

THREAT
ANALYSIS

CHINA

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By Insikt Group®

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Breaking the Circle: Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Infrastructure Rapidly Expands

100+ international communication centers throughout China reflect a swift expansion of resources and coordination in China's efforts to conduct effective, targeted foreign propaganda campaigns.

International communication centers combine soft and hard, overt and likely covert approaches to target audiences by using websites, mobile apps, social media assets, and international partnerships.

International communication centers are unlikely to become widely trusted sources on China in the short term, but they likely improve the CCP's astroturf capability without being labeled "state media".

Executive Summary

China's propaganda apparatus is taking significant steps to deepen its target-driven precise communication strategy so that China's voice can "break the circle", "go overseas", and be heeded by foreign audiences. Authorities have established more than 100 international communication centers (ICCs) in provinces, cities, and counties across the country, signaling continued investment in global information influence capabilities and media innovation. ICCs centralize management of; coordinate local, national, and international partnerships for; and contribute new resources to global propaganda efforts to promote China's viewpoints and interests — in some cases, ICCs explicitly target key regions, including Southeast and Northeast Asia.

ICCs generally focus on building a positive image of their jurisdiction and China, operating under the theory that repeated exposure to isolated positive stories will, over time, coalesce into one unified understanding of China as defined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). ICCs also support China's "struggle" for global discourse power by sharing political narratives through overt and (likely) covert means such as inauthentic social media amplification and — in the case of Fujian's ICC — a TikTok account likely called Two Tea Eggs that is dedicated to targeting the Taiwan public. Although very likely impaired by all of the challenges facing national-level central state media, ICCs are expanding the implementation of China's long-pursued strategies, such as the use of foreign influencers and collaborations with overseas media organizations.

ICCs, especially those that are well-resourced and positioned as fusion centers for propaganda resources across a given jurisdiction, are becoming key elements in China's propaganda apparatus. Moreover, they are likely achieving perceived success in expanding interest in China's content, though inauthentic engagement cannot be ruled out. One city-level ICC, for example, claims to produce over 100 videos per year, which are likely translated by a network of foreign volunteers across five languages and collectively garner more than 250 million clicks. Fujian's likely Two Tea Eggs account has nearly 80 videos with 10,000 or more likes, dozens with hundreds of thousands of views, and some with over one million views.

ICCs and their parent entities — typically local CCP or state media organizations — very likely collectively operate or oversee thousands of foreign social media accounts and networks of thousands of foreign influencers. Many of their accounts are unlikely to clearly self-declare or be labeled as state-sponsored media. While it is unlikely that ICCs will become trusted go-to sources for information on China and current events among foreign audiences in the near term, their distribution channels are likely sufficient to be mobilized to astroturf China's preferred viewpoints during a crisis. Further, proliferating connections between ICCs and overseas media organizations likely have the potential to influence foreign opinion of China.

Private- and public-sector organizations focused on tracking propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, and foreign influence should account for ICCs in their work and take steps to publicly

catalog and label their channels for disseminating content. Social media companies should also consider labeling accounts affiliated with ICCs as “state-sponsored media” as they are discovered.

Key Findings

- There are currently more than 100 ICCs throughout China, many established under guidance from propaganda authorities in major media organizations at the provincial, city, and county levels; the earliest created was in 2018, but most were formed in 2023 or later.
- ICCs have a range of responsibilities that include explaining China to the world, developing external propaganda capabilities, coordinating resources throughout their jurisdiction, operating foreign social media accounts, training external propaganda talent, monitoring international public opinion, building networks of foreign influencers, organizing trips by foreigners around China, and supporting economic development in their jurisdiction.
- A well-resourced ICC can operate and be supported by infrastructure such as websites, social media accounts, mobile applications, broadcast channels, domestic sub-centers, overseas liaison stations, and foreign-oriented news brands, as well as partnerships with government departments, central state media, businesses, and universities.
- Countries covered by ICCs dedicated to targeting specific audiences include Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Russia, and South Korea; other ICCs likely conform to provincial economic interests, such as in the targeting of Japan by Fujian’s ICC.
- Countries in which ICCs have established overseas liaison stations and other partnerships include (but are almost certainly not limited to) Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Guyana, Hungary, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Panama, Peru, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and Uzbekistan.

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Strategic Positioning

According to research published by Chinese scholars in mid-2024, there are more than 100 ICCs across China.¹ Most of these were [created](#) in 2023 or later. The recent proliferation of ICCs is almost certainly the outcome of calls from central CCP authorities to improve China's international communication capabilities and progressive efforts to deepen local-level involvement in external propaganda work.² In May 2021, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping [called](#) for creating a "strategic communication system with Chinese characteristics" (中国特色的战略传播体系) during a CCP Politburo study session. During the same event, Xi called on every jurisdiction and department to give voice to their own qualities and advantages in demonstrating a vibrant and lively image of China. It is within the context of these and related pronouncements, as well as assessments that Western media continues to dominate global discourse, that Chinese researchers [understand](#) the [emergence](#) of [ICCs](#).^{3 4}

Government-guided [provincial-level](#), [city-level](#), [county-level](#), and [district-level](#) ICCs are typically implemented by major local media organizations. A single jurisdiction can have more than one ICC within different media, [academic](#), or other organizations.⁵ The earliest provincial-level ICC was [established](#) in Chongqing in mid-2018. In June of that year, the local Chongqing CCP Propaganda Department approved the creation of the Chongqing International Communication Center (CICC; 重庆国际传播中心) by Chongqing Daily Newspaper Group (庆日报报业集团).

In 2020, researchers and editors affiliated with the external propaganda-focused magazine of a CCP Central Propaganda Department (CPD)-subordinate work unit published a report on the strategic development of local international communication capabilities.⁶ They describe the overall theory of victory of such work, which almost certainly applies to ICCs. According to their report, local-level international communication about, for example, a specific city provides foreigners with isolated positive impressions that will coalesce into one unified understanding of China over time. They further suggest that localization supports increased collaborative communication between China and media and social organizations in target countries in a globalized information environment.⁷

According to the authors of the 2020 report and other Chinese propaganda scholars, localization is further driven by — and ICCs support the advancement of — the CCP's "precise communication" (精准传播) strategy; the expectation that content implements requirements such as "one country, one policy" (一国一策) and "[one group, one policy](#)" (一群一策); and the goal of collective "[polyphonous](#)

¹ 张志安 [Zhang Zhi'an], "城市国际传播"的三个关键词" ["The Three Keywords of 'City International Communication'"], 上海广播电视研究 [Research of Radio and Television], no. 3 (2024), 99-101.

² 于运全 [Yu Yunquan] et al., "2020年中国地方国际传播战略发展报告" ["2020 Report on the Development of China's Local International Communication Strategy"] in 全球传播生态发展报告(2020) [Annual Report on the Global Communicative Ecology (2020)], edited by 高伟 [Gao Wei] and 姜飞 [Jiang Fei], 央视国际视频通讯社智库 [Global International Video Agency (CCTV+) Think Tank] and 北京外国语大学国际新闻与传播学 [Beijing Foreign Languages University School of International Journalism and Communication], December 2020, 101-120.

³ 李宁 [Li Ning], "现阶段地方国际传播中心业务建设的主要挑战与发展策略" ["The Main Challenges and Development Strategy of Current Local International Communication Industry Affairs Construction"], 现代视听 [Modern Audio-Video Arts], no. 1 (2024), 88-91.

⁴ Yu et al., "2020 Report on the Development of China's Local International Communication Strategy".

⁵ For an example of a jurisdiction with more than one ICC, see Hebei [1](#), [2](#).

⁶ Yu et al., "2020 Report on the Development of China's Local International Communication Strategy".

⁷ Ibid.

[communication](#)" (复调传播).⁸ A joint "Malanshan Initiative" (马栏山倡议) declaration by fifteen ICCs and additional Chinese state media outlets in 2023 further [asserted](#) that these organizations would "tell China's story well", "communicate China's voice", and "break the circle to go overseas" (破圈出海) by pursuing regionalized (区域化) and audience-differentiated (分众化) expression. Each of these concepts is related to the CCP's efforts to [innovate and tailor](#) its communications for maximum effect among specific audiences.

ICCs have a range of functions. As understood through surveys with personnel at thirteen ICCs [conducted](#) for a 2024 paper by Chinese communication scholars, ICCs undertake four broad missions: (1) expounding national development concepts like "whole-process people's democracy"; (2) serving international communication work by, for example, recruiting foreigners to make content about life in China; (3) communicating regional image such as by [supporting](#) Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) activities; and (4) promoting economic cooperation, such as by [helping](#) local brands reach international audiences.

