

Winds From the East:

How the People's Republic of China Seeks to Influence the Media in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Douglas Farah and Andy Mosher

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**National Endowment
for Democracy**
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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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He holds a B.A in Latin American Studies and a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Kansas and is the author of two books—*Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror* (2004) and *Merchant of Death: Viktor Bout and the New World Order* (2007).

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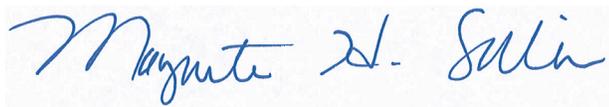
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Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of China’s media assistance in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. It approaches the topic from the standpoint of developments on the ground in those regions and is intended for an audience interested primarily in media assistance rather than for experienced China watchers.

CIMA is grateful to Douglas Farah, a veteran foreign correspondent in Africa and Latin America, and Andy Mosher, a long-time newspaper editor and consultant for CIMA, for their research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marguerite H. Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light blue rectangular background.

Marguerite H. Sullivan
Senior Director
Center for International Media Assistance

Executive Summary

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is using various components of public diplomacy to influence the media in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

China's primary purposes appear to be to present China as a reliable friend and partner, as well as to make sure that China's image in the developing world is positive. As part of its efforts to do this, the Chinese government seeks to fundamentally reshape much of the world's media in its own image, away from a watchdog stance toward the government to one where the government's interests are the paramount concern in deciding what to disseminate. The Chinese efforts often result in helping authoritarian governments expand control of their local media.

A great deal of emphasis is placed on forming alliances that are anti-Western and on promoting an anti-Western media model to combat what the Chinese regularly portray as part of an imperialist plan to distort the truth. A secondary but important purpose in China's new emphasis on media outreach is to demonstrate the benefits of a relationship with the PRC to those nations that still have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The diplomatic isolation of Taiwan remains a high priority for the PRC, and the bulk of the countries that recognize Taiwan are in Latin America and Africa.

The PRC's efforts are also clearly aimed at expanding Chinese influence in regions where the PRC is greatly stepping up its economic and political presence and military sales. As part of its expansion into significant commodity acquisitions (oil,

copper, bauxite, tin, and many others) in Africa and Latin America and its search for business acumen, technology, and markets in Southeast Asia, China has made media aid and the expansion of Chinese media influence a high priority. This comes as Western news outlets have cut their overseas staffs and fewer U.S. and European government resources are allocated for training and other media support in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

China is carrying out these efforts through:

- Direct Chinese government aid to state-run media in the form of radio transmitters and financing for national satellites.
- The provision of content and technologies to allies and potential allies that are often cash strapped.
- Memorandums of understanding on the sharing of news, particularly across Southeast Asia.
- Training programs and expense-paid trips to China for journalists.
- A significant, possibly multi-billion dollar expansion of the PRC's own media on the world stage, primarily through the Xinhua news agency, satellite and Internet TV channels controlled by Xinhua, and state-run television services.

The overall results of these media efforts by China are hard to determine. By successfully hosting major media conferences, including those co-sponsored

by Western media giants, China's media have clearly shown themselves to be a force to be reckoned with on the world stage.

In Southeast Asia, the PRC seems to have been particularly successful in reaching agreements to provide Chinese government content for numerous regional outlets and has a significant footprint in the emerging digital TV and Internet-based TV markets. By signing memorandums of understanding with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as individual members of the alliance, China has made significant advances in integrating its view of the world into nightly broadcasts and morning newspapers throughout the region.

In Latin America, the Chinese assistance is closely but not exclusively aligned with the left-leaning populist states of the Bolivarian alliance (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua), led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Venezuela purchased a communications satellite from China, in part to be able to project the government's message more broadly, although the satellite does not appear to be functioning. Bolivia's

The Chinese government seeks to fundamentally reshape much of the world's media in its own image, away from a watchdog stance toward the government to one where the government's interests are the paramount concern in deciding what to disseminate.

Chinese-manufactured satellite has yet to be launched. China does appear to have significantly beefed up its own media presence in the region and is also a leading content provider for many news outlets.

In Africa, where China has made significant media infrastructure investments, primarily in radio transmitters, there also have been agreements on content sharing and a targeted emphasis on providing Africa-relevant content to resource-starved media outlets. Given China's multi-billion

dollar investments in commodity extraction and large scale infrastructure projects in Africa, it is reasonable to assume that much of the effort is aimed at keeping local public opinion on the side of the Chinese.

Chinese news media, far less independent than Western news organizations, form the basis for China's

media assistance, which emphasizes cooperation with governments—many of them undemocratic—and rejects the Western media's role as watchdogs holding governments accountable. Western media development implementers and those who fund them should take note.

Global Overview

The People's Republic China (PRC) is rapidly expanding its commercial, diplomatic, and military ties across the globe. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Southeast Asia there is a key, though little noted, element embedded in this multi-faceted strategy of projecting global influence and extracting natural resources to meet China's economic needs: a well-resourced effort to strengthen ties to the regions' media and influence how and what they report. This is a goal that is explicit in official policy statements. While Southeast Asia has long been a region of Chinese influence, only in the past decade has the PRC begun significant efforts to woo public opinion in Latin America and Africa.

The Chinese efforts often result in helping authoritarian governments expand control of their local media, while working to undermine the Western model of an independent, adversarial media. This raises troubling questions for Western media assistance implementers and those who fund their activities.

The goals of the media policy appear to be two-fold. The first and most important is to ensure that China's growing presence in these regions is viewed positively, and significant emphasis is placed on generating media attention to the multiple programs that accompany the commercial expansion. As John Pomfret of the *Washington Post* noted of the PRC's efforts to influence the media and provide media content on a global level:

Behind the push is a Communist Party hierarchy that has seized upon the idea of "soft power" as

China's new Holy Grail in its search for superpower status. President Hu Jintao has publicly stressed the strategy. And in 2008, Li Changchun, the party leader responsible for propaganda, summed up China's rationale: "In the modern age, whichever nation's communication methods are most advanced, whichever nation's communication capacity is strongest . . . has the most power to influence the world."¹

Pomfret, who has covered China for more than a decade, elaborated in an interview, saying "The Chinese want to change the way people think about them. They have a belief they don't get a fair shake in the Western media, and they want to get out the message of how well China is doing. But it is also a business proposition. They want to create international media conglomerates to compete with Thomson-Reuters, the BBC, and AP."²

A second important element of the media strategy appears to be aimed at swaying the countries that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), to switch their formal recognition to the PRC. More than half of the nations in the world that still recognize Taiwan (12 of 23) are in Latin America, and four are in sub-Saharan Africa.

