

(U) TEXT SIMILARITY AND BACKLINK ANALYSIS

(U) Regarding Xinjiang, Overseas Mandarin Outlets in Southeast Asia Usually Provide Attribution When Reprinting PRC State-Media Content

(U) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: To evaluate if coverage of Xinjiang from Overseas Mandarin Outlets (OMOs) in Southeast Asia is influenced by Beijing, the GEC assessed how often OMOs shared content—pulling exact text for the whole or portions of articles with or without attribution—from PRC state-media outlets between April and July 2021. Thirty-nine articles published by nine OMOs were extremely similar to those published by PRC state-media outlets. Although we identified that 36 of the 39 articles attributed content to a specific state-media outlet in some way, the remaining three articles reprinted PRC content without attribution. There did not appear to be a pattern of attribution among the articles we evaluated. Some of the reprinted PRC content only detailed COVID-19 case counts in Xinjiang. Other content, however, took a pro-PRC view and espoused pro-PRC talking points by reprinting state-media reporting on public statements from PRC officials characterizing U.S. government statements on Xinjiang as lies. This included statements diverting attention from Xinjiang by pointing out the history of human rights violations that have occurred in the West. We also analyzed historical backlink data between PRC state-media outlets and the nine OMOs that shared similar articles. The *China News Service (CNS)* website, the PRC's second largest news agency and primary Chinese Communist Party (CCP) entity targeting overseas Chinese audiences, was the most linked-to outlet, likely as a result of *CNS* wire subscriptions.

(U) REPORT

(U) Text Similarity Analysis

(U) In a 2020 survey of PRC influence on Chinese-language media in Australia, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) found that some Chinese-language media outlets “appear to republish content without attribution.” Specifically, they found that articles on the *Australian Chinese Daily* website “often do not diligently indicate whether they are republished from external outlets.”¹ With these findings in mind, the GEC sought to investigate potential linkages between the PRC and OMOs located in Southeast Asia, specifically with regard to content published about China's Xinjiang region and regardless of attribution. The GEC analyzed 6,901 PRC state-media articles and 2,038 articles from 27 Southeast Asia-based OMOs that were published about Xinjiang between 1 April and 1 July 2021.² Using text similarity analysis, we identified a total of 39 articles published by nine OMOs that were either identical or extremely similar to those published by PRC state-media outlets.³ While some Southeast Asian OMO's disclose their content sharing agreements with PRC state-media outlets, the *Financial Times* found that OMOs without public agreements also reprint state-media content.⁴ Unlike the findings published by the ASPI, of the 39 articles we identified, 29 (almost 75%) attributed their textual content to the original PRC publisher, three attributed a photo in the article to a PRC publisher, four cited PRC government websites, and only three were not attributed to the PRC in any way. We did not find a discernible pattern regarding what content was attributed to PRC outlets and what content was not.

(U) *Evaluating the 39 PRC-OMO Links*

(SBU) The 39 OMO-published articles that were extremely similar to those published by PRC state media—often by several PRC state-media outlets—frequently focused on statements from PRC officials. Although they relied heavily on quoted content, they reordered the quotations, used different phrasing when introducing them, and sometimes added additional context. Sometimes articles that did not focus on statements from PRC officials used content directly from PRC outlets instead. An article from *Sin Chew*—owned by *Media Chinese International*, a conglomerate that was reportedly paid USD \$2,000 by a PRC proxy to run a full-page ad endorsing Beijing’s National Security Law for Hong Kong⁵—quoted heavily from a *Xinhua* article characterizing a G7 foreign ministers’ meeting as “Yue Buqun style,” in reference to a power-hungry, hypocritical villain in a famous Chinese martial arts novel.⁶

(U) Twenty-eight of the 39 articles that met our similarity threshold espoused pro-PRC talking points related to Xinjiang, often summarizing or quoting public statements from PRC officials. In one example, *China Press*, an outlet owned by a Malaysian media conglomerate with extensive timber holdings in Mainland China, published an article detailing comments from Yang Jiechi—a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC and director of the office of the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs—following a phone call with the U.S. Secretary of State.⁷ The article included quotes from Yang—attributed to *Xinhua*—that urged “the United States to respect China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, not to interfere in China’s internal affairs under any pretext,” and accused the United States of “throwing out all kinds of lies about Xinjiang.”⁸ Although there are some notable differences in text, the *China Press* article was similar to at least five articles published by PRC state-media outlets.⁹ The most notable difference was that the *China Press* article also included comments from the Secretary’s Twitter account and from the U.S. State Department spokesperson, while the PRC state-media articles focused only on Yang’s statement.