Likely with some variations dependent on local government priorities and funding, ICCs [undertake](#) the following [responsibilities](#):^{9 10} produce content for international audiences; set up and operate overseas social media accounts for government entities, businesses, and social groups; seek to innovate international communication channels and discourse methods; develop external propaganda talent; monitor international public opinion; execute media activities according to contracts¹¹ with other organizations¹²; organize international exhibitions and cultural exchange activities; build international networks and foreign contacts; and establish organizational infrastructure to support communications from and to other countries.

More advanced government-guided ICCs can also function as fusion centers for wider jurisdictional resources, such as from across a given province, though not all have achieved this. ICCs [integrate, produce, and publish](#) local resources; implement reforms to systems and mechanisms for resource coordination, operations, information collection, drafting, and public opinion analysis in their area of responsibility; and integrate information about current events, culture, the economy, and other developments for publication in multiple languages. Some provincial ICCs specifically take a [leading role](#) in all international communications work for their jurisdiction, coordinating the resources of government departments and work units (事业单位) at that level and resources from cities and prefectures under their province.¹³ The Jiangxi International Communication Center (JXICC; 江西国际传播中心), for instance, has [signed](#) strategic cooperation framework agreements with provincial government departments for overseas Chinese affairs, education, commerce, and foreign affairs, as well as with the Jiangxi branch of China News Service (中国新闻社) and other institutions and media organizations. Through these agreements, the JXICC seeks to launch a central China international communication exchange mechanism and activities to bring foreign journalists to the province.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Li, "Main Challenges and Development Strategy".

¹¹ Source held by Recorded Future.

¹² Source held by Recorded Future.

¹³ Ibid.

Despite the number of ICCs throughout China and their wide range of objectives and functions, several noteworthy facets of their organization and communication strategies stand out. The following section explores the organization of well-resourced ICCs, their overt and likely covert communications, their creation of foreign and overseas networks, and geographic targeting priorities.

Channels and Content

Organizational Structure

Organizationally, ICCs can vary greatly. ICCs that formally represent their jurisdictions are typically established under guidance from local propaganda departments and implemented by major local media organizations. At a minimum, most ICCs are likely to have a “matrix” (矩阵) of accounts across popular foreign social media platforms, which are often accompanied by an English-language website run by the ICC or its parent. These websites and social media accounts often center on a “main brand” (主要品牌) like iLiaoning (1, 2), HiHainan (1, 2), Meet Jiangxi (1, 2), Discover Guizhou (1), iShandong (1, 2), Open Hubei (1), ShanghaiEye (1, 2), The Silk Road-Shaanxi (1), and HolaFujian (1). Smaller auxiliary brands are also [common](#); for example, the aforementioned CICC’s [main brand](#) is iChongqing, but it almost certainly also disseminates content using the iNSIDE CHINA YouTube channel ([@insidechinalive](#)). There are very likely thousands of social media accounts on foreign platforms run by ICCs (hereafter, “foreign social media accounts”) throughout China, either as center assets directly or on behalf of others; as of 2022, for example, the Fujian International Communication Center (FICC; 福建国际传播中心) alone reportedly [has](#) 106 foreign social media accounts, and it or its parent entity very likely [operates](#) at least 669 affiliated accounts for others.

Well-resourced ICCs, [such as](#) the Guangdong Today (GToday) International Communication Center (GTICC; 今日广东国际传播中心), can also have [versions](#) of their websites in languages other than English and a dedicated [mobile application](#) or distribution channel through the mobile app of their parent. Some ICCs have [sub-centers](#) throughout their jurisdiction and set up [liaison offices](#) with media organizations in foreign countries. A few have broadcast [television channels](#) (or television programs) that are organic to their organization or shared with their parents.¹⁴ Further, some ICCs or their parent entities [operate](#) affiliated foreign-oriented news brands. They or their parents can also, like the aforementioned [FICC](#), [operate](#) multi-channel networks (MCN) — a type of service that helps manage social media content creators.

Finally, there is collaboration and resource sharing among ICCs and between ICCs and central state media outlets. The aforementioned “Malanshan Initiative” is very likely an example of such collaboration. In September 2022, the Burmese-language newspaper of a local Chinese media company in Yunnan [organized](#) a foreign social media action to highlight Chinese culture, with assets from ICCs in Jiangsu, Hainan, Sichuan, Qingdao, and other areas participating.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Figure 1 depicts a notional outline of how a large and well-funded ICC may be structured, with further examples of select ICCs provided below.

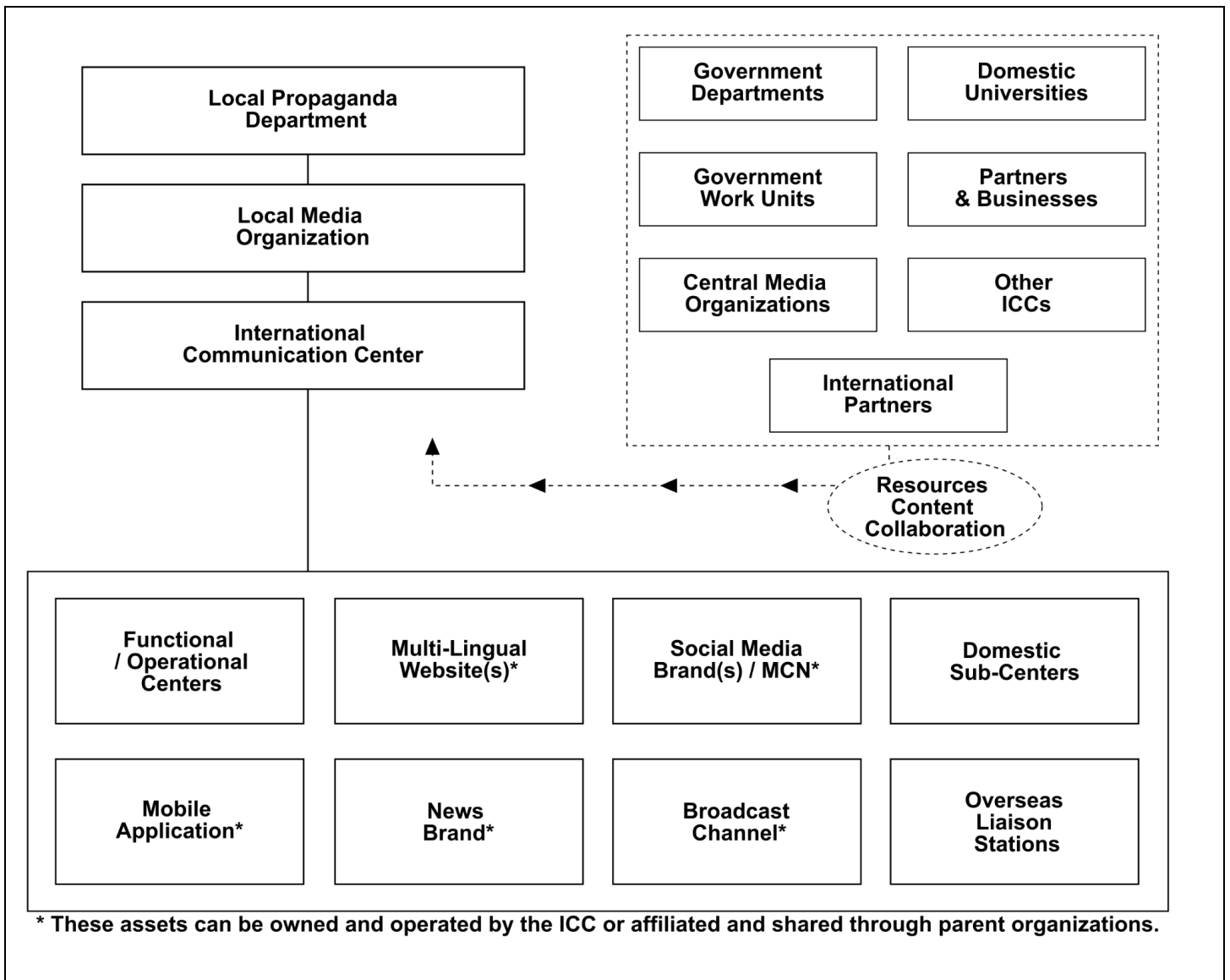


Figure 1: Notional diagram of the infrastructure supporting well-funded ICCs (Source: Insikt Group)

Examples of relatively sophisticated ICCs that exhibit aspects of the organization and functions diagrammed in **Figure 1** include the provincial-level Western China International Communication Organization (WCICO; 西部国际传播中心), JiangsuNow International Communication Center (JNICC; 江苏Now国际传播中心), Shandong International Communication Center (SDICC; 山东国际传播中心), Henan International Communication Center (HNICC; 河南国际传播中心), and Great Wall International Communication Center (GWICC; 长城国际传播中心), as well as the city-level “Changsha International Communication Matrix” (CICM; 长沙国际传播矩阵) — an umbrella grouping of three ICCs, related studios, and partner infrastructure.