A collateral effect is to strengthen the grip of authoritarian governments on state control of the media in their respective countries, as will be examined in the cases of Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and Bolivia. While strengthening the official media may not be

the officially enunciated policy, in media seminars PRC officials have repeatedly attacked the Western media as biased, unreliable, and full of propaganda and have urged “aggrieved” nations to form a unified media counterforce led by China.³

Superpower attempts to influence the media existed throughout the Cold War, but China’s efforts in the field are relatively new in form and content.

In addition to the clear intent to have a strong say in the international media’s portrayal of the world, particularly of China, the PRC leadership is promoting a news-gathering paradigm that stands in stark contrast to the West’s traditional view of the media as a watchdog of the government and intense competitors among themselves.

In a speech opening the 2009 World Media Summit in Beijing, Chinese President Hu urged the global media to “maintain a balance between competition and cooperation, and in the process strive to be mutually complementary, helpful and beneficial,” and added that “the media of the world can enhance exchanges and cooperation to seek common development to promote world peace and development.”⁴

To media development practitioners, and to the thousands of journalists around the world who have been touched by their efforts, the story of media assistance by

the West is a familiar one. From modest beginnings in the 1960s, with an initial focus on Latin America, assistance to media in developing countries and emerging democracies blossomed with the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc after 1989.

Western democracies and Japan spent millions of dollars training journalists in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe and helping independent, non-governmental media outlets take root. As the media assistance sector grew, it broadened its scope, reaching out to countries on every continent.

“In the modern age, whichever nation’s communication methods are most advanced, whichever nation’s communication capacity is strongest . . . has the most power to influence the world.”

— Li Changchun, Propaganda Chief for the Communist Party of China

Throughout, the United States led the way. In 2008, U.S. funding of media assistance was estimated at \$124 million, nearly as much as the combined contributions of the second- and third-ranked funders—the European Commission,

with \$81 million, and Japan, with \$45 million.⁵ Likewise, the United States and its democratic allies set the agenda. The principles of free, independent media formed the basis for assistance efforts. The countries providing assistance to foreign media modeled their efforts to reflect the way media operated in their own countries, often tailored to the needs and realities of the targeted society but attempting to hew to liberal democratic norms.

But as with other types of development assistance, media development is also

conducted by countries outside the so-called club of democracies. China—with the world’s largest population and its second-largest economy—has emerged as a major contributor to developing countries, particularly through loans. It is almost impossible to do an “apples to apples” comparison of China’s aid programs and Western programs, however, because there are no consistent metrics used to measure the PRC’s expenditures. As the Congressional Research Service noted:

China’s foreign aid is difficult to quantify. The PRC government does not release or explain Chinese foreign aid statistics, and much of PRC foreign aid does not appear to be accounted for in the scholarly literature on foreign aid. Some Chinese foreign assistance partially resembles official development assistance (ODA) as defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), but in other aspects shares characteristics of foreign investment. In terms of development grants, the primary form of assistance provided by major OECD countries, China is a relatively small source of global aid. However, when China’s concessional loans and state-sponsored or subsidized overseas investments are included, the PRC becomes a major source of foreign aid.⁶

While China is best known for helping developing countries with huge infrastructure projects, it is estimated to rank 10th among contributors to direct media assistance, providing roughly \$18 million in 2008.

The same study found that “PRC foreign assistance and government-supported economic projects in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia grew from less than \$1 billion in 2002 to \$27.5 billion in 2006 and \$25 billion in 2007. Aid and related investment to Africa showed the most significant increase.”⁷

American University professor Deborah Brautigam estimates that Chinese aid for Africa is about \$3 billion a year when categories such as debt relief and face value of loans are included (as the OECD does in calculating Western countries’ aid figures, but the Chinese government does not).⁸ Foreign aid equaling \$3 billion dollars would put China roughly on par with Norway, though markedly below the world-leading U.S. figure of \$19.8 billion.⁹ The Congressional Research Service report estimates the PRC’s aid at between \$1.4 billion and \$2.7 billion a year, with concessional loans to Africa having a “total outstanding balance of approximately \$8-9 billion.”¹⁰

And while China is best known for helping developing countries with huge infrastructure projects such as dams, railways, oil fields, and stadiums, it is estimated to rank 10th among contributors to direct media assistance, providing roughly \$18 million in 2008.¹¹ However, that figure does not take into account the hundreds of millions of dollars (more than

\$6 billion by some estimates) that China is spending on enhancing the global reach of its state-run media enterprises, focused on the Xinhua news agency, CCTV, and the *People's Daily* newspaper.¹² This effort, discussed in more detail below, seems primarily geared to providing content to all forms of media around the globe as well as giving the PRC several potent platforms for overcoming what that government frequently calls a Western bias in the global news gathering.

If China's leadership truly believes, as publicly stated, that "whichever nation's communication methods are most advanced, whichever nation's communication capacity is strongest . . . has the most power to influence the world," then such large scale investments have some rationale.

Chinese official media assistance projects have, in fact, often involved infrastructure, notably the refurbishing of government broadcasting systems in Liberia and Zambia and financing and building satellites that carry state news programming in Venezuela. Broader initiatives have included training of large numbers of foreign journalists in Beijing and providing print content and broadcast programming from Chinese news agencies in multiple languages on almost every continent.

There is no question that the content has evolved rapidly, and potential clients and partners are receiving a much more sophisticated product than a few years ago. Pomfret points out the growing sophistication of the PRC's media abroad, including greatly enhanced language skills by correspondents and a more subtle approach to spreading the PRC's vision of itself. "It is no longer tales from the ball bearings factory and that type of propaganda," Pomfret said in the interview. "It is more nuanced

than that. They are now using local [non-Chinese] anchors in some places for the first time ever, and Xinhua is also hiring locals for the first time. About 200 people a year receive language training. They are much better than they used to be."¹³

Among the most prominent of the new Chinese media is the recent creation of CNC World, a 24-hour English language news channel launched in July 2010 by the Xinhua news service. It is intended to be an alternative to the global reach of the BBC, CNN, and Fox. "An international vision with a China perspective" is how Li Congjun, Xinhua's president, described the project. Using the channel to influence Africa's emerging markets is of particular interest in launching the effort.¹⁴

Given the limited resources of local media outlets in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, China has made particularly effective use of expense-paid invitations to international media conferences in China. At these, the Chinese leadership has consistently pushed the theme that the Western media is biased and deliberately slanders developing nations. The solution proposed is the creation of a global media alliance against the West, including CNC World, to present a more positive image of the developing world.