(U) Another OMO-published article that was similar to content published by PRC state media echoed the claim by PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian that the United States was using a “double standard on labor issues” following a U.S. statement at the 109th International Labor Conference. The article, published by Malaysian OMO *Nanyang Siang Pau*, contained notable similarities to at least three articles published by PRC state-media outlets *thepaper.cn*, *chinanews.com*, and *ce.cn*.¹⁰ While there were some differences in the *Nanyang Siang Pau* article—including an attribution to a *CCTV News* report—all four articles focused heavily on quotations from Zhao. Other OMO articles that were similar to those published by PRC state-media outlets pushed pro-PRC stances and criticized the United States, including articles from *Sin Chew* citing *Xinhua* and *Chinese Commercial News* citing the *CNS*.¹¹

National Health Commission: Yesterday, 4 new local confirmed cases were confirmed, all in Yunnan

National Health Commission website
2021-04-02 08:44

From 0-24 o'clock on April 1, 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps reported 9 new confirmed cases, including 5 imported cases (2 in Shanghai, 1 in Hunan, 1 in Sichuan, Shaanxi) 1 case), 4 local cases (all in Yunnan); no new deaths; 2 new suspected cases, all imported cases (all in Shanghai).

8 new cases were cured and discharged on the same day, and 72 close contacts were released from medical observation. The severe cases were the same as the previous day.

There are currently 169 confirmed cases imported from abroad (including 2 severe cases) and 5 suspected cases. A total of 5305 confirmed cases, 5136 cured and discharged cases, and no deaths.

As of 24:00 on April 1, according to reports from 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, there are 188 confirmed cases (including 2 severe cases), a total of 85,402 cured and discharged cases, and a total of 4,636 deaths. A total of 90,226 confirmed cases have been reported, and there are 5 suspected cases. A total of 990,865 close contacts have been traced, and 6,015 close contacts are still under medical observation.

Government) and Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps reported 20 new cases of asymptomatic infections, including 16 imported cases and 4 local cases (all in Yunnan); no cases were converted to confirmed cases on the same day; medical observation was lifted on the same day 13 Cases (all imported from abroad); 295 cases of asymptomatic infection are still under medical observation (265 imported from abroad).

A total of 12,564 confirmed cases have been notified from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Among them, 11480 cases were in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (11108 cases were discharged and 205 deaths), 48 cases were discharged from Macau Special Administrative Region (48 cases were discharged), and 1036 cases were discharged in Taiwan (983 cases were discharged and 10 cases died).

China's 16 new confirmed cases of coronary disease yesterday were all imported from abroad


Release / May 1, 2021 11:24 AM

font size: Small middle Big

China's 31 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps reported yesterday that there were 16 newly confirmed cases, all of which were imported cases, including 7 in Guangdong, 3 in Shanghai, 2 in Sichuan, 1 in Zhejiang, 1 in Fujian, and 1 in Guangxi, A case in Yunnan.

According to the website of China's National Health Commission, there were no new deaths in China yesterday; three new suspected cases were imported cases from Shanghai. On the same day, 19 new cases were cured and discharged, and 528 close contacts were released from medical observation. The severe cases were the same as the previous day.

There are currently 287 confirmed cases imported from abroad (including three severe cases) and 11 suspected cases. A total of 8,073 confirmed cases, a total of 5386 cured and discharged cases, and no deaths.



White Crystal White Pearl Simulant Gold Tone St...

As of yesterday, China has 325 confirmed cases (including three severe cases), a total of 85,710 cured and discharged cases, a total of 4,636 deaths, a total of 90,071 confirmed cases, and 11 suspected cases. A total of 1,008,010 close contacts have been traced, and 8,479 close contacts are still under medical observation.

