



Perspective in Asia

China's Publicity Strategy

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Admiral Samuel Locklear III, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, gave a [briefing](#) earlier this month on Asia-Pacific-U.S. Security at the Foreign Press Center in Washington, D.C. Not surprisingly, several members of the Asian media were in attendance, representing Japan, China, South Korea, the Philippines, Cambodia, and India. It is worth noting that of the fifteen questions asked, seven were from six Chinese media outlets, four of which are owned or sponsored by the People's Republic of China.

In recent years, the Chinese media presence covering U.S. foreign policy towards Asia has grown significantly in Washington, D.C., and I experienced this firsthand while working for a Japanese broadcaster from 2001 to 2012. For most of that period, the Japanese press corps dominated the Asia media scene in Washington, with anywhere from 10 to 15 outlets (TV, radio, newspaper, and wires) operating like a well-oiled machine. In 2009, several new members of the Chinese media arrived in Washington and began their coverage of the White House, Pentagon, and State Department, and their numbers quickly increased. This can be explained in part by Chinese economic growth, but on the whole it is more than that. It reflects a very deliberate strategy started in 2009 by China's Central Committee of the Communist Party, called "Da Wai Xuan," which means *Strengthening Outside Propaganda and Publicity*.

Li Congjun (李从军) is Chief of Xinhua News Agency, the official press agency of the People's Republic of China, and deputy chief of China's Central Propaganda Department for over six years before he took on the top job at Xinhua. In February 2009, Li, quoted here in [China Media Report](#), wrote the following in *China Journalist*:

According to the central committee's strategic demand for "strengthening outside propaganda/publicity" (大外宣), we must work hard to get our own voice out at the first moment from the actual scene for important news and sudden-breaking incidents ... constantly enhancing the affinity, attractiveness and infectiveness of Chinese news reports to the outside world, actively seizing the initiative and our right to have a say in international public opinion channeling, working to create an objective and amicable international public opinion environment ...

[We must] actively seek out new horizons, new mechanisms, new channels and new methods in the area of outside dialogue and cooperation, *particularly, as by the demands of central party leaders* ... building a platform for dialogue among first-rate international media (国际一流媒体), further raising the capacity of Xinhua News Agency to make its voice heard in the international news and information sector.^[1]

Li's comments support the media policy launched by then-President Hu Jintao in 2008 designed to combat what China saw as its strategic failure of "discourse power" internationally. China has sought a larger voice and greater global influence, and the Chinese attendance at the Foreign Press Center briefing earlier this month is a prime example of those efforts being realized. Many Chinese outlets continue to develop English language networks and establish news bureaus in Washington, D.C., and other major U.S. cities as part of their publicity campaign. Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV has elevated its status by securing an office closer to the U.S. Capitol than many of the large U.S. networks. CCTV, China's national broadcaster, launched CCTV America in February 2012 and currently has approximately 120 people working in its D.C. bureau, with plans to expand to 200. To put this in perspective, I worked for one of Japan's largest broadcasters and our Washington, D.C., news bureau had six people.

The arrival of Chinese media in the U.S. is a positive development in that it can foster cultural understanding while strengthening connections between China and the U.S. But there is also reason for concern, as consuming news from only one outlet, viewpoint, or government can limit one's understanding of events, and this is true in China as well as the United States. America benefits from a higher concentration of news outlets, which are not censored or controlled by the government, allowing for a wider variety of viewpoints and opinions which the consumer may consider. This is not to say that the U.S. government has not at times exercised its influence over privately owned media outlets, but what is clear is that an independent media and freedom of the press contribute to a more vibrant industry, which provides a critical role in checking and balancing the public, private, and international sectors.

No matter how large the Chinese media presence grows in the U.S, Chinese domestic audiences will have limited exposure to opinions on U.S. foreign policy that differ from those presented by government-sponsored media outlets. American actions towards China may be misconstrued as a result. In this current period of increased tensions between China and the U.S., messaging is more important than ever, and understanding the dynamic of the Chinese media can help guide administration officials, politicians, and other news-makers.

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[1] Quoted by David Bandurski, "Your Only Report on the World Media Summit," China Media Project, 11 October 2013, <http://cmp.hku.hk/2013/10/11/34266/>