



## China's Efforts to Shape the Information Environment in Vietnam

Ryan Loomis and Heidi Holz

## Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch about China. This report is part of a series of reports that examine Beijing's efforts to influence the media environment in the neighboring Mekong countries—Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. This report focuses on China's efforts to shape the information environment of its neighbor, Vietnam. In order to place China's efforts into context, this report begins by providing an overview of Vietnam's information environment—the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that play a key role in shaping opinions through the dissemination of news and information. Next, this report examines each of the ways that China attempts to shape the information environment in Vietnam in order to promote its preferred narratives. This report concludes with a brief discussion of issues to consider as Vietnam's information environment—and China's footprint there—evolves.

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Approved by:

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

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# Executive Summary

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch about China. This report, which is part of a series that assesses Beijing's efforts to influence the media environments of the Mekong countries, focuses on China's efforts targeting audiences in Vietnam.

## Key findings

***China has had very little success shaping the media environment in Vietnam.***

- Beijing faces a hostile media environment in Vietnam that makes it difficult for it to promote PRC narratives. In the words of one Vietnamese media expert, "They [China] are just not very successful in getting their messages across."
- Government policies and regulations—in combination with a lack of public interest in PRC propaganda—significantly restrict China's access to Vietnam's information environment.
- Vietnamese media is highly critical of China on specific issues, likely due to a combination of official propaganda guidance and anti-China sentiment. Vietnamese journalists and editors avoid including interviews with Chinese officials.
- PRC narratives fail to resonate among audiences in Vietnam due to widespread anti-China sentiment. Historical Sino-Vietnamese conflicts and contemporary grievances make for a hostile environment for Chinese media narratives.

***China's traditional tools for shaping foreign media have had little effect in Vietnam. Nevertheless, there is evidence that China is attempting to shape the media environment in Vietnam in the following ways:***

- ***Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment to Vietnam to bolster China's "soft power":*** Chinese TV and film appear to be popular with Vietnamese audiences. They represent the most successful aspect of China's efforts to gain a foothold in Vietnam's information environment. However, only apolitical Chinese TV programs and films appear to have gained popularity in Vietnam, as government censors and a China-critical public reject entertainment that touches on politically sensitive subjects.
- ***Producing Vietnamese-language news content:*** Several state-run PRC media outlets produce content in Vietnamese, including China's official overseas broadcaster, China Radio International (CRI), and China's official news agency, Xinhua. However,

local audiences have increasingly shunned these PRC news outlets over the past decade, and they have failed to secure substantial content-sharing agreements with Vietnamese news outlets.

- ***Seeking channels for distribution of PRC media content:*** Despite their efforts to achieve greater cooperation with Vietnamese counterparts, PRC media outlets have had very limited success to date—securing only one content-sharing agreement that is limited to English-language news content.
- ***Hosting training and cooperation forums in an effort to influence how the Vietnamese media reports on China:*** Vietnamese central-level media officials have participated in China-led international media forums and training programs such as the Lancang-Mekong Media Cooperation Summit. However, their level of participation appears to be lower than that of officials from other Mekong countries and there has been no observable softening of Vietnamese media’s criticism of China.

***The narratives that Beijing seeks to promote in Vietnam include the following:***

- China and Vietnam have a shared heritage.
- China is willing to set aside its differences with Vietnam and pursue greater cooperation.
- China is a more responsible and constructive international actor than the US, including in the fight against COVID-19.

## Issues to watch

***As China continues to seek a presence in Vietnam’s information environment, key issues to watch for in Vietnam include the following:***

- ***The appearance of more “Chinese voices” in Vietnamese media.*** Vietnamese media outlets are reluctant to publish interviews with Chinese officials. Likewise, Vietnamese media outlets publish few op-eds by Chinese officials compared to media outlets in other Mekong countries. An increase in Chinese official op-eds and interviews observed in Vietnamese media would indicate greater openness to China’s efforts to promote official narratives in the local media environment.
- ***Vietnamese media republishing PRC-produced content.*** Multiple PRC state-run media outlets have sought increased cooperation with Vietnamese state-run media outlets, but have thus far failed to achieve widespread republication of PRC media content by Vietnamese news outlets. Of note, Vietnamese media does occasionally republish PRC media content in order to criticize it. If Vietnamese media outlets begin to republish PRC-produced news content without mocking it, this could allow Chinese narratives to reach a broader audience in Vietnam.

- ***Indications that Chinese entertainment is increasing in popularity.*** Although Chinese historical dramas are popular in Vietnam, Chinese entertainment depicting contemporary political issues does not appear to be. If such Chinese entertainment were to gain popularity among local audiences, it would indicate a widening of Chinese media's most successful inroad into Vietnam's information environment: entertainment.
- ***An increase in anti-China reporting in Vietnamese media.*** Historically, Vietnamese authorities have managed expressions of anti-China and anti-Chinese sentiment to keep the domestic political situation and bilateral relations stable. In doing so, Vietnamese media authorities typically greenlight criticism of China on maritime territorial disputes and disputes over the Mekong River. It would be notable if Vietnamese media began to criticize China on a broader range of issues. Such a shift could suggest that the Vietnamese government had decided to take a harder-line stance against China.
- ***Coordinated, inauthentic pro-China messaging campaigns on social media.*** Even though Vietnam has enacted restrictions to online anonymity (i.e., the 2018 Cyber Security Law), Chinese entities may step up efforts to promote and amplify pro-China messaging on Vietnamese-language social media and online message boards, while attempting to conceal the Chinese origins of these campaigns.

## Recommendations from experts & media professionals in the region

Vietnamese media professionals and experts offered suggestions about how the international community could help to support the development of Vietnam's media environment and its continued resilience against PRC efforts to shape it. These included the following:

- ***Provide journalism and media skills training.*** Vietnamese media professionals and experts suggested that providing discrete skills training for journalists in partnership with the Vietnam Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) is likely the most successful strategy for helping to support Vietnam's media. Conversely, attempts to support broader media development and/or promote Western journalistic norms would be unlikely to secure the necessary official approval.
- ***Coordinate with long-standing, trusted international partners.*** Several experts noted that Vietnamese media officials are likely to view Western-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media training organizations with a critical eye. These experts suggested collaborating with international organizations that already have an established record of working in Vietnam as a way to improve access to the local information environment.



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# 1. Overview of Vietnam’s Information Environment

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## *Quick Country Facts*

- Literacy rate (2018): 95%<sup>1</sup>
- Internet penetration (2018): 70.35%<sup>2</sup>
- Mobile phone subscriptions (per 100 people in 2018): 147<sup>3</sup>
- Total population (2020): 96,721,275<sup>4</sup>
- Languages: Vietnamese (official), English (favored as a second by at least 53% of the population)<sup>5</sup>
- UN Developing Country Status<sup>6</sup>

Source: CNA.

## 1.1 Introduction

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has embarked on a campaign to shape what audiences around the world read, hear, and watch about China.<sup>7</sup> In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Chinese president and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping voiced the aspirations of this campaign, stating, “We will improve our capacity for international communication so as to tell China’s stories well, present a true, multi-dimensional, and panoramic view of China, and enhance our country’s cultural soft power.”<sup>8</sup> This report is part of a series of reports that examine Beijing’s efforts to influence the media environment in the neighboring Mekong countries—Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand.

This report focuses on China’s efforts to shape the information environment of its neighbor, Vietnam. In order to place China’s efforts into context, the report begins by providing an overview of Vietnam’s information environment—the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that play key roles in shaping opinions through the dissemination of news and information. Next, the report examines each of the ways that China attempts to shape the information environment in Vietnam in order to promote its preferred narratives. The report

concludes with a brief discussion of issues to consider as Vietnam's information environment—and China's footprint there—evolves.

## 1.2 Background & key developments

***Vietnam's media is state run.*** The Vietnamese party state, ruled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), oversees all major media outlets and maintains tight control over their content through a system of propaganda guidance and censorship. The government also mandates that press outlets use information from the official Vietnam News Agency.<sup>9</sup> The CPV exercises legal authority over all print, broadcast, online, and electronic media, primarily through the Ministry of Information and Communications under the overall guidance of the CPV Propaganda and Education/Training Commission.<sup>10</sup> The government works to ensure ideological alignment by installing CPV members in news media management. Vietnamese law requires news editors-in-chief to be CPV members (although, anecdotally, some editors in the south are not CPV members); many outlets apply this requirement to other managers as well.<sup>11</sup>

***Vietnam's state-run media outlets function as mouthpieces of the CPV.*** As in other communist countries, Vietnam's state-run media complex serves as a propaganda organ of the party state. News media communicate the party's directives and priorities and seek to shape domestic views to promote economic and social development and stability.<sup>12</sup> Critical voices are given little, if any, space in the state-run media. Not only are newspaper editors-in-chief required by law to be CPV members, lower-level editorial positions are also often filled by party members. In 2018, for instance, *Than Nien* reportedly replaced 13 editors who were not CPV members with active CPV members. These actions ensure a unified CPV message from Vietnam's key media.<sup>13</sup>

***Social media has given the Vietnamese public greater space to exchange news and analysis.*** Facebook and, to a lesser extent, the domestic social media platform Zalo are very popular in Vietnam. According to a 2019 Pew research report, 91 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds in Vietnam say they currently use Facebook, though only 23 percent of the country's 50-and-older population uses the site.<sup>14</sup> Free access to content from non-state run media outlets and open discussion on social media attracted government scrutiny, which ultimately resulted in the 2018 Cyber Security Law. Under the law, the government can prosecute producers of online content for a broad range of offenses. Despite the threat of censorship, fines, and arrest, social media—primarily Facebook—continues to serve as a popular alternative source of news and information.<sup>15</sup> Research by Pew in 2018 indicates that 81 percent of Vietnamese citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 get their daily news from social media.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 1. CPV management of Vietnamese media



Source: Le Thu Mach and Chris Nash, "Social Media Versus Traditional Vietnamese Journalism and Social Power Structures," *Asian Journal of Journalism and Media Studies*, No.2, 2019, accessed Apr. 15, 2020, [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/ajjms/2/0/2\\_2.0\\_1/pdf/-char/en](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/ajjms/2/0/2_2.0_1/pdf/-char/en).

**Vietnam has developed its own information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure.** In addition to high internet penetration, provided at high speeds (compared to neighbors) by more than 65 domestic internet service providers (ISPs), Vietnam is also rolling out a domestically developed 5G nationwide network.<sup>17</sup> Vietnam has deliberately chosen not to rely on China or other foreign manufacturers for the newest generation of ICT upgrades, choosing instead to develop its own infrastructure with the assistance of foreign partners from a variety of countries, including Korea, Japan, India, China, Laos, Cambodia, the United Kingdom, France, Slovakia, Hungary, and Iran.<sup>18</sup> In addition to shunning Chinese investment in domestic 5G upgrades, Vietnam has also carried out broadcast television digitization upgrades using non-Chinese standards.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Vietnamese citizens' access to media is as follows:***

- **Internet and social media.** According to a 2019 survey, people in Vietnam spent a daily average of 6 hours and 42 minutes using the internet.<sup>20</sup> The Pew Research Center reports that 48 percent of Vietnam's online population uses social media as a source for news at least once a day.<sup>21</sup> Vietnamese social media users tend to be younger, more educated, and wealthier than the general population.<sup>22</sup>
- **Television.** TV remains a popular source of news and entertainment.<sup>23</sup> A 2019 survey indicates that Vietnamese people spend a daily average of 2 hours and 31 minutes watching TV (broadcast, streaming, and on-demand).<sup>24</sup> According to reports by two Vietnamese media and advertising organizations, broadcast TV accounts for 60 to 80 percent of advertisement spending in media.<sup>25</sup> According to the most recent Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) statistics, as of 2017, Vietnam had 181 TV channels (103 free-to-air), 3 satellite digital TV service providers, and 5 terrestrial digital service providers.<sup>26</sup>
- **Radio.** Low advertising spending on radio compared to internet and television suggests it is less popular among audiences in Vietnam.<sup>27</sup> According to the most recent MIC statistics, as of 2017, Vietnam had 86 radio stations (77 free-to-air).<sup>28</sup>
- **Print.** Print media in Vietnam is declining in popularity to the point that the government is moving forward with an initiative to phase out most print media and move newspapers to digital platforms.<sup>29</sup>

***China has had very little success shaping the media environment in Vietnam.*** Beijing faces a hostile media environment in Vietnam that makes it very difficult for it to promote PRC narratives. Government policies and regulations significantly restrict China's access to Vietnam's tightly controlled information environment. In addition, according to Vietnamese media experts, many Vietnamese media professionals have internalized an anti-China bias that is rooted in popular anti-China sentiment, as well as government censorship guidance. Because of this, Vietnamese media is highly critical of China on specific issues. Finally, PRC narratives fail to resonate among audiences in Vietnam because of widespread anti-China sentiment among the general population. In the words of one Vietnamese media expert, "They [China] are just not very successful in getting their messages across."<sup>30</sup>

## **1.3 Key domestic media outlets**

Vietnam's central, provincial, and district governments each have their own media outlets. Central-level mass media organizations include the Vietnam News Agency, *Nhan Dan (the People)* newspaper, Vietnam Television (VTV), The Voice of Vietnam (VOV) radio, and the

newspapers run by the ministries and military. In addition, each province has at least three media outlets: a newspaper, a broadcast station, and an online portal. Finally, each district runs its own television station, which delivers information from the local government. Districts and provinces also produce local programs for the upper-level journalism organizations.<sup>31</sup> The law requires at least 70 percent of Vietnamese radio and TV broadcasts to be domestically produced content.<sup>32</sup>

Vietnam News Agency (VNA) is the most important media organization in Vietnam. According to its website, VNA is a government agency that publishes and broadcasts official party and state information.<sup>33</sup> VNA runs more than 60 outlets, 30 overseas bureaus, and provides domestic and foreign media outlets with news in Vietnamese, Chinese, English, French, and Spanish.<sup>34</sup> VNA offers print and digital newspapers in 10 languages: Vietnamese, Lao, Khmer, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, English, French, and Spanish. VNA owns and operates many domestic media outlets, including the following:<sup>35</sup>

- Thông tấn xã Việt Nam (TTXVN Vietnam News Agency Publishing House)
- *Tin Tuc* (*The News*)
- *Vietnam News* (English-language daily and “top foreign service publication”)
- *Vietnam Plus e-newspaper* (accessed via vietnamplus.vn)
- Thể thao & Văn hóa (sports & culture)
- *Vietnam Pictorial* (a magazine for external services in 10 foreign languages; the only Vietnamese paper published in Latin America)
- *Le Courier du Vietnam* (only French-language newspaper in Vietnam)
- *Vietnam Law & Legal Forum* (issues English translation of Vietnamese legal bulletin, *Cong Bao*)

Figure 2. VNA media outlets



Source: Vietnam News Agency Twitter, @VNAEnglish, accessed Apr. 23, 2020, <https://twitter.com/vnaenglish?lang=en>

VNA also runs television news programs on VNews TV channel, offered in English and Chinese daily and in French and Spanish weekly.<sup>36</sup> The tables below list other key local media actors in order of popularity.