- The WCICO was formed from the aforementioned CICC, which was [created](#) in 2018 but [upgraded](#) in August 2023 to [support](#) international communication objectives representing Western China as the WCICO. The WCICO is [pursuing](#) a “1331” functional group” (“1331”功能集群) that consists of WCICO has a “hub” (1); iChongqing, Bridging News (陆海财经; which uses a [mobile app](#)), and the Chongqing International News Center (重庆国际新闻中心) as platforms for tourism and culture, economic news, and media services, respectively (3); a charity fund for international communication, a municipal cultural exchange association, and a likely cultural book publishing company as supportive institutions (3); and market-oriented international communication industry incubation zone (1).
- The JNICC was [founded](#) in June 2022 and is run by the Omnimedia International Communication Department of Xinhua Daily (新华日报全媒体国际传播部) under Xinhua Daily Media Group (新华报业传媒集团). The JNICC’s [main brand](#) is JiangsuNow, which is used on social media and an English [website](#), but the JNICC also has auxiliary channels, like [Modern Jiangsu](#) on Threads. The JNICC has hired notable academics to advance research into international communication strategies, including precise communication [advocate](#) Hu Zhengrong (胡正荣), who is [director](#) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Journalism and Communication Research Institute (中国社会科学院新闻与传播研究所). Further, the JNICC has [created](#) at least four “Jiangsu enterprise media workstations” in partnership with Jiangsu-based companies operating overseas to help their brands “go global”.
- The SDICC was [established](#) in November 2023 under the Shandong Radio and Television Station (山东广播电视台). The SDICC has four [internal centers](#) for collecting international news, promoting foreign people-to-people exchange, conducting international communications research, and developing international communications talent. At the time of SDICC’s establishment, its parent [signed agreements](#) with a range of domestic propaganda and media organizations, including China Daily, China News Service, the China International Publishing Group Center (CIPG; 中国外文局) for Central and Eastern Europe and South Asia (欧亚中心), and foreign organizations, such as Kyrgyz Television and the France-based documentary filmmakers “marketplace”, Sunny Side of the Doc.
- The HNICC was [founded](#) in June 2023, operated and managed by Henan Daily (河南日报社) with support from China Daily.¹⁵ The HNICC [implements](#) a “1+1+N+X” overseas communication matrix comprising the flagship external propaganda brand “HiHenan” (as reported, but the HNICC actually uses [iHenan](#)) across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms; the English-language website [hihenan\[.\]cn](#) (as reported, but also [ihenan\[.\]top](#)); the HiHenan mobile app; and other provincial-level external propaganda coordinating and linkage platforms. In June 2024, the HNICC [opened](#) a Xuchang Sub-center (许昌分中心) with Xuchang Daily (许昌日报社) to expand the city’s “international circle of friends”; a simultaneous launch event for the sub-center

¹⁵ 中国日报社与河南省国际传播战略合作项目签约仪式在郑州举行 [“Signing Ceremony for the International Communication Strategic Cooperation Project Between China Daily and Henan Province Was Held in Zhengzhou”], 光明地方 [Guangming Local], 27 December 2023, [https://difang\[.\]gmw\[.\]cn/ha/////2023-12/27/content_37055900.htm](https://difang[.]gmw[.]cn/ha/////2023-12/27/content_37055900.htm).

involved “Generation Z” youths from Russia, Belarus, Albania, and other countries touring Xuchang.

- The GWICC was [established](#) in January 2024 in Hebei under Great Wall New Media Group (长城新媒体集团). Upon creation, the GWICC’s parent issued “appointment letters” to “overseas communication officers” from the UK, the US, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Russia, and Brazil. It [implements](#) a “1+2+4+N” strategy in which iHebei is its main brand across foreign social media. The GWICC also has a [portal](#) on the website of its parent organization and the Jiyun mobile app (冀云), which are its two main distribution channels. The “N” in the GWICC’s strategy [refers](#) to an unspecified number and type of other communication channels. To “integrate international communication resources from all areas and sectors”, the GWICC has relationships with provincial government departments, universities, enterprises, and public work units. Further, the GWICC has overseas liaison stations in [Brazil](#) and [Milan, Italy](#).
- The CICM is an umbrella [grouping](#) of city-level international communication infrastructure established in July 2024. The CICM [implements](#) a “1+2+3+N” model that comprises the Changsha International Communication Center (CSICC; 长沙国际传播中心); two sub-centers within Changsha Evening News (长沙晚报) and Changsha Broadcast and Television Station (长沙市广播电视台); three studios, namely the China-Africa International Communication Studio, Shishan Lou Studio (拾山楼工作室), and the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Generated Content Studio; and numerous partnerships with media organizations, enterprises, universities, think tanks, overseas chambers of commerce, and overseas liaison stations.

Externally oriented (relative to mainland China) news brands like Bridging News under WCICO represent a trend in ICC infrastructure and the capabilities of their parent organizations. Another of these is Straight News (also known as Zhi News; 直新闻), which likely [focuses](#) on audiences in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Straight News is an “omnimedia matrix” and mobile app [under](#) the Shenzhen Media Group International Communication Center (SZMGICC; 深圳广电国际传播中心).

Zhejiang Daily (浙江日报), which [established](#) the Zhejiang International Communication Center (ZICC; 浙江省国际传播中心) in May 2024, [developed](#) the Tianmu News app (天目新闻) in 2019. Tianmu News appears to focus on Chinese diaspora communities, having reportedly (in 2021) established relationships with diaspora media organizations in the US, Canada, Japan, Russia, France, and South Africa. In 2023, Zhejiang Daily [consolidated](#) Tianmu News and two other news channels into the Chao News App (潮新闻).

A fourth news brand is ZhengguanMedia (正观新闻). ZhengguanMedia was [created](#) in 2021 under Zhengzhou Newspaper Group (郑州报业集团) and is present on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and other foreign social media platforms. In 2023, Zhengzhou Newspaper Group [merged](#) the “international communication brand ZhengguanMedia” with the local CPP newspaper’s “external propaganda brand WhereZhengzhou” and established its External Communication Convergence Media Center (对外传播融媒体中心). Both Zhengguan Media and Tianmu News [participated](#) in the aforementioned September 2022 initiative alongside dozens of ICCs to share Chinese culture.

That at least two of the four news brands described above predate their affiliated ICC is not an anomaly. Many of the brands and assets used by ICCs predate their creation, almost certainly reflecting the centralization of resources under ICCs as fusion centers. For example, the website Yunnan Gateway (云桥网) was [registered](#) in 2011 but is now [under](#) the Yunnan International Communication Center for South and Southeast Asia (YICC; 云南省南亚东南亚区域国际传播中心). Similarly, the Our Jiangsu International Communication Center (我苏国际传播中心; not to be confused with the aforementioned JNICC) was [established](#) in July 2023 under Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation (JSBC; 江苏省广播电视总台). Its associated website is very likely “Our Jiangsu” (我苏网), but “Our Jiangsu” has existed since at least 2017 and [describes](#) itself as administered by a JSBC subsidiary under authorization from the Jiangsu CCP Committee United Front Work Department. Social media accounts are also sometimes preexisting assets, such as FICC’s HolaFujian YouTube [account](#), which was created a year before the ICC.

Positivity and Struggle

ICCs appear to predominantly focus on disseminating soft¹⁶ content about Chinese culture and modernization but are also a conduit for rebuttals of perceived anti-China narratives and other overtly political commentary. The aforementioned 2020 report characterizes this participation in “international public opinion struggle” as an ongoing evolution in response to the dominance of Western news media.¹⁷ The frequency of activity in the latter category can vary, and many likely only sporadically contribute to the struggle for discourse power in this way. However, some ICCs frequently publish hard content. At least one ICC — the FICC — likely has a dedicated covert channel for negative and contentious content aimed at a specific target: Taiwan.

