición 188*, September 27, 2022. <https://shre.ink/Uq2w>



### 3.5.1 China-Mexico-U.S.: A Triangular Relationship

The historical interactions between Mexico and China stretch back to the imperial era. During the early years of Spanish rule, Mexico emerged as a pivotal nexus on maritime trading routes with Asia.

In 1565, the Spanish inaugurated a maritime passageway linking Acapulco and Manila. The Manila Galleon, originally termed “La Nao de China,” made annual voyages to the Philippines, engaging in commerce with Ming and Qing dynasty Chinese traders. This exchange brought silver and provisions from the Americas in return for coveted Asian goods like silk, porcelain, and spices, which held immense value in Europe<sup>389</sup>.

This trade route fostered a thriving market for Chinese commodities, attracting consumers in both Europe and Mexico. However, with the early 19th-century independence wars and the subsequent cessation of the Manila Galleon’s voyages, Mexico’s post-independence governments viewed direct trade with China as a means to meet global demand and reinvest the revenue into national development.

Initially lacking a commercial fleet, Mexico allowed foreign entities, predominantly from England, France, and the United States, to use its ports for trade. Under the advocacy of the Mexican Pacific Navigation Company, which sought to boost its trade profit margins and replace African slave labor with Chinese migrants<sup>390</sup>, Mexico initiated diplomatic negotiations with China through the Chinese envoy in the U.S.<sup>391</sup>.

In 1899, Mexico and China consummated their inaugural treaty of amity and commerce. A mere five years later, Mexico established its first diplomatic mission on Chinese soil, upholding an almost constant diplomatic presence until the Communist Party’s triumph in 1949.

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389 Schottenhammer, Angela. “Connecting China with the Pacific World?” *Orientierung* (Frankfurt) 31, (2019): 111–171. <https://shre.ink/UqKV>

390 Jingsheng, Dong. “Chinese Emigration to Mexico and the Sino-Mexico Relations Before 1910.” *Estudios Internacionales* 38, no. 152 (2006): 75–88. <https://shre.ink/UqIt>

391 Lakowsky, Vera Valdés. “México y China: del galeón de Manila al primer tratado de 1899,” *Estudios de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea de México* 9 (1983): 9-19. <https://shre.ink/UqQM>

Mexico continued relations with the exiled Republican government in Taiwan until 1972 when it acknowledged the government in Beijing, aligning with the People's Republic of China. This period saw Mexico frequently supporting U.S. efforts to prevent Communist China from gaining representation in international bodies, influenced by American perceptions of the Chinese communists and Mao Zedong's leadership — a legacy that lingers in contemporary Sino-Mexican relations.

Mexican diplomacy was cautious. Mexico often sided with the U.S. to deter China's inclusion in global organizations, apprehensive that direct engagement with Beijing might provoke U.S. reprisals. As Ojeda noted,

“Mexico (...) abstained from recognizing the People's Republic of China and consistently voted against its admission to the United Nations, siding with the United States whenever the issue arose (...). The Mexican government believed that not recognizing the People's Republic of China was not of critical importance to the country, as it would have minimal domestic impact. Furthermore, the economic and political benefits of recognition were deemed relatively insignificant, and there was a risk of substantial loss through potential reprisals from third-party states<sup>392</sup>.”

In Mexican society, views on communism were divided. The American cultural industry, especially during the Cold War, profoundly influenced the elite's worldview and opinions on the purported advantages of capitalism<sup>393</sup>. Conversely, the lower classes' growing affinity for communist principles was violently suppressed when they opposed the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI).

Supported by the U.S.<sup>394</sup>, the PRI ruthlessly targeted activists connected to student protests, Marxist guerrillas, and Christian-socialist groups during the “dirty

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392 Ojeda, Mario. *Alcances y Límites de La Política Exterior de México*. 85-86. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 1984

393 Washington, S. Walter. “Mexican Resistance to Communism” *Foreign Affairs*, April 01, 1958. <https://shre.ink/Uq3z>

394 Doyle, Kate. “The Dawn of Mexico's Dirty War: Lucio Cabañas and the Party of the Poor” *National Security Archive*, December 05, 2003. <https://shre.ink/UqLZ>

wars” of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>395</sup>. Those sympathetic to Communist China were often surveilled and harassed, perceived as potential threats to national security.

Despite measures that diminished the PRI’s popularity, Luis Echeverría, a lawyer, was elected president in 1970 with a narrower margin of victory than usual. Confronted with the disappointing economic outcomes of his import substitution strategy, Echeverría contemplated a reassessment of Mexico’s foreign policy, which had long been closely aligned with Washington.

Echeverría’s shift towards a more multilateral diplomatic approach was catalyzed by the “Nixon Shock” — President Richard Nixon’s abrupt decision to end the dollar’s convertibility to gold —, accompanied by emergency measures, including import surcharges, which adversely affected Mexico’s export-driven economy.

Echeverría then initiated a diplomatic tour and became a fierce proponent of a pragmatic and diversified foreign policy, endorsing the recognition of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a sovereign state at the United Nations in September 1971<sup>396</sup>.

In October of 1971, despite U.S. opposition, Mexico supported UN Resolution 2758, which acknowledged the PRC as the only legitimate Chinese representative, sidelining Taiwan. Following the easing of Sino-American relations, Echeverría prioritized diplomacy with the PRC, leading to severed ties with Taiwan and the establishment of relations with Beijing in 1972<sup>397</sup>.

Since that time, Mexico has worked diligently to strengthen its alliance with China. In 1973, President Echeverría became one of the first Latin American leaders to meet with Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping<sup>398</sup>. This precedent was maintained by his successors and was reciprocated

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395 Sloan, Julia L. “Carnivalizing the Cold War: Mexico, the Mexican Revolution, and the Events of 1968” *European Journal of American Studies* 4 (2009). <https://shre.ink/UqLX>

396 Reyes, Ana Karen Mora. “El vínculo partidista entre el Partido Comunista Chino y el Partido Revolucionario Institucional en las relaciones bilaterales China-México: Un estudio comparativo de los sexenios de Luis Echeverría Álvarez y Enrique Peña Nieto” (thesis) *Faculty of Law and Social Sciences BUAP*, Puebla, January, 2017. <https://shre.ink/UCbn>

397 Ibid.

398 Seade, Jesus. “China-Mexico rapport” *Beijing Review*, February 03, 2022. <https://shre.ink/UCOG>

by prominent Beijing officials such as Zhao Ziyang, Jiang Zemin, Wen Jiabao, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping.

These exchanges were matched by diplomatic advances. In 2003, China recognized Mexico as a “strategic partner.” The following year, China endorsed Mexico’s initiative to form the Mexico-China Permanent Binational Commission, a high-level mechanism for bilateral consultation and negotiation aimed at enhancing and reinforcing the two nations’ relations<sup>399</sup>. In 2013, during Xi Jinping’s visit to Mexico City, the relationship was further upgraded to a “comprehensive strategic partnership”<sup>400</sup>.

However, these developments did not translate into stronger economic ties. Despite Echeverría’s early ambitions, Mexico’s reliance on the U.S. persisted, and Sino-Mexican relations have fluctuated, with periods of closeness and optimism interspersed with intervals of distancing<sup>401</sup>.

The complexities of enhancing trade and investment ties with China, as seen elsewhere in Latin America, are partly rooted in the Mexican perspective that China threatens its domestic industries and competes for market share, particularly, in the United States<sup>402</sup>. As Conejo pointed out, this situation stems from both nations traditionally exporting manufactured goods, with China having the upper hand due to its industrial prowess and investment in science and technology<sup>403</sup>.

Mexico’s hesitance in 2001 to endorse the bilateral agreements necessary for China’s entry into the World Trade Organization — and its subsequent refusal to recognize China as a “market economy”<sup>404</sup> — did little to assuage the concerns of Mexican entrepreneurs. They often cite unfair competition

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399 Parra, Raúl L. “Presencia de la UNAM en la V Reunión de la Comisión Binacional México-China” UNAM-China (*Centro de Estudios Mexicanos*), April 03, 2012

400 Zhu, Zhe. “China, Mexico boost relations” *China Daily*, June 05, 2013. <https://shre.ink/UCVR>

401 Apango, Eduardo and T. Legler. “Mexico’s Elusive Partnership with China: The Search for Explanations” *Norteamérica, Revista Académica Del CISAN-UNAM* 15-2 (2020). <https://shre.ink/UCi0>

402 Coqui, Martha Bárcena. “Why Mexico’s Relationship with China Is So Complicated” *America’s Quarterly*, September 28, 2021. <https://shre.ink/UCGs>

403 Cornejo, Romer. “China y México 2012-2018, Entre El Inicio Idílico y La Realidad” *Foro Internacional* (2019): 879–906. <https://shre.ink/UCFk>

404 Cornejo, Romer, Francisco Javier Haro Navejas, and José Luis León-Manríquez. “Trade Issues and Beyond: Mexican Perceptions on Contemporary China” *Latin American Policy* 4-1 (2013): 57–75. <https://shre.ink/UCiD>

from subsidized Chinese imports as the reason for domestic industry collapses, especially in textiles and shoe manufacturing<sup>405</sup>.