**Table 1. Key online outlets by consumers**

| Name      | Type of media   | Description   | Average daily reach  | Ownership   |
|-----------|-----------------|---|--|---|
| VnExpress | Online, digital | Vietnamese- and English-language online newspaper for politics, economics, finance, travel, and food. VnExpress publishes an average of 500 pieces daily. <sup>37</sup> Describes itself as the “most viewed Vietnamese newspaper.” <sup>38</sup> | 46 million regular users; 15.8 billion page views a year. 27,400 YouTube followers, 16,800 Twitter followers <sup>39</sup> | FPT Group, a major ICT conglomerate. Editor-in-chief Thang Duc Thang <sup>40</sup> Under the Ministry of Science and Technology <sup>41</sup> |
| Yan News  | Online, digital | Vietnamese-language online media outlet that produces digital print and video content news and entertainment for young people in Vietnam.   | 17,206,278 Facebook followers  | Yan Media Group <sup>42</sup>   |
| Zing News | Online, digital | Vietnamese-language outlet that covers breaking news, lifestyle, sports, economics, world news, and technology.   | 151 million page views per month <sup>43</sup>   | Vietnam Publishing association, under the Central Propaganda and Education Department <sup>44</sup>   |
| 24h       | Online, digital | Tabloid news and entertainment.   | 8 million Facebook followers   | 24h online advertising corporation <sup>45</sup>  |

Source: CNA.

**Table 2. Key television outlets**

| Name                    | Type of media          | Description  | Average daily reach*    | Ownership  |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| THVL1 (TH Vinh Long 1)  | Free-to-air television | Vinh Long Province’s television station, news and entertainment. | 3,008,992 daily viewers | Vinh Long Province                                   |
| (HTV7) TH Ho Chi Minh 7 | Free-to-air television | General entertainment.   | 1,905,377 daily viewers | People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City <sup>46</sup> |
| VTV1                    | Free-to-air television | Vietnam’s original television station, now an all-news channel.  | 1,904,605 daily viewers | Government of Vietnam                                |

Source: CNA.

\*Average daily reach according to 2019 Nielsen data

**Table 3. Key domestic actors: radio**

| Name                   | Type of media | Description  | Average daily reach  | Ownership  |
|------------------------|---------------|--|--|--|
| Voice of Vietnam (VOV) | Radio         | National broadcaster, with nationwide stations and broadcasts including news, music, and entertainment. Has two 24/7 English frequencies and broadcasts short segments in 12 languages (including a daily one-hour Chinese segment). <sup>47</sup> | Available nationally, broadcast by provincial VOV stations | Vietnamese government  |
| Voice of HCMC (VOH)    | Radio         | Communicates the standpoint of the party, the state, and the city to all citizens. <sup>48</sup>   | Limited to southern Vietnam                                | Under the administration of the Ho Chi Minh City Service of Culture and Communication, HCMC Communist Party Commission <sup>49</sup> |

Source: CNA.

**Table 4. Key domestic actors: newspapers**

| Name                | Type of media                | Description  | Average daily reach   | Ownership  |
|---------------------|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <i>Tuổi Trẻ</i>     | Newspaper, print, and online | Covers education and culture, business, economic reforms, social welfare, health, environmental issues, unemployment, urban development, and lifestyle.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 500,000 copies per day<sup>50</sup></li> <li>• 2.4 million Facebook followers</li> <li>• 404,000 YouTube subscribers</li> </ul>      | Hồ Chí Minh Communist Youth Union <sup>51</sup>                  |
| <i>Thanh Niên</i>   | Newspaper, print, and online | Official news and information on politics, social, economic, education, culture, sports, and opinion pieces.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 300,000 copies per day<sup>52</sup></li> <li>• 1.8 million Facebook followers</li> <li>• 2.25 million YouTube subscribers</li> </ul> | Official tribune of Vietnam’s Youth Association <sup>53</sup>    |
| <i>Nhân Dân</i>     | Newspaper, print, and online | “Central Organ of the Communist Party of Vietnam” and “The Voice of the Party, State and People of Vietnam” <sup>54</sup> Available online in English, Vietnamese, and Chinese. <sup>55</sup>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 220,000 copies per day<sup>56</sup></li> <li>• 18,000 Facebook followers</li> <li>• 1.2 million YouTube subscribers</li> </ul>       | Owned and operated by the CPV                                    |
| <i>Vietnam News</i> | Newspaper, print, and online | English-language daily newspaper, publishes seven days a week in print and maintains online news portal. Covers domestic and international news, socioeconomic issues, and sports. <sup>57</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulation unknown</li> <li>• 23,649 Facebook followers</li> <li>• 35,000 YouTube subscribers</li> </ul>                            | Operates under the management and oversight of VNA <sup>58</sup> |

Source: CNA.

## 1.4 Key factors that shape Vietnam's information environment

Several factors shape Vietnam's information environment. These include the following:

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

### 1.4.1 Regulations on press or individual freedoms of speech

Vietnam currently ranks very low in terms of press freedom. France-based Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) ranked Vietnam 176 out of 180 countries on its World Press Freedom Index, noting that “all Vietnamese media follow communist party orders, and the only source of independently-reported information are bloggers and citizen journalists, who are subject to ever-harsher persecution [such as] plainclothes police violence.”<sup>59</sup> In October 2019, The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ranked Vietnam as one of the 10 most censored countries on earth (at number 6). Vietnam's “raft of repressive laws and decrees,” it wrote, “sharply [curtail] any media criticism of the one-party government, its policies, and its performance” via digital technologies.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, Freedom House scores Vietnam 1 out of 4 for free and independent media.<sup>61</sup> The Vietnamese government uses the following tools to manage the media:

- Party guidance
- Laws and regulations
- Control over the allocation and renewal of print and broadcasting licenses
- Censorship
- Encouragement of self-censorship

#### Party guidance

At the highest level, the CPV's Central Propaganda and Education Commission (CPEC) works together with the government's MIC to ensure that all of the nation's media conforms to party guidance.<sup>62</sup> As noted previously, news editors-in-chief are legally required to be CPV members and all journalists must be party accredited.<sup>63</sup> Vietnamese journalists interviewed by Al Jazeera



have confirmed that they signed papers affirming that their jobs included protecting the country in addition to being journalists.<sup>64</sup>

### **Media Development and Management Plan Until 2025**

In April 2019, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc approved a plan for developing and managing Vietnam's national press through 2025. According to *Nhan Dan*, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the objective of the plan is to reduce redundancy within the press system and improve multimedia capabilities within the six major media outlets and agencies of the national press system: VNA, VOV, VTV, *People's Army Newspaper*, *People's Public Security Newspaper*, and *Nhan Dan*. The plan emphasizes the development of modern multimedia capabilities, while maintaining State and Party control. The main points of the plan can be summarized as follows:

- To reaffirm that the press is an important means of communication, propaganda, and thought for Party and State, under the direct and comprehensive leadership of the Party.
- To develop the media in line with modern information needs, intellectual and cultural development, while propagating the Party's positions, policies, and laws.
- To adopt state and market financial mechanisms and policies that create the conditions to allow media to serve its political purpose and not be driven by profit, nor allow private ownership or interest groups to dominate the press.
- To securely develop journalism and media in line with the trends of science, technology, and modern information and communication development.

Source: "Press Development Planning until 2025 Approved," *Nhan Dan*, Apr. 4, 2019, accessed Sep. 1, 2020, <https://en.nhandan.com.vn/politics/domestic/item/7317502-over-1-800-entries-submitted-to-vietnam?PageSpeed=noscript>; "Approval of the national press development and management planning until 2025," (QUYẾT ĐỊNH: Phê duyệt Quy hoạch phát triển và quản lý báo chí toàn quốc đến năm 2025), Ministry of Information and Communication, Apr. 4, 2019, Decision No. 362-QĐ/TTg, accessed Sep. 1, 2020, [https://www.mic.gov.vn/Upload\\_Moi/VanBan/QD362.pdf](https://www.mic.gov.vn/Upload_Moi/VanBan/QD362.pdf).

## Laws

The Vietnamese party state governs its media through a system of strict laws and regulations. Key laws are described in Table 5.

Table 5. Key media laws

| Law                            | Description  | Key articles   |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>1999 Law on Media</b>       | The law states that, “the State is to organize information for the media and manage the information of the media;” and the “press is prohibited from reporting on information that could be considered ‘untruthful, distorted, or slanderous and harmful’ to an individual or organization.” <sup>65</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2006 Decree – Defines 200 additional violations in culture and information.<sup>66</sup></li> <li>• 2011 Decree – Restricts the use of pseudonyms and anonymous sources. Also excludes bloggers from press protections.<sup>67</sup></li> <li>• 2013 Decree – Prohibits sharing “compiled information” on social media.<sup>68</sup></li> </ul> |
| <b>2016 Press Law</b>          | The law states that the press must serve as the voice of the party, party organizations, and state agencies. Censorship is enforced through government directives to newspaper, radio, and TV editors, commanding topics that are to be highlighted and omitted. <sup>69</sup>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Article 88 – Bans dissemination of anti-government propaganda.</li> <li>• Article 79 – Ban on activities for overthrowing the state.</li> <li>• Article 258 – Prohibits the “abuse of democratic freedoms” to undermine state interests.<sup>70</sup></li> </ul>  |
| <b>2018 Cyber Security Law</b> | Regulates technology companies that operate in Vietnam, mandates companies to store information about Vietnamese users in Vietnam, making it accessible to state authorities, and restricts the Internet connections of users who post “prohibited” content. <sup>71</sup>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The law bans people from using online platforms to “insult great men, national leaders, historical figures, and national heroes,” to “distort history, undermine national solidarity, or to disseminate untrue information that stirs obfuscation among the people.”<sup>72</sup></li> </ul>  |

Source: CNA.

State-run media outlets have been punished for violating these laws. In 2018, Vietnam's MIC announced that the state-run *Tuoi Tre* newspaper would be suspended for three months and fined 20 million dong (US \$10,000) for a June 2018 report that authorities said “misquoted President Tan Dai Quang endorsing a law on public demonstrations.”<sup>73</sup>

## Licensing

The MIC is in charge of licensing for media outlets. The MIC is the policymaking and regulatory body for the press, publishing, post, telecommunications, radio frequency, information technology, electronics, broadcasting, media, foreign information, domestic information, national information and communication infrastructure, and management of related public services on behalf of the government. The MIC's functions, duties, and responsibilities are outlined in Government Decree No. 17/2017/ND-CP, dated February 17, 2017.<sup>74</sup> According to MIC statistics, there are more than 65 licensed ISPs in Vietnam.<sup>75</sup>

## Censorship

Propaganda officials require editors of major media outlets to meet regularly to discuss topics that are off-limits for reporting. CPEC and the MIC convene these meetings in Hanoi to review media activities conducted during the previous week, and deliver guidance on topics to be reported on in the coming week.<sup>76</sup> The MIC and the military both play a role in domestic online censorship. In December 2017, the military unveiled a 10,000-strong military cyberwarfare department called "Force 47," which is tasked with defending the Party and targeting dissident bloggers.<sup>77</sup> There have been reports that Vietnamese authorities responsible for internet censorship have coordinated with Chinese counterparts.<sup>78</sup>

The MIC also restricts online advertising funding for content it deems "anti-state," in an attempt to further censor the online media environment. In 2019, the MIC's Authority of Broadcasting and Electronic Information told dozens of brands to pull their ads from YouTube videos that contain "anti-state propaganda." The request was made after the MIC reported the reoccurrence of advertising attached to videos containing illegal and malicious content. The list of offending firms included Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd.<sup>79</sup>

## Self-censorship

Self-censorship is reportedly pervasive in Vietnam, including among independent journalists and bloggers, because of the threat of dismissal and possible arrest. The government has punished journalists for failing to self-censor, including by revoking press credentials.<sup>80</sup> In November 2018, for instance, the CPV publicly denounced Chu Hao, then-director and editor-in-chief of the Tri Thuc Publishing House, for "disobeying the Party's regulations" and "self-evolution." Hao, a former vice minister of science and technology and a prominent intellectual, had directed Tri Thuc to publish books with themes of freedom and democracy, which the CPV inspection body said indicated Chu Hao's "degeneracy in political thought, ethics and lifestyle." Hao left the CPV and, as a result, lost his position at Tri Thuc.<sup>81</sup>

## 1.4.2 Regulatory framework for managing foreign media actors

Foreign media is highly regulated in Vietnam. Key aspects of government regulation include the following:

- **Foreign media must obtain licenses to operate in Vietnam.** The MIC can revoke the licenses of foreign publishers; and foreign publishers must renew their licenses annually.<sup>82</sup> According to the Associated Press (AP), foreign media representatives are allowed to live in Vietnam but are subject to restrictions on where they can travel and what they can report.<sup>83</sup>
- **The government controls visas for foreign journalists.** Major foreign media outlets have reported that the government delayed or refused to issue visas for reporters who previously covered sensitive political topics, particularly reporters for the overseas Vietnamese-language press.<sup>84</sup>
- **Regulations limit the number of foreign broadcast channels.** According to MIC regulations, the number of foreign channels included in a paid radio or television service package “will not account for more than 30 percent of the total number of channels.”<sup>85</sup>
- **Regulations limit the volume of foreign-produced broadcast content that can be aired domestically.** According to a report in the state-run *Vietnam News*, the MIC asks radio and television stations to ensure that 70 percent of programs are domestically produced and only 30 percent are foreign.<sup>86</sup> The law requires “live” foreign television programming to run on a 30- to 60-minute delay to enable content monitoring.<sup>87</sup>
- **Foreign broadcast content must be translated by state-approved translators.** Foreign channels must be translated into Vietnamese by an organization that is licensed to edit foreign broadcasting channels and has an authorized agent in Vietnam to fulfill its financial obligations under Vietnamese regulations.<sup>88</sup> The MIC appears to be on track to amend Decree 6 on Broadcasting and TV Services to regulate on-demand content in a way that has raised concern by foreign media companies because of additional translation and editing requirements, prohibition of pre-installed advertisements, and other licensing hurdles.<sup>89</sup>
- **Foreign channels are not allowed to broadcast foreign-produced advertisements.** Regulations require that foreign channels must not broadcast advertisements from abroad. Advertising content must be prepared in Vietnam, edited by a government-licensed unit, and comply with Vietnamese advertising law.<sup>90</sup>
- **Foreigners cannot be majority owners of domestic telecom companies.** Vietnamese law prohibits majority ownership of facilities-based basic telecom companies. The law states that foreign investment in facilities-based basic telecom services is possible through licensed telecom service providers. However, foreign capital contributions cannot exceed 49 percent of legal capital in the joint venture. For non-facilities-based basic telecom

services, foreign capital contribution cannot exceed 65 percent of the legal capital in the joint venture. In the case of virtual private networks (VPNs), foreign capital contribution may not exceed 70 percent of legal joint venture capital.<sup>91</sup>