As summarized in a 2024 Chinese academic study, common soft content themes promoted by ICCs include good people, good acts, engineering construction, technological innovation, agricultural development, village revitalization, beautiful scenery, cuisine, and similar topics.¹⁸ Surveying the Facebook and YouTube activity of iLiaoning (1, 2), HiHainan (1, 2), Meet Jiangxi (1, 2), Discover Guizhou (1, 2), HolaFujian (1, 2) and other ICC “main brand” accounts supports this summary. Posts that showcase natural scenery, art, history, culture, business, locally held international engagements, and the activities of foreigners are among the most frequently shared by such accounts. The Sichuan International Communication Center (SICC; 四川国际传播中心) has a dedicated channel across multiple platforms for sharing videos of pandas, called the [Panda Daily Show](#) (熊猫每日秀). Some Chinese scholars see such positive content as relevant to directly [countering](#) the one-sidedness of Western reporting.

In contrast, searching the same accounts for keywords likely to be associated with more critical commentary, such as the names of US politicians, terms related to current conflicts, and references to

¹⁶ “Soft”, and, later in the report, “hard”, is used to describe content according to the concepts of “soft” and “hard” news. Whereas “soft” news refers to reporting on topics such as human interest stories, sports, and entertainment, “hard” news refers to timely reporting on social, political, and economic topics. “Hard” content is more likely to overtly espouse specific CCP viewpoints and China’s national interests, including by commenting critically on international affairs (1, 2).

¹⁷ Yu et al., “2020 Report on the Development of China’s Local International Communication Strategy”.

¹⁸ Li, “Main Challenges and Development Strategy”.

scandals and perceived “smears”, only rarely returns notable results. On [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#), for instance, HiHainan — which represents the provincial government with [jurisdiction](#) over China’s South China Sea claims — does not have any currently available content reflecting China’s position on South China Sea tensions with the Philippines or other claimants. In part, limited engagement with geopolitical topics on Facebook may be an intentional aspect of how ICCs use specific foreign social media platforms. As discussed below, whereas some ICCs regularly publish content on contentious and current events via YouTube and their websites, the same content is not always found on Facebook. Still, in the case of the Hainan International Media Center (HIMC; 海南国际传播中心), its [website](#) similarly does not appear to emphasize ongoing disputes or tensions.

When overt ICC accounts surveyed do post content related to potentially contentious topics, content about Taiwan appears most common. However, such content typically [focuses](#) on the positive interactions of people from Taiwan in mainland China rather than the more coercive elements of China’s messaging on this issue. In a separate example of rare hard content, the Meet Jiangxi YouTube channel and Facebook account once [shared](#) a video [celebrating](#) the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as a “staunch force in safeguarding world peace”.

Nevertheless, examples of ICCs frequently and actively engaging in the struggle for discourse power by focusing on current events, responding to anti-China perceptions, and distributing other hard content are readily discoverable. The US-based research organization China Media Project [identified](#) the SZMGICC’s aforementioned Straight News after it contributed to Chinese media’s rebuttal of a US government report [asserting](#) that China “employs a variety of deceptive and coercive methods as it attempts to influence the international information environment”.

The Shanghai Media Group International Communication Center (SMGICC; SMG国际传播中心) shares hard content via its ShanghaiEye (魔都眼) website and similarly named YouTube channel. For example, the featured video as of this writing on YouTube is an “[exclusive interview](#)” with international relations scholar John Mearsheimer that covers “US elections, China policy, Palestine-Israel and Russia-Ukraine”. Unlike the latest videos pages of other ICC YouTube accounts, that of ShanghaiEye skews heavily toward coverage of current geopolitical events (**Figure 2**). One video from June 2024 is [republished](#) news footage from a Japanese outlet regarding the criminal conduct of a US military service member while stationed in Japan. Another [reshares](#) PLA media regarding military exercises around Taiwan. On its website, the SMGICC has shared a video [discussing](#) Israel’s bombing of a hospital in Lebanon and an interview with former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who [asserts](#) (according to the captions) that “the Taiwan question was created by the US to contain China’s development. Japan must not get involved”. Interestingly, while not entirely absent, this kind of content is [not prominent](#) on the ShanghaiEye Facebook account, which aligns more with the behavior of the overt ICC Facebook accounts surveyed above.

ShanghaiEye 魔都眼
 @ShanghaiEyeMagic · 260K subscribers · 21K videos
 BRINGING STORIES TO LIFE, ShanghaiEye is a multi-platform media brand focusing on hi...more
 facebook.com/shanghaieyeSMG and 3 more links

Home Videos Shorts Live Playlists Community

Latest Popular Oldest

Video Title	Duration	Views	Time Ago
'CRAZY, INTENSE WILDFIRE' IN CALIFORNIA	1:06	17 views	27 minutes ago
China-built \$1.4bln port to open in Peru	1:47	62 views	42 minutes ago
Kremlin & Muscovites voice on Trump's w...	3:23	115 views	57 minutes ago
'Don't worry, Mexicans' Trump don't favor immigr...	2:19	58 views	1 hour ago
INSIDE CHINA'S MOST ADVANCED NUCLEAR POWER UNITS	2:27	183 views	1 hour ago
THERE IS NO REASON WE SHOULD GO BACKWA...	2:03	116 views	2 hours ago
UKRAINIANS ANXIOUS ON TRUMP'S VICTORY ?	4:16	310 views	2 hours ago
TRAFFIC LIGHT COALITION COLLAPSES	2:47	336 views	3 hours ago

Figure 2: ShanghaiEye latest videos as of October 24, 2024 (Source: [YouTube](#))

While WCICO's iChongqing YouTube channel largely appears to [focus](#) on the lives and activities of foreigners in Chongqing, the city's unique landscape, its business development, and aspects of China's modernization, the channel also publishes a steady stream of videos on China's place in the world and world events from perspectives that align with preferred CCP narratives. Participants in a video from September 2024, titled "Trump or Kamala? Who Does Beijing Prefer?" sought, for example, to [contrast](#) Chinese and American foreign policy by highlighting the US's "1.6 billion dollar anti-China propaganda campaign" and China's "50 billion dollar pledge" to develop Africa, calling the former "incredibly sad and just ridiculous". Another video from August 2024 is [titled](#) "Inside Joe Biden's Secret Nuclear Plan Against China". Both of these videos feature a foreign WCICO reporter who also [produces](#) content under the Bridging News brand. Both examples were removed from the iChongqing YouTube account before publication of this report. However, at least one ("Trump or Kamala") was also [shared](#) by other channels, likely reflecting a form of cooperation. Google searches for both still provide an indication these videos were once hosted by iChongqing. iChongqing has also [released](#) several [videos](#) highlighting China's system of democracy.

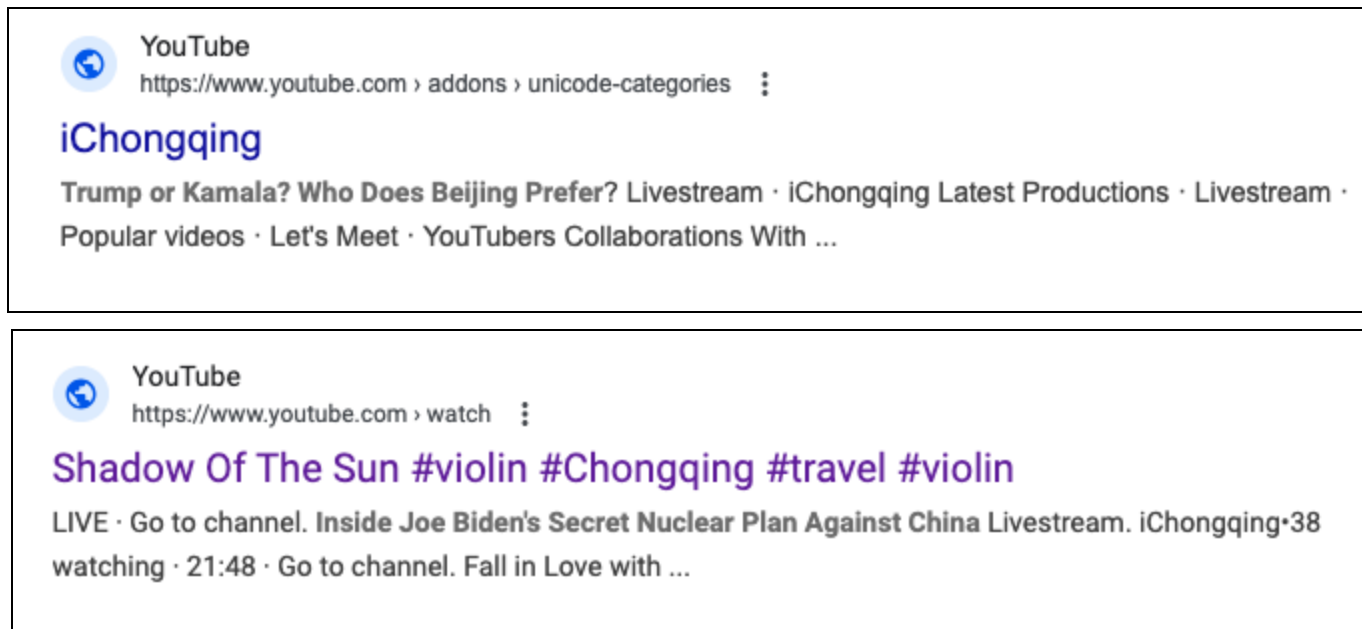


Figure 3. References to “Trump or Kamala” and “Secret Nuclear Plan” on iChongqing’s YouTube channel, the latter appearing as a suggested video (Source: Google [1, 2])