Trade between Mexico and China has grown substantially since 2001<sup>406</sup>. This has exacerbated Mexico's trade deficit. In 2018, for every dollar in goods Mexico exported to China, it imported goods worth eleven dollars<sup>407</sup>.

Mexican industries supplying the U.S. market, such as those producing electronic components and automotive parts, remain dependent on Chinese manufacturing<sup>408</sup>, suggesting that reversing the trade imbalance is unlikely in the near future.

Moreover, Mexico's integration into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 solidified its economic reliance on the U.S. and Canada. Fraying U.S.-China relations also impact Mexico's ability to broaden cooperation with Beijing, contingent on Washington's political agenda.

During Donald Trump's presidency, characterized by a confrontation with China, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto faced U.S. pressure to abstain from initiatives like the Belt and Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)<sup>409</sup>. The U.S. has tried to block Mexico from allowing Huawei to develop its 5G infrastructure<sup>410</sup>, and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) includes provisions granting Washington a *de facto* veto over any Mexican-Chinese free trade deals<sup>411</sup>.

Beijing recognizes these constraints and has voiced frustration. For instance, a 2019 *Global Times* article criticized U.S. overreach in Mexican affairs, claiming it undermined Mexico's diplomatic and economic autonomy<sup>412</sup>.

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405 Reuters. "Mexico considering import tax on Chinese shoes, president says" *South China Morning Post*, July 12, 2023. <https://shre.ink/UCt2>

406 Ellis, R. Evan. "El compromiso de México con China y las opciones para su futuro" *Diálogo Américas*, August 11, 2023. <https://shre.ink/UC2b>

407 Patiño, Dainzú. "¿Cómo reducir el déficit comercial de México con China?" *Expansión*, August 03, 2018 <https://shre.ink/UCtf>

408 Morales, Roberto. "México le compra más cosas a China que a Estados Unidos" *El Economista*, February 07, 2023. <https://shre.ink/UC26>

409 Anguiano, Eugenio. "Las Vinculaciones de México Con China y Estados Unidos." *Economía UNAM* 16, vol. 46 (2019): 144–56. <https://shre.ink/UCk7>

410 Graff, Garrent M. "Inside the Feds' Battle Against Huawei" *Wired*, January 16, 2020. <https://shre.ink/UCGe>

411 Blanchfield, Mike. "Beijing attacks USMCA clause seen as blocking efforts to expand trade with Canada, Mexico" *CBC*, October 05, 2018. <https://shre.ink/UCGO>

412 Hu, Weija. "Mexico, China can be partners against US pressure" *Global Times (GT)*

This tension is mirrored in Chinese media's foray into Mexico. It initially targeted Hispanic audiences in Latin America and the U.S., but now increasingly seeking to sway Mexican public opinion.

Lately, this strategy has broadened into a comprehensive campaign that both challenges U.S. narratives and promotes the achievements of Beijing's Communist leadership.

### 3.5.2 A Strategy in the Making

Despite the challenges posed by American influence, Mexico's strategic location has been pivotal in China's efforts to expand its media presence in Latin America. For instance, in 1984, Xinhua formed a partnership with *Notimex*<sup>413</sup>, Mexico's state news agency, even before establishing its Mexico City office in 1986<sup>414</sup>.

Since 1960, the magazine 'China Today' has been published in Spanish as 'China Hoy'. In 2004, it chose Mexico for its first Latin American office<sup>415</sup>, tasked with tailoring the content of its English edition, produced in Beijing, for Hispanic audiences. This office also distributes the magazine across South and Central America and coordinates events to promote Chinese culture, in partnership with the Chinese Embassy and the network of Confucius Institutes in the country<sup>416</sup>.

In recent years, 'China Hoy' has collaborated with Mexican media outlets like the newspaper *Reforma* and *Revista Macroeconomía*<sup>417</sup>, hosting forums for journalists and academics. *Macroeconomía's* website even hosts digital issues of *China Hoy*<sup>418</sup>.

When CCTV, the Chinese broadcaster, decided to launch Spanish-language programming, it did so in collaboration with *Televisa*, a major Mexican TV network. Since 1997, *Televisa* has been broadcasting CCTV content

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*Voice*), June 30, 2019. <https://shre.ink/USm4>

413 Xinhua. "Xinhua y Notimex acuerdan fortalecer más la cooperación" *CRIes*, November 03, 2018. <https://shre.ink/UCfV>

414 Pei, Jianrong. "Presidente de México felicita 30 aniversario de fundación de Oficina Regional de Xinhua para América Latina" *Xinhua*, September 04, 2016

415 Since 2009, the magazine also has a branch in Lima, Peru

416 Liu, Shuangyan. "15 años de presencia em México" *China Today*, January 08, 2020. <https://shre.ink/UCfr>

417 Ibid.

418 Example: <https://macroeconomia.com.mx/china-hoy-suscribete-ahora-4>

across Latin America via satellite<sup>419</sup>, and in 2007, it agreed to support the introduction of CCTV's E&F (English and French) channels in Mexico<sup>420</sup>.

The CCTV E&F bilingual channel, offering content in Spanish and French, was launched in Mexico City in June of the same year, reaching approximately 500,000 households<sup>421</sup>. The channel aimed to establish a 'Latin American platform' to enhance the reach of Chinese journalism in Spanish-speaking regions. In exchange, CCTV opened the Chinese market to *Televisa's* soap operas<sup>422</sup>, a global leader in this genre.

China Radio International (CRI) also selected Mexico for its first self-operated station in Latin America, aiming to target Hispanic communities in the United States. Taking advantage of Mexico's flexible media regulations, CRI acquired AM 1470 in Tijuana, located on the U.S. border, in 2004<sup>423</sup>. The station offered 12 hours of daily programming in Spanish. From the beginning, CRI's primary focus, as stated on its website, was to reach Tijuana residents and the six million-strong Hispanic potential listeners in the United States<sup>424</sup>.

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419 Zhou, Qian. "China's International Television Broadcasting and Internal and External Challenges" *25th JAMCO Online International Symposium*, December, 2016 – June, 2017. <https://shre.ink/UCjX>

420 CRI Online. "中国广电总局与墨西哥特莱维萨公司签署合作备忘录 [China's State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television and Mexico's Televisa signed a memorandum of cooperation]", *Sina* 新闻中心, April 19, 2007. <https://shre.ink/UCj9>

421 State Administration of Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China. "中央电视台西法语频道在墨西哥正式开播 [CCTV's Spanish and French channel officially launched in Mexico]" *Sina* 新闻中心, June 11, 2007. <https://shre.ink/UCjl>

422 Landreth, Jonathan. "Televisa localizing 'Love' with CCTV" *Hollywood Reporter (via Associated Press)*, June 29, 2010. <https://shre.ink/UCn4>

423 Not to be confused with the case of W-Radio 690, another radio station purchased by the Chinese in Tijuana in 2018. In that case, the station broadcast in Chinese for the Chinese-speaking population in Southern California. An investigation by the British newspaper Daily Mail revealed a link between H&H Group USA, officially the company that bought the station, and Phoenix TV, a pro-Beijing television network based in Hong Kong. Following the publication of the story and protests from Senator Ted Cruz, the US Federal Communications Commission revoked W-Radio 690's broadcast license in June 2020

424 Xinhua. "China Radio International opens 1st branch in Latin America" *China.org*, November 03, 2010. <https://shre.ink/UCn3>

### 3.5.3 Advertorials in Mexican Print Media

The strategy described above aimed to popularize the Spanish-language versions of Chinese media. However, it failed to gain significant influence. Despite substantial investments, content localization, and the employment of local talent, networks like CGTN, CRI, Xinhua, and People's Daily did not achieve notable traction, with their reach remaining limited.

For instance, research by Pablo Morales involving focus groups with Mexican college students between September and November 2016 revealed a lack of credibility for CCTV reports among young audiences. The students expressed distrust in the objectivity and veracity of the Chinese content, showing a preference for Mexican news sources instead<sup>425</sup>.

Acknowledging these shortcomings, Chinese media entities shifted their approach towards forming alliances with local media outlets. In the realm of print journalism, they entered into agreements with various newspapers to include Chinese content in an advertorial style.

#### 3.5.3.1 *Reforma*

In 2019, *Reforma* entered a commercial partnership with People's Daily to republish content from its Spanish version, *Diario Del Pueblo*.

*Reforma*, founded by Alejandro Junco de la Vega in 1993, adopted an independent editorial approach from its Monterrey-based counterpart, *El Norte*. With a daily circulation of around 165,000 copies as of May 2023<sup>426</sup>, *Reforma* is among Mexico's top newspapers, adhering to a strict ethical code that typically excludes advertisements from entities it reports on<sup>427</sup>.

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425 Morales, Pablo Sebastian. "China's Global Media in Latin America: Exploring the Impact and Perception in Mexico and Argentina" In: *China in the Global South Impact and Perceptions*, ed. Theodor Tudoroiu and Anna Kutelev (Singapore: Springer, 2022), 79-94

426 Guttman, A. "Average daily circulation of selected paid daily newspapers in Mexico as of May 2023" *Statista*, August 29, 2023. <https://shre.ink/UC19>

427 Seaton, Edward. *Heroes and Scoundrels: Five Decades of Flashpoints, Conflicts and Compromises Supporting Press Freedom in Latin America*. Spearfish: Seaton Publishing Company (2019): 170-171



It's unclear whether *Reforma* lifted this ban or amended its rules to accommodate the partnership, which includes a monthly page of People's Daily content and a dedicated section on the newspaper's website<sup>428</sup>.