Of note, according to the central-level VNA, joint production of radio and television news or political broadcasts does not count as foreign content. A domestic media entity licensed to produce broadcasts for domestic channels may select its partners (foreign or domestic) to produce joint programming or channels. The domestic agency takes responsibility for the content and ensure that it is in accordance with the press law.<sup>92</sup>

### 1.4.3 Foreign media presence and access to foreign media

Foreign media content and news bureaus are present in the Vietnamese media environment, though they are tightly controlled. According to the CPJ, there are no independent or non-state online news outlets permitted in Vietnam apart from the Catholic Church-run *Redemptorist News*.<sup>93</sup> Foreign news agencies from the US, France, Russia, China, and elsewhere have bureaus in Vietnam, from which they report for their respective global services. AP, Reuters, and Bloomberg have bureaus in the Vietnamese capitol, Hanoi; Bloomberg also has a bureau in the more business-oriented Ho Chi Minh City.<sup>94</sup> As of 2017, 50 foreign TV channels were licensed to broadcast on subscription services.<sup>95</sup> China's Xinhua and *People's Daily* have bureaus in Hanoi, as does France's national news agency, Agence France-Presse (AFP), which also provides journalism and multimedia training to VNA staff.<sup>96</sup> According to its website, VNA maintains bilateral and multilateral partnerships with more than 40 international media organizations. It is a member of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA), the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool (NANAP), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) News Exchange (ANEX).<sup>97</sup>

Because of Vietnam's history as French colony, French media continues to have a presence in the Vietnamese media environment. AFP has a bureau in Hanoi.<sup>98</sup> France 24, a state-owned TV news broadcaster based in Paris has a distribution agreement with five Vietnamese TV operators, including two of the largest: FPT Telecom and VNPT Media Corporation.<sup>99</sup> According to local media reports, the French channel (which predominately airs English programming) now has deals with Vietnamese broadcast companies including VTVcab, Viettel, HTV-TMS, Clip TV and K+, "making it available to 2.2 million additional families, bringing the total audience to 3.75 million Vietnamese families, representing nearly 30 percent of the Vietnamese houses equipped with a television set."<sup>100</sup> France 24 was the first international channel in three years to receive this authorization from MIC.<sup>101</sup>

Although regulations ensure that 70 percent of available media content is domestically produced, foreign entertainment media is popular. According to Lan Khanh Phung, general manager of Yan Media Group, one of Vietnam’s largest media groups, “Chinese, Korean, Indian, US and European localized content have been performing well in the Vietnamese market.”<sup>102</sup> Table 6, below, summarizes key foreign actors in Vietnam’s information environment, ranked according to their social media following.

**Table 6. External actors in Vietnam’s information environment**

| Name                          | Type of media                                 | Description   | Ownership              | Social media following                      |
|-------------------------------|---|---|------------------------|---|
| Voice of America - Vietnamese | FM radio, streaming TV, video, print, digital | Radio: 3.5 hours per week<br>TV: 2.5 hours per week<br>News and feature stories about Vietnam, the US, and the world via TV, radio, and the internet. <sup>103</sup>  | US government (USAGM)  | 2,988,303 Facebook followers <sup>104</sup> |
| BBC - Vietnamese              | Streaming audio, print, digital               | Digital print news and translated/subtitled videos about Vietnam, the world, economics, and learning English. <sup>105</sup>  | UK public company      | 2,688,972 Facebook followers <sup>106</sup> |
| CRI - Vietnamese              | FM radio, streaming TV, video, print, digital | Vietnamese-language digital print and audio; two daily Vietnamese newscasts totaling 90 minutes of audio programming. <sup>107</sup>  | PRC government         | 1,947,959 Facebook followers <sup>108</sup> |
| Radio Free Asia - Vietnamese  | Streaming audio, video, print, digital        | RFA Vietnamese is now all digital; Digital print news and daily videos totaling approximately two hours of video per week. <sup>109</sup>   | US government (USAGM)  | 1,354,769 Facebook followers <sup>110</sup> |
| RFI - Vietnamese              | Streaming audio, print, digital               | Two daily Vietnamese audio broadcasts, totaling 60 minutes, plus digital, print, and video news and cultural content in Vietnamese. <sup>111</sup>  | French government      | 168,899 Facebook followers <sup>112</sup>   |
| France 24                     | Pay TV  | Subscription packages carrying France 24 are paid for by 3.75 million households, representing nearly 30 percent of the Vietnamese houses equipped with a television set. <sup>113</sup>  | French government      | N/A   |
| BBRTV (Beibu Gulf Radio & TV) | Digital print, streaming audio and video      | Digital print news and entertainment from CRI and Guangxi Radio in Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese, and English. BBRTV Vietnamese Facebook page updated daily with local-language content, despite only having 65 followers. <sup>114</sup> | Guangxi People’s Radio | 65 Facebook followers <sup>115</sup>        |

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

#### 1.4.4 Diversity of foreign partners

According to the MIC, Vietnam's approach to international partnership in the ICT sector includes bilateral and multilateral agreements. In recent years, the MIC has signed bilateral agreements with ministries and regulators in ICT sectors from countries including South Korea, Japan, India, China, Laos, Cambodia, England, France, Slovakia, Hungary, Iran, and others.<sup>116</sup> While Vietnam has not relied on foreign development assistance for domestic media capabilities, the MIC considers foreign financial relationships "important to mobilize international resources and support Vietnamese ICT enterprises to increase their foreign investment and business cooperation through investment promotion programs and forums to be organized annually in Viet Nam and other countries."<sup>117</sup> Of note, Vietnam's largest mobile telecom company—state-owned Viettel, operated by the country's Ministry of Defense—has developed its own 5G network. Viettel's CEO has expressed concern over Huawei's security practices, saying, "Many other countries, including the US, have found evidence that showed using Huawei is not safe for the security of the national network."<sup>118</sup>

Foreign governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have provided some financial support and capacity building for Vietnamese journalism and media development. This support to Vietnamese media appears to be channeled through a number of domestic media training institutes under the official authority of the MIC and the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations.<sup>119</sup> Examples of domestic media organizations and their foreign partners are described in Table 7.

China's role as a foreign partner to Vietnamese media development appears primarily in the form of various "trainings" hosted in China under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation framework and through translation and dubbing provided by the Guangxi People's Radio Multimedia Translation Center.<sup>120</sup> China's relatively low ODA to Vietnam and lack of development support for Vietnamese media likely stem from ongoing tension over the two countries' overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea.

**Table 7. Select foreign sources of support for Vietnamese media**

| Vietnamese organization   | Foreign partner  | Description   |
|---|--|---|
| Vietnamese Journalists Training Centre of the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy                | Fulbright Program (United States)                            | Fulbright Program and State Department support for journalist training. <sup>121</sup>  |
| Media Training Centre of the Ministry of Information and Culture                                    | Fojo Media Institute (Sweden)                                | Sweden’s Fojo Media Institute has worked to support Vietnamese media development since 1998. <sup>122</sup>                             |
| Media and Development Initiatives of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations       | Danish Embassy (Denmark)                                     | Danish Embassy support for investigative journalism workshops. <sup>123</sup>   |
| Media and Development Initiatives (MDI) of the Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations | Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) (US-based)    | MDI translating GIJN training materials into Vietnamese for local media. <sup>124</sup>   |
| The Academy of Journalism and Communication under the Ministry of Education                         | Middlesex University (United Kingdom)                        | Middlesex University in cooperation with the Vietnamese Academy offers a BA in media, advertising, and public relations. <sup>125</sup> |
| Quang Ninh Television and Radio Station   | Guangxi People’s Radio Multimedia Translation Center (China) | Translation of Chinese television, radio, and other media into Vietnamese. <sup>126</sup>   |

Source: CNA.



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


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The Chinese Party state has developed an extensive and wide-ranging array of tactics, techniques, and tools for shaping narratives in the international media. These include the following:

- Tailoring the content produced by China's state-run media outlets so that it is more accessible, credible, and compelling to foreign audiences.
- Maximizing channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content to reach as broad an audience as possible.
- Attempting to influence foreign media outlets and journalists to promote China-friendly narratives and suppress narratives that China finds objectionable.
- Using entertainment as a means of promoting China's narratives to global audiences beyond the news media.

This section focuses on China's employment of these tactics, techniques, and tools to shape the media environment in Vietnam. The checklist in Table 8 offers a framework for taking stock of China's efforts to shape the media environment in a particular place, in this case Vietnam. The checkmarks indicate tools China currently employs in the Vietnam information environment; question marks indicate tactics for which we have not yet observed evidence of use in Vietnam, but that are worthy of continued monitoring.

Table 8. Checklist: China’s playbook for shaping the information environment in Vietnam

|       | China’s playbook for shaping the information environment in Vietnam |
|--|---|
| <b>Tailoring PRC media content to appeal to Vietnam audiences</b>                      |   |
| ✓  | Producing content in Vietnamese language                            |
| ✓  | Reporting on China's activities in Vietnam                          |
| ?  | Reporting on local events that do not necessarily involve China     |
| ✓  | Recruiting local voices in Vietnam                                  |
| <b>Maximizing channels for distribution of China’s narratives</b>                      |   |
| ✓  | Selling or providing content for free to Vietnamese media           |
| ✓  | Jointly producing content with Vietnamese media outlets             |
| ✓  | Authoring opinion pieces for Vietnamese media outlets               |
| ?  | Buying space in Vietnamese media                                    |
| ✓  | Establishing a presence on foreign social media                     |
| ?  | Investing in Vietnamese media outlets                               |
| ?  | Investing in Vietnamese telecommunications infrastructure           |
| <b>Attempting to influence foreign media to promote only China-friendly narratives</b> |   |
| ?  | Promoting self-censorship among Vietnam’s journalists and scholars  |
| ?  | Purchasing a right to shape content                                 |
| ✓  | Hosting international media forums and conferences                  |
| ✓  | Hosting training and cooperation programs                           |
| <b>Using entertainment to promote Chinese narratives</b>                               |   |
| ✓  | Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment                            |
| ?  | Investing in the Vietnamese film industry                           |
| ?  | Promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms                     |

### **Chinese academics advocate strategy for tailoring content to Southeast Asian audiences**

In a 2019 article in the Chinese journal *International Communications*, published by the China International Publishing Group under State Council Information Office guidance, Chinese academics advocated the development of a long-term strategy for strategic communications targeted at Southeast Asia. Doing so would promote Chinese messages and counter US strategic communications aimed at the region. Elements of the proposed strategy include the following:

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

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

## **2.1 PRC narratives targeted at audiences in Vietnam**

China promotes narratives that it wants told in the international media. It does this to (1) promote a positive image of China, (2) counter Beijing’s critics, and (3) support China’s national objectives. (See Appendix B for China’s global narratives.) China tailors these narratives to target audiences in specific regions or countries. China seeks to promote several key narratives to audiences in Vietnam, including the following:

- **China and Vietnam have a shared heritage.** PRC media directed at audiences in Vietnam promotes the narrative that the two countries are inextricably linked by shared cultures, socialist ideologies, and geography. PRC officials describe this relationship with the “16 Golden Words,” which roughly translate into English as “friendly neighbors, comprehensive cooperation, long-term stability and future

oriented."<sup>127</sup> Of note, multiple local media experts said that Vietnamese media and netizens often ridicule the “16 Golden Words” and view them as disingenuous.<sup>128</sup>

- ***China is willing to set aside its differences with Vietnam and pursue greater cooperation.*** PRC media and official statements targeted at audiences in Vietnam portray China as willing to set aside bilateral differences over conflicting South China Sea territorial claims in order to pursue greater cooperation. PRC media highlights China’s willingness to cooperate on various issues (e.g., the “door to cooperation on fisheries is open”) and downplays frictions. Of note, local media experts expressed surprise that Chinese media directed towards Vietnamese audiences even attempt to promote this narrative, with one expert saying, “it is not getting through,” while another said, “it has no value in Vietnam.”<sup>129</sup>
- ***China is a more responsible international actor than the US.*** PRC media targeted at audiences in Vietnam promotes the narrative that the US behaves irresponsibly and unilaterally on the international stage while repressing the rights of its own people. At the same time, PRC media highlights China’s “support for multilateral institutions” and its provision of aid to Vietnam and other foreign countries, most notably in the fight against COVID-19.

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

## 2.2 Tailoring PRC media content

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

- Producing content in languages spoken in Vietnam
- Reporting on local events
- Recruiting local voices in Vietnam

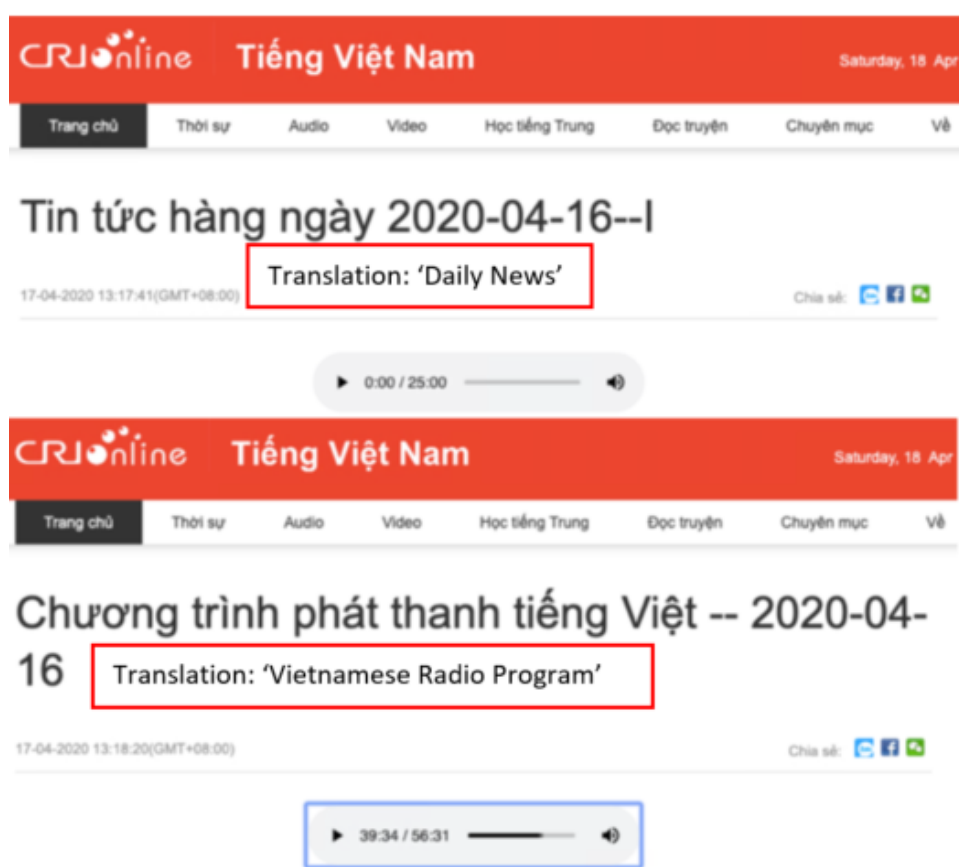


### 2.2.1 Producing content in Vietnamese

China Radio International (CRI) is the primary PRC state-run media outlet that publishes in Vietnamese. While CRI did not have an office in Hanoi until 2018, CRI has produced Vietnamese-language content since 1950, with the stated goal of educating “Vietnamese audiences about the Chinese people” and serving as a “media bridge that connects people between the two countries.”<sup>130</sup> Today, Vietnamese-language news is available on CRI’s

Vietnamese website (Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc), Facebook page, digital streaming radio, and broadcasts on frequency 9550 kHz. CRI produces two daily Vietnamese newscasts totaling 90 minutes of daily Vietnamese programming.<sup>131</sup> According to a 2014 Facebook post on its official account, CRI's Vietnamese service had 19 staff members at the time.<sup>132</sup> Despite CRI's long-standing local presence, Vietnamese media experts said that the introduction of widespread internet access has given local audiences more options for sources of international news. This, in conjunction with rising anti-China sentiment, has decreased the popularity of CRI's Vietnamese broadcasts and other local-language news offerings.<sup>133</sup>

Figure 3. CRI Vietnamese “Daily News” and “Vietnamese Radio Program” broadcasts



Source: CRI, “Vietnamese Radio Program,” chương trình phát thanh tiếng việt, China Radio International Vietnamese, CRI tiếng việt Nam, Apr. 16, 2020, accessed Apr. 20, 2020, <http://vietnamese.cri.cn/20200417/cc6f3eed-f038-38ca-40d8-e9b226d7c3e5.html>.; CRI, “Daily News,” tin tức hàng ngày, China Radio International Vietnamese, CRI tiếng việt, Apr. 16, 2020, accessed Apr. 18, 2020, <http://vietnamese.cri.cn/20200417/30bd38e3-2c26-ce27-57fb-d5fe4ae94ca4.html>.