Past observations of the activities of the WCICO’s predecessor organization — the CICC — further highlight the likelihood that, like other elements of China’s propaganda apparatus, ICCs are willing to use inauthentic and covert means to reach their audiences. In 2022, the New York Times and ProPublica “often” [identified](#) iChongqing social media posts among those amplified by a network of several thousand inauthentic accounts also amplifying a now-deleted account named “Spicy Panda”, which promoted China’s view of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing and countered “deceiving propaganda” emanating from the US. An investigation by Voice of America and the Taiwan-based research organization DoubleThink Lab in 2024 similarly [discovered](#) a [network](#) of more than 1,000 likely inauthentic cryptocurrency-focused accounts that also promoted accounts in the China-linked influence operations network Spamouflage (tracked by Insikt Group as [Empire Dragon](#)), the accounts of Chinese government and central media entities, and accounts associated with city-level Jinan International Communication Center (JICC; 济南国际传播中心).

The FICC’s activities also showcase this mix of approaches — soft and hard, overt and (likely) covert. The FICC was [established](#) by Fujian Media Group (FMG; 福建省广播影视集团) in June 2023 at the [direction](#) of provincial propaganda authorities. The FICC is also [known as](#) the Fujian Taiwan-Hong Kong-Macau Communication Center (福建台港澳传播中心). It is part of FMG’s sprawling organization, which also [comprises](#) numerous satellite channels, television (TV) terrestrial channels, broadcast frequencies, and “platforms”, in addition to having at least eighteen subsidiary units and enterprises. Beyond FICC, important FMG channels and platforms with which the FICC almost certainly collaborates include [Southeast Television](#) (中国东南卫视), [Haibo TV](#) (海博TV), [StraitPlus](#) (台海时刻), [China Fujian](#) (中国福建), and [multiple](#) MCNs.

The FICC almost certainly acts as a fusion center. In March 2024, FMG Deputy Chief Editor Deng Jinmu (邓金木), who is also [director](#) of FMG's Convergence Media Information Center (融媒体资讯中心) and founder and operator of the FICC, [described](#) this role in a way that suggests that FICC has relationships with provincial and sub-provincial Fujian-based media organizations outside of FMG:

[T]hrough deep integration of Fujian's external propaganda resources, the Fujian International Communication Center fully gathers the external propaganda energy of Straits Today [今日海峡; part of StraitPlus], StraitPlus, New Fujian [清新福建], other social media, and the accounts of local official institutions... to give full play to the main force role of regional international communication.

As mentioned above, the FICC reportedly has 106 foreign social media [accounts](#), with its "main brand" being HolaFujian. The FICC also very likely [operates](#) the "Fujian International Communication MCN Platform" (福建国际传播MCN平台) or is the [beneficiary](#) of such under FMG. Through this MCN alone, there are at least 669 other foreign social media accounts [managed](#) by the FICC or FMG.

HolaFujian, which predominantly appears to post on Facebook and YouTube about scenery, culture, modernization, sports events, and art-making and has frequently also posted about Taiwan in ways that emphasize [shared culture](#) or the [viewpoints](#) of Taiwan internet personalities in China, [responded](#) to "smears" by the US about Hong Kong; and highlighted various military [technologies](#) and [advances](#). HolaFujian also ran a series of posts between March and July 2024 with the hashtag #Chineserumorbreaker, which mockingly responded to social media claims and questions about China. Topics included "[you can only have one kid or you will die](#)", "[Are there any protesters in China?](#)", and "[Do you still see homeless in China?](#)". An FICC-[affiliated](#) auxiliary brand, Moli Moli, similarly [focused](#) on cultural topics while it was in use.

HolaFujian does not frequently (if at all) appear to disseminate coercive or critical content aimed at Taiwan or others; however, in August 2024, Deng said that the FICC [uses](#) both "soft" and "hard" measures, "exposing" and carrying out "struggle" against Taiwan's "Green Camp" (绿营) — a [reference](#) to the pan-green coalition of parties that focus "on the island's story unique from China", of which the incumbent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP; 民主進步黨) is a member. For example, in July 2023, after then-presidential candidate Lai Ching-te [outlined](#) his plan to "preserve peace in the Taiwan Strait" and [asserted](#) that being able to visit the White House in Washington, DC, symbolized his "political goal", the FICC reportedly [issued](#) 30 short videos "refuting" Lai. Deng [claimed](#) that such activity is happening across TikTok, Facebook, Xiaohongshu (小红书), and other platforms without mentioning any particular accounts.

This raises a question of what accounts the FICC is using to struggle against Taiwan. One likely channel is the TikTok account Two Tea Eggs (2TE; 兩顆茶葉蛋; @lkcyedan), the successor to a now-deleted account called One Tea Egg (1TE; 一顆茶葉蛋; @ykcyedan). This assessment is supported by publicly acknowledged FICC-produced TikTok content that was shared by 1TE and 2TE; overlapping content between 2TE and other FMG channels; and comparisons of FICC's claims about its presence on TikTok, the characteristics of 2TE, and the characteristics of StraitPlus, a known FMG-run TikTok account that

targets audiences in Taiwan. **Appendix A** provides additional details about key elements of this assessment.

The assessment of 2TE as a likely FICC asset is further supported by research published by the Taiwan Information Environment Research Center (台灣資訊環境研究中心; formerly known as Information Operations Research Group [IORG]) in March 2024. IORG [found](#) that “2TE is likely a proxy TikTok account controlled by [China’s] state media”. In particular, IORG found significant overlap between 2TE content and multiple Douyin accounts run by Fujian Daily News Group (FDNG; 福建日报报业集团) in patterns of activity reflecting a “mixed publishing schedule” that “indicates complexity in the coordination of actors in the production effort”. Given the FICC’s almost certain fusion center role for provincial assets, which almost certainly include FDNG, the IORG’s findings align with expectations for how an FICC account would likely behave.

Thus, through 2TE — which, while readily identifiable as partisan, is not overtly associated with any Chinese state media entity — the FICC is likely engaged in covert efforts to target Taiwan. 2TE shares soft and hard content, including frequent videos critical of Taiwan politics or supportive of China’s viewpoints, fulfilling the mandate that FICC’s TikTok channel would be deploying “hard measures” against Taiwan (**Figure 4**). For example, 2TE’s earliest videos [mocked](#) a DPP election campaign video, [attacked](#) Lai as a hardcore independence advocate, [attacked](#) the DPP as corrupt, [criticized](#) the economy under DPP leadership, and [leaked](#) an alleged recording of former president Tsai Ing-wen discussing DPP internal politics. According to IORG’s [observations](#), much of 2TE’s content comes “from Taiwanese political talk shows” and other interviews, as well as “press conferences of [mainland] officials, including spokespersons of the Taiwan Affairs Office and the Foreign Ministry”. The account [shares](#) general interest and entertainment videos as well. As of this writing, 2TE has shared 79 videos, including those critical of Taiwan politics, that garnered 10,000 or more likes. Many more have received hundreds of thousands of views, and at least two dozen have one million or more views.



Figure 4: Examples of 2TE content critical of the DPP and supportive of China's influence operations; the left-most example uses 1TE branding despite being posted by 2TE (Source: TikTok [1, 2, 3]; translation by Insikt Group)

Foreign Networks

Provincial and city-level ICCs particularly focus on building linkages with foreigners and overseas organizations. This is almost certainly a means of implementing precise communication (in other words, propaganda [tailored](#) for specific audiences) and almost certainly seeks to use foreign communities to advance China's international communication objectives. This is occurring in at least two primary ways: foreign influencers and overseas institutional partnerships. In this, ICCs are expanding the application of central state media strategies pursued in recent years.