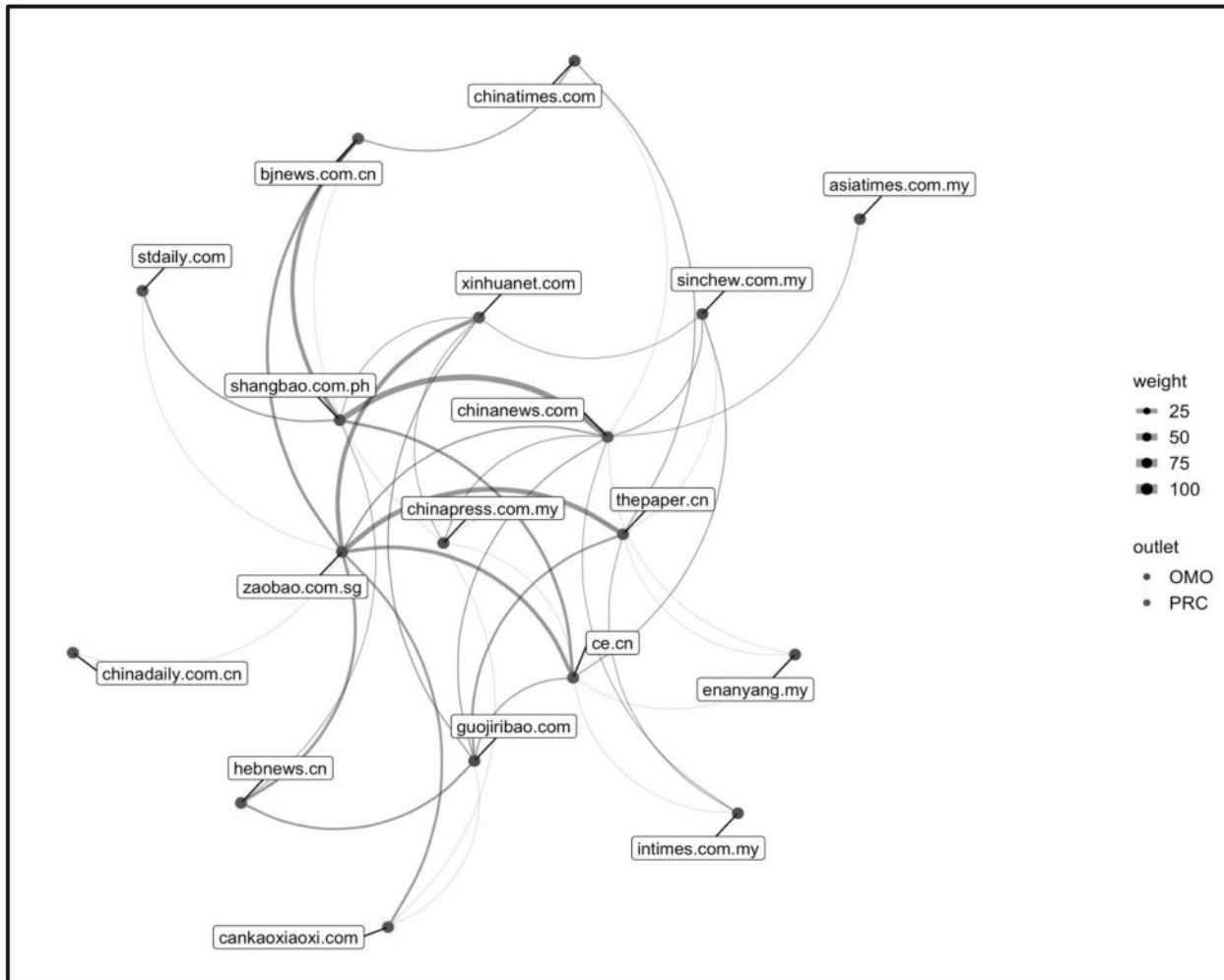
31 provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the central government) and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps reported 16 new asymptomatic infections (all imported from abroad); 1 confirmed cases (all imported from abroad) on the same day; 17 medical observations were lifted on the same day (All imported from abroad); 319 cases of asymptomatic infection are still under medical observation (310 imported from abroad).