CRI's online print Vietnamese content focuses on China and its role in global events. Beyond audio and print news, other CRI Vietnamese pages include Chinese-language learning and video news clips from CCTV channels in either Chinese or English with Vietnamese subtitles, and translated audio versions of popular historical Chinese literature.

At the time of writing this report, many of CRI's recent Vietnamese print news pieces focused on China's domestic "successes" combating COVID-19, China's support for the World Health Organization (WHO) and other countries, and attacks on the US for its "politicization" of the virus.<sup>134</sup> CRI's Vietnamese outlet has a significant footprint on Facebook, with 1.952 million followers.<sup>135</sup> Several recent examples of CRI items published on the CRI Vietnamese homepage and Facebook page are listed below. Their headlines and content promote the narrative that China is a more responsible international actor than the US, especially on COVID-19:

- **"Surprisingly Robbing Masks-Culmination of America's 'Selfish Nationalism'."** The report quotes German media alleging that masks purchased by Germany from China "were blocked by the US abroad and shipped to the US." The CRI report quotes Berlin Secretary of Interior Andreas Geisel: "This behavior is no different than 'modern piracy'." The report goes on to say that because of "American robbers, countries are forced to protect materials in extraordinary ways," while the "Defense Production Law prevents [the US] from exporting its country's medical materials."<sup>136</sup>
- **"Mr. Bill Gates: Chinese Experience Brings Important Changes to Prevention of Plague in the World."**<sup>137</sup> The article draws from a CCTV interview with Bill Gates and quotes his remark that, "China's experience provides a model for prevention for countries that are equally or more developed than China." The author of the article contends that the COVID-19 crisis demands greater international cooperation.<sup>138</sup>
- **"China Firmly Supports the Work of WHO, Condemning the Personal Attack on General Director Tedros."**<sup>139</sup> The article quotes the Chinese Foreign minister condemning the US for "borrowing the plague to play politics" and for its "words of racism against General Director Tedros." The article notes that China, along with the European Union and other countries, supports the World Health Organization (WHO) and its work as the "international community needs to strengthen epidemic prevention cooperation."<sup>140</sup>

Figure 4. CRI Vietnamese Facebook article: “Mr. Bill Gates: Chinese Experience Brings Important Changes to Prevention of Plague in the World”



Source: CRI Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc, “Mr. Bill Gates: Chinese Experience Brings Important Changes to Prevention, Prevention of Plague in the World,” Ông Bill Gates: Kinh nghiệm Trung Quốc mang lại thay đổi quan trọng cho phòng, chống dịch bệnh trên thế giới, Facebook, Apr. 9, 2020, accessed Apr. 10, 2020,.

In addition to CRI, Beibu Gulf Online broadcasts in Vietnamese. Beibu Gulf Online was jointly formed by CRI 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. According to Chinese media, “Beibu Gulf Online” (BBRTV.com) is a network-oriented new media dedicated to ASEAN countries, with webpages in simplified Chinese, English, Vietnamese, and Thai. As of 2018, it received 20,000 unique visitors from ASEAN countries.<sup>141</sup>

Xinhua does not have a Vietnamese stand-alone website, but it is active on Twitter, where tweets appear in Vietnamese, with 52,600 followers (see Figure 5).<sup>142</sup>

Figure 5. Xinhua Vietnamese tweet critiquing US funding halt to WHO



*UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on April 14 said: “The World Health Organization (WHO) must be supported”, this is not the time to cut down funding for WHO after the General President Donald Trump announced that the US would stop funding this organization.*

Source: Twitter.

China.com’s Vietnamese-language website, China.com Tiếng Việt, features news and entertainment coverage from CRI and the China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN). China.com is an official PRC site, hosted by the China Internet Information Center, under the auspices of the China International Publishing Group and the State Council Information Office. Of note, as of the time of writing, the China.com Tiếng Việt website had not been updated in 123 days.<sup>143</sup>

Table 9. Chinese state-run media outlets that produce local-language content in Vietnam

| Media outlet                              | Vietnamese | English |
|---|------------|---------|
| China Radio International (CRI; 中国国际广播电台) | ✓          | ✓       |
| Beibu Gulf Online (北部湾在线)                 | ✓          | ✓       |
| China.com (中华网)                           | ✓          | ✓       |
| Xinhua News Agency (新华社)                  | ✓          | ✓       |
| China News Service (中国新闻社)                | ✗          | ✓       |
| <i>China Daily</i>                        | ✗          | ✓       |
| China Global Television Network (CGTN)    | ✗          | ✓       |
| <i>People’s Daily</i> (人民日报)              | ✗          | ✓       |
| <i>Global Times</i> (环球时报)                | ✗          | ✓       |

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



## 2.2.2 Reporting on China’s activities in Vietnam

Where possible, PRC state-run media leverages partnerships with local news outlets to produce reporting on local events. In Vietnam, however, the vast majority of Vietnamese-language content produced by PRC media is about China’s role in global events, not local events. For instance, CRI’s Vietnamese site—the PRC outlet that produces the most Vietnamese content—devotes very little coverage to international issues involving Vietnam, and even fewer to domestic events in Vietnam. In a review of hundreds of CRI articles published between April 2019 and April 2020, only 19 headlines referred to Vietnam and only 2 were reports on domestic events (both COVID related).

For example, a 2019 CRI Vietnamese article titled “Prospects for China-Vietnam Fisheries Cooperation are Wide Open” promotes the narrative China is willing to set aside its differences with Vietnam and pursue greater cooperation. The article describes steps that the two countries can take to “lay an important foundation for exchanges and cooperation between the seafood enterprises of China and Vietnam.”<sup>144</sup> Of note, China and Vietnam share competing territorial claims in the South China Sea, including its fisheries. This CRI report is part of an



effort by Beijing to encourage Vietnam to set aside bilateral differences over territorial claims in favor of greater cooperation.

In an effort to promote the narrative that China and Vietnam have a shared political and cultural heritage, CRI Vietnamese featured a report on the annual Việt Nam-China Friendship Singing Contest, where contestants from each country perform songs in both Chinese and Vietnamese. This contest has been held annually since 2000; China and Vietnam alternate hosting the contest. CRI coverage of the event focuses on how it promotes cultural exchange and understanding.<sup>145</sup>

One of the most prominent narratives that PRC state-run media promotes to audiences in Vietnam is that China is a responsible international actor. For instance, in March 2020, CRI reported that the Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam, Xiong Bo, had distributed “health packages” to Chinese students studying at Hanoi University. The article asserts that the Chinese students and the Chinese Embassy—through their COVID-19 protection efforts on the Hanoi University campus—are helping to “form an international vision” and “are increasing understanding, which will become a bridge for Sino-Vietnamese friendship and cooperation.”<sup>146</sup>

The two CRI Vietnamese articles that focused exclusively on domestic events, rather than China’s activities, were both COVID-19 related. One article marked the day that Vietnam’s case count exceeded 100; the other was an article about a three-month-old child who became infected.<sup>147</sup>

Xinhua has a bureau in Hanoi and a Vietnamese-language Twitter account that posts tweets daily.<sup>148</sup> Reports filed from Xinhua Hanoi and posted in Vietnamese to Twitter are similar in form and content to those published by CRI Vietnamese in that they focus on China’s role in global events. When the articles pertain to Vietnam, the content promotes narratives advocating improved bilateral cooperation (including through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)), and highlighting China’s support to Vietnam’s fight against COVID-19. One recent Chinese-language report filed by two reporters at the Xinhua Hanoi bureau, titled “China and Vietnam Join Hands to Build a Safety Net for Epidemic Prevention and Control of the Hanoi Light Rail Project,” describes how Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) China Railway Sixth Bureau is “safely” constructing the Hanoi light rail. The report highlights the PRC SOE’s effort to keep employees and workers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>149</sup>

*People’s Daily* currently has one journalist in Vietnam, Liu Gang. According to the online repositories of Chinese-language stories filed from his post, he has been in Vietnam since at least December 2018 and publishes stories that focus on a range of Vietnam-China issues.<sup>150</sup>



### 2.2.3 Recruiting Vietnamese voices

PRC media often seeks to “borrow” foreign voices to amplify and lend credence to Chinese narratives by creating the appearance that they are espoused by others outside of China. Chinese state-run media targeted at audiences in Vietnam does this in two main ways: First, by quoting Vietnamese government officials, industry leaders, and average citizens in an effort to portray cooperation with China as beneficial. Second, at least one Chinese state-run media outlet—Xinhua—is seeking to recruit local voices directly by hiring Vietnamese journalists.

Examples of PRC media “borrowing” local voices by quoting Vietnamese citizens include the following:

- A 2019 Vietnamese-language CRI report quotes Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc saying, “The Party and State of Vietnam vow to seize the opportunity to build ‘one belt, one road,’ deepen exchange and cooperation in various fields with China, and open up new prospects for bilateral relations.”<sup>151</sup>
- A March 2020 report from Xinhua’s Hanoi bureau details how a Chinese SOE is keeping its workers safe from COVID-19 while continuing work on a Hanoi light rail project. The report quotes a “Vietnamese employee of the Hanoi Light Rail Project” stating that the company “insists on distributing masks to every employee every day, which makes us feel very safe.”<sup>152</sup>

China’s Xinhua news agency has a bureau in Hanoi that appears to be looking to hire local staff.<sup>153</sup> According to a Vietnamese job-posting website, the Xinhua Hanoi office has 10 to 20 office staff and is seeking a journalist/editor and two photojournalists.<sup>154</sup>

Figure 6. Xinhua Hanoi job postings for local reporters and photo journalists

**XINHUA NEWS AGENCY**  
JobsGO / Nhà tuyển dụng / Tân Hoa Xã Phân Xã Hà Nội

**Tân Hoa Xã Phân Xã Hà Nội**  
Báo chí/Biên tập viên  
Tân Hoa Xã (Xinhua News Agency) là hãng thông tấn nhà nước chính thức của Cộng hoà Nhân dân Trung Hoa. Tân Hoa Xã là cơ quan truyền thông lớn nhất và có ảnh hưởng nhất ở Trung Quốc, được thành lập ngày 7/11/1931.

Hiện nay, Trụ sở chính của Tân Hoa xã có 8 ban biên tập tin, 14 doanh nghiệp trực thuộc. Có 33 phân xã và 6 chi nhánh xã, 4 trạm phóng viên thường trú tại các tỉnh, thành, khu tự trị cùng Hồng Kông, Ma Cao; có phóng viên thường trú tại Đài Loan. Có 180 cơ quan thường trú tại nước ngoài, trong đó có 7 Tổng phân xã tại Hongkong, New York, Brussels, Cairo, Nairobi, Moscow, và Mexico. Tân Hoa xã hơn 10.000 nhân viên,...

Xem thêm ▾

**Thông tin liên hệ**  
6 Khúc Hạo, Điện Biên, Ba Đình, Hà Nội  
10-20 cán bộ/nhân viên

Source: “Xinhua News Agency, Hanoi,” Tân Hoa Xã Phân Xã Hà Nội, JobsGo.VN, accessed Apr. 17, 2020, <https://jobsgo.vn/tuyen-dung/tan-hoa-xa-phan-xa-ha-noi-211832400.html>.

## 2.3 Maximizing channels for distribution of China’s narratives

In addition to tailoring content, China also seeks to maximize the number and types of channels that it uses to distribute PRC-produced media content in Vietnam. China’s efforts to do so include the following:

- Using Vietnamese media outlets as channels for distributing Chinese-produced media content.
- Establishing a presence on social media platforms popular in Vietnam, especially Facebook.



### 2.3.1 Providing content to Vietnamese media

PRC media outlets seek to place their content in Vietnamese media through content-sharing agreements with Vietnamese media outlets. Given the tightly government-controlled media environment in Vietnam, having content-sharing agreements with the nation’s key actor, the VNA, would be one of the most effective ways to ensure that PRC media content reaches domestic audiences. Under one 2017 content-sharing agreement between VNA and

Xinhua, Vietnamese state-run media publishes some English-language Xinhua articles. The agreement does not include Xinhua providing VNA with Vietnamese content, and VNA outlets do not typically publish Vietnamese-language articles attributed to Xinhua in the byline.