Using foreign "[friends](#)", journalism professionals, and organizations — such as by [placing](#) content in or acquiring foreign outlets — has a long history in China's [approach](#) to external propaganda. Increasingly important in the last decade is the use of online [personalities](#), foreign social media [influencers](#), and [vlog-style](#) content to amplify China's self-image and "positive energy". ICCs adhere to this strategic direction, bringing additional resources to experiential propaganda (such as the aforementioned tour of Xuchang) and lines of effort that support and encourage foreigners to create online content that offers viewers their "friendly" perception of China. In November 2023, a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) on the growing prominence of foreign influencers in CCP propaganda [highlighted](#) this, stating that ICCs are contributing to "rapidly growing efforts to develop diverse forms of cooperation with foreign influencers".

The foreign “friends” and online influencers of ICCs have titles such as “[overseas promotion ambassadors](#)” (海外推介大使), “[overseas communication officers](#)” (海外传播官), “[overseas recommendation officers](#)” (海外推荐官), and “[global communicators of Chinese culture](#)” (中华文化全球传播使者). These recruits and other influencer-based activities are found across ICCs regardless of their jurisdictional level. For example, the aforementioned provincial-level HIMC has reportedly “[cultivated](#)” a [group](#) of more than 120 “overseas communication officers” from more than 40 countries, consisting of economists, think tankers, entrepreneurs, journalists, study abroad students, and internet influencers. This network is one of three [key enablers](#) in the HIMC’s strategy, the other enablers being institutional cooperation and foreign columnists. The city-level Wenzhou Overseas Communication Center (WOCC; 温州市海外传播中心) [has more than](#) 300 “overseas communication officers” and more than 500 “international communication volunteers” (国际传播志愿者). The WOCC claims to produce more than 100 original videos annually that are translated (likely with the help of this network) into English, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Spanish, and other languages and collectively garner 250 million clicks each year. Like other ICC assets, this kind of network can [predate](#) ICCs themselves, as is the case with the WOCC.

The aforementioned SICC, [established](#) in March 2023, similarly [views](#) foreign personnel as an important part of its strategy, according to a July 2024 Xinhua News Agency report. The SICC is “[actively exploring](#)” the onboarding of foreign personnel and “accelerating construction” of an “overseas communication officer team”, particularly focusing on establishing a routine content cooperation mechanism with foreigners in target countries and foreigners in Sichuan. According to Xinhua’s report, the SICC has already gathered a group of more than 740 foreign influencers and consistently invited them to China and Sichuan. The provincial-level Dazhong International Communication Center (DZICC; 大众国际传播中心) under the Shandong CCP Committee newspaper also makes “[user-generated content](#)” (UGC) a key part of its model for implementing precise communication. In October 2024, the FICC’s HolaFujian YouTube channel began [publishing](#) a series of [videos sharing](#) the travels of a “Taiwan media personality” around China. The subject of these videos [works](#) as the host of a television program for Taiwan-based news outlet TVBS around China.

After China [announced](#) a 144-hour visa-free transit travel policy for select nationalities and cities in July 2024, the GWICC, Gansu International Communication Center (GICC; 甘肃国际传播中心), Anhui International Communication Center (安徽国际传播中心), Qingdao Daily International Communication Center (青岛日报国际传播中心), and almost certainly other ICCs “[followed](#) international communication officers deep into the locality to explain the stories that made foreign travelers’ eyes wide”. A video [produced](#) for this occasion by the GWICC, for example, showcases China’s commitment to nature conservation with a visit to Baiyang Lake by a Russian GWICC “communication officer”. Similarly, WCICO’s iChongqing [published](#) a live-streamed vlog exploring Chongqing and promoting awareness of the visa-free transit policy with a Canadian influencer. This kind of activity almost certainly occurs frequently. WCICO [invited](#) more than ten “Youtubers” to Chongqing in 2020 to support pandemic recovery. In 2023, to align with an international event in Chongqing and a larger China Media Group (中央广播电视总台) initiative, the WCICO [invited](#) US, Italian, and Polish influencers to the city to make videos about their experiences.

ICCs also pursue institutional relationships with overseas media and other organizations in the form of sub-centers, liaison stations, joint activities, and cooperation agreements. These forms of external engagement very likely enable the collection and distribution of news information and opportunities for collaboration in ways that support China's international communication objectives, which almost certainly include [decreasing](#) reliance on mainstream Western media coverage for China-related stories.

The GWICC's aforementioned overseas liaison stations in Brazil and Italy are part of this effort. In Italy, the liaison station was [created](#) at the Milan China Design Center (米兰中国设计中心). In Brazil, the GWICC has a [liaison station](#) at Agência Brasil Central (ABC) and [cooperates](#) with TV Brasil Central (TVBC). Using these relationships, the GWICC has [coordinated](#), for example, a "China-Brazil Joint Journalist Interview Program" that involved TVBC journalists conducting interviews broadcast from Hebei province. The GWICC, ABC, and Brazil's Secretariat of State for Tourism, Sports, and Culture have also [organized](#) a photograph exhibition in Brazil.



Figure 5: Locations of ICC overseas liaison stations and sub-centers (non-exhaustive); map depicts the self-image that China portrays to the world (Source: Insikt Group)

Other examples include a [liaison station](#) between the GICC and the Belarusian Association of Journalists, which was established in August 2023. The ZICC [established](#) its first batch of overseas liaison stations in South Africa and Egypt in June 2024 with the diaspora media organization African Times (非洲时报) and the "Cairo China-Egypt Entrepreneurs Association" (开罗中埃企业家协会; likely meaning The Egyptian-Chinese Entrepreneurs Association), respectively. The WCICO's Bridging News has a [liaison office](#) in Rome. The Guangxi International Communication Center (GXICC; 广西国际传播中心) has [signed](#) cooperative agreements with The Cambodia China Times (柬中时报), building on a preexisting relationship between GXICC's parent and the Cambodia-based news outlet. The Shaanxi Chinese Business International Communication Center (CBICC; 陕西华商国际传播中心) — an ICC

focused on international communication from and for the professional Chinese diaspora community created in July 2023 — reportedly has [sub-centers](#) in the US, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Egypt, the UK, Germany, France, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Sweden, likely based on preexisting connections with overseas Chinese civil society groups.

At the city level, the aforementioned JICC in Shandong reportedly [has eleven](#) overseas sub-centers or liaison stations (海外分中心或联络站) as of March 2024, including in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, South Korea, Egypt, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Panama. The Cangzhou International Communication Center (CZICC; 沧州市国际传播中心) has [overseas sub-centers](#) in New York City, US, and Brussels, Belgium, to “provide 24-hour international communication service”. During the 2023 Lunar New Year parade in New York, the CZICC [sponsored](#) the lead parade float, which was [celebrated](#) in China as a noteworthy international communication success.

Engagements outside of the sub-center and liaison station pattern also exist, as seen in the SDICC’s aforementioned very likely [agreements](#) with Kyrgyz Television and France’s Sunny Side of the Doc. The GWICC has [signed](#) a news-sharing agreement with the Peru-based diaspora media organization La Voz de la Colonia China (公言报). China Media Project [documented](#) in July 2024 that a delegation from five Guyana-based media outlets visited the SDICC, with at least one (Guyana Times) signing an agreement with the SDICC to “deepen cooperation in the exchange of news copy, personnel, branding and other aspects”. When the JICC was [launched](#) in May 2022, it published a promotional video [broadcast](#) in New York City’s Times Square.

Geographic Targeting

Although most ICCs appear to predominantly target English-speaking audiences in general, some ICCs institutionalize the precise communication strategy by focusing on specific target audiences, countries, or regions. Examples include the aforementioned Yunnan International Communication Center for South and Southeast Asia, the Heilongjiang Northeast Asia International Communication Center (HICC; 黑龙江东北亚国际传播中心), and the Guangxi Chongzuo International Communication Center (GCICC; 广西崇左国际传播中心; not to be confused with the aforementioned GXICC). Other ICCs likely also have regional focuses determined by provincial economic interests or at least engage in activities aligned with them. In this, there does not appear to be a high level of centrally directed coordination with regard to defining geographic targets across most ICCs.

The YICC, as its name suggests, focuses on international communications aimed at South and Southeast Asia. The YICC was created with the approval of the CCP CPD, under the [guidance](#) of the Yunnan provincial propaganda department and effort of the Yunnan Daily Newspaper Group (云南日报报业集团) on May 31, 2022 — exactly one year after Xi Jinping’s aforementioned May 2021 remarks. It [implements](#) a “111238” approach, comprising the ICC itself; a focus on the regions named above; the “Beautiful China Colorful Yunnan” (美丽中国七彩云南) brand; the characteristics of peripheral propaganda and diversified propaganda; highlighting of precision, professionalism, and socialization; and an eight-part external propaganda matrix. This matrix includes “front construction”, media cooperation, social interaction, cultural and sports exchange, think tank consulting, public opinion

monitoring, talent training, and people-to-people bonds. The YICC also [comprises](#) various functional centers, including a laboratory and research institute. In January 2024, [demonstrating](#) cooperation between central media and ICCs, the YICC and China Daily [established](#) a new South and Southeast Asia Media Network (南亚东南亚媒体联盟).