As reported by a Nigerian newspaper, 94 journalists from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe at a 2009 media conference hosted by Guizhou Television, decided that:

[Western media] propaganda is a serious concern and concluded that the best way to stop [the] media offensive of the west was for the

aggrieved nations to network in the area of collaboration to establish a global multimedia agency capable of matching the established nations. Participants said the media should always be used to tell the truth but instead of presenting facts to the people, western media take advantage of their network to blackmail the developing countries.¹⁵

At the same conference, Guizhou Television President Pai Fang told the seminar that his station was already forming a “global network to deliver China to the world in a better way than is being done against it,” in part by launching satellite channels to “send signals to all parts of the world.”¹⁶ This may explain in part the generous terms the Chinese offered both Venezuela and Bolivia to launch communications satellites that also carry Chinese programming in English and Spanish.

Another key component of the strategy of creating a global network is the expanding Xinhua news agency, which operates CNC World and other TV ventures as well as its wire services. One Chinese newspaper reported that an the astonishing figure of \$6.6 billion (45 billion yuan) “is believed to have been budgeted for expanding the state (PRC) media with Xinhua set to get the lion’s share.”¹⁷

Xinhua scored a coup by co-hosting in Beijing a World Media Summit in 2009, along with such heavyweights as the News Corporation, AP, Reuters, Itar-Tass, Kyodo News, BBC, Turner Broadcasting System, and Google. With that move, Xinhua firmly established itself as a major player in the traditional mainstream media arena. A total of 135 news organizations from 70

countries participated in the conference, the theme of which was “Cooperation, Action, Win-Win and Development.”¹⁸

According to Xinhua’s Li, the news service maintains 117 bureaus outside China and provides news, financial information, photographs, audio, video, and mobile phone text services in eight languages: Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, and Japanese. Li said his agency “vigorously” promotes exchanges and cooperation and has reached agreements with media organizations from more than 100 countries and regions on news, personnel exchanges, and technical cooperation.¹⁹ Xinhua has plans to expand to more than 200 bureaus world wide, which would make it the largest news agency in the world.

China’s willingness to provide financing for the increasingly sophisticated and broadening reach of the PRC’s media and influence is unusual in today’s global context. Most countries are cutting back on this type of activity due to financial constraints and other national priorities, while the PRC is devoting billions of dollars across the world to them.

In particular, the United States, which traditionally has dominated the field, has curtailed its own public diplomacy programs in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere in the world. Given the resource commitment they are willing to make and the dearth of competitors, the Chinese are likely to make significant gains.

One of the reasons for expansion is that Xinhua, as a state-financed agency, does not need to worry about the economic viability of the expansion or about revenue streams.²⁰

While it was not possible to determine the different components of the agreements cited by Li, several Latin American journalists said Xinhua is making a concerted effort to sell its services in the region, often virtually giving away its services to entice potential subscribers.²¹

The Chinese overtures to African and Latin American media are comparatively recent, mostly within the past decade, but extend to traditional spheres of influence in Southeast Asia as well through rapidly increasing content sharing agreements and other methods.

They have come during a period when China's global profile has risen dramatically, raising the question of whether China intends to become as prominent a player in media assistance as it has become in other sectors such as mining, telecommunications, and construction. And while another country eager to assist media around the world would normally be welcomed by those already involved in such efforts, China is not just another country, particularly when it comes to media.

The economic changes that enabled China's economy to boom over the past 30 years have not been accompanied by similar political reforms. The country's secretive Communist government has made only halting moves toward limited transparency and maintains ultimate control over all news media in the country,

If the Chinese government is propagating a less-than-free model of journalism, or is propping up friendly regimes by supporting media that buttress them, do advocates of free media and democratic government need to find a way to counter such moves?

as well as access to the Internet.

Though the number and quality of news outlets in China has increased sharply in recent years, even Wang Shuo, a journalist renowned in China and abroad for his investigative work, lamented during a recent visit to Washington: "If independence means that media has no relationship with government, there is no independent media in China. End of story."²²

Accordingly, there is concern that the Chinese are exporting a form of journalism that resembles their own, far less free and independent than media in democracies. China's government also looks upon media assistance the same way it does other forms of assistance: as an instrument of foreign policy, intended to further the aims of both donor and recipient.

Both perspectives pose troubling questions for those in the established media assistance sector. If the Chinese government is propagating a less-than-free model of journalism, or is propping up friendly regimes by supporting media that buttress them, do advocates of free media and democratic government need to find a way to counter such moves?

It is clear China is working to influence the media on several continents in significant ways, and a closer look at what has been done may offer some insight into what lies ahead.

China and Africa

Though the People’s Republic of China came into being only in the middle of the last century, it has been assisting developing nations for almost its entire history—even though it, too, is still considered a developing nation.

American University’s Brautigam writes in her recent book, *The Dragon’s Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*, that only a year after the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, as the Korean War broke out, they were sending grain, cotton, and industrial materials to North Korea. In 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai proclaimed China’s “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” one of which—“equality and mutual benefit”—became the bedrock of an ever-growing aid program.

“At the start of the 1980s, China qualified as one of the world’s twenty least developed countries,” Brautigam writes. “The country’s annual per capita income of \$208 placed it squarely between Mozambique and Burma ... It was highly unusual for a relatively poor country to even have an aid program.”²³ (China still receives assistance from the World Bank for transportation, health, environmental, and rural development projects.)