A total of 12,951 confirmed cases have been notified from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Among them, here were 11774 cases in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 49 cases in Macau Special

(U) Example of Zaobao (left), an OMO, publishing similar article as The Paper (right), a PRC media outlet [Articles translated into English]

(U) The three OMO-published articles that were most similar to the highest number of PRC state-media articles provided updates on COVID-19 case counts in China—including in the Xinjiang region. While these articles were not always published on the same date, and they frequently included different numbers, it appears they used a consistent template for providing daily case counts, including referencing reporting from the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. Singapore's *Lianhe Zaobao* and Philippines's *Chinese Commercial News* published articles that were similar to those from PRC state-media outlets including, but not limited to *xinhuanet.com*, *thepaper.cn*, *bjnews.com.cn*, *ce.cn*, *hebnews.cn* and *chinanews.com*.¹²

(U) Importantly, reprinting COVID-19 statistics reported by PRC state media-outlets alone does not signify that the evaluated OMOs are proxies of PRC state media. For example, while *Lianhe Zaobao* amplified the PRC's COVID-19 case numbers, it also recently published content sympathetic to Hong Kong protestors in contrast to PRC messaging.¹³ These connections via similar articles reporting China's COVID-19 case counts dominate the network of OMOs and PRC state-media outlets displayed in the figure below, where line thickness represents the number of articles with similar text.



(U) Network diagram of PRC state media outlets and OMOs in the Southeast Asia region. Red nodes depict PRC state media outlets, while blue nodes represent OMOs. Links are weighted by number of articles with similar text.

(U) Backlink Analysis

(U) To further understand the relationship between OMOs and PRC state media, we analyzed the historical backlink data between PRC state-media outlets and the nine OMOs that shared similar articles. This allowed us to determine if any webpages on OMO websites linked back to PRC state-media websites, whether to increase web traffic or to simply embed references for PRC websites. Our findings are summarized in the table below. Notably, the website corresponding with Philippine outlet *Chinese Commercial News*—*shangbao.com.ph*—has had 8,407 backlinks to *chinanews.com* since April 2015. *Chinanews.com* corresponds with the website of *China News Service (CNS)*, the PRC’s second largest news agency and the primary CCP entity targeting overseas Chinese audiences.¹⁴ The high amplification of PRC messaging via sharing *CNS* content is unsurprising, as *Chinese Commercial News* maintains content sharing agreements with multiple PRC state-media outlets, frequently participates in *CNS*-sponsored Global Chinese Language Media Forum events, sends delegates alongside Philippines President Duterte for official PRC visits, and subscribes to a *CNS* wire service.¹⁵ Overall, *chinanews.com* had the most number of OMOs (6) that backlink to it.

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OMO	PRC	Number of Backlinks
shangbao.com.ph	chinanews.com	8,407
chinatimes.com	thepaper.cn	468
chinatimes.com	chinanews.com	375
chinatimes.com	bjnews.com.cn	93
guojiribao.com	chinanews.com	66
guojiribao.com	xinhuanet.com	54
sinchew.com.my	xinhuanet.com	13
chinapress.com.my	chinanews.com	12
intimes.com.my	chinanews.com	3
sinchew.com.my	chinanews.com	2
sinchew.com.my	thepaper.cn	2
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(U) ANALYST COMMENT: None.

We would appreciate your feedback by completing a short survey here.

(U) References

¹ (U) <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2020-12/The%20influence%20environment.pdf>

² (U) The GEC identified 82 overseas Mandarin outlets in Southeast Asia with a presence online but were only able to capture content from the following subset of 27 outlets due to data coverage limitations.

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Outlet Domain	
asiatimes.com.my	orientaldaily.com.my
cand.com.vn	qndn.vn
chinapress.com.my	seehua.com
chinatimes.com	shangbao.com.ph
chinesetoday.com	sinchew.com.my
cincaicnews.com	thaicn.net
dangcongsan.vn	udn.com
enanyang.my	udnbkk.com
guangming.com.my	uweekly.sg
guojiribao.com	weareunited.com.my
intimes.com.my	worldnews.net.ph
kwongwah.com.my	yan.sg
ocdn.com.my	zaobao.com.sg
onefm.com.my	
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³ (U) Our algorithm, which utilizes cosine similarity measure, compares the texts of two articles to determine their similarity. This measure gives a score between 0 and 1 for each pair of articles such that 0 represents no similarity between articles and 1 represents identical articles. Furthermore, we only used the first 350 characters of each article to determine similarity (due to data limits). However, we found this to be sufficient since the first 350 characters contained the majority of the text for most articles. During analysis, we set a threshold of 0.95 to the similarity measure in order to remove noisy results (articles—especially those dealing with similar topics or published in similar regions—tend to use similar words) and find articles that were identical or extremely similar. The “links” listed in the table below represent instances in which two article webpages contain similar text, such that, e.g., one PRC-PRC link represents a pair of articles, both from PRC websites, that contain similar text.