According to the agreement Xinhua and VNA signed in 2017, “the two news units will exchange Chinese and English news and photos for free, and further their cooperation in multimedia, video news, and social media.”<sup>155</sup> In 2019, a report in the state-run *Viet Nam News* described the extent of the two news agencies’ content sharing, saying that “Xinhua’s English news is a major news source used by VNA, especially regarding China and Northeast Asia,” and that “VNA receives 5,000–6,000 photos from Xinhua each month, and sends about 10 photos to Xinhua each day.”<sup>156</sup>

Discussions with Vietnamese media experts confirmed that key local media outlets rarely publish Vietnamese-language PRC news. Several experts noted that 10 to 15 years ago, Xinhua and CRI news was more prevalent in the Vietnamese media environment, but as popular anti-China sentiment grew and the Vietnamese government relaxed restrictions on anti-China reporting, Western media sources like AP and CNN largely replaced Xinhua and CRI. One expert said simply that Xinhua “used to have some influence, but nowadays it is obsolete.”<sup>157</sup>

Based on a review of Xinhua content published by VNA outlets in English and Vietnamese, VNA outlets do appear to republish English Xinhua articles and Xinhua photos. However, in Vietnamese-language editions of VNA online news outlets such as *Nhan Dan*, *Thanh Nien*, and *Tuoi Tre*, Xinhua (written “Tân Hoa Xã in Vietnamese) is cited as a source of information, but the name of the VNA outlet appears in the byline. This may be because of the requirement that Vietnamese outlets translate English or Chinese Xinhua articles into Vietnamese. It may also be because the Vietnamese outlet has altered the article’s content. Bylines for these Vietnamese articles that include information from Xinhua typically appear as follows: “[VNA outlet abbreviation] – According to Xinhua News” (see Figure 7).<sup>158</sup> Conversely, English-language Xinhua articles appear without a VNA outlet byline, and with a “Xinhua” byline at the end of the article.<sup>159</sup>

Figure 7. *Nhan Dan* and *Tuoi Tre* citing Xinhua as a source



Source: “China Will Discuss Delaying the Time to Organize the Third Session of the 13th National Assembly,” Trung Quốc sẽ thảo luận lùi thời gian tổ chức Kỳ họp thứ ba Quốc hội khóa 13, *Nhan Dan*, Feb. 17, 2020, accessed Apr. 26, 2020, <https://www.nhandan.com.vn/thegioi/tin-tuc/item/43294902-trung-quoc-se-thao-luan-lui-thoi-gian-to-chuc-ky-hop-thu-ba-quoc-hoi-khoa-13.html>; “Xinhua Warned of the Risk of Coronavirus Transmitted through the Gastrointestinal Tract,” Tân Hoa xã cảnh báo nguy cơ virus corona lây qua đường tiêu hóa, *Tuoi Tre*, Feb. 2, 2020, accessed Apr. 26, 2020, <https://tuoitre.vn/tan-hoa-xa-can-bao-nguy-co-virus-corona-lay-qua-duong-tieu-hoa-20200202132114851.htm>.

VnExpress online, which claims to be Vietnam’s “most popular newspaper,” publishes Vietnamese-language articles from authoritative state-run PRC media and non-authoritative Chinese media.<sup>160</sup> Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic however, Xinhua articles focused on lifestyle topics appeared on VnExpress very infrequently. For example, a search for Xinhua articles in Vietnamese between May 2018 and May 2019 (one year) returns only two Xinhua articles: one about a Chinese man who kayaked alone from China to the Arctic Ocean and one about the 2016 Vietnamese Olympic pistol shooter Hoang Xuan Vinh.<sup>161</sup> Since the outbreak of COVID-19, VnExpress has republished more than a dozen Xinhua reports, all relating to COVID-19.<sup>162</sup> In addition to Xinhua content, VnExpress readers also see articles from commercial Chinese media outlets such as *Sohu*.<sup>163</sup>

Figure 8. Xinhua articles and video appear in Vietnamese in key digital newspaper

VN EXPRESS Thứ ba, 14/4/2020 24h Qua International

Đời sống Sức khỏe Giáo dục Pháp luật Thể thao Giải trí Kinh doanh Thế giới Góc nhìn ời sự

Sức khỏe > Tin tức Thứ bảy, 28/3/2020, 09:18 (GMT+7)

## Trung Quốc viện trợ 40 tấn thiết bị y tế cho Indonesia

Trung Quốc đóng gói các máy thở, bộ kit xét nghiệm nhanh, đồ bảo hộ... gửi đến hỗ trợ Indonesia khi tỷ lệ tử vong tại nước này tăng cao.

XinhuaVideo

Trung Quốc gửi 40 tấn trang thiết bị y tế hỗ trợ Indonesia trong cuộc chiến chống Covid-19.

Lê Cẩm (Theo Tân Hoa Xã)

Source: Xinhua, “China Provided 40 Tons of Medical Equipment to Indonesia,” Trung Quốc viện trợ 40 tấn thiết bị y tế cho Indonesia, VnExpress, Mar. 28, 2020, accessed Apr. 13, 2020, <https://vnexpress.net/trung-quoc-vien-tro-40-tan-thiet-bi-y-te-cho-indonesia-4076012.html>.

*Viet Nam News*, the country's state-run English-language daily, has republished Xinhua articles. A 2019 Xinhua article titled "China to stay on peaceful development path: Xi" ran in *Viet Nam News*, promoting the Chinese narrative that China's rise "will stay on the path of peaceful development, and pursue a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up."<sup>164</sup>

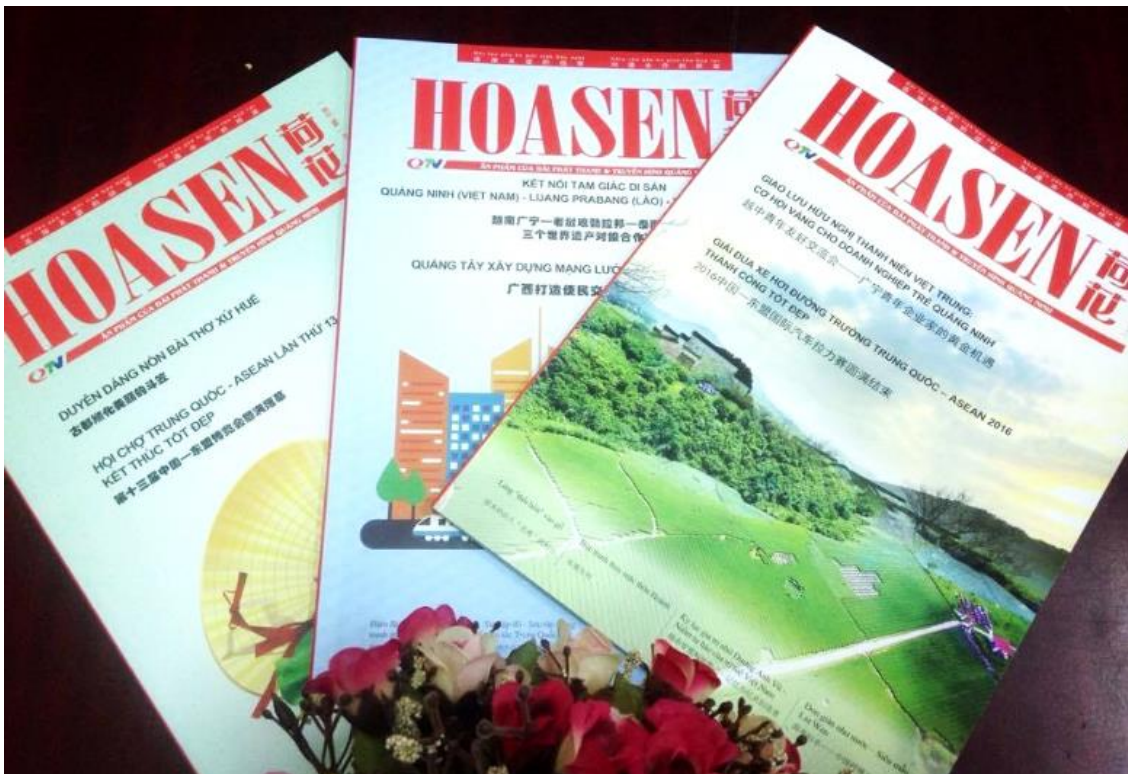


### 2.3.2 Jointly producing content with Vietnam media

Chinese and Vietnamese national and provincial media organizations have produced joint Vietnamese-language radio, television, and digital print content, as well as a print magazine. In each case we observed, Guangxi Radio and Television, a regional broadcaster based in Nanning operated by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Administration of Radio and TV, was the Chinese entity supporting coproduction.

China's Guangxi Radio and Television station jointly produces content with Vietnam's Quảng Ninh Media Group (QMG), from neighboring Quảng Ninh province. The two signed an MOU on cooperation in 2019, and according to a 2019 press release from the Quảng Ninh province news portal, the two media organizations have plans to jointly produce television and documentary films.<sup>165</sup> Currently, Guangxi Radio and Television and QMG jointly produce *Lotus Magazine*, the only Chinese-Vietnamese bilingual magazine in the country. Quảng Ninh province, where *Lotus* magazine is published, borders China's Guangxi province, and is a popular tourist destination for Chinese travelers. Published once a month since 2012, the magazine has a circulation in Vietnam of more than 10,000 copies. The magazine focuses on issues related to the improvement of cooperation and understanding between the two countries, with sections on culture, film, cuisine, news and events, and tourism.<sup>166</sup>

Figure 9. Lotus magazine, co-published by Guangxi Radio and Quang Ninh Television and Radio Station



Source: "Special Issue of Bilingual Hoa Sen Innovates to Bring Readers Closer," Đặc san song ngữ Hoa Sen đổi mới để đến gần hơn với độc giả, Quang Ninh TV (QTV), Jun. 18, accessed Apr. 20, 2020, <http://giocaodiem.qtv.vn/channel/5183/201706/dac-san-song-ngu-hoa-sen-doi-moi-de-den-gan-hon-voi-doc-gia-2558467/>.

Coproduction of media extends to theatrical television. Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, along with China's Guangxi Radio and Television station jointly produce the annual Việt Nam-China Friendship Singing Contest.<sup>167</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang have both attended events related to the contest held in Vietnam and China.<sup>168</sup>



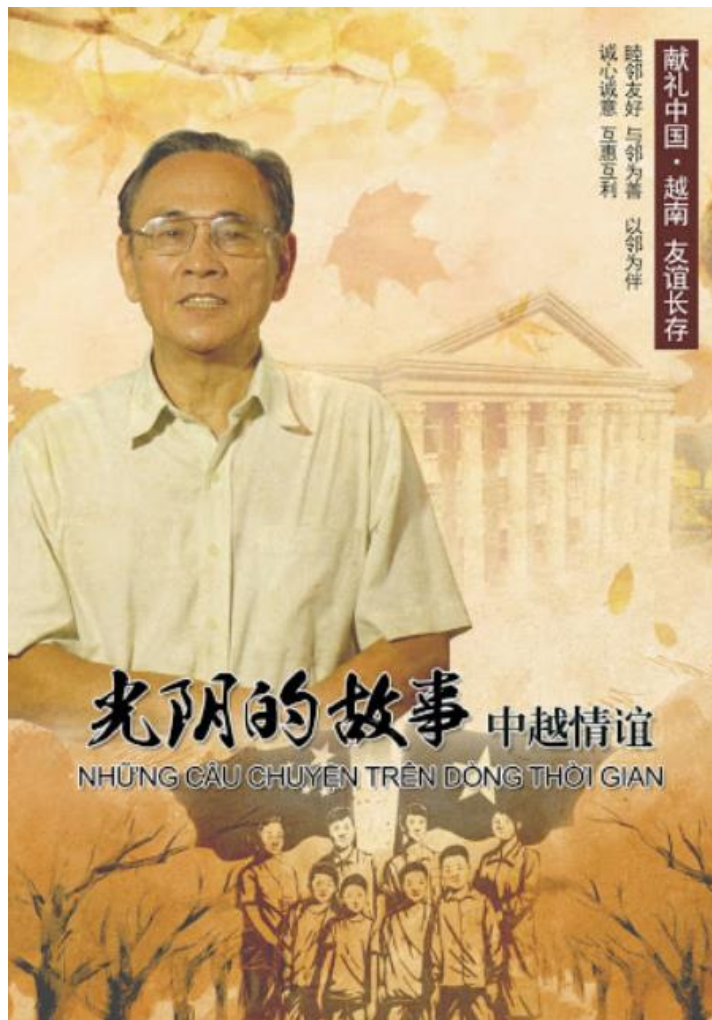
Figure 10. 2019 Việt Nam-China Friendship Singing Contest held in Hanoi



Source: “Singing Contest Strengthens Friendship between Việt Nam, China,” Viet Nam News, Dec. 26, 2019, accessed Apr. 20, 2020, <https://vietnamnews.vn/life-style/570404/singing-contest-strengthens-friendship-between-viet-nam-china.html>.

Guangxi Radio and Television also has ties to Vietnam’s state TV broadcaster, VTV.<sup>169</sup> One Chinese media report describes the Guangxi Television-VTV relationship as a “television bridge” between the two countries and peoples. The stations have coproduced programs that feature positive portrayals of Sino-Vietnamese, ties such as a two-part documentary called “The Story of Time: The Sino-Vietnamese Friendship” (光阴的故事-中越情谊), broadcast simultaneously on VTV and GXTV.<sup>170</sup> This program was produced for broadcast on CCTV’s international and documentary channels, as well as Vietnam’s VTV channels during the 2017 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Vietnam.<sup>171</sup> A *People’s Daily* article describes the documentary as “playing the role of cultural exchange and spiritual dialog that can eliminate prejudice and a bad mentality, and become a vanguard of the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative.” While it is clear that the documentary promotes Chinese narratives, it is unclear why VTV and the CPV agreed to “jointly-produce” and broadcast the documentary.<sup>172</sup>

Figure 11. VTV – Guangxi TV coproduced documentary series “The Story of Time – The Sino-Vietnamese Friendship”



Source: “Documentary: The Story of Time – The Sino-Vietnamese Friendship,” (*jilupian*) *guangming de gushi -- zhong yue qingyi*; 【纪录片】光阴的故事—中越情谊), CCTV YouTube Channel, Jan. 18, 2018, accessed Apr. 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7IPMKGj6ws>.