Emilia Martinez, editor of *Reforma*'s international news desk, estimated for our study<sup>429</sup> that the paper receives approximately M\$200,000 (US\$11,000) per page from the agreement, which is overseen by the marketing department without editorial meddling. Martinez stated,

“They [the marketing department] never tell me when we are going to publish the People's Daily page. Often it is at the end of the day, around 6 p.m., and the page just appears in my system.” She cannot edit or reject content from the Chinese, and a People's Daily banner in the middle of *Reforma*'s articles is also immovable. Despite the design similarity, there's no disclaimer clarifying the content as “sponsored,” leading to reader confusion. Martinez added, “I do not think they can distinguish what is our content and what is the ad. I always have to explain that we didn't write it.”

While such deals are said to have little influence on Mexico's independent reporting on China<sup>430</sup>, the specifics of this contract add ambiguity to the situation. Martinez said the Chinese Embassy in Mexico usually complains when *Reforma* publishes content critical of Beijing on the same day or the day after the People's Daily page is published.

“They call me, sometimes they complain to my director. [In these cases] the newspaper usually offers to publish an opinion piece written by them. Not necessarily to contradict what we have published, but if they have something to say, they can send us a text from the ambassador and we can publish it,” she recalled. The only stipulations are that they must not contain hate speech, insult Mexicans, or exceed the word limit.

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428 Available at <https://www.reforma.com/diariodelpueblo>.

429 All related quotes from Interview Emilia Martinez by the author, March 09, 2023

430 Casarini, Nicola, Edward Cavanaugh, et. al. “Coercion, Capture, and Censorship: Case Studies on the CCP's Quest for Global Influence” *International Republican Institute*, September 28, 2022. <https://shre.ink/UCzH>

Also, commercial interests sometimes cause conflicts. For instance, a controversy emerged when Human Rights Watch emailed her an allegation about an undisclosed visit by Mexican ambassador Francisca Mendez Escobar to Xinjiang, where Beijing is accused of human rights violations against Uyghurs.

As denounced by Human Rights Watch, “The Chinese government notoriously uses highly controlled diplomatic tours as a propaganda tool (...). Chinese officials have carefully choreographed these tours, temporarily removing guard towers and fences, permitting only heavily scripted interviews, and forcing detainees to perform pre-prepared songs<sup>431</sup>.”

A photo on Twitter/X<sup>432</sup> by Juan Antonio Quintanilla Román, Ambassador of the Cuban Mission in Geneva, implicated Mendez Escobar. Although Martínez pursued the story, an internal source claimed that one of the paper’s directors, who has since left, pressured against publishing the story, arguing that “no one in Mexico is interested in the human rights of Muslims.”

The reason behind this directive, whether it was related to the newspaper’s commercial ties with Chinese media, remained unverified. Nonetheless, Martínez’s report was ultimately published.

In conjunction with its collaboration with People’s Daily, *Reforma* also occasionally publishes material from Xinhua. Martínez mentioned that while the news agency isn’t heavily relied upon by the editorial team, it proves valuable by offering early reports on Chinese government decisions compared to Western competitors.

Lacking the resources to maintain a Beijing correspondent, Xinhua serves as a crucial content provider on China-related matters, she said, catering to the increased interest of Mexican readers in Chinese affairs and presenting an alternative viewpoint to that of the U.S. and European perspectives.

### 3.5.3.2 *Milenio* and *El Universal*

The publication of Chinese advertorials is not limited to *Reforma*. *Milenio* and *El Universal*, two other major Mexican newspapers, have systematically

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431 Broner, Tamara Taraciuk and M. Wang. “Letter to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Marcelo Ebrard” March 02, 2023. <https://shre.ink/UCzz>

432 Available at <https://bit.ly/3FCDd7T>

published content from CGTN and Xinhua since at least 2021, often without informing readers of the origin of the reports.

*El Universal*, Mexico's largest daily newspaper, published several advertorials written by CGTN journalists. The use of the "sponsored content" label is irregular and the media often reproduces Chinese content without warning readers. Some examples of advertorials published by *El Universal* are:

★ *Profundizar la cooperación, unificar la fuerza y fomentar el consenso* [Strengthening collaboration, consolidating collective strength, and building consensus]\* – Published on December 02, 2021;

★ *¿Por qué EE. UU. siempre acusa a China de 'atrapar a EE. UU.'?* [Why does the United States consistently accuse China of 'entrapping the U.S.?' – Published on July 24, 2023;

★ *¿Por qué va a Argentina a especular sobre la llamada 'carrera espacial' entre China y Estados Unidos?* [Why going to Argentina to speculate on the so-called 'space race' between China and the United States?] – Published on July 30, 2022;

★ *¿Quién puede reír hasta el final, China o EE.UU.? La respuesta ya está en el Arte de la Guerra* [Who will have the last laugh, China or the U.S.? The answer can be found in The Art of War] – Published on August 03, 2023;

★ *¿Cómo es la verdadera Xinjiang? Diplomáticos extranjeros hallan la respuesta* [What is the real Xinjiang? Foreign diplomats find the answer] – Published on August 09, 2023;

★ *La 'pesadilla americana' en la tragedia de los inmigrantes latinoamericanos* [The 'American Nightmare' amidst the tragedy of Latin American immigrants]\* – Published on September 24, 2022;

★ *Buscar la felicidad para la gente es la búsqueda inquebrantable del Partido Comunista de China* [The relentless quest for the people's happiness is a core principle of the Communist Party of China]\* – Published on October 17, 2022.

\* *The newspaper did not include disclaimers like "sponsored content" or "advertorial".*

It is not possible to say with certainty what the amounts paid for the above ads were, but a price list provided by the newspaper to its advertisers provides some clues<sup>433</sup>.

As of 2023, *El Universal* charges between M\$84,000 and M\$26,2500 (US\$4,700 to US\$14,650) for each publication of branded content on its website, with the price varying depending on their complexity. Advertorials in the printed editions will cost between M\$13,415 and M\$119,246 (US\$750 to US\$6,650).

This study also found at least two stories that were written by CGTN but published by the Mexican newspaper as if they were its own. The bylines are credited to “Redacción El Universal” (*El Universal* Newsroom), with no mention of the Chinese television network (except in the credits of the images illustrating the reports). As there is also no reference to “sponsored content,” it is impossible for readers to recognize that they are reading Chinese propaganda (see Figure 14)

*Milenio*, a newspaper based in Monterrey, included the Chinese ambassadors to Mexico, Zhu Qingqiao and Zhang Run, in its list of columnists.

Zhu published 26 op-eds between July 2019 and October 2022<sup>434</sup>, when he was appointed ambassador to Brazil. Zhang arrived in Mexico City in February to take up the vacant post and began his column that same month<sup>435</sup>.

The Mexican daily also publishes advertorials<sup>436</sup> and, as Freedom House noted in its report on Chinese media influence, “international news section features a section titled ‘The Silk Road’ which draws heavily on reprinted Xinhua articles that describe China’s relations with other countries around the world, promotes positive perspectives and politically favorable quotes by foreign experts about China, and highlights BRI projects<sup>437</sup>.”

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433 El Universal. “Tarifario 2023” *El Universal Publicidad*, n.d. <https://shre.ink/USAP>

434 Available at <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhu-qingqiao>

435 Available at <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/zhan-run>

436 Examples: “China confía en mantener impulso de recuperación mientras se fortalece la economía” [China optimistic about sustaining economic recovery and bolstering growth] available at <https://shre.ink/USaq> or “El mundo entero aborda el tren rápido del desarrollo de China” [The whole world hops aboard China’s high-speed development train] available at <https://shre.ink/USNP>

437 Young, Ellie and J. Ludwing. “Mexico” *Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022*, n.d. <https://shre.ink/USN7>

**FIGURE 14:** The article appearing on *El Universal*'s website is a verbatim copy of the original piece by CGTN and discusses China's collaboration with Arab countries.



### 3.5.4 Partnerships with Mexican TV

As mentioned earlier, *Grupo Televisa* has played a crucial role in the implementation and distribution of Chinese media content in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. The Mexican company, one of the most important

entertainment producers in the world, is also the majority shareholder of the main Latin American satellite TV provider (Sky), which enabled the distribution of the CCTV E&F signal to several Hispanic countries.

Since the mid-1990s, *Televisa* has also frequently used news content from Chinese state television and was named one of CCTV's most important partners in an internal report from 2010<sup>438</sup>.

But this is not the only example in Mexico. In recent years, Chinese media have managed to dramatically increase the number of their partnerships, both with major players and regional broadcasters.

*TV Azteca*, a member of AIL and the largest free-to-air television station in Mexico, signed a contract with CCTV in 2019 to broadcast Chinese films. The agreement was signed by Zhang Ling, Vice President of CCTV-6<sup>439</sup>, and Alberto Ciurana, then Director of Content and Distribution at *Azteca*<sup>440</sup>.