When Africans began in earnest their struggle to break free from colonial rule, China was there to lend a hand. After

covertly providing money, supplies, and advisors to several African independence movements in the 1950s, China launched its first official African aid program in Guinea in 1960, lending the government of Sékou Touré the equivalent of about \$25 million to build a cigarette and match factory.²⁴

China supplied advisors to oversee construction of the Guinean factory, but donor and recipient maintained a distant relationship. William Attwood, the U.S.

ambassador to Guinea at the time, wrote that “the Chinese pretty much kept to themselves and their Guinean contacts ... They never ventured out of their compound except in pairs and shied away from casual contacts. Africans were generally ill at ease with them.”²⁵

Though the People’s Republic of China came into being only in the middle of the last century, it has been assisting developing nations for almost its entire history—even though it, too, is still considered a developing nation.

Half a century and nearly \$6 billion later, China has given aid to every country in Africa except Swaziland—the only country on the continent that has always recognized Taiwan rather than the PRC.²⁶

Currently, four of sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries maintain official relations with Taiwan: Burkina Faso, Sao Tome and Principe, Gambia, and Swaziland. Indicating the importance the PRC places on the issue of diplomatic recognition, in 2007 China offered Malawi aid and investment worth \$6 billion, in every significant economic

sector. In January 2008 Malawi switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing.²⁷

The aid has had a lasting impact. A Chinese-built railway connects landlocked Zambia with the Indian Ocean. Chinese telecommunications powerhouse Huawei Technologies Co. had signed contracts worth \$2 billion in sub-Saharan and North Africa combined as of 2006, and its products were being used in 40 African countries.²⁸ China and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have agreed to a deal in which China will lend the Congolese \$6 billion to pay the Chinese company Sinohydro to build dams, hospitals, roads, universities, and housing in the sprawling central African country.²⁹ And a host of Chinese companies or joint ventures are pumping oil in Angola, Nigeria, Sudan, and other African countries as the continent exports one million barrels of oil to China every day.³⁰

Compared with big-ticket, headline-grabbing projects such as these, China's media assistance efforts have so far been modest—and not well documented. It appears that before 2000, China did little to directly assist African media other than to provide support for guerrilla movements' clandestine radio stations and content for print and broadcast outlets.³¹

“Chinese assistance to African media is not new. What is different now is that it is being administered in the post-Cold War era with a greater degree of openness,” said Fackson Banda, then SAB Ltd.-UNESCO chair of media and democracy at the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies in Grahamstown, South Africa, and now a program specialist with UNESCO's communications development division.³²

But there are clear indications that the role with the media is expanding and is a priority in China-Africa relations, as shown by various initiatives launched in recent years.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a Chinese government initiative designed to serve as a platform for coordinating Chinese foreign policy toward Africa.³³ The Chinese government launched FOCAC in October 2000 by bringing ministers from 44 African countries together with 80 top Chinese officials in Beijing. Two more ministerial conferences and a summit in 2006 spawned plans in a broad range of areas, including media.

The initial blueprint for cooperation was the Beijing Action Plan, which arose from the 2006 Beijing summit and outlined key milestones to be achieved between 2007 and 2009. The action plan spelled out dozens of undertakings aimed at increasing cooperation in politics, economics, international affairs, and social development. One of the nine subsections comprising the last category was news media, an area in which the action plan laid out five targets:

- encouraging media on both sides to “play a positive role in enhancing mutual understanding and friendship”;
- enabling visits and exchanges between journalists and authorities;
- supporting and encouraging each side to increase coverage of the other by “sending resident and non-resident correspondents for news reporting”;

- conducting workshops in China for African correspondents and inviting “heads of press authorities and media groups as well as correspondents from Africa to China to exchange views, cover news and explore ways of conducting effective cooperation”;
- expanding cooperation in broadcasting, with a focus on China helping African countries train radio and TV journalists.³⁴

Another summit in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, in 2009 yielded a new action plan for 2010–2012. This plan narrowed the focus of media initiatives to three points: strengthening exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and African government officials who deal with media, including an annual workshop for African officials; promoting mutual visits between Chinese and African media officials, editors, and other journalists, and the posting of correspondents from each side to the other “to step up objective and fair coverage of Africa and China;” and increasing cooperation in radio and TV program production.³⁵

According to Banda, the exchanges and workshops held under the FOCAC action plans “have included African journalists and other media workers, mostly those in the employ of state-owned media, although there is evidence of editors from privately-owned media participating (according to the Chinese Embassy in South Africa). As Cheng Min, Johannesburg bureau chief for Xinhua, informed Journalism.co.za: ‘We invite journalists from African countries to China and train them on journalism, news gathering and writing.’”³⁶ One of the most significant initiatives was the Xinhua News Agency’s launch in 2008 of the China African News Service, whose stated

purpose is to expand coverage of Chinese and African news of mutual interest to Chinese and African audiences. The announcement stated that the service “focuses on expanding and improving coverage of African regional news, major international news, world news and China news related to Africa, and China’s domestic news of African interest.”³⁷

Banda asserts, however, that “‘training’ is not value-neutral; it also carries with it the cultural and political values associated with those skills.” He noted that a workshop held in 2006 and attended by 42 journalists from 23 English-speaking African countries covered such subjects as China’s experience and achievements on economic reform and national development, the Taiwan question, and China’s journalistic view and the operation of Chinese media.³⁸

Zambia

China has been aiding Zambia since before there was a Zambia.³⁹ When Britain still ruled the central African colony then known as Northern Rhodesia, China supported the liberation movement that won independence in 1964. As the new nation’s reliance on its abundant supply of copper drove its economy from boom to bust, and the government of Kenneth Kaunda gradually slid into debt—and one-man rule—China remained supportive.

In 1967, China, Zambia, and Tanzania agreed to a project that still stands as China’s biggest infrastructure project in Africa to date:⁴⁰ the railway that links Zambia’s Copperbelt with Tanzania’s Indian Ocean port of Dar es Salaam. Built between 1970 and 1975, and finished two years ahead of schedule,⁴¹ it still carries passengers and cargo along its 1,100-mile route.