In 2018, Guangxi People’s Radio and Television station also agreed to coproduce television programs with VOV. Under the agreement, VOV sent reporters to China to produce pieces about the two countries’ relations and the Chinese station sent staff to Vietnam to cooperate on television programs. According to one expert on Chinese media, “This can be seen as an extension of the state-run CRI strategy of establishing radio stations in border provinces to target countries bordering China.”<sup>173</sup>



### 2.3.3 Authoring opinion pieces for Vietnam media outlets

Chinese officials frequently author opinion pieces in foreign media outlets ahead of official visits and during other significant bilateral diplomatic events. These opinion pieces promote key narratives that China uses to encourage public and elite support for China's interests in the target country. Of note, signed opinion pieces and interviews with Chinese officials rarely appear in Vietnamese media. One local expert offered an explanation for this, noting that Vietnamese media outlets are very cautious about providing a platform for PRC officials to promote Beijing's perspective. With regard to interviewing foreign embassy personnel, for example, one local media expert noted that Vietnamese journalists are "very willing to interview Americans and French, but not Chinese."<sup>174</sup>

Vietnamese media has published a few articles by and interviews with PRC officials. For example, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam Xiong Bo have both authored articles in Vietnamese publications. In addition, China's Ambassador to ASEAN Deng Xijun has participated in an interview with VNA. *Nhan Dan*, the official mouthpiece of the CPV, for instance, published a signed article by Xi Jinping ahead of his 2017 state visit to Da Nang, where he attended the 25th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. In his article, Xi promoted key PRC narratives targeted at Vietnam, including the following examples:

- ***China is willing to set aside its differences with Vietnam and pursue greater cooperation.*** Xi wrote, "[W]e need to write a new chapter of good-neighborliness in our relations... and stay committed to seeking a fundamental and durable solution to the maritime issues acceptable to both sides through friendly consultation."
- ***China and Vietnam have a shared cultural and political heritage.*** Quoting Ho Chi Minh, Xi stated described the China-Vietnam relationship as being like that "between hand and foot, between pestle and mortar, between root and stem, and between elder and younger brothers."
- ***China is a more responsible international actor than the US.*** In an implicit critique of US unilateralism, Xi highlighted China's support for multilateral institutions, saying, "[W]e need to strengthen coordination within multilateral frameworks such as the UN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, China-ASEAN Cooperation, and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC)."<sup>175</sup>

In April 2020, a popular Vietnamese newspaper under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thế Giới & Việt Nam*, published a signed article by PRC Ambassador Xiong Bo that touted the benefits of cooperation through the LMC framework.<sup>176</sup> Ambassador Xiong's piece highlights China's bankrolling of projects along the Mekong, saying, "The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund established by China has successively funded 265 projects to benefit people's livelihood

in coastal countries, and plans to add 144 additional projects in 2020... benefitting economic and social development in the region, including in Vietnam.”<sup>177</sup> In addition to promoting Chinese development support to Vietnam through the LMC, Ambassador Xiong’s article appears to push back against criticism that China’s Mekong projects have had a severely negative effect on communities downriver. Xiong enumerates the ways in which China helps Vietnam and its neighbors with drought, flooding, and hydrological issues associated with the Mekong River.<sup>178</sup>

Figure 12. Ambassador Xiong Bo’s signed article in *The World & Vietnam*



Source: Xiong Bo, “Promote More Substantive Lancang - Mekong Cooperation, Bringing more Benefits to the People,” Thúc đẩy hợp tác Lan Thương - Mekong thực chất hơn, mang nhiều lợi ích hơn nữa cho nhân dân, *The World and Vietnam*, Báo Thế giới & Việt Nam, Mar. 3, 2020, accessed Apr. 14, 2020, <https://baoquocte.vn/thuc-day-hop-tac-lan-thuong-mekong-thuc-chat-hon-mang-nhieu-loi-ich-hon-nua-cho-nhan-dan-112874.html>.

During discussions with local media experts, several pointed to an interview that PRC Ambassador to Vietnam Xiong Bo gave to local media as a public relations failure for Beijing. During the interview, Xiong described China’s ongoing construction of Hanoi’s first metro line,

the Linh-Hà Dong urban railway project as a positive example of bilateral relations. Vietnamese netizens reportedly mocked Ambassador Xiong's comments, pointing to extensive delays in construction of the Chinese-led project and China's reported efforts to demand interest payments despite the fact that the project remains unfinished as evidence that bilateral ties are not as good as they could be.<sup>179</sup>

In a 2020 interview with VNA, Ambassador Deng Xijun, head of the Chinese mission to ASEAN, sought to promote positive bilateral ties. He told VNA in April 2020 that China "strongly supports" Vietnam's ASEAN Chairmanship. In the interview, Deng said that Vietnam's "strong leadership as ASEAN chair... has shown the solidarity and willingness to enhance cooperation of regional countries in this battle and greatly helped with the policy coordination and sharing of information, experience, best practices and technologies, which will eventually bring victory over COVID-19 in the region."<sup>180</sup>



### 2.3.4 Establishing a presence on social media in Vietnam

Chinese state-run media's presence on social media in Vietnam appears to be smaller than in its neighboring Mekong countries, both in terms of the number of social media pages operated by PRC state-run media outlets and the number of followers. According to social media analytics companies Hootsuite and We Are Social, Vietnam had 61 million active Facebook users, 6.2 million active Instagram users, and 685,000 active Twitter users in 2019.<sup>181</sup> While user numbers for Chinese app WeChat are not available for Vietnam, survey data show fewer internet users use WeChat than Facebook, Zalo, Instagram, and Twitter. Zalo, a social media app developed in Vietnam, is used by 74 percent of internet users in the country.<sup>182</sup>

Two PRC state-run outlets have social media presences in Vietnamese. By comparison, Chinese state-run media outlets have at least nine Facebook pages targeted at audiences in Laos, eight directed at Cambodian audiences, and five aimed at audiences in Myanmar.<sup>183</sup>

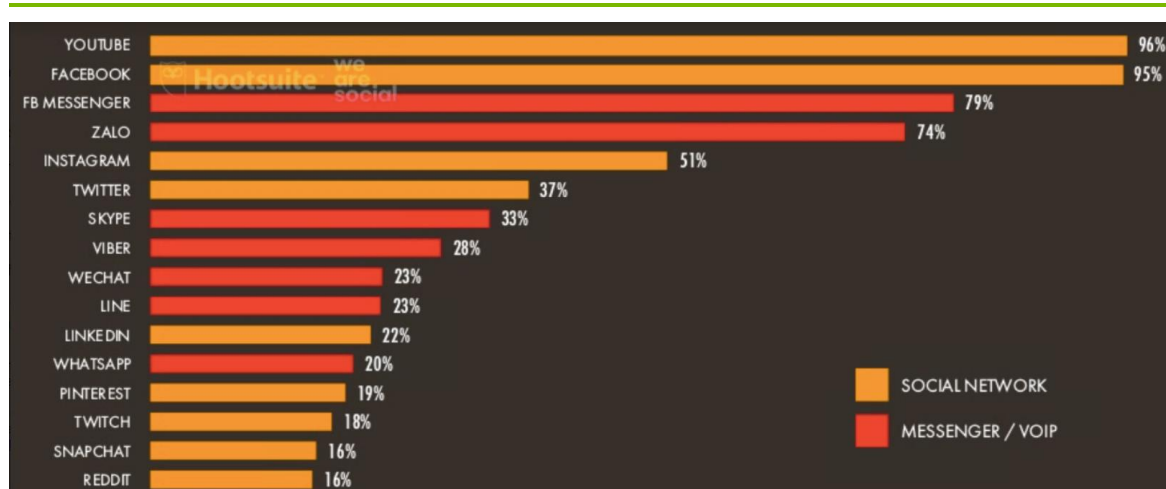
- **CRI** has a Vietnamese-language Facebook page, *Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc*, with 1,947,126 followers.
- **Xinhua** has a Vietnamese Twitter account *Tân Hoa Xã*, with 52,600 followers.

In addition, the PRC Embassy in Hanoi and the Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City have Facebook pages on which they post content from state-run PRC media outlets.

Zalo is primarily a chat platform, with additional functionalities for booking travel, shopping, and making payments, many of the same features as China's WeChat. A search of Zalo did not identify any pages representing PRC media outlets. While we did not observe Xinhua, CRI, or other PRC state-run media accounts on Zalo, the CRI Vietnamese website has a "share" function at the bottom of each article that includes options to share to a reader's Facebook page,

WeChat, or Zalo feed.<sup>184</sup> Whether Chinese media outlets such as Xinhua, *People's Daily*, and *Global Times* establish a presence on Zalo is an issue to watch.

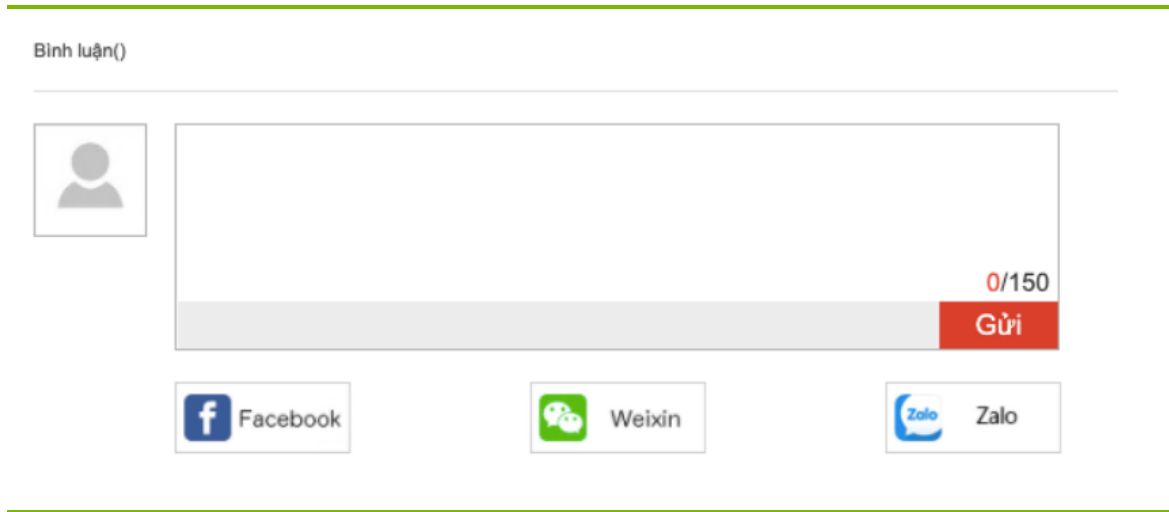
Figure 13. Most active social media platforms in Vietnam (percentage internet users using each platform)



Source: Hootsuite/We Are Social, "Digital 2019 Vietnam," Slideshare, January 2019, 2019, accessed Apr. 10, 2020, <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-vietnam-january-2019-v01>.

Both domestically and abroad, Beijing has sought to manipulate social media through the use of coordinated, inauthentic behavior to conduct pro-China messaging campaigns.<sup>185</sup> One local media expert raised this issue during a July 2020 discussion about China's presence in the Vietnamese media environment. Even though Vietnam has enacted restrictions on the ability to post anonymously online (i.e., 2018 Cyber Security Law), the expert observed social media accounts that appeared to be inauthentic promoting pro-China narratives in Vietnamese-language social media and online message boards in what appeared to be coordinated responses to anti-Chinese online posts.<sup>186</sup>

Figure 14. CRI Vietnamese “share” function includes local app Zalo



Source: Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc, “The Media and the American People Supported the Displaced Captain of Roosevelt,” Truyền thông và người dân Mỹ ủng hộ Hạm trưởng tàu sân bay Roosevelt bị cách chức, CRI Vietnamese, Apr. 9, 2020, accessed Apr. 10, 2020, <http://vietnamese.cri.cn/20200405/ea71bea0-e92b-d0fb-b2ab-9a02115365f8.html>.

## 2.4 Attempting to influence Vietnamese media to promote China-friendly narratives

In addition to using its own state-run media to promote its narratives, Beijing seeks to influence reporting by foreign media outlets and journalists. China seeks to shape the perceptions of Vietnamese media professionals by using the following tools:

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




### 2.4.1 Hosting international media forums and conferences

The CCP’s official mouthpiece, *People’s Daily*, has hosted three annual joint regional media summits that include Vietnamese media officials and journalists, the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit (*Lancang Jiang Meigong He Hezuo Meiti Fenghui*; 澜沧江湄公河合作媒体峰会). The summit, which is part of “the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative,” has taken place in China twice and in Laos once since 2017.<sup>187</sup> The first summit took place in Beijing, China; the second in Vientiane, Laos; and the third in Kunming, Yunnan, China.

Of note, according to the summit programs, MOU signing ceremonies between some partner news outlets occur at the summits (such as an MOU between *Global Times* of China and Shwe Than Lwin Meida of Myanmar at the 2018 summit); however, Vietnamese outlets do not appear to be among the signatories.<sup>188</sup> Based on the participant list provided by the Laos organizers of the 2018 summit, Vietnam sent six representatives, the fewest of the six participating countries. The other Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit countries sent: Laos (host), 30; China, 13; Cambodia, 8; Thailand, 9; and Myanmar, 7.<sup>189</sup>

Figure 15. Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit co-hosted by *People’s Daily*



Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit

**Theme:**  
Shared Vision, Shared Future

**Topics:**  
1. Consumption Upgrading & Tourism Development  
2. Core Value & Media Transformation

**Hosts:**  
MICT, People’s Daily

| Participants of Vietnam |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Name                    | Title   |
| Mr. Phan Huy Hien       | Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Nhan Dan Newspaper            |
| Mr. Le Quoc Minh        | Deputy Director General, Vietnam News Agency          |
| Mr. Nguyen Viet Hai     | Senior Journalist, Vietnam News Agency                |
| Ms. Pham Thi Hien       | Reporter, Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper |
| Ms. Tran Minh Hang      | Reporter, Nhan Dan Newspaper                          |
| Ms. Phi Hoang Le        | Reporter, Voice of Vietnam (VOV)                      |

Source: “2018 Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit Program,” Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Media Summit, accessed Nov. 15, 2019, [http://www.laja.la/sub-page/Delegatesand/2018\\_Delegates.pdf](http://www.laja.la/sub-page/Delegatesand/2018_Delegates.pdf).

In addition, China’s hosting of forums related to the BRI have provided opportunities for regional media outlets—including Vietnamese outlets—to publish positive reports about China. One example is an editorial published on April 24, 2019, in the Vietnamese military’s official newspaper, *People’s Army Newspaper* (*Báo Quân đội nhân dân*). The editorial stated, “Vietnam welcomes initiatives to promote regional economic cooperation and connectivity, including the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative.” The piece further argued that Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc’s participation in the second BRI cooperation forum “is an important contribution to promoting the comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership,” and would allow Vietnam-China relations to “develop stably and sustainably” and provide development opportunities for Vietnam. The positive tone of the article likely stems from the involvement of a Vietnamese leader.<sup>190</sup> The article was republished one day later on the CRI Vietnamese website and Facebook page under the title “Vietnamese Media Publish an Editorial that



Greatly Appreciates the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Forum for International Cooperation.” CRI added an intro paragraph highlighting Vietnamese prime minister’s second visit to the forum at Xi Jinping’s invitation and the BRI’s contribution to bilateral ties and Vietnamese development goals.<sup>191</sup>

Figure 16. Vietnamese military-run newspaper article supporting BRI



Source: “Promote Cooperation in Service of National Construction and Development,” Thúc đẩy hợp tác phục vụ công cuộc xây dựng và phát triển đất nước, People’s Army Newspaper, Báo Quân đội nhân dân, Apr. 24, 2019, accessed Apr. 14, 2020, <https://www.qdnd.vn/chinh-tri/xa-luan/thuc-day-hop-tac-phuc-vu-cong-cuoc-xay-dung-va-phat-trien-dat-nuoc-572523>.