In the following years, the agreement was also extended to news content. In 2020, Gabriel Díaz Rivera, Director of Special Investigations and anchor at *TV Azteca*, was one of the guests at the "Online Forum on Cooperation with Latin American Media Partners"<sup>441</sup>.

The UNECLAC-sponsored event was promoted by CGTN Español to highlight the benefits of media collaboration with Latino journalists and to "dispel rumors and form consensus" regarding coverage of the pandemic. For example, Yin Xiaotong, a director of China Media Group, who was invited to the same panel with Díaz Rivera, paraphrased Xi Jinping's calls for a "community with a shared future" and argued that in the face of the health crisis caused by Sars-CoV-2, "Chinese and Latin American circles unite in one voice (...) focused on economic recovery"<sup>442</sup>.

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438 Lu, Jinlong. "试论中央电视台的国际传播策略 [On CCTV's International Communication Strategy]" 电视研究 [*Television Research*] 3 (2010). <https://shre.ink/UkuG>

439 Also known as China Movie Channel, managed by China's National Radio and Television Administration (a branch of the Central Propaganda Department)

440 China National Radio. "多部中国电影将亮相墨西哥电视荧屏 [Multiple Chinese films to debut on Mexican TV screens]" *Baidu Baijiahao*, May 23, 2019. <https://shre.ink/UkcY>

441 CGTN Español. "Foro online sobre la cooperación con los medios de comunicación 'Socios Latinoamericanos' 2020 [Video]" *You Tube*, August 28, 2020. <https://shre.ink/Ukcf>

442 Ibid.

*TV Azteca* has also disseminated CGTN's reports about the pandemic's progression in China across its social media channels. Additionally, it has collaborated with China Media Group to produce a "special virtual program" where Chinese and Latin American university students discussed global development issues. Furthermore, it has joined the CMG-sponsored ASMP — an all-encompassing interactive service platform that integrates content exchange, display, business interaction, and customization for global cooperative media<sup>443</sup>. This platform leverages the strengths of CMG's unified communication capabilities.

"We at TV Azteca are excited about this new alliance between our Mexican-Chinese communications companies. We are sure that it will bear many fruits and that this cooperation, the exchange between reporters, will be very fruitful,<sup>444</sup>" said Benjamín Salinas, general director of *TV Azteca*, at ASMP's launching event.

For instance, in December 2022<sup>445</sup>, *Canal 6 TV*, a small station in the city of Ixtapaluca, entered into a partnership with CGTN Español. Following this, in October 2023, it broadcast "Tan lejos, Tan Cerca: Desde Quanzhou a Acapulco" (So Far, So Close: From Quanzhou to Acapulco)<sup>446</sup> — a documentary series from the Chinese network recounting the history of the Manila Galleon.

Other networks, such as *Canal ONCE*<sup>447</sup> and *MexiquenseTV*<sup>448</sup>, have entered into agreements identical to those made with *Señal Colombia* by Classic Media China International, resulting in the airing of series like "Xi Jinping's Governance Strategies" and "The Legend of Bruce Lee".

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443 CGTN. "CMG's global media customized service platform launched" CGTN, February 28, 2022. <https://shre.ink/UkiT>

444 CGTN. CMG lanza la "Plataforma de Servicios para Todos los Medios" CGTN Español, February 28, 2022. <https://shre.ink/UkiP>

445 García, Julio César. "China Media Group y @canal6tv refrendan compromiso de colaboración" *Twitter/X*, December 08, 2022. <https://shre.ink/Uktr>

446 Martínez, Francisca. "@canal6tv difundirá en #México la serie Tan lejos, Tan cerca: desde Quanzhou a #Acapulco, una producción de CGTN Español que permitirá ver los lazos tan antiguos en el intercambio China-América Latina" *Twitter/X*, October 13, 2023. <https://bit.ly/3Fi92mf>

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448 MexiquenseTV. "#MexiquenseTV trae para ti el especial 'China luchando contra la pobreza', el retrato de la transformación de en un país con un imponente modelo económico y social" *Facebook*, March 19, 2021. <https://fb.watch/nJPlxBSVx>

## INTERVIEW – JUAN CARLOS ISAZA MONTEJO

**JUAN CARLOS ISAZA MONTEJO** serves as the Director of the Latin American Informative Alliance, the region's most influential media consortium. Since 2005, he has been at the helm of the organization, which is headquartered at the Caracol TV S.A. facilities in Bogotá, Colombia. Under his stewardship, the Alliance has emerged as a key partner for Chinese media in Latin America, disseminating content produced by CGTN across numerous Latin and Caribbean countries, as well as Spain and the United States.



### **Can you explain the mechanics of content exchange between television stations that are part of the AIL (Alianza Informativa Latinoamericana)?**

From 2005 to 2007, there was only occasional collaboration. When one of the stations needed something, they asked each other. In 2007, for the first time, the alliance's information service was set up, i.e., all the news that the broadcasters now share. This was done through satellite broadcasts, using equipment from *Caracol* Televisión.

In the beginning, *Caracol* provided this service free of charge, delivering content to all the stations twice a day via satellite. This continued until 2014 when CBS executives in the United States learned about the alliance and expressed interest in joining. From then on, we used the CBS platform called Newspath. We have been distributing our content that way ever since.

### **What is the current scale of the AIL, in terms of member stations and geographic reach?**

In its news distribution service, AIL delivers around 40,000 news items per year to its 22 channels. This is content produced by the members themselves, but also those available through agreements we have with media organizations around the world.

That's where China Media Group comes in, as a kind of news agency for the Chinese government. We have a partnership with them, as we do with



Voice of America, with the United Arab Emirates News Agency, with TPS in Israel... Both China and all these agencies provide us with content that is broadcast through this platform Newspath.

**How did the collaboration between AIL and CMG (China Media Group) originate? Was it initiated through diplomatic channels, such as the Chinese Embassy?**

*Caracol* signed a cooperation agreement with CCTV, the Chinese broadcaster, a long time ago. Therefore, there was already a relationship between *Caracol* and CCTV before I joined AIL as a manager. We then began to explore a broader approach with the Chinese media, and that's how we ended up with the strong relationship we have today, which was formalized in 2016 at the Assembly in Santo Domingo.

**Given that Chinese media operates under strict censorship, how do members of the AIL, and specifically Caracol, differentiate between news content and propaganda?**

This filtering is done by our professionals. In all the channels associated with AIL, *Caracol*, and others, there is what we call the International Desk, with our journalists who know what is happening in the world every day and who have an idea of what the news reality is.

Each station decides for itself how to use this Chinese content. For example, when Xi Jinping speaks out about Covid in China, I think each station in the organization, all of which are very serious and very responsible for the information they share, receives that content, evaluates it, and presents it to their audience in the way that they think is best, the most accurate.

**Are there any plans to station a dedicated AIL correspondent in China?**

We already have one in Beijing. He is a freelance reporter who works for different media.

**Considering the existing partnership with CMG for news related to China, what type of content would you commission from the AIL correspondent?**

If we want to know what the government thinks, and what the Chinese position is, we turn to the Chinese media. But if we want a neutral view of what's happening in China, we turn to the Alliance reporter in Beijing.

When the Alliance is interested in knowing the Chinese government's position on a particular issue, we ask CGTN for help. On some occasions, it is important to compare that position with the North American position.

I will give you an example. When Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan took place, causing so much anger in China, we asked CGTN for a report and we also had a report from Voice of America. When our anchors here at *Caracol* were presenting the news, they explained it very clearly. "We will now present you the Chinese government's position on this matter," showing a CGTN reporter presenting his report in Spanish shortly after. "Now we want to present the American view on the same issue to balance the information", and we broadcast a VoA story.





## Conclusions

**DISCUSSING BEIJING'S DIPLOMATIC** strategy necessitates acknowledging the pivotal role of state media in bolstering China's soft power. This research has illustrated that the proliferation and international presence of Chinese media entities such as CGTN, Xinhua, China Daily, People's Daily, and CRI are tightly woven into Beijing's bridge-building efforts and its influence on global bilateral relations.

Latin America is not insulated from these dynamics and image-building, including the promotion of silence. Its vulnerability is pronounced. The region's cultural and geographical remoteness from China, combined with limited subject matter expertise and an academic sector grappling with structural impediments, hampers the development of an informed perspective on Sino-Latin American ties.

This vulnerability extends to the region's newsrooms, which, lacking specialized reporters and adequate funds, are increasingly dependent on Chinese state media for their China-related reporting. This dependence is concerning, as it steers public perception through a lens crafted by the Chinese Communist Party's censorship and propaganda arms.

Furthermore, Beijing exploits its stringent visa policies and the prohibitive costs of stationing correspondents in China to position its media outlets as attractive alternatives for Latin American partners. CRI and CGTN employ bilingual reporters to create a cadre of digital influencers, tailoring content to specific demographics and, at times, broadcasting skewed or incorrect views on pivotal Chinese domestic and international policy matters.

It is vital for liberal democracies, including the United States, to acknowledge this trend and bolster their regional allies in counteracting it. This study does not suggest censoring these outlets or restricting Chinese journalists. Instead, it underscores the imperative to enlighten governments, civil societies, and the Latin American media to foster transparency and independence in journalism concerning Chinese endeavors locally and worldwide.