Today, ties between Zambia—a multi-party democracy for the past two decades—and China are arguably stronger than ever, and Chinese assistance continues apace. In February 2010, for example, Zambian President Rupiah Banda visited Beijing, where he and several of his cabinet ministers signed “bilateral agreements focusing mainly on economic cooperation between the two countries ... Among the main agreements signed are on economic and technical cooperation for the construction

of the National Stadium in Lusaka for a period beginning March 2010 to February 2015.”⁴² The following month, former finance minister Ng’andu Magande said that 80 percent of government road and school construction projects had been given to Chinese companies.⁴³

Zambian media have been getting help from China since 1973, according to former information minister Vernon Mwaanga. ⁴⁴ It was not until 2002,

Chinese Government Assistance To African Media

There are many examples of Chinese government assistance to African media,¹ but details about the projects are relatively scarce. They include:

- **Mauritius**, 2006 – Chinese assistance went toward construction of a building for MBC, the state broadcaster.
- **Kenya**, 2005–A facility was established for China Radio International FM 91.1, which in February 2006 began broadcasting in English, Swahili and Chinese to Nairobi residents for 19 hours a day. Programs covered China’s economic, social and cultural development and played music from China and Africa.² Kenya also hosts other foreign broadcasters, including Voice of America, BBC, and Radio France International.
- **Gabon**, 2004–Broadcasting station built.
- **Lesotho**, 2003-2005–China provided \$4.5 million in radio and TV equipment for expansion of the national network across the country.
- **Guinea**, 2001–Agreements worth about \$9.6 million were signed in 2001 to build a radio and TV network to be run by the state.³
- **Sudan**, 1997– \$8 million for audio equipment
- **Eritrea**, 1994–\$3.6 million to build a radio station headquarters

1 Examples listed are taken from e-mail from Brautigam to authors, May 25, 2010. Sources of additional information are noted.

2 Allan Kisia, “State Set to Expand FM Frequencies,” Nation, February 28, 2006, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200602280127.html>

3 “China to Build a Radio-television Station in Guinea,” Pan-African News Agency, February 14, 2001, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200102140381.html>

however, that Chinese assistance to Zambian media achieved a scale sufficient to draw notice outside the country.

In that year, China lent the Zambian government \$14.5 million (120.9 million yuan) for FM radio transmitters, as well as a new government complex.⁴⁵ Fourteen transmitters were installed in seven of Zambia's nine provinces to improve reception of the state-owned Zambia National Broadcasting Corp. (ZNBC).⁴⁶ In 2006 a loan of \$560,000 (3.8 million yuan) went toward purchasing more transmitters⁴⁷ that would extend ZNBC's FM signal across the entire country.

On its face, such assistance would not be out of line with the kind frequently offered to developing countries by governments or media development groups in the West or Japan. Although ZNBC had been regarded as little more than a government

mouthpiece for its entire history, long-awaited legislation passed by the Zambian parliament in 2002 made ZNBC a public service broadcaster, governed by a board to which members would be appointed without government influence. But the legislation was never implemented, and ZNBC remains as much a tool of the government as ever.

"The ZNBC Amendment Act of 2002 removed state control over the independence and thus provided a guarantee for editorial independence. However, as this act has not yet been implemented and with the Supreme

Court judgement [*sic*] of 2006 effectively giving the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services the right to reject nominations for board members, this guarantee has been annulled," the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) reported in 2009. "In terms of ZNBC content there is a clear bias and the ruling party is given preference over opposition parties when it comes to coverage."⁴⁸

Assessing ZNBC, the panel of experts who compiled IREX's 2006-07 Media Sustainability Index for Africa "suggested that the control of media by the state affects the balance of news content, especially political reporting. Ken Makungu [a lecturer

at the University of Zambia] stated that 'the influence from government in Zambia can be seen in the news content ... The information is usually concerning what the government is doing and little or no information about achievements from their adversaries.'⁴⁹

In 2002, China lent the Zambian government \$14.5 million for FM radio transmitters. Fourteen transmitters were installed in seven of Zambia's nine provinces to improve reception of the state-owned Zambia National Broadcasting Corp.

In addition, both Chinese loans were awarded during election years in Zambia, "timed to support the pro-Beijing ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in its electoral campaign effort, especially in rural Zambia," according to Fackson Banda.⁵⁰

The friendship between the two countries' governments is not universally shared among Zambians, and opposition parties have made an issue of some Zambians' resentment of Chinese aid and loans that

have often resulted in jobs for Chinese workers, who typically stand apart from Zambian society in the way that Attwood described in Guinea in the early 1960s.

In the end, it is not clear that the Chinese transmitters fully achieved their intended purpose. “The state’s radio signal covers all 72 districts,” MISA reported in 2009. “However, the quality of the broadcast signal is relatively weak in some more remote parts of the country, because of a lack of proper equipment to boost the signal, resulting in snowy TV pictures and poor radio reception quality.”⁵¹

Liberia

In contrast with the enduring friendship between the governments of China and Zambia, state-to-state relations between China and Liberia have been vacillating and volatile, particularly over the past 20 years. Not only was Liberia ravaged by bloodshed and anarchy during the civil war launched in late 1989 by Charles Taylor, remaining in turmoil during Taylor’s 1997-2003 presidency, but a succession of Liberian governments switched allegiances between Beijing and Taipei four times. The stakes were viewed as high for both governments.

In 1989, shortly before Taylor’s rebels invaded from the Ivory Coast and ensured his eventual demise, then-President Samuel K. Doe repudiated Beijing and chose to recognize Taiwan. In 1993, a transitional government propped up by West African peacekeeping troops switched back to recognition of Beijing, but Taylor reverted to the Taiwanese in 1997. When Taylor, who is now on trial for crimes against humanity, was driven into exile in 2003, Liberia once again recognized Beijing.⁵²

During Taylor’s trial prosecutors revealed that Taiwan had paid Taylor \$20 million in eight installments in order to maintain diplomatic recognition. “Michel Lu, a Taiwan diplomat, said in an interview with the *New York Times* that his government offered ‘deep regret’ for a ‘humiliating’ turn of events. He said that [Taiwan], internationally isolated, was under tremendous pressure from Mr. Taylor, who ‘threatened to cut off relations,’ and that his nation had since discarded checkbook-style diplomacy.”⁵³

When Taylor went into exile, the PRC’s leadership responded the following year with \$3 million to cover 100 days of operation of a transitional government and, after Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson was elected Africa’s first female head of state in 2006, gave \$1.5 million to her administration for budgetary support. “Cash transfers are highly unusual for China’s normal aid ... Economic crisis and fragile states are omnipresent in Africa, but reports of Chinese budget support are not,” American University’s Brautigam writes. “I suspect that it may require Taiwan waiting in the wings to call forth actual cash from the keepers of the coffers in China.”⁵⁴

If so, concern over diplomatic recognition may also explain why China’s major media assistance project in Liberia so closely resembles the one in Zambia: loans for FM transmitters to expand coverage of the state broadcasting system. And, as in Zambia, Liberia’s democratic government appears reluctant to grant independence to its most effective mouthpiece.