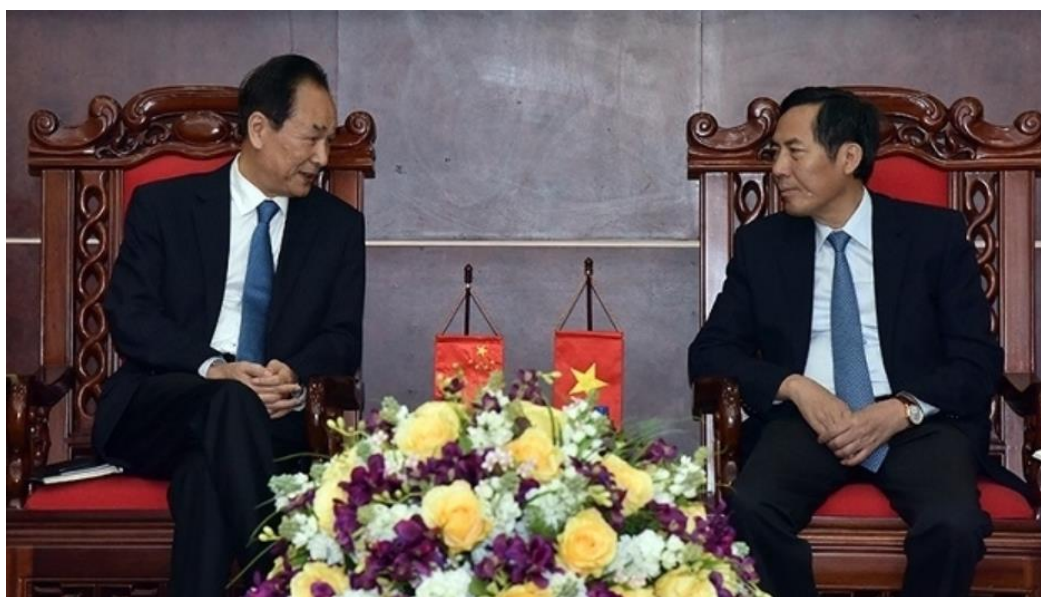
## 2.4.2 Hosting training and cooperation programs

PRC media organizations host training programs that are at least partially aimed at promoting a positive image of China. A recent example of a China-led training under the LMC framework is the 2019 Lancang-Mekong National New Media Business Training Course, held at Guangxi Radio and TV Station. A Chinese media report on the training course noted that 31 media professionals from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar participated in the

training, which focused on “new mobile editing, and editing and multi-media broadcast visualization systems.”<sup>192</sup>

PRC media outlets also hold dialogues and exchanges with Vietnamese media outlets to promote the use of PRC media content and combat negative portrayals of China. These exchanges have garnered positive responses from the heads of at least two of Vietnam’s top state-run media outlets. During a 2017 meeting with Xinhua President Cai Mingzhou, Thuan Huu, the head of Vietnam’s official party newspaper, said that *Nhan Dan* consults Xinhua content and considers it an important source for news on global affairs news.<sup>193</sup> During another exchange held in 2019, VNA General Director Nguyễn Đức Lợi told his Xinhua counterpart, “[B]oth sides should fight negative news about their respective countries’ situations, especially distorted and reactionary news that aimed to divide the two nations.”<sup>194</sup>

Figure 17. *Nhan Dan* newspaper’s editor-in-chief Thuan Huu (right) and Xinhua’s President Cai Mingzhao in 2017



Source: “Xinhua Delegation Visits Nhan Dan Newspaper,” *Nhan Dan*, May 25, 2017, <https://en.nhandan.com.vn/politics/item/5228402-xinhua-delegation-visits-nhan-dan-newspaper.html>.

CRI also appears to have a cooperative relationship with *Nhan Dan*. When CRI opened its “representative office” in Hanoi in 2018, it sent a delegation to meet with *Nhan Dan* editor-in-chief Thuan Huu. Reports say that in this meeting, Thuan Huu “spoke highly of the presence of CRI’s representative office in Vietnam” and expressed the hope that *Nhan Dan* and CRI’s representative office in Vietnam would “carry out further cooperation activities including the exchange of delegations, information, and professional knowledge.”<sup>195</sup> Reports on the two outlets’ interactions did not specifically note any content-sharing agreements.

Other Vietnamese and Chinese reports about “working meetings” between editors and officials from Chinese and Vietnamese state-run media include references to their relationship being important to healthy bilateral ties, but stop short of referring to content sharing beyond “press photos.” VNA general director Nguyen Duc Loi, for example, met the head of the CCP’s Propaganda Department, Huang Kunming, in 2018. At the meeting, Huang proposed facilitating visits between leadership from both agencies, extending collaboration, and sharing TV news and press photos.<sup>196</sup>

Figure 18. VOV cooperation meetings with CRI and Guangxi People’s Radio



Source: “VOV Exchanged Cooperation with China International Radio,” VOV trao đổi hợp tác với Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc; VOV, Jul. 24, 2017.; “VOV strengthens cooperation with Guangxi Radio Station (China),” VOV tăng cường hợp tác với Đài phát thanh Quảng Tây (Trung Quốc), VOV, May 16, 2017, accessed Apr. 20, 2020, <https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/dau-an-vov/vov-tang-cuong-hop-tac-voi-dai-phat-thanh-quang-tay-trung-quoc-624914.vov>.

The CRI Vietnamese website showcases a series of partner institutions at the bottom of its homepage, including Vietnam’s national radio broadcaster, VOV.<sup>197</sup> While VOV, for its part, ran two articles in 2017 describing “strengthening cooperation” with both CRI and China’s Guangxi Radio station, it is unclear whether VOV publishes or broadcasts CRI or Guangxi Radio content.<sup>198</sup>

Figure 19. CRI Vietnamese website lists VOV News as a partner institution



Source: China Radio International, “News,” Thời sự, CRI Vietnamese, Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc, 2020, accessed Apr. 10, 2020, <http://vietnamese.cri.cn/news/domestic/list>.

## 2.5 Using entertainment to promote Chinese narratives

In recent years, Beijing has sought to expand its footprint in the global entertainment industry as a means of promoting a positive image of China to global audiences. In Vietnam, there is evidence that China is doing this by exporting Chinese-produced entertainment and promoting PRC-controlled social media platforms.

Southeast Asia is one of the major output destinations for Chinese TV series and movies. According to one Chinese media scholar, Southeast Asian countries watched a majority of Chinese movies per year, with an average of 2.8 times more than other countries outside China. According to one PRC scholar, among Southeast Asian countries, Vietnamese audiences watched the most, with an average of 3.71 times more views than other countries.<sup>199</sup>



### 2.5.1 Exporting Chinese-produced entertainment

China actively exports Chinese-produced entertainment content to Vietnam. Certain genres of Chinese TV and film are popular with Vietnamese audiences, representing the most successful aspect of China’s efforts to gain a foothold in Vietnam’s information environment.<sup>200</sup> However, Vietnamese media experts are quick to point out the Chinese TV shows and films that are popular in Vietnam predominantly consist of historical and literary dramas. Experts suggested that these shows have found popularity because they are able to make it past the dual hurdles of Vietnamese government censors and a public that deeply resents present-day PRC government policies and activities, especially Beijing’s efforts to assert its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Chinese historical dramas like “Story of Yanxi Palace” and classic literary adaptations like “Journey to the West” are reportedly popular with Vietnamese audiences. PRC state-run media promotes the narrative that this popularity is due to the two nations’ shared culture. A 2018

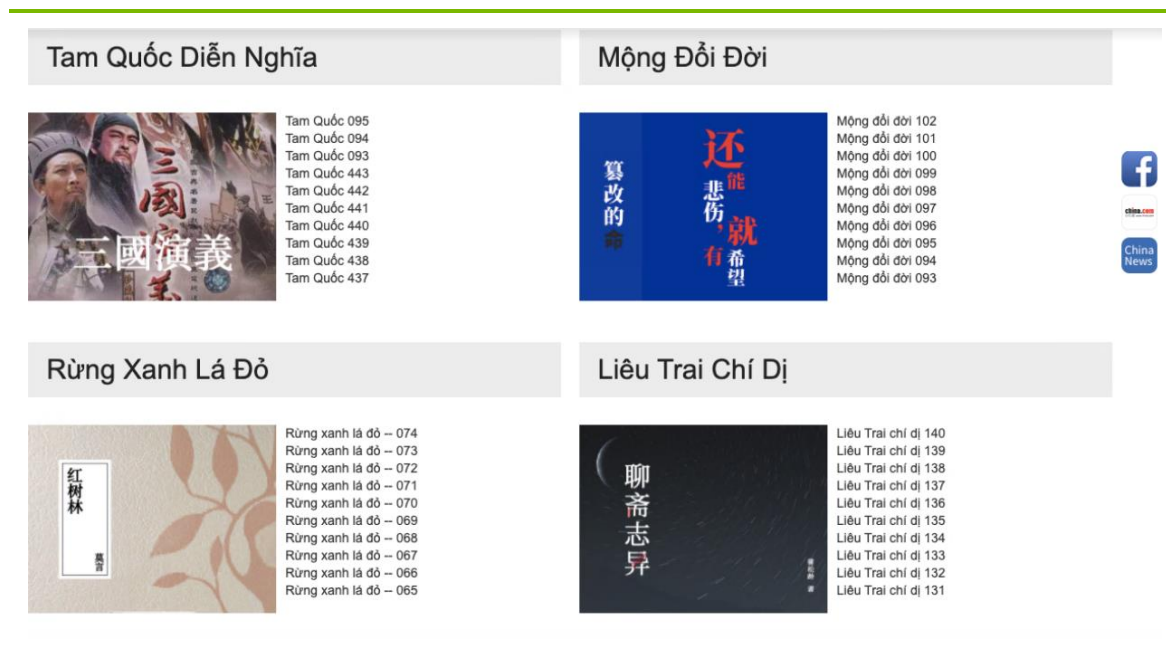
Xinhua report offered the following explanation for Chinese television’s appeal to Vietnamese audiences:

Like Chinese, Vietnamese audiences love palace intrigues. Due to similarities in culture and history, what makes a Chinese laugh or cry while watching a Chinese series, is most likely to have the same effect on a Vietnamese.<sup>201</sup>

The same Xinhua report quotes a 26-year-old Hanoi resident, who described Chinese historical dramas as “very enjoyable” because the “stories and characters presented in those works are very familiar to Vietnamese people.”<sup>202</sup> Another Xinhua article quoted Phung Thi Hue, a researcher with the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, who stated that “China and Vietnam share similar cultures,” and “many of the social issues highlighted in Chinese TV series also resonate among Vietnamese.”<sup>203</sup>

According to a 2018 Xinhua report, Guangxi People’s TV station has translated and dubbed more than 130 episodes of Chinese TV series, 196 documentary program episodes, and 104 episodes of animated Chinese shows into Vietnamese.<sup>204</sup> CRI Vietnamese has translated 12 compendiums of Chinese literary work into Vietnamese audio, available on its website. Titles range from the historical drama *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, to the 2012 Nobel Literature Prize-winning book *Red Woods* by Chinese author Yan Mo.<sup>205</sup>

Figure 20. Chinese literature available in Vietnamese audio on CRI



Source: “Reading Stories,” Đọc truyện, CRI Vietnamese, CRI Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc, accessed Apr. 10, 2020, <http://vietnamese.cri.cn/novel>.

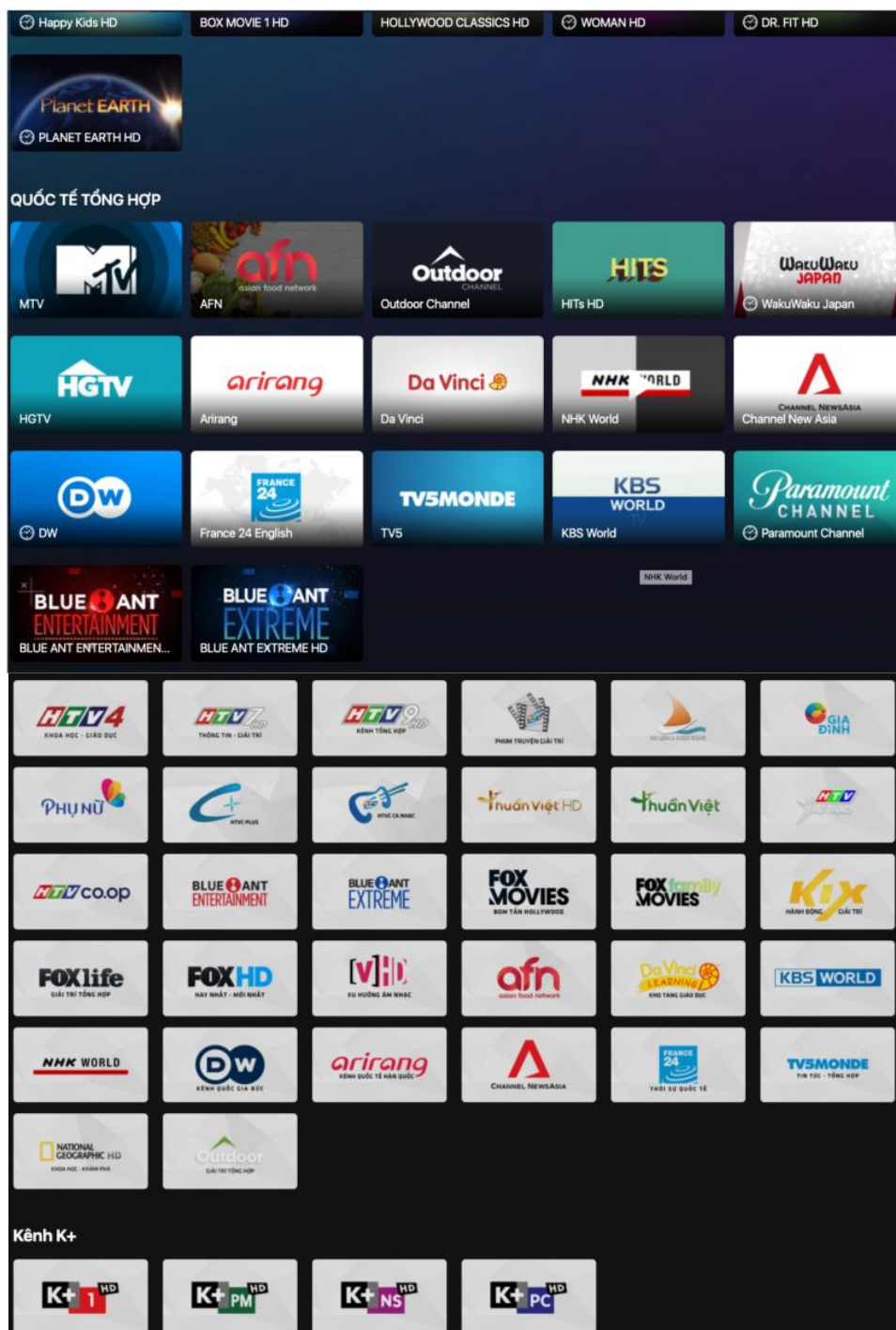
Vietnamese media also reports that Chinese films are popular with Vietnamese audiences, but point to it as a source of concern rather than a cause for celebration. Some within Vietnam have suggested implementing additional measures to protect the Vietnamese film industry against competition from China and other foreign countries. According to a 2018 article titled “Should Vietnam’s film industry be protected?” in the Vietnamese state-owned newspaper *Tuoi Tre*, “South Korean films, and more recently Chinese productions, are able to maintain mild competitiveness with the support they receive from state-run organizations and budgets which can also occasionally reach into the hundreds of millions of dollars.”<sup>206</sup> Ngo Thi Bich Hanh, deputy general director of Vietnamese movie distributing company BHD said in the *Tuoi Tre* article:

It is certainly necessary to protect Vietnamese films if we do not want Vietnamese children to grow up knowing only American superheroes, dressing after South Korean idols, and understanding Chinese history.<sup>207</sup>

Nguyen Van Nhiem, director of the Vietnam Broadcasting and Television Association, shared Hanh’s mindset. “In many countries, in addition to complying with the law and international commitments, ‘technical barriers’ are set up to regulate the number of domestic films released each year, the number of sessions for each film will be shown, and the film schedule,” Nhiem explained.<sup>208</sup> Whether Vietnam decides to introduce new restrictions on foreign films entering Vietnamese cinemas is an area to watch.