More experienced democracies with a history of navigating relations with China have valuable insights to share, including strategies for improving media transparency regarding agreements with Chinese entities, techniques for independent reporting on China, and training for Latin American professionals. The endgame should not be prioritizing Washington's narratives in Latin American reporting but cultivating a professional press capable of reporting in an increasingly bipolar global landscape.

# Policy Recommendations

**AS THIS RESEARCH HAS SHOWN**, it is difficult to monitor Chinese state media's activities and develop an ecosystem that protects the local population from disinformation. Apart from the need for more expertise in China affairs, the Latin American media landscape remains vulnerable due to budget constraints, media concentration by private conglomerates, and threats to freedom of expression. Below, I propose some actions for Western democracies (in particular, the United States, Australia, and European countries), local governments in Latin America, the media, and civil society.

## Policy Recommendations for Western Democracies

★ **Create, fund, and promote scholarship programs to train professional journalists and expand their expertise on China affairs.** The only opportunities for Latin American media professionals interested in Sinology or China affairs available today are funded by Beijing, which uses its economic power to control negative coverage of Chinese affairs and prevent public interest stories with a negative bias towards China from being published. As they have more expertise in dealing with the Chinese, rich Western democracies in the Global North should fund the training of Latin American journalists. This can be done in partnership with long-standing NGOs and networks already working to improve the quality of world journalism, such as Reporters without Borders, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford (U.K.), the Michael Gordon Fellowships Program (Australia), the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and the International Journalists' Network (both in the U.S.);

★ **Offer Chinese language courses to Latino journalists.** Proficiency in Mandarin is an essential skill for reporting on Chinese affairs, whether for

contacting sources or reading (and understanding) official Chinese government documents. In countries such as the United States and Australia, there are thousands of Mandarin courses, many of which are recognized worldwide for their quality, such as the Chinese Language Program at Harvard and the Princeton Language Program in Modern Chinese. As tuition fees for these courses remain prohibitive, countries in the Global North should consider establishing scholarships, funding, or even adapted online versions of these courses that focus particularly on technical vocabulary useful for writing stories, analyzing documents, and interviewing Chinese sources on sensitive topics (something that the China-sponsored Confucius Institutes do not usually offer);

★ **Promote professional exchange programs for Latino journalists in newsrooms in the United States, Europe, and Australia.** In the past, there were numerous exchange programs for foreign journalists in American, Australian, and European newsrooms, but many were severely curtailed and disappeared after the pandemic. By providing funding, facilitating agreements between media outlets, and facilitating the issuance of journalist visas, the above countries can help promote expertise in professional reporting on China, disseminate best practices, and generally improve the quality of reporting on China affairs on both sides;

★ Work with local governments, NGOs, and private companies to find solutions that protect professional and independent journalism. While curbing potential false narratives from Chinese state media is an urgent necessity, the Latin American press as a whole is facing a growing wave of disrepute, budgetary difficulties, and attacks on editorial freedom. Western democracies must work to strengthen these institutions by denouncing attacks on journalists' freedom, demanding the release of professionals imprisoned for political reasons, and demanding that their partners in Latin America investigate murders of journalists motivated by their work. Strong media are increasingly necessary to cut through the noise on the internet and deliver adequately prepared information to the public, regardless of China.



## Policy Recommendations for Latin American Governments

★ **Protect and enforce media regulation laws.** Legislators and leaders throughout Latin America must promote policies and laws aimed at reducing media monopolies and preventing foreign countries from completely taking over mass media;

★ **Demand transparency.** As it has emerged during this research, some Chinese state media outlets are exploiting the perceived ignorance and apathy of audiences to spread their stories through content-sharing agreements signed by Beijing with traditional and well-established media outlets. Legislators should pass laws requiring the publication of each company's ownership structure when there is a significant change in ownership. It should also inform the public about potential paid arrangements to broadcast external content by clearly and visibly indicating that a specific story is a propaganda piece or journalistic content produced by foreign media (whether it originates in China or anywhere else);

★ **Be wary of coordinated disinformation campaigns.** While regulating social media such as Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter/X is still a divisive debate among Latin American politicians, local decision-makers should consider setting up councils composed of government agencies capable of identifying, monitoring, and curbing the spread of false, biased narratives by foreign agents. In parallel, journalists, lawyers, officials, police officers, and other members of civil society must engage in dialogue to find ways to stop potential fake news campaigns without falling into the dangerous frenzy of online censorship;

★ **Invest in media literacy education programs in schools.** Less educated populations are more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns. Latin American countries must invest in media education and teach kids how to read, interpret, and think about the information received through local or foreign press. Everyone should develop critical thinking skills, learn how to spot disinformation and identify propaganda.

## Policy Recommendations for Media

★ **Inform audiences of content published through sharing agreements.** Some media outlets analyzed for this study do not have clear rules to distinguish original journalistic materials from those published through content-sharing agreements. Aware of this gap, Chinese media have made their content as similar as possible. They have even invested in a graphic design similar to the pattern of a newspaper in Mexico, for example. Media across the region need to adopt clear labels that make it easy for audiences to know whether a specific piece was sponsored or not and who is paying for it (when applicable);

★ **Keep commercial and editorial areas separate as much as possible.** A mixed team of marketing and journalism professionals can compromise the quality of critical news reporting by creating room for commercial interference in matters of public interest and undermining the fairness and impartiality of reporters and editors;

★ **Promote careful curation of content reproduced in the media outlet and reserve the right to deny publishing stories that violate journalistic values, ethics, and standards.** In some of the cases mentioned throughout this study, contracts signed between local and Chinese state media do not guarantee editors the right to change or refuse content when payments are involved. Editors must have the final word, and it is up to them to decide whether a piece is appropriate, taking into account several criteria such as quality, impartiality, and public interest;

★ **Always verify information obtained through content-sharing agreements or Chinese newswires.** Editors must consider the ostensible system in China to censor independent journalism and subjugate the media to the interests of the CCP. Therefore, if one decides to publish something from these media, one should verify the veracity of the information and supplement the content by interviewing independent voices whenever possible;

★ **Encourage reporters to develop expertise on China affairs.** As diplomatic and commercial relations between Latin American countries

and China become increasingly important, specialized professionals who understand China's political, bureaucratic, and economic systems and how Beijing deals with partners in the rest of the world will be essential. Except for Brazil, none of the newsrooms visited during this investigation had reporters dedicated exclusively to covering China affairs. Media companies should encourage continuing education for editors and reporters through scholarships for language courses and salary bonuses for specialists if funding is available.

## Policy Recommendations for Civil Society

★ **Advocate for professional media and demand government action to ensure the safety of journalists.** Latin American journalists are subjected to moral harassment, threats, and attacks on their physical integrity. According to RWB, 47.2% of all journalists murdered in cases related to their profession in 2022 were in the Americas, including 11 in Mexico and 3 in Brazil. Civil society support is crucial in demanding that the media and government agencies protect these professionals and not be intimidated by legal, judicial, or financial threats;

★ **Support professional and independent media financially.** Professional journalism is expensive, and in an ongoing effort to pay the bills, some media outlets visited during this research have had to give in to contracts with the Chinese state media so they could pay their staff salaries. Civil society can reduce financial dependence on newsrooms by subscribing to paid content and making voluntary donations, particularly to independent reporters and media outlets;

★ **Monitor and expose disinformation campaigns.** Civil society organizations should monitor and expose disinformation campaigns from China, including tracking the spread of coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media, identifying the sources of disinformation, and publicizing the tactics used by Chinese state media and propaganda agencies;

★ **Research the topic to better inform policymakers.** Although there is abundant material on the presence and effects of Chinese state media in

Africa, bibliographic material on the subject in Latin America is very scarce. Local universities and think tanks should join forces to research the impact of Chinese propaganda in the region and share the findings with policymakers, government officials, civil society organizations, and the public. This can help inform policy decisions and influence public opinion.





# Afterword

Paulo Menechelli\*

**THIS IS NOT THE FIRST PIECE** by Igor Patrick that I have had the pleasure of reading. Yet, as always, my initial reaction remains unchanged: he is an exceptional communicator. I have been closely tracking Patrick's journey since 2020 when he invited me to collaborate on the creation of a think tank, *Observe China* 观中国, which is dedicated to researching China from a Brazilian viewpoint.

During this period, we engaged in comprehensive discussions about China, its culture, and its soft power. A fortunate coincidence of our research timelines, my tenure as a visiting scholar at the University of Virginia coinciding with Patrick's research at the Wilson Center, provided us with the opportunity to meet in Washington, D.C., and Charlottesville. We exchanged insights on China studies in Brazil and the United States. Seeing this work come to fruition brings me immense satisfaction, and it is a tremendous honor to be invited to write this Afterword.

Perhaps due to our collaborative exploration, much of what Patrick writes strongly resonates with my own research and activities. In the introduction, Patrick underscores the prevalent lack of knowledge about Chinese affairs among the general public and their respective leaders in Latin America, which exacerbates existing challenges. Despite the expansion of China's engagements

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with the region over the last two decades, this development has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in scholarly investigations, journalistic coverage, and public scrutiny facilitated by civil society.