More concretely, the YICC has at least [four sub-centers](#) in Lincang, Baoshan, Dehong, and Dali, the former three of which border Myanmar; more than 30 foreign social media accounts;¹⁹ and the Yunnan Gateway website (云桥网), which [serves](#) content in Burmese, Laotian, Thai, Khmer, English, and Vietnamese. It also has four [affiliated](#) foreign-language magazines. Examples of articles covered through Yunnan Gateway include "[China, Laos roll out Beijing-Kunming-Vientiane freight service](#)", "[BRICS a beacon of hope for Global South](#)", and "['Time to end the war', Blinken tells Israel as aid groups condemn U.S. ruling](#)". When the GCICC was founded in September 2023, a local propaganda official indicated it would establish a communication matrix [aimed](#) also at countries in the ASEAN.

The HICC was [created](#) in February 2024 as a joint effort by the Heilongjiang Daily Newspaper Group (黑龙江日报报业集团), the website of the Hong Kong-based Ta Kung Pao (大公网), and city of Heihe. The HICC focuses on external propaganda in Korean and Russian through the Heilongjiang News website (黑龙江新闻网), the Longtou News (龙头新闻) mobile app, and the Heilongjiang News Weixin account. It further [claims](#) to have cooperative [partnerships](#) with outlets in South Korea, Russia, and other countries and to pursue globalized expression, regionalized expression, and audience-differentiated expression — all references to precise communication.

Other ICCs appear to make some effort to target specific audiences as well, likely driven by local economic priorities. A prime example of this is the HIMC. The HIMC's activities are [oriented](#) toward supporting the Hainan Free Trade Port. In implementing precise communication to facilitate this goal, the HIMC targets investors and "business elites" in ASEAN countries, "frontier" BRI countries, and Western developed countries. Further, the HIMC strives for a "one city, one media" pattern of international media cooperation and claims to cooperate with Russia's TASS, PR Newswire, Associated Press, and other outlets.

The FICC has HolaFujian-brand social media accounts [aimed](#) at [Japan](#) and [Indonesia](#), suggesting some level of focus on these countries. Via YouTube and a dedicated HolaFujian channel on the mobile app of its sister outlet, Haibo TV, the FICC also [disseminates content targeting](#) these audiences. In August 2024, the FICC and Indonesian media jointly [covered](#) an event held between Chinese and Indonesian government bodies. This focus likely [reflects](#) strong economic and trade [ties](#) between Fujian and these countries. As noted above, the CICM [includes](#) a China-Africa International Communication Studio, suggesting a focus on that continent by the city-level ICC in Changsha.

In northeast China's Shandong province, the DZICC appears to target Japan and South Korea. It has reportedly [hired](#) many "Shandong Overseas Recommendation Officers" and "Youth Exchange Officers" (青春交流官) from among Japanese and South Korean study abroad students to collaborate with local

¹⁹ Ibid.

influencers as part of the DZICC's UGC model. The SDICC likely targets Russia as well; upon its creation, the SDChina (中国山东网) provincial news site under its parent organization [added](#) a Russian language service. The same website also [serves](#) content in English, Korean, and Japanese. In July 2024, the SDICC [interviewed](#) a county-level Japanese government official to mark the 40th anniversary of friendly relations between Shandong and the officials' county. However, as noted above, the SDICC also has links to Kyrgyzstan, France, Guyana, and a CCP propaganda work unit (the aforementioned CIPG center) focused on Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and South Asia, highlighting that not all ICCs have a strictly defined geographic scope. Nevertheless, these links likely reflect provincial priorities; Shandong has [established](#) sister cities and other [relations](#) in the former two countries.

Challenges to Success

ICCs essentially represent an expansion in the production capacity and coordination of China's extant state media sector. As such, ICC operations very likely entail many of the historical obstacles associated with central state outlets. Similar to reservations about those organizations, Chinese researchers [express concerns](#) that ICCs lack professional talent, struggle to attract foreign talent, lack discourse power, lack data that could help them implement precise communication, lack means to evaluate their effectiveness, and are not consistently or adequately funded, unable to successfully translate local developments into stories with meaning for foreign audiences, and often unfocused with regard to target audience.²⁰ In fact, some ICCs are likely highly [reliant](#) on existing central media infrastructure. For example, government procurement records show²¹ how the city-level Nanning International Communication Center (南宁国际传播中心) outsourced the 2024-2025 operation of its foreign social media accounts, expansion of overseas channels and communication services, provision of Omnimedia promotion services, and other activities to the News Information Center of Xinhua News Agency (新华通讯社新闻信息中心).

Outlook

Despite significant challenges, the proliferation of ICCs and their expanding activities in recent years almost certainly reflects continued incremental innovation and reform in China's media industry, investment in capabilities to shape global understanding of China and world events, and deepening implementation of precise communication as a strategy for success under Xi Jinping's leadership. ICCs further signal increasing centralization and coordination among national and local resources, including very likely thousands of overt, obscured, and (likely) covert foreign social media accounts, as well as increasing points of collaboration between China and foreign media organizations.

At a minimum, the development of ICCs and the "strategic communication system" will likely improve China's ability to astroturf its preferred viewpoints at critical junctures. In part, this is likely because ICCs appear positioned to overcome the stigma of labels on foreign social media platforms that impair Chinese media credibility by identifying it as state-sponsored (see **Appendix B**). Such labeling is a

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Source held by Recorded Future.

consistent point of [consternation](#) for China's communication scholars. Indeed, one 2024 study of ICCs specifically [lamented](#) that the names of their overt social media accounts are too uniform, creating opportunities for "foreign hostile forces" to easily identify and block them.

This astroturf capability could be used in at least two ways. One way would be to amplify China's assertive or deterrence messaging ahead of or during a conflict, such as over Taiwan. Although most (at least most overt) ICC assets currently focus on positive portrayals of China, during a crisis, they are very likely to be [viewed](#) as assets to support national defense mobilization. Another way ICC assets could be used that would not require a change in tactics on their part would be to suppress potentially negative coverage of China during a similar conflict or other crisis. Additionally, proliferating connections between ICCs and overseas media organizations likely have the potential to influence foreign opinion of China by offering regular engagement, providing alternatives to Western sources, and focusing on non-normative content (for example, quality of life in China rather than political values). This influence will likely be most successful among Chinese diaspora communities and in Global South and Western periphery countries, where survey-based research [finds](#) there is opportunity for Beijing to strengthen public preference for China over the West through this kind of content.

From China's perspective, a better outcome would almost certainly be that one or more ICC-affiliated information portals — social media accounts, websites, mobile apps, or news brands — become trusted, long-term, go-to sources of information on China and current events among target audiences. This level of success will almost certainly require overcoming significant challenges and is an unlikely proposition in the near term. In the mid-to-long term, however, ICCs signify China's continued pursuit of a more effective external propaganda system. As Xi Jinping [emphasized](#) at an October 2024 CCP Politburo study session, China must advance the reconstruction of the international communication pattern, innovate online external propaganda, and build a multi-channel, three-dimensional external communication pattern. When viewed in the context of such priorities, other [propaganda strategies](#), and the CCP's [incremental innovations](#), ICCs represent a likely effective next step toward Xi's goal and almost certainly a building block for innovations to come.

Propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, and foreign influence researchers, government bodies, and others with interests in tracking China's influence operations and the narratives China seeks to support internationally should incorporate ICCs into their understanding of China's media environment. Most importantly, further research and tools to identify, catalog, and track overt, obfuscated, and likely covert accounts are needed. This report also highlights another area of further research: the extent to which ICCs or other entities in China may differentiate their communication styles across platforms in service of reaching target audiences. Social media companies should also consider labeling accounts affiliated with ICCs as "state-sponsored media" as they are discovered.

Appendix A: Two Tea Eggs Assessment

The assessment that the Two Tea Eggs (2TE; 兩顆茶葉蛋; @lkcyedan) TikTok account is, and its now-deleted predecessor One Tea Egg (1TE; 一顆茶葉蛋; @ykcyedan) was, likely operated by the FICC under FMG is supported by the following elements. A more detailed analysis of each of these elements is available to Recorded Future clients via a Geopolitical Intelligence Summary titled “Insikt Group Identifies Likely China State-Run Covert TikTok Account: Two Tea Eggs”.