The civil war left the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) heavily damaged, and as recently as 2007, its FM signal barely extended 80 miles from the capital, Monrovia.⁵⁵ But in February

of that year, Chinese President Hu visited Liberia, and “a major package of economic and technical assistance was announced”: the building of modern FM and shortwave services for the LBS.⁵⁶

By November 2008, Liberian and Chinese officials were celebrating completion of the LBS-China Aided FM Radio Expansion Project, which cost \$4 million and left LBS “well placed to cover the entire country with relay outstations in six counties, including Lofa, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Bomi, and Maryland. The facilities are also equipped with a microwave satellite link to boost transmitted signals from the system’s headquarters in Monrovia to its stations around the country,” according to a presidential press release from Liberia’s Executive Mansion. The Chinese government would provide maintenance for the system for one year, after which a Chinese company would maintain it under contract for four more years.⁵⁷

At the November 19 handover ceremony, Sirleaf-Johnson said that China’s decision to expand LBS broadcasting could not have come at a better time, according to the press release, “given the ever increasing need to adequately inform Liberians of the progress taking place in the country ... The President reminded the management of LBS to ensure that the station remains objective, neutral, and apolitical in the dissemination of information to the Liberian people, adding, ‘concentrate on development.’”⁵⁸

Analysts say, however, that objectivity and neutrality are not hallmarks of LBS. IREX’s 2008 Media Sustainability Index for Africa contends that, even as newly established independent radio stations offer Liberians a variety of viewpoints, “the state-run radio

station has continued to largely propagate the views of the government with limited coverage of dissenting political opinions, especially coverage of opposition events.”⁵⁹

“Basically the system that the Chinese gave to the [Liberian government] is quite good from a technology point of view, although they haven’t improved on the journalism/programming side,” said Michael Keating, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Development at the University of Massachusetts-Boston’s McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies. “I do not believe it is the intention of this government to turn this capability into a ‘true’ public broadcaster but rather they will use it to bolster the administration’s position in the upcoming 2011 election cycle. There is a law rolling around to convert the [LBS] to a public broadcaster, but there is no lobbying being done to pass the law and the government is not interested.”⁶⁰

The expansion project also provided for the airing of English-language newscasts from China Radio International over LBS. At the handover ceremony, China Radio International Vice President Wang Yunpeng said: “Liberian people will from now on be able to listen to the voices of 1.3 billion friendly Chinese people, rather than to learn of China only through third-party media. This will further enhance friendship and mutual understanding between the Chinese and Liberian peoples.” He then presented 500 radios as gifts to Sirleaf-Johnson.⁶¹

Zimbabwe

As with so much else in the country, China’s relationship with Zimbabwe is closely identified with one man: Robert Mugabe.

When rival guerrilla factions were fighting to overthrow white-minority rule in what was then Rhodesia, China backed Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union, while the Soviet Union supported the Zimbabwe African People's Union, led by Joshua Nkomo. When Ian Smith's renegade white government was toppled and independence from Britain won in 1980, Mugabe's party had the upper hand, and he has ruled Zimbabwe ever since. "Of all the countries, China has been our strongest supporter ... the greatest of friends," Mugabe said in 1999.⁶²

There are few more secretive governments than those in Beijing and Harare. As such, details about Chinese aid to Zimbabwe tend to be mostly anecdotal, and little is known about its broader dimensions. In the West, most discussions of such aid tend to be short on specifics and long on assertions that support for Mugabe's dictatorship embodies China's disregard for the political and social fallout from its avowedly apolitical approach to aid. Likewise, Chinese assistance to Zimbabwean media tends to get lost in broader debates over bigger initiatives.

In March 2005, Zimbabwe jammed short-wave broadcasts by SW Radio Africa, a privately-owned radio station based in London that employs Zimbabwean

journalists living in exile, according to Reporters Without Borders, which alleged that the jamming equipment had been supplied by the Chinese government. "Thanks to support from China, which exports its repressive expertise, Robert Mugabe's government has yet again just proved itself to be one of the most active predators of press freedom," the group said.⁶³

Jamming was extended in September 2005 to include short-wave broadcasts by Voice of the People, a station run by exiled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corp. (ZBC) employees and beamed into Zimbabwe from a Radio Netherlands relay station in Madagascar. The following year, the Voice of America's "Studio 7," a program targeted at Zimbabwe, was also jammed.

"According to sources in Zimbabwe, the jamming of Zimbabwean exile radio stations began after a group of Chinese technicians arrived in Harare in January 2005 under a trade accord between China and Zimbabwe," Reporters Without Borders said. "Housed at the Sheraton Hotel for three months, they reportedly carried out a number of installations including a radio jamming system using a ZBC transmitter in Gweru, in the centre of the country, and the ZBC Pockets Hill broadcasting centre in Highlands, a suburb of Harare."⁶⁴

China In Latin America

Ties to the Bolivarian States

While the PRC's economic, military, and political programs are widespread across Latin America, the Chinese media interests are particularly concentrated in Venezuela and other nations in the "Bolivarian Axis" led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, including Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador.⁶⁵

The principal tools used by the PRC in aiding Latin American nations in the realm of media:

- helping to finance and launch communications satellites that provide increased capacity for the host nations while expanding the reach of Chinese media into Latin America
- expense-paid excursions and media conferences in China for Latin American journalists
- the establishment of Confucius Institutes, which are PRC-sponsored cultural centers, across the region
- high-profile visits of senior PRC officials to the region to push for agreements to mutually strengthen media ties

Until the early part of the 21st century, Latin America was a secondary or tertiary foreign policy and trade priority for the PRC. However, as domestic demand for raw materials such as copper, iron, petroleum, and foodstuffs grew dramatically in recent years, the PRC

has greatly accelerated its relationships in Latin America in an effort to insure its own internal commodity needs are met.