I wholeheartedly share this perception, which is one of the reasons driving our significant investment in creating and consolidating *Observa China* 观中国. As part of an effort to enhance not only general knowledge about China but specifically about Chinese soft power initiatives and cultural diplomacy, I published a book in 2023 in Portuguese, translated as “Chinese Cultural Diplomacy: Instruments in China’s Strategy for International Insertion in the 21st Century.” One conclusion drawn from my research is that, in practice, China employs means of public and cultural diplomacy similar to other nations, utilizing media, cinema, and cultural institutions such as the Confucius Institutes. However, there are significant nuances in China’s understanding of soft power and cultural diplomacy.

In this context, after years of analyzing China’s soft power, I believe that many of China’s actions in this realm are not entirely novel, adhering to a model well-established in the West. What stands out most is the sheer scale and reach of it all. In a sense, Patrick’s work often seems to align with this perspective, evident at various points in his research. The title of this book itself implies this, employing “winning hearts and minds,” a term coined by a French general and commonly used in the military-diplomatic vocabulary.

An intriguing example highlighted by Patrick involves a recent study by Harvard, Yale, and Groninger universities, published in early 2023. The research provides insightful perspectives into the efficacy of Chinese state media. Spanning 19 countries and 6,276 individuals, the study observes a significant surge in global support for China’s economic model, escalating from 16% to 54%. Surprisingly, the influence of Chinese state media surpasses that of its American counterpart, particularly in developing countries across Africa and Latin America. It is interesting to note that the study compares the performance of Chinese state media with that of U.S. state media. Once again, China is employing traditional tools of cultural diplomacy, but perhaps what stands out is the magnitude of its efforts, as well as the nature of the Chinese regime.

Patrick explores the uncertain Western response to the allure generated by Chinese state media for autocracies, leading to a decline in support for democracy worldwide. Measures taken so far have been labeled as amateur-



ish, ineffective, or even authoritarian. The United States' requirement for Chinese state media to register as "foreign agents" under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), a law initially designed to curb the activities of Nazi officials in the U.S., serves as a significant illustration.

The situation becomes even more precarious in developing countries, particularly in Latin America, where there has been a lack of substantial precautions to monitor messages disseminated by Chinese state media. However, as Patrick reveals, Beijing has adeptly addressed these challenges, and Chinese propaganda is gaining momentum.

In addition to these theoretical considerations, Patrick's work offers three significant contributions, notably in the realms of interviews, mapping Chinese media initiatives in Latin America, and formulating policy recommendations.

The wealth of interviews conducted for this book stands out as a notable strength. Featuring diverse perspectives, from academia to the practical intricacies of media collaborations, they provide nuanced insights. Notably, Patrick's findings challenge preconceptions, as evidenced in the case of *Band* in Brazil. Collaborating with Pablo Morales, my research reveals that *Band* has adopted a notably positive stance towards China. Andre Basbaum, *Band's* Director of Journalism, acknowledged an editorial shift, attributing it to the Jair Bolsonaro administration's antagonistic posture towards China rather than the partnership with CMG. These nuanced insights, consistently present here, constitute a significant contribution to advancing research on Chinese media in Latin America.

Another pivotal contribution lies in Patrick's meticulous mapping of China's media initiatives in Latin America. There exists a notable void in both international relations and communication literature concerning the expansion of Chinese media into this region. While there has been a burgeoning interest in the "going out" process of Chinese media, especially in proximity to China and the African continent, there remains a scarcity of analyses involving the burgeoning Chinese presence in Latin America.

This work not only illuminates this gap and these deficiencies but also furnishes a wealth of material for other analysts to delve deeper into these investigations. Igor conducted diverse field research, engaging in interviews with individuals immersed in these actions daily, and scrutinizing documents, websites, newspapers, and programs that practically illustrate some of the out-

comes of these Chinese initiatives. This material will undoubtedly captivate all those engaged in or researching these dynamic interactions.

Finally, “Hearts & Minds, Votes & Contracts” underscores the third major contribution to the formulation of policy recommendations. This practice, more common in the United States than in Brazil, stands out as particularly noteworthy. Yet, beyond this, Igor has demonstrated a keen understanding in his recommendations, addressing not only civil society but also wealthier Western nations, the Global South, and the media outlets themselves in navigating the complex landscape of Chinese media presence in Latin America.

While the author acknowledges the potential for propaganda in China’s initiatives, many of his recommendations have a broader focus on handling foreign influence in general. Additionally, as a journalist, Igor emphasizes the crucial need to protect press freedom, including ensuring the physical safety of journalists from Latin America who increasingly face violence and threats. Therefore, the policy recommendations intricately weave together Patrick’s exceptional work, leveraging his academic, journalistic, and political analyst skills in the broadest sense of the term.

If you’ve reached this Afterword after delving into Patrick’s work, you’ll undoubtedly concur that this book emerges as a crucial reference for anyone engaged with Chinese media and researching this subject. If you’ve begun with this Afterword, I strongly urge you to immerse yourself in the remarkable book that you currently hold.





# Acknowledgments

**AFTER NEARLY FOUR YEARS** investigating this topic, I am pleased to present the result of my research on Chinese e media, which was only made possible through the generous support of the Wilson Center and the Stephen A. Schwarzman Education Foundation. I am truly grateful for their trust and assistance.

Talking about Schwarzman, I must emphasize that I would not have contemplated dedicating myself exclusively to this research for such an extended period if it were not for the invaluable guidance from Julia Zupko, our career advisor. Julia, should you ever require motivation to persist in the outstanding work you perform for our community, be certain that your compassion, professionalism, and commitment have transformed my life. I will forever be indebted to you for this.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my brilliant colleagues at the Wilson Center, who provided inspiration, motivation, and invaluable assistance for nearly a year. Without their help in contacting sources, suggesting new angles, and sending me papers and books, this research would not have been possible. Special thanks go to Robert Daly, Rui Zhong, Bruna Santos, Francisco Urdinez, and Margaret Myers. Additionally, I need to express my gratitude to Lindsay Collins, whose warm welcome and willingness to assist with anything I needed were greatly appreciated.

My research ended in Washington, DC, but it began much earlier, thanks to the important advice of my advisors in Beijing, Professors Fan Shiming (Peking University) and Anbin Shi (Tsinghua University).

My journey as a China scholar would also never have begun without my friends at *Observa China*, a think tank I proudly co-founded in 2020. Many thanks to Thiago Bessimo, Lucas Wosgrau Padilha, Paulo Menechelli, Paulina Yeal Cho, Betânia Barros, Aline Tedeschi, and Rodolfo Barrueco for the countless hours of dedication to a project that was born out of our love for sinology and is now deservedly one of the most important Latin American think tanks for China Studies. Extended thanks to Calebe Guerra, Maria Rosa Azevedo, and Leopoldo Cavalcante, three friends who, together with me, created the best podcast about China in Portuguese (not that we are biased, of course).

What you have read is the result of dozens of interviews conducted over several months. Many people were willing to talk to me because they believe, as I do, in the importance of this topic. Given the sensitivity of the subject, it is not possible to mention them all here, but I am very grateful to Andre Basbaum, Bochen Han, Carolina Sandoval, Cibele Resckhe, Daigo Oliva, Ellie Young, Emília Martinez, Fernando Fuentes, Gwendolyn Ledger, Hernán de Goñi, Juan Carlos Isaza, Joshua Kurlantzick, Keila Cândido, Ignacio Vivas, Marcel Oppliger, Olivia Yang, Pablo Morales, and Parsifal D'Sola. The credit for this research lies more with them than with me.

Some of my Schwarzman friends were also instrumental in completing this project. Arjun Neil Alim, Eduarda dos Santos, Emma Verges, Joshua Kemp, Lucia He, Lucio Milanese, Mallie Prytherch, Matthew Barrocas, and Yuexuan Chen, thank you for your continued support and valuable contributions before, during, and after this research. Being part of your cohort makes me seriously wonder what the Selection Committee saw in me, but I hope I live up to your genius.

My friends at the Yenching Academy extended their expertise, patience, and support. I couldn't have reached this professional milestone without expressing my gratitude to Tianyun Song, Xiaolin Liu, and particularly my fellow cohort member, roommate, and lifelong friend, Weishen Zeng. He is perhaps the greatest and most special gift from my academic journey in China. His thought-provoking questions made me less presumptuous and more receptive to listening. His friendship has made me a better man.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the one who was there for me when I was going through my daily breakdowns, endless monologues on Chinese media, insecurities, complaints, and fears. André, you are the rock that sustains not only this but all my works. Thank you for choosing to walk by my side, even if "by my side" means thousands of miles away. I hope you are proud.

Igor Patrick  
Washington, D.C. – 2024

## Notes on the Author



**Igor Patrick** is a journalist specializing in Chinese state media. He holds a Master's degree in China Studies (Politics and International Relations) from the Yenching Academy at Peking University and a second one in Global Affairs from the Schwarzman Scholars at Tsinghua University. He is dedicated to understanding the impact and effectiveness of China's media strategy in developing countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa. In recent years, he has published stories and articles in media outlets such as The HuffPost,

The Diplomat, RIA Novosti, CBN, and *Folha* de S. Paulo, where he has been covering Chinese affairs weekly since 2020. Since 2023, he is also a correspondent for the South China Morning Post in Washington, D.C.