Element I: 1TE [shared](#) a video that FMG Deputy Chief Editor Deng Jinmu [acknowledged](#) as an FICC product.



Figure 6: FICC's “Crossing the Strait Veterans ‘Come Home’” featuring the “Soul Ferryman”²² branded with 1TE logo; source tag also refers to 1TE; as 1TE was no longer online during the research period, this video was identified through a separate likely inauthentic account (Source: [TikTok](#))

²² The “Soul Ferryman” is a person who has carried the ashes of Chinese civil war veterans from Taiwan to their hometowns on the mainland for twenty years.

Element II: 1TE and 2TE share common branding elements.

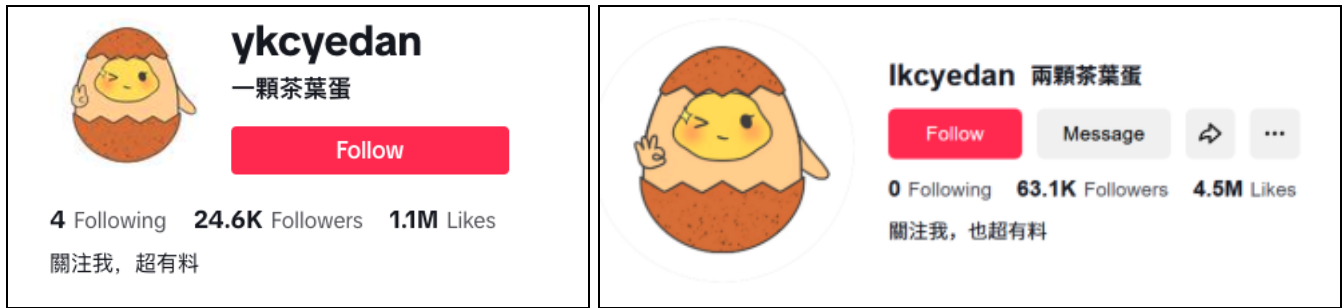


Figure 7: 1TE (top) and 2TE (bottom) TikTok account profiles (Source: TikTok [1, 2])



Figure 8: 1TE (left) and 2TE (right) in-video branding (bottom of images) (Source: TikTok [1, 2])

Element III: 2TE has continued to publish content related to known FICC outputs shared by 1TE on a publication schedule that closely aligns with the activity of FMG’s Haibo TV.

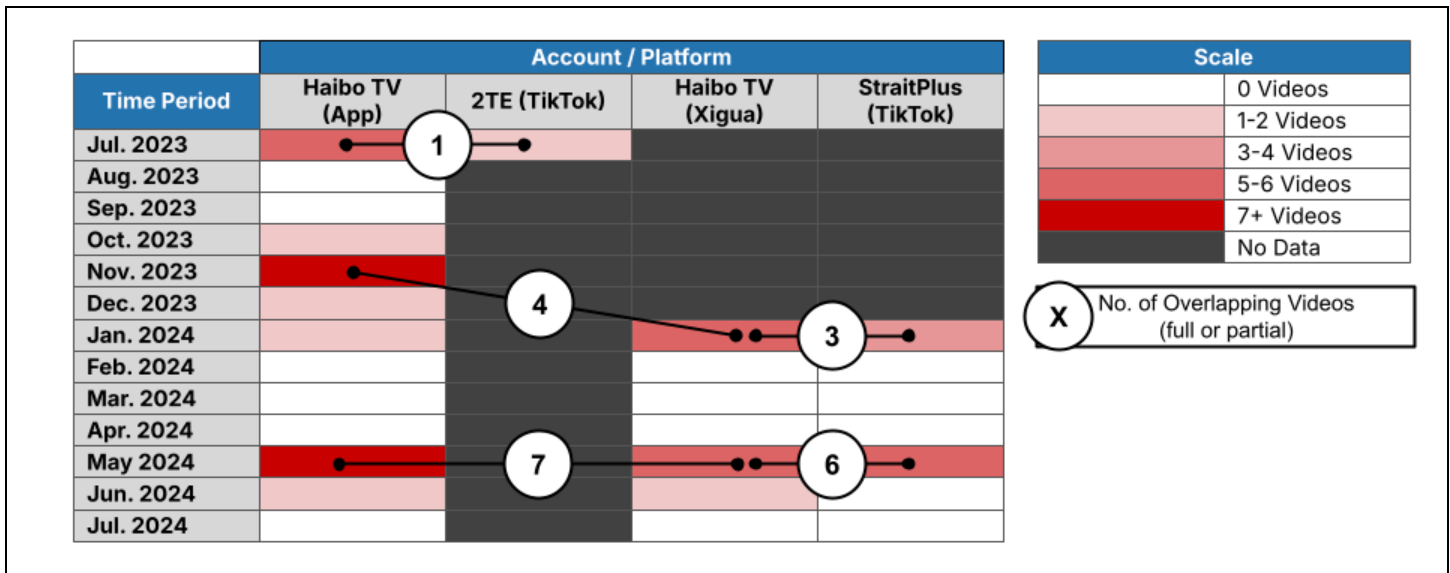


Figure 9: Select instances of overlapping “Soul Ferryman”²² content distribution across 1TE, 2TE, and Haibo TV’s app and Xigua account (Source: Insikt Group)

Element IV: 2TE has [shared](#) other videos related to content (namely, “Agen’s Story” [阿根的故事] about Taiwan people finding their Chinese ancestry through historical records) [acknowledged](#) by Deng Jinmu as developed by the FICC around the same time that FMG’s China Fujian Facebook account [posted](#) something [similar](#).

Element V: 1TE and 2TE have consistently been larger (by follower count) than other FMG TikTok accounts aimed at Taiwan (namely, StraitPlus), which is significant because Deng Jinmu also [claims](#) that the FICC controls China’s “largest Taiwan-facing TikTok account”.

Date of Archive	No. of Followers		
	StraitPlus	1TE	2TE
November 9, 2023	4.3 thousand		
December 16, 2023		18.1 thousand	
January 3, 2024	9.2 thousand		
January 6, 2024		24.6 thousand	
April 27, 2024			22.5 thousand
August 27, 2024	39.5 thousand		47.9 thousand
October 25, 2024	40.1 thousand		63.1 thousand
November 15, 2024	40.3 thousand		65.5 thousand

Figure 10: Comparison of historical follower counts among StraitPlus, 1TE, and 2TE; blank cells indicate no available data
(Source: Insikt Group)

Element VI: The Taiwan-based Taiwan Information Environment Research Center has [assessed](#) a complex overlap between 2TE content and the content of multiple Fujian-based state media outlets, likely befitting the FICC’s role as a provincial fusion center.

Appendix B: Clarity of State-Affiliation among ICC Social Media Accounts

With just one exception (ShanghaiEye on YouTube), none of the overt ICC accounts on foreign social media platforms discussed in this report are identified by those social media platforms as state-sponsored or -affiliated. Most also do not self-declare this affiliation. When such a declaration is available, it is often only with reference to a given ICC or discernable through the use of the word “official”. In some cases, no declaration is made, but the affiliation is discernable by knowledgeable parties through references to central state media outlets in email addresses or website URLs. This trend almost certainly applies to many other known and unknown ICC accounts. Likely covert accounts such as 2TE are, by their definition, likewise not transparent about their operators and affiliations.

Account	Platform(s)	State-Media Label	Affiliation Acknowledged
Beautiful Shandong	Facebook	No	Yes
Bridging News	Facebook; YouTube	No	No
Discover Gansu	Facebook; YouTube	No	No; Yes
Discover Guizhou	Facebook; YouTube	No	No
HiHenan	Facebook; YouTube	No	Yes
HolaFujian	Facebook; YouTube	No	No
iChongqing	Facebook; YouTube	No	No; Yes
iHebei	Facebook; YouTube	No	No; Yes
iLiaoning	Facebook; YouTube	No	Yes
iNSIDE CHINA	YouTube	No	No
JiangsuNow	Facebook; YouTube	No	Yes
Meet Jiangxi	Facebook; YouTube	No	Yes
Modern Jiangsu	Facebook	No	No
Open Hubei	Facebook	No	No
Panda Daily Show	Facebook	No	No
ShanghaiEye	Facebook; YouTube	No; Yes	No
Straight News	Facebook	No	Yes
The Silk Road-Shaanxi	Facebook	No	No
ZhengguanMedia	Facebook; YouTube	No	No

Recorded Future reporting contains expressions of likelihood or probability consistent with US Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203: Analytic Standards (published January 2, 2015). Recorded Future reporting also uses confidence level standards employed by the US Intelligence Community to assess the quality and quantity of the source information supporting our analytic judgments.

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