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Link Types	Number of Links
PRC-PRC Links	94,414
PRC-OMO Links	367
OMO-OMO Links	91
All Links	94,872
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⁴ (U) <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnlQnN>; <https://www.ft.com/content/f5d00a86-3296-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498> - A Financial Times investigation found that party-affiliated outlets were reprinting or broadcasting their content in at least 200 nominally independent Chinese-language publications around the world. 24 of those publications are located in Southeast Asia.

⁵ (SBU) MRN: 20 KUALA LUMPUR 694; Date/DTG: Aug 12, 2020 / 121042Z AUG 20; From: AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR; Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE; E.O.: 13526; TAGS: SCUL, MY, PREL, CN, KPAO, KMDR; Captions: SENSITIVE; Reference: A) 19 Kuala Lumpur 156

⁶ (U) http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2021-04/09/c_1127313085.htm;
<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/286581>;

⁷ (U) <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/286581>;
<https://www.chinapress.com.my/20210612/%e6%9d%a8%e6%b4%81%e7%af%aa%e5%b8%83%e6%9e%97%e8%82%af%e5%86%8d%e4%ba%a4%e9%94%8b-%e5%90%81%e7%be%8e%e5%8b%bf%e5%b9%b2%e6%b6%89%e5%86%85%e6%94%bf/>

⁸ (U) http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2021-06/12/c_1127556360.htm

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http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2021-06/12/c_1127556360.htm
https://www.bjnews.com.cn/detail/162345670014864.html
http://www.cankaoxiaoxi.com/china/20210612/2445855.shtml
http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2021/06-12/9498355.shtml
http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/202106/12/t20210612_36638565.shtml
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¹⁰ (U)

<https://www.enanyang.my/%E5%9B%BD%E9%99%85/%E4%B8%AD%E5%A4%96%E4%BA%A4%E9%83%A8%E4%BF%83%E7%BE%8E-%E5%81%9C%E6%AD%A2%E5%B0%B1%E5%8A%B3%E5%B7%A5%E9%97%AE%E9%A2%98%E6%90%9E%E5%8F%8C%E6%A0%87>, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_13232332, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2021/06-21/9504012.shtml>, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/202106/21/t20210621_36658929.shtml

¹¹ https://www.sinchew.com.my/content/content_2472893.html, <http://www.shangbao.com.ph/zgxw/2021/04-08/102519.shtml>

¹² (U) *Lianhe Zaobao* attributed content to the PRC National Health Commission; *Chinese Commercial News* attributed content to the China News Service. <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/realtime/china/story20210501-1143538>, <http://www.shangbao.com.ph/zgxw/2021/04-08/102520.shtml>, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-04/02/c_1127285574.htm, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_12037298, <https://www.bjnews.com.cn/detail/161749379515012.html>, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/202104/08/t20210408_36451410.shtml, http://world.hebnews.cn/2021-04/05/content_8448150.htm, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2021/04-04/9447497.shtml>

¹³ (U) <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/realtime/china/story20210716-1169660>

¹⁴ (U) China News Service (CNS), China's second largest state-owned news agency operating under the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (OCAO) (国务院侨务办公室), organizes the forums, which include presentations from PRC state media editors and broadcasters, as well as CCP Politburo-level and United Front Working Department officials. Participants write essays that serve as a direct approach for the CCP to encourage the OCLM to follow the external propaganda policy of the Party. A "declaration of consensus" has also been introduced to the Forum, whereby participants sign a non-legally binding document expressing agreement with the findings of the essays written for the Forum. The CNS has also created several complementary forums, including the Advanced Seminar for the Overseas Chinese Language Media (Hawaii Huawen Meiti Gaoji Xunlianban 海外华文媒体高级研修班).

¹⁵ (U) <http://www.chinaqw.com/hwmt/2019/10-10/233549.shtml>; <http://www.chinaqw.com/hwmt/2019/11-19/237068.shtml>