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# APPENDIX I

Note: This is a self-translated English version of the content-sharing agreement signed between Xinhua and the Brazil Communications Company (in Portuguese, Empresa Brasileira de Comunicação - EBC), obtained exclusively for this research. Although subsequent updates in 2016, 2019, and 2023 were not made available, the document provides a rare opportunity to gain insight into the legal terms included in agreements of this nature, not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America.

## NEWS EXCHANGE AND COLLABORATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN XINHUA NEWS AGENCY AND EMPRESA BRASIL DE COMUNICAÇÃO S.A.

The XINHUA News Agency of the People's Republic of China, hereinafter simply referred to as the XINHUA Agency (XINHUA Agency is the legal entity established by the law of the People's Republic of China, located at Xuanwumen Ward 57, Beijing, China), and the Federative Republic of Brazil, hereinafter referred to simply as Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC (Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC is a legal entity, created by the law of Brazil, located at SCS Quadra 08, Bloco B 50-1st basement, Edifício Venâncio 2000, in the Federal District of Brasília), to reinforce the exchange and friendly collaboration in the field of news between the People's Republic of China and the Federative Republic of Brazil, will reach the following collaboration agreements:

### CLAUSE 1

XINHUA Agency agrees to provide Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC with news written in Spanish via the Internet free of charge. From the date of signature of this agreement, XINHUA Agency will provide Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC with the URL, user, and password to collect and copy the above information and messages. Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC cannot provide the user and the password to third parties without the permission of XINHUA Agency.

#### CLAUSE 2

Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC agrees to provide XINHUA Agency with real-time news in Portuguese via the Internet free of charge. From the date of signing this agreement, Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC will provide XINHUA Agency with the URL, user, and code to collect and copy the above information and messages. The XINHUA Agency shall not disclose the User and the password to third parties without the authorization and permission of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC.

#### CLAUSE 3

Both parties are responsible for the authenticity and legitimacy of their news and are also the rightful owners of the material.

#### CLAUSE 4

Both parties have the right to edit the news provided by the other party as long as they do not change the intention of the reports. They also have the right to publish and distribute the news in their newswire service, including translation into other languages. When using the news provided by the other party, both parties must indicate the sources of information and respect the facts, content, and intent of the news and, in the case of direct quotations, must not alter the original text.

#### CLAUSE 5

XINHUA Agency includes the reference news agency and its affiliates, and Empresa Brasil de Comunicação S.A.-EBC includes the Agência Brasil, TV Brasil, TV Brasil Internacional, the Broadcasting System Companies, and the Projeto Interatividade, Brasil 4D shall be entitled to use the news material provided by the other party. Both parties may also use the news and information offered by the other party at exhibitions, conferences, and technical activities in their respective countries.

#### CLAUSE 6

Both Parties agree to exchange their experience in news and technical work. They will conduct reciprocal visits of editors and technical staff at regular intervals. The specific topics of the exchanges will be agreed upon by the parties.

#### CLAUSE 7

Both Parties will promote cooperation in areas of common interest and encourage participation in cultural, economic, and social activities as well as conferences and exhibitions organized by the other Party's country. The content and manner of cooperation will be negotiated between the Parties and will also be regulated in a separate agreement.

#### CLAUSE 8

Both Parties agree to provide the necessary support to journalists in their countries who are seconded by or temporarily working in the other Party within the framework of national law and their capacities.

#### CLAUSE 9

The Parties shall endeavor to resolve any disputes that may arise between them concerning the interpretation and/or execution of this AGREEMENT amicably and in a friendly manner. Should this not be possible, the Parties shall choose the jurisdiction of the capital of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Brasilia, for the resolution of issues arising from this AGREEMENT.

#### CLAUSE 10

This AGREEMENT does not imply any financial responsibility. Costs incurred as a result of this AGREEMENT, including taxes, labor expenses, insurance, transportation costs, document translation costs and other expenses of any kind arising from this AGREEMENT shall be borne by the respective parties.

#### CLAUSE 11

From the date of signature by both parties, this AGREEMENT shall enter into force and be valid for 1 year. If either party intends to terminate this AGREEMENT, it must give written notice to the other party at least 3 months before the expiry of the term of this AGREEMENT. If both parties have not given such notice in writing, the validity of this AGREEMENT shall be extended by amendment for a further year, subject to a total term of 5 years.

CLAUSE 12

This AGREEMENT was signed in August 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, in Portuguese, in duplicate, with each party retaining one of the signed copies. Both texts shall have the same value.

SIGNED BY:

XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

CHEN WEIHUA

Director of Xinhua's branch in Brazil

EMPRESA BRASILEIRA DE COMUNICAÇÃO S.A.

RICARDO PEREIRA DE MELO

President of the EBC

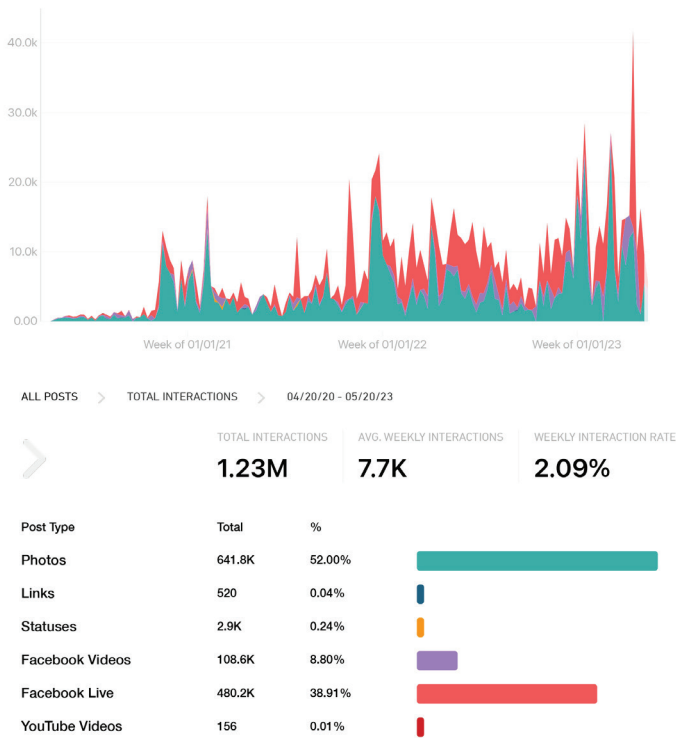
CHRISTIANE SAMARCO RODRIGUES CECILIO

Director General of the EBC

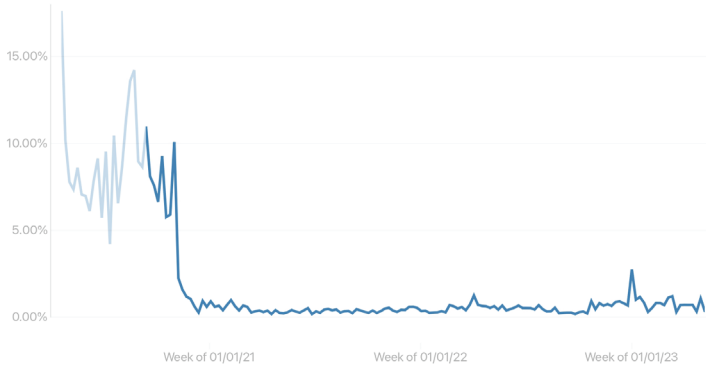
# APPENDIX II

## 1 Jimena a tu clic

### 1.1 Interactions



## 1. 2 Interaction Rate



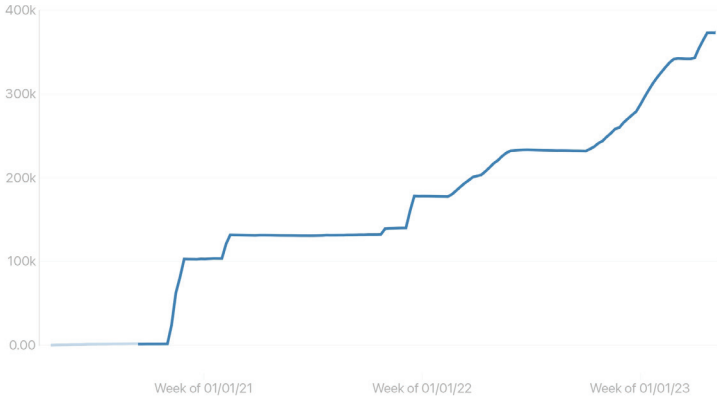
ALL POSTS > AVG. INTERACTION RATE > 04/20/20 - 05/20/23

>	WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE	AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS	TOTAL POSTS
	<b>2.05%</b>	<b>7.7K</b>	<b>1.4K</b>

Post Type	Avg. INTERACTION RATE
Photos	2.00%
Links	1.65%
Statuses	0.19%
Facebook Videos	2.27%
Facebook Live	2.03%
YouTube Videos	7.13%