At the same time, Latin America has become an increasingly attractive export market for Chinese goods, as well as a market open to Latin American exporters.⁶⁶ Overall trade between Latin American and China has risen from about \$10 billion in 2000 to more than \$100 billion in 2009, and the PRC in 2009 supplanted the United States as Brazil's largest trading partner.⁶⁷

In addition to the economic considerations, the PRC remains deeply committed to advancing its "One China" policy, insisting on recognition of the PRC as the sole Chinese state. While the PRC has made significant strides in isolating Taiwan diplomatically, Latin America has remained the most problematic region in this regard. Of the 23 countries that still recognize Taiwan, 12 are in Latin America and the Caribbean. These countries are Belize, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.⁶⁸

Because of the relatively small size of the Central American and Caribbean nations, the PRC and Taiwan have often engaged in bidding wars to achieve diplomatic recognition. For example, the PRC outbid the ROC in an aid package to Dominica in 2004, offering \$11 million in immediate aid and a \$100 million package over the next six years, while the ROC balked at a \$58 million request. However, since then

only one country, the tiny island nation of St. Lucia, has switched allegiances—from the PRC to Taiwan. The decision drew an angry reaction from the PRC government, which warned other nations not to follow suit.⁶⁹ The PRC is working hard to get the leftist populist governments in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Paraguay to sever ties to Taiwan.

Ties to the Media

The most visible and costly participation of the PRC in Latin America media enterprises has been the sale and launching of a communications satellite for Venezuela and the signing of an agreement to do the same for Bolivia. Both countries have come under increasingly harsh international condemnation for their efforts to restrict freedom of the press and silence opposition news outlets, as well as for the respective leaders' constant attacks on freedom of information and journalists.⁷⁰

The satellites provide Spanish-language Chinese government content to Latin America, clearly a Chinese priority. However, they offer a collateral benefit to the host government. They greatly enhance the capacity of the governments to broadcast state-controlled programming across the country and beyond their own borders and gives them a strong counterweight to the already-crippled independent media. The Venezuelan satellite dubbed Venesat-1,

with a life expectancy of up to 15 years, was launched in October 2008 with great fanfare.⁷¹ In Venezuela the stated purpose of the satellite communications was to enhance the capacity of rural areas to participate in educational programs, create the ability to provide long distance medical attention and education and update the nation's communications network.

However, there is an unmistakable component of increasing the Venezuelan government's ability to control the news and increase the viewership of *Aló Presidente*,

Chávez's marathon live, weekly radio and TV broadcasts across the region. Chávez said the satellite cost Venezuela \$400 million for construction, launch, and technical support and that it "will put an end to media terrorism and help us spread our own truth, to wage the battle of ideas with efficiency and transparency."⁷²

The most visible and costly participation of the PRC in Latin America media enterprises has been the sale and launching of a communications satellite for Venezuela and the signing of an agreement to do the same for Bolivia.

The money, however, may not have been well spent. More than a year later the satellite was experiencing severe technical difficulties and was not providing television, high speed Internet, or communications services, and the Venezuelan government had stopped mentioning the project.⁷³

The setback in Venezuela did not stop the Bolivian government from signing a similar deal with China in April 2010. Bolivian president Evo Morales signed a \$300 million agreement with the Chinese firm Great Wall, the same company that

built Venesat-1, to build the Tupac Katari communications satellite for the same purpose as the Venezuelan satellite.⁷⁴

Like Chávez, Morales has had a contentious relationship with the independent media, whom he has called his enemy, and left little doubt that the new communications satellite would be used to greatly increase the reach of government broadcasts “The Catholic Church and the media are the only opposition I have left,” Morales has said.⁷⁵

Hosting Media Delegations

Given the limited resources and local focus of much of the Latin American media, travel abroad is an important perk and potential inducement to print favorable stories. For years the PRC and Taiwan have hosted individual journalists or national delegations of journalists, often with the requirement that the reporters write a certain number of favorable reports about the host nation in exchange for the expense-paid jaunts of a week to 10 days.⁷⁶

However, in recent years the PRC has hosted not only large Latin American media delegations that were received by senior Chinese officials but has also organized larger-scale media conferences aimed at giving China and its model of media management legitimacy and currency. While a total accounting of Latin American media delegations was not available, over the past

five years the PRC’s state news services have reported on six such visits for Latin American delegations, as well as several visits that were part of larger conferences. A Xinhua news service story on a 2006 visit is typical in repeatedly striking the themes of unity, friendship, and the need for mutual cooperation. It reported on a visit by “senior media professionals” of eight news organizations from six Latin American countries with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi:

Hailing China-Latin America ties and cooperation in various fields, Yang said China has always regarded Latin America as a good partner and friend. It is in the fundamental interests of the people in China and Latin America to further the friendly ties, Yang said. China would like to make joint efforts with Latin America to promote the friendly and mutually-beneficial cooperation.⁷⁷

Three years later a similar delegation was received by a much more senior Communist Party official, perhaps signaling the PRC government’s sense that these delegations merited a higher priority. The state media reporting was much lengthier and more detailed than the earlier reports.

The 2009 delegation was received by “senior Communist Party of China (CPC) leader Li Changchun” in the Great Hall of the

For years the PRC and Taiwan have hosted individual journalists or national delegations of journalists, often with the requirement that the reporters write a certain number of favorable reports about the host nation in exchange for the expense-paid jaunts of a week to 10 days.

People. The delegation was made up of “media leaders” from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru visiting China “at the invitation of the Information Office of the State Council.”

Hitting the familiar themes, Xinhua reported Li as saying he “hoped the delegates could take this opportunity to have more understanding of China’s economic and social progress ... In recent years, the media of [China and Latin America] have made fruitful exchanges which have promoted understanding, he said.”⁷⁸

The Growing Role of the Confucius Institutes

One area where the PRC is concentrating its resources is on the creation of Confucius Institutes. These are government-funded agencies that promote Chinese language, culture, and understanding and serve as centers for outreach to local media. The first one in Latin America was established in Mexico City in February 2006.⁷⁹

Since that opening, the program spread rapidly. Over the next two years the PRC opened 17 institutes in eight Latin American countries, spanning the political spectrum of the region. Five institutes were established in Mexico, three in Peru, two in Colombia, two in Chile, two in Brazil, one in Argentina, one in Cuba, and one in Costa Rica.⁸⁰

While the primary purpose of the institutes, which are global in their reach, is to teach Chinese to the local population, they are also a key component of the PRC’s soft power strategy. In addition to the language training courses, Chinese culture is taught and there is constant outreach to the local media to portray China in a positive light. This is not dissimilar to the bi-national associations the United States government operated prior to the Cold War. These centers provided English language training, scholarships, English language literature, popular U.S. movies, and other cultural material.