According to one local media expert, China’s CCTV and CGTN TV channels used to be available as part of Vietnamese cable packages. However, a recent review of several subscription service’s international offerings shows that all Chinese TV channels had been removed. Current international TV offerings include US, UK, Japanese, French, German, and Australian channels.<sup>209</sup>

Figure 21. International channels included in cable subscriptions – no Chinese



Source: Screenshots provided by Vietnamese media expert.

## 3. Assessing the Impact of Chinese Narratives

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### 3.1 Reach and resonance

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

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*“I can see many failures, and very few successes.”*

*Vietnam media professional on China’s efforts to shape the local media environment*

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Vietnam. These include critical coverage of China by state-run Vietnamese media and popular anti-Chinese sentiment driven by bilateral tensions over conflicting maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea, China’s inequitable use of Mekong River water resources, and episodes of historical armed conflict. One expert summarized China’s efforts to shape the media environment in Vietnam saying, “I can see many failures, and very few successes.”<sup>210</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Widespread criticism of China in Vietnamese media

China’s efforts to promote its narratives to audiences in Vietnam appear largely offset by widespread criticism of China’s activities in domestic Vietnamese media. Vietnamese state-run media widely reiterates the Vietnamese government’s official opposition to China’s competing maritime claims in the South China Sea and its activities there.<sup>211</sup> Vietnamese state-run media regularly features articles denouncing Chinese activities in the South China Sea. These pieces often cite foreign experts and officials who share the CPV’s views about China’s “illegal” moves in the region. This tactic is on display in headlines featured on state-run VOV website (see Figure 22).

Vietnam’s “most read newspaper,” the digital outlet VnExpress, routinely publishes original articles and wire service reports that are critical of China across a host of topics beyond South China Sea tensions (see Figure 23). For example, a 2019 original article contends that the Mekong is “dying” because of the dams that China has built along the river.<sup>212</sup>



VnExpress also republished 2018 AFP article that decries the 2017 media crackdown in Cambodia and the kingdom’s subsequent embrace of the “China model” of media.<sup>213</sup>

Vietnamese media has also portrayed BRI in a negative light. For example, according to a Wuhan University study that compares BRI-related reporting from VOV and CRI Vietnamese, “Vietnamese media pays more attention to the controversial topics [associated with BRI]... and frequently cites third-party reports of foreign media to indirectly present China's image negatively and raise questions about the initiative, further making Vietnamese readers call into question the real purpose of the initiative.”<sup>214</sup>

Figure 22. Extensive VOV push-back against China’s South China Sea claims

6 giờ trước



### Vietnam not alone in East Sea issue: Russian experts

(VOVWORLD) - Russian researchers studying East Sea issues have condemned the Chinese coast guard’s sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel in the waters of Vietnam’s Hoang Sa (Paracel)

archipelago,...

01/12/2019



### Crushing China’s nine-dash line claim in the East Sea

(VOVWORLD) - China has recently included the image of the controversial nine-dash line on T-shirts, lapel pins, globes, maps, digital maps, and in films and textbooks. This shows that China

does not miss any...

28/11/2019



### Vietnam needs to make a strong case to the wider world: US professor

(VOVWORLD) - China's acts in the East Sea are negatively affecting the whole region, so countries, including Vietnam, needs to show their clearer attitude toward the issue, said John Rennie Short...

19/11/2019



### China’s “grey zone” tactic in East Sea

(VOVWORLD) - Experts on the East Sea say China’s “grey zone” strategy provokes tension in order to control most of the East Sea

Source: VOV5, “VIETNAM'S MARITIME SOVEREIGNTY,” The Voice of Vietnam, 2020, accessed Apr. 8, 2020, <https://vovworld.vn/en-US/event/vietnams-maritime-sovereignty/565.vov>.

Figure 23. VnExpress publishes AFP article decrying “China Model” of media in Cambodia



Source: AFP, “With Cambodia’s Free Press Under Fire, ‘China Model’ Makes Inroads,” VnExpress International, Jun. 4, 2018, accessed Apr. 13, 2020, <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/world/with-cambodia-s-free-press-under-fire-china-model-makes-inroads-3758554.html>.

### 3.1.2 Critical views of China

According to a 2020 survey of Southeast Asian nations conducted by the ASEAN Studies Center and ISEAS Yusof Ishak institute of Singapore, Vietnam’s citizens had the most critical views.

According to the study, 95.3 percent of Vietnamese respondents are “worried about China’s growing regional political and strategic influence.” Similarly, PRC narratives promoting BRI to Vietnamese audiences are likely to be ignored—only 1.3 percent of Vietnamese respondents indicated they have “full confidence in the BRI approach.” Finally, 38.2 percent of Vietnamese survey respondents expect Vietnam’s relations with China to “worsen” or “significantly worsen” over the next three years.<sup>215</sup>

### **What can the international community do to support the development of Vietnam’s information environment?**

Between March and July 2020, CNA held discussions with Vietnamese media professionals and experts. During these discussions, participants offered suggestions about how the international community could help to support the development of Vietnam’s media environment and continued resilience against PRC efforts to shape it.

- ***Provide journalism and media skills training.*** Vietnamese media professionals and experts suggested that providing discrete skills training for journalists in partnership with the Vietnam Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) is likely the most successful strategy for helping support Vietnam media. Conversely, attempts to provide broader media development or discuss the role of media in society run the risk of failing to secure the necessary official approval.
- ***Coordinate with long-standing, trusted international partners.*** Several experts noted that Vietnamese media officials are likely to view Western-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media training organizations with a critical eye. These experts suggested collaborating with international organizations that already have an established record of working in Vietnam as a way to improve access to the local information environment. Several of these organizations are listed in Table 7.

## **3.2 Issues to watch**

Among the Mekong countries, Vietnam is probably the least receptive to China’s efforts to promote its narratives. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the PRC propaganda apparatus continues to seek opportunities to reach Vietnamese audiences. Below are several issues to watch:

- ***The appearance of more “Chinese voices” in Vietnamese media.*** Vietnamese media outlets are reluctant to publish interviews with Chinese officials. Likewise, Vietnamese media outlets publish few op-eds by Chinese officials compared to media outlets in other Mekong countries. An increase in Chinese official op-eds and interviews observed in Vietnamese media would indicate greater openness to China’s efforts to promote official narratives in the local media environment.

- ***Vietnamese media republishing PRC-produced content.*** Multiple PRC state-run media outlets have sought increased cooperation with Vietnamese state-run media outlets, but have thus far failed to achieve widespread republication of PRC media content by Vietnamese news outlets. Of note, Vietnamese media does occasionally republish PRC media content in order to criticize it. If Vietnamese media outlets begin to republish PRC-produced news content without mocking it, this could allow Chinese narratives to reach a broader audience in Vietnam.
- ***Indications that Chinese entertainment is increasing in popularity.*** Although Chinese historical dramas are popular in Vietnam, Chinese entertainment depicting contemporary political issues does not appear to be. If such Chinese entertainment were to gain popularity among local audiences, it would indicate a widening of Chinese media's most successful inroad into Vietnam's information environment: entertainment.
- ***Coordinated, inauthentic pro-China messaging campaigns on social media.*** Even though Vietnam has enacted restrictions to online anonymity (i.e., 2018 Cyber Security Law), Chinese entities may step up efforts to promote and amplify pro-China messaging on Vietnamese-language social media and online message boards while attempting to conceal the Chinese origins of these campaigns. The emergence of such campaigns would be a sign that China is trying to covertly influence Vietnam's information environment.
- ***Anti-China reporting on a broader range of issues in Vietnamese media.*** Historically, Vietnamese authorities have managed expressions of anti-China and anti-Chinese sentiment to keep the domestic political situation and bilateral relations stable.<sup>216</sup> In doing so, media authorities typically greenlight Vietnamese media criticism of China on maritime territorial disputes and disputes over the Mekong River. It would be notable if Vietnamese media began to criticize China on a broader range of issues, such as China's COVID-19 response, intellectual property theft, or other sensitive topics. Such a shift could suggest that the Vietnamese government had decided to take a harder stance against China.

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# Appendix A: China Radio International on Facebook

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

The reach of CRI to Facebook audiences is indicated, by follower numbers, in Table 10.

Table 10. China Radio International on Facebook in the Mekong countries

| Country         | Facebook account                              | Followers  | Facebook page URL              |
|-----------------|---|------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Cambodia</b> | CCFR Beijing (China-Vietnam Friendship Radio) | 1,214,192  | facebook.com/ccfrbeijing/      |
| <b>Laos</b>     | CRI-FM 93 Vientiane                           | 1,185,992  | facebook.com/crifm93/          |
| <b>Vietnam</b>  | CRI Vietnam                                   | 1,252,685  | facebook.com/ccfr.cri/         |
| <b>Thailand</b> | China Face                                    | 2,453,364  | facebook.com/ChinafacecriThai/ |
| <b>Vietnam</b>  | Đài Phát thanh Quốc tế Trung Quốc             | 1,947,126  | facebook.com/criviet           |
| <b>Global</b>   | China Plus News                               | 20,941,191 | facebook.com/chinaplusnews/    |

Source: Facebook, CNA.

## Appendix B: China's Global Narratives

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>China is peaceful</b></p>   | <p>China portrays itself as an inherently peaceful country that would never intentionally start a conflict.<sup>217</sup></p>   |
| <p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promotes a positive image of China:</b> Portrays China as peaceful and non-threatening</li> <li>• <b>Counters critics:</b> Counters concerns about the rapid growth of China's military power and regional assertiveness</li> <li>• <b>Supports China's foreign policy objectives:</b> Seeks to foster receptivity to China's diplomatic overtures</li> </ul>  |   |
| <p><b>Cooperation with China is beneficial</b></p>  | <p>China claims its approach to cooperation with other countries is mutually beneficial and "win-win."<sup>218</sup></p>  |
| <p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promotes a positive image of China:</b> Portrays China as generous and helpful</li> <li>• <b>Counters critics:</b> Counters criticism of China's economic aid and investment practices as being exploitive</li> <li>• <b>Supports China's foreign policy objectives:</b> Seeks to foster support for cooperation with China on a range of issues, including economic, technological, and security matters</li> </ul>   |   |
| <p><b>China is a responsible member of the international community</b></p>  | <p>China portrays itself as an upholder of the international system that provides public goods, such as contributions to peacekeeping efforts, support to antipiracy missions in the Gulf of Aden, and disaster relief.<sup>219</sup></p> |
| <p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promotes a positive image of China:</b> Portrays China as a responsible and active contributor to the international system</li> <li>• <b>Counters critics:</b> Counters accusations that China is a revisionist power that seeks to reshape the international system; also counters concerns about the Chinese military's expanding overseas operations</li> <li>• <b>Supports China's foreign policy objectives:</b> Seeks to foster support for China's expanding global presence and position China as a leader in the international community</li> </ul> |   |
| <p><b>China's approach to development and international affairs is different from that of the US/West</b></p>   | <p>China often contrasts its approach to development and foreign policy with that of the US and other Western nations.<sup>220</sup></p>  |
| <p>How it supports PRC objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Promotes a positive image of China:</b> Portrays China as better than the US and the West</li> <li>• <b>Counters critics:</b> Deflects criticism by the United States and other Western countries, often by seeking to delegitimize their policies, positions, and activities</li> <li>• <b>Supports China's foreign policy objectives:</b> Portrays China as a more desirable partner</li> </ul>  |   |



# Abbreviations

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|          |   |
|----------|---|
| AFP      | Agence France-Presse                        |
| ANEX     | ASEAN News Exchange                         |
| AP       | Associated Press                            |
| APEC     | Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation           |
| ASEAN    | Association of Southeast Asian Nations      |
| BA       | bachelor of arts (degree)                   |
| BBC      | British Broadcasting Service                |
| BBRTV    | Beibu Gulf Radio & TV                       |
| BHD      | [Vietnamese Media Corporation]              |
| BRI      | Belt and Road Initiative                    |
| CCP      | Chinese Communist Party                     |
| CCTV     | China Central Television                    |
| CEO      | Chief Executive Officer                     |
| CGTN     | China Global Television Network             |
| CIBN     | China International Broadcasting Network    |
| COVID-19 | coronavirus disease 2019                    |
| CPEC     | Central Propaganda and Education Commission |
| CPJ      | Committee to Protect Journalists            |
| CPV      | Communist Party of Vietnam                  |
| CRI      | China Radio International                   |
| DTMB     | Digital Terrestrial Media Broadcast         |
| DVB-T2   | Digital Video Broadcast-Terrestrial 2       |
| FDI      | Foreign Direct Investment                   |
| FPT      | Financing and Promoting Technology (group)  |
| GXTV     | Guangxi TV                                  |
| HCMC     | Ho Chi Minh City                            |
| ICT      | Information and Communications Technology   |
| ISEAS    | Institute of Southeast Asian Studies        |
| ISP      | internet service provider                   |
| LMC      | Lancang-Mekong Cooperation                  |
| MIC      | Ministry of Information and Communications  |
| MOU      | memorandum of understanding                 |
| NANAP    | Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool              |
| NDDT     | <i>Nhan Dan (dien tu)</i>                   |
| OANA     | Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies  |
| ODA      | Official Development Assistance             |
| PRC      | People's Republic of China (China)          |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| QMG   | Quảng Ninh Media Group                     |
| QTV   | Quảng Ninh TV                              |
| RFA   | Radio Free Asia                            |
| RFI   | Radio France Internationale                |
| RSF   | Reporters sans Frontières                  |
| SOE   | state-owned enterprise                     |
| TTO   | <i>Truoi Tre (online)</i>                  |
| TTXVN | Vietnam News Agency Publishing House       |
| UN    | United Nations                             |
| USAGM | US Agency for Global Media                 |
| VNA   | Vietnam News Agency                        |
| VNPT  | Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group |
| VOH   | Voice of Ho Chi Minh City                  |
| VOV   | Voice of Vietnam                           |
| VTV   | Vietnam Television                         |
| WHO   | World Health Organization                  |

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Other meetings include:

In April 2018, Xinhua president Cai Mingzhao met with VNA general director Nguyen Duc Loi.

According to Xinhua, Cai suggested that Xinhua and VNA have a responsibility to create a sound media environment for the healthy development of China-Vietnam ties.<sup>196</sup> During the same visit, the VNA delegation also visited People’s Daily HQ where they met with President Li Baoshan.

In October 2019, VNA hosted Xinhua vice-president Zhang Sutang and a delegation of Xinhua personnel for a three-day working visit. VNA noted that Xinhua’s news “especially in English and Chinese, provided an important source of international news for VNA, especially regarding China and Northeast Asia.” Both sides expressed an interest in increasing information sharing.<sup>196</sup>

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