## 1.3 Followers



FOLLOWER GROWTH > 04/20/20 - 05/20/23



FOLLOWERS

**380.0K**

GROWTH

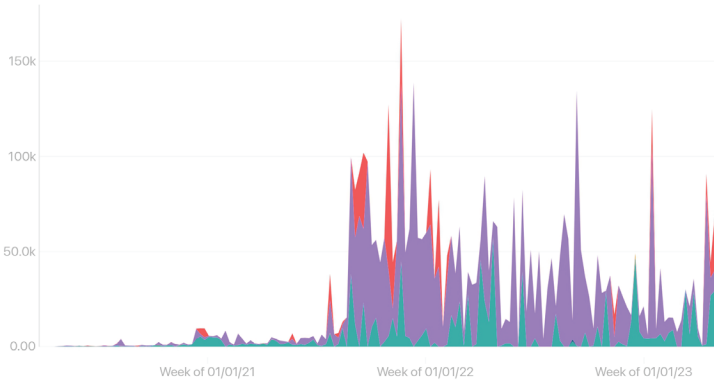
**+379.8K**

% GROWTH

**+215,801.14%**

## 2 VivaStudio

### 2.1 Interactions



ALL POSTS > TOTAL INTERACTIONS > 04/16/20 - 05/20/23



TOTAL INTERACTIONS

**4.49M**

AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS

**28.0K**

WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE

**2.66%**

Post Type	Total	%	
Photos	904.7K	20.16%	
Links	1.4K	0.03%	
Statuses	2.9K	0.07%	
Facebook Videos	3.13M	69.66%	
Facebook Live	452.0K	10.07%	
YouTube Videos	98	0.002%	

## 2. 2 Interaction Rate



ALL POSTS > AVG. INTERACTION RATE > 04/16/20 - 05/20/23



WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE

**2.14%**

AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS

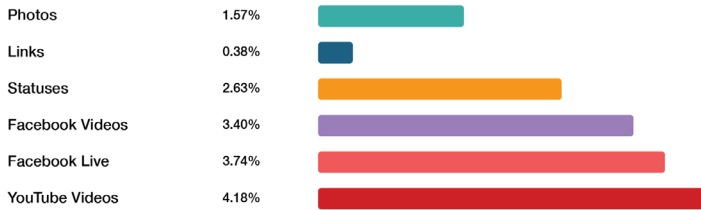
**28.0K**

TOTAL POSTS

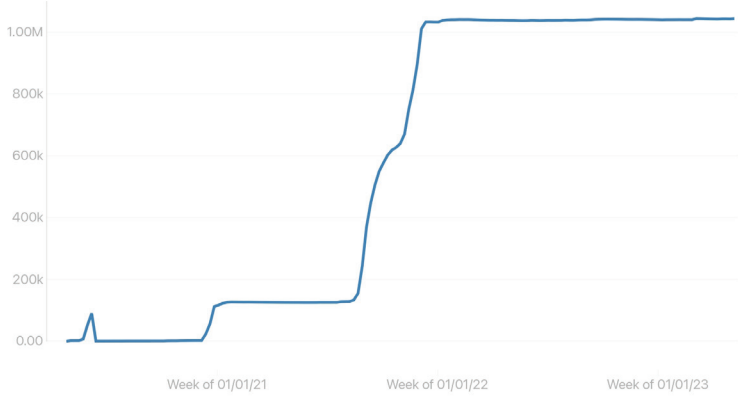
**1.1K**

Post Type

Avg. INTERACTION RATE



## 2.3 Followers



FOLLOWER GROWTH > 04/16/20 - 05/20/23



FOLLOWERS

**1.04M**

GROWTH

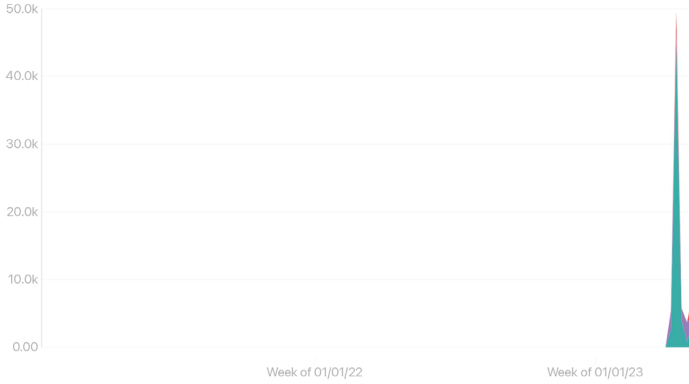
**+1.04M**

% GROWTH

**+100.00%**

# 3 Luana em Pequim

## 3.1 Interactions



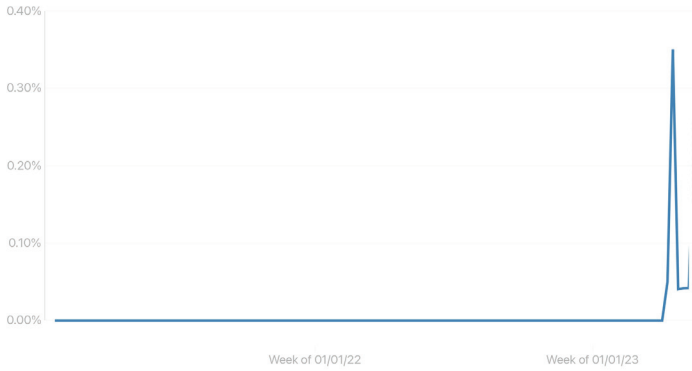
ALL POSTS > TOTAL INTERACTIONS > 01/24/21 - 05/20/23



TOTAL INTERACTIONS	AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS	WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE
<b>81.7K</b>	<b>13.5K</b>	<b>0.14%</b>

Post Type	Total	%	
Photos	63.5K	77.77%	<div style="width: 77.77%; height: 15px; background-color: #26a69a;"></div>
Facebook Videos	9.4K	11.53%	<div style="width: 11.53%; height: 15px; background-color: #8e7cc3;"></div>
Facebook Live	8.7K	10.70%	<div style="width: 10.70%; height: 15px; background-color: #e74c3c;"></div>

### 3. 2 Interaction Rate



ALL POSTS > AVG. INTERACTION RATE > 01/24/21 - 05/20/23



WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE    AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS    TOTAL POSTS

**0.13%**

**13.5K**

**39**

Post Type

Avg. INTERACTION RATE

Photos

0.21%



Facebook Videos

0.03%

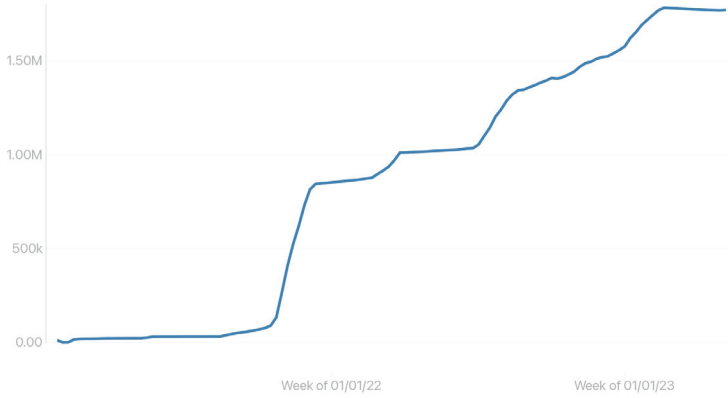


Facebook Live

0.11%



### 3. 3 Followers



FOLLOWER GROWTH > 01/24/21 - 05/20/23



FOLLOWERS

**1.77M**

GROWTH

**+1.76M**

% GROWTH

**+13,041.55%**

## 4 Repórter Olivia Yang

### 4.1 Interactions



ALL POSTS > TOTAL INTERACTIONS > 07/31/20 - 05/20/23



TOTAL INTERACTIONS

**615.8K**

AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS

**7.3K**

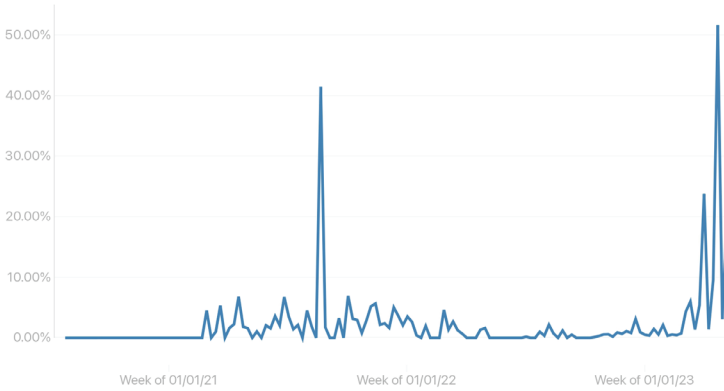
WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE

**11.85%**

Post Type	Total	%	
Photos	107.7K	17.48%	
Links	1.5K	0.25%	
Statuses	306	0.05%	
Facebook Videos	424.7K	68.97%	
Facebook Live	78.7K	12.79%	
YouTube Videos	2.3K	0.37%	
Other Videos	547	0.09%	



## 4. 2 Interaction Rate



ALL POSTS > AVG. INTERACTION RATE > 07/31/20 - 05/20/23

>

WEEKLY INTERACTION RATE	AVG. WEEKLY INTERACTIONS	TOTAL POSTS
<b>3.89%</b>	<b>7.3K</b>	<b>310</b>

Post Type	Avg. INTERACTION RATE
Photos	1.67%
Links	0.31%
Statuses	0.12%
Facebook Videos	6.42%
Facebook Live	7.35%
YouTube Videos	0.49%
Other Videos	0.68%







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