China and Southeast Asia

Unlike Latin America and Africa, where China's influence has only recently been felt, Southeast Asia is a region where China has played a significant role for centuries. While many of the region's countries are flourishing democracies with vibrant free market systems, others, such as Vietnam, retain the socialist model with more limited economic reforms.

From an extensive literature and media review it is clear that the PRC is investing significant time and energy to expand its media ties across the political spectrum.

Over the past three years the PRC has hosted or participated in various regional forums a year dealing with media; greatly expanded the technological means to increase the reach of official PRC media; and signed multiple agreements on media training.

The overall objective seems to be to make the PRC's state media a prominent news voice in the region as well as one of its primary content providers.

As in Latin America and Africa, the PRC has placed considerable effort in Southeast Asia on forming "media partnerships" in which China provides a great deal of content for local media. The PRC also appears to be sharing its Internet control system, known as "The Great Firewall of China," with other Communist countries, particularly Vietnam.

The Vietnamese government has recently begun attacking and shutting down dissident websites in much the same way China does.⁸¹

A more publicly discussed issue is integrating the news-gathering and media operations of the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with China. In October 2008 China and ASEAN signed a memorandum of understanding on information cooperation, designed to "further solidify the foundations for cooperation and partnership in the information and media sectors between ASEAN and China."⁸²

In December 2008 Singapore hosted a follow-up ASEAN-China "Meeting on Media Collaboration," where those attending were encouraged to "discuss co-production and other media partnerships."⁸³ Indonesian Information Minister Muhammad Nuh said the

meeting was "to cooperate and exchange information which has a strategic role in stepping up information and media cooperation among ASEAN and China."⁸⁴

It is clear that the PRC is investing significant time and energy to expand its media ties across the political spectrum. The overall objective seems to be to make the PRC's state media the dominant news voice in the region.

Individual nations are also moving toward content sharing of their state media with Chinese state entities, while China is also rapidly expanding its regional reach. Bernama, the Malaysian national news agency, in 2009 agreed to work with China Radio International to jointly produce and exchange radio programs and exchange

personnel.⁸⁵ A month later Laos also announced plans to “enhance exchanges and cooperation” with China in news, media exchanges, and personnel training.⁸⁶

At the same time, China announced the creation of the first regional radio broadcast aimed at Southeast Asia. Guangxi Beibu Bay Radio was jointly formed by China Radio International and Guangxi Foreign Broadcasting Station and broadcasts in five languages: English, Thai, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, and Cantonese. The potential audience was estimated at more than 100 million people.⁸⁷

China has also placed a great deal of emphasis on creating new media in recent years, primarily Internet-based broadcast sites in multiple languages aimed primarily at Southeast Asia. The most prominent is China Network Television, described by one publication as “a key weapon in a push to expand [the PRC’s] Web presence” and inaugurated by “the powerful senior politician Li Changchun, a member of the Politburo.”⁸⁸ The article noted that “a lot of competition for CNTV has been swept away in recent months—the government has shut down many sites that provide video downloading services as part of a crackdown on ‘unhealthy’ content.”⁸⁹

To help replace the banned services, China Network Television is offering live webcasting of all the national television’s 20 channels, as well as older shows. It is also providing access to two state-approved downloading services: Bugu, which provides live online broadcasts, video on demand, and 24/7 reruns of shows; and Xiyou, a community where users upload and share their videos.⁹⁰

In another major step to expand its reach, Hunan TV, a major PRC station, signed a

“strategic contract” to share content with Multicultural Radio Broadcasting Inc., an Asian-American media company that operates scores of radio stations, including 42 stations in 22 U.S. cities, and broadcasts in 38 languages.⁹¹

Singapore has been particularly valuable for China’s new media expansion.

Singapore’s digital media companies have reached a series of agreements with Chinese companies that will amplify the PRC’s voice across the region. In late 2009 a group of 30 digital media companies from Singapore, organized by the Media Development Authority of Singapore, signed a series of agreements with different Chinese state media entities, officially described as covering:

the launch of a Chinese version of a popular Made-in-Singapore social networking game; a cross-border venture development and incubation effort for new media companies; the digitisation of Chinese television content by a Singapore service provider; a joint collaboration in the psychological analysis technologies on the internet, mobile and social networking sites; and, the commercialization of a word-of-mouth media channel in China based on a digital technology application developed in Singapore.⁹²

The goal of the PRC’s expansion of the “new media” was explained by Qian Xiaogian, China’s vice minister at the State Council Information Office during a meeting of editors from China and ASEAN nations. The new media, he said, “will bring new vigour and vitality to traditional media, and it will make us even more influential than ever before through multimedia and new technologies.”⁹³

Conclusion

The People's Republic of China is seeking to influence the media in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia through a variety of means: direct aid to state-run media in the form of radio transmitters and financing for national satellites; the provision of content and technology to allies and potential allies; the sharing of news; and training programs and expense-paid trips for journalists to China.

This effort has accompanied a massive expansion of the PRC's own media internationally, primarily through the Xinhua news agency, satellite and Internet TV channels, and state run television services. It comes at a time when resources for media assistance in some regions of the world—notably Latin America—are becoming scarcer.

Chinese news media, far less independent than Western media, form the basis for China's media assistance, which emphasizes cooperation with governments—many

of them undemocratic—and rejects the Western media's role as watchdogs holding governments accountable.

China's moves pose troubling questions for those in the Western media assistance sector. As the Chinese government propagates a less-than-free model of journalism and assists undemocratic regimes by supporting media that buttress them, advocates of free media and democratic government should take note.

Media developers and donors might consider countering these developments with more robust support for independent media in the countries where China is assisting news media. This might include more programs in investigative journalism, ethics, and internationally recognized journalism standards, as well as support for digital media infrastructure, such as broadband Internet access in developing countries to provide citizens with increased access to information.

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