



Navigating Chinese presence in the Swedish media landscape

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is intensifying its efforts to enhance China's global influence. It aims to shape international perceptions of China to make these align with its interests. These efforts in foreign propaganda target [two main groups](#): communities with ties to China through their heritage, ethnicity or language, so called Overseas Chinese, and foreigners without these ties. They aim to mitigate hostility towards the regime and enhance loyalty to the CCP among overseas Chinese, while also disseminating positive narratives regarding the CCP's achievements to non-Chinese foreigners. This means that the CCP politically prioritizes information control and propaganda initiatives. The CCP views it as necessary to provide guidance of public opinion, because not doing so would be a risk to [China's national security and political stability](#). In this respect, news media abroad plays a pivotal role in the CCP's efforts to influence public opinion beyond China's borders.

This overview will analyse into the CCP's interactions with news media in Sweden. It focuses on the following aspects: Chinese-language diaspora media, expelled Chinese journalists, as well as the CCP's engagement with both traditional and alternative media channels. Understanding these dynamics is important for safeguarding media independence, upholding democratic values, and fostering a well-informed public discourse on the CCP's efforts to influence global issues.

Chinese-language diaspora media in Sweden

In recent years, a substantial proportion of the Chinese-language diaspora media outlets operating outside of China have shifted to become more supportive of the CCP. This is likely the result of the CCP's increased efforts under Xi Jinping to tighten control over diaspora people. This work is largely [conducted through the United Front](#), which is both a department within the CCP and a political strategy involving the use of networks of groups and individuals who are influenced or controlled by the Party to advance its interests.

This media strategy involves a [closer collaboration with local editorial teams](#) and an expansion of communication channels to reach the diaspora. Studies also highlight the United Front's role in shaping media narratives by [incentivizing Party-friendly views](#) and penalizing dissent. The shift has led to a [decline in the quality of reporting](#), freedom of expression, and independence of Chinese-language media in many countries. Globally, CCP influence is pervasive, with the presence of numerous CCP-friendly diaspora media outlets worldwide. In 2020, over 100 such outlets were [identified in Europe](#), primarily in the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, and the Nordic countries.

In 2023, the Swedish National China Center published an in-depth overview of [the Chinese-language diaspora media in Sweden](#). The report analysed how these outlets are influenced by the CCP, which makes use of them to disseminate its narratives. It defined influence as established connections between diaspora media and the CCP. These connections included organizational links between media outlets and the Chinese authorities and the United Front. They also included the way Chinese-language media organizations avail themselves of CCP offered benefits like free access to content through content-sharing agreements, sponsored journalist trips to China aiming to align media reporting with CCP narratives, and offers of increased status and visibility. These kinds of agreements between the CCP and overseas Chinese media organizations are common. They are part of a media strategy employed by Chinese officials referred to as "[borrowing a boat to go out on the sea](#)", which means to make use of someone else to spread your own message.¹

The report identified four currently active Chinese-language diaspora media outlets in Sweden: *Green Post*, *Chinese Online*, *Nordic Chinese Times* and *Nordic Chinese Newspaper*, as well as one press centre. The outlets were established in the mid-2010's and all of them present CCP-friendly narratives. The media outlets primarily publish news online and according to their own information have approximately 6000-10000 daily views each. However, Nordic China Newspaper also publishes a printed newspaper. All outlets have a social media presence on for instance WeChat and X, but the level of engagement seems quite low.

The 2023 report revealed that all outlets have numerous points of contact and exchanges with both Chinese authorities and organizations affiliated with the United Front, both within and outside of Sweden. They are also members of journalist associations controlled by the CCP. They take part in sponsored media forums and trips to China for journalists. Furthermore, these media outlets have multiple content-sharing agreements with party and state media, making them examples of the CCP's use of the "borrowing a boat to go out on the sea" strategy.

While the existence of diaspora media is not necessarily problematic, collaborations with the Chinese authorities raise several concerns. First, these collaborations suppress independent CCP-critical news that could otherwise be featured in diaspora media. Second, they allow the CCP to influence reporting and to disseminate news that supports its own narratives. The diaspora media's free syndication of news produced by Chinese state media encourages the uncritical spread of regime propaganda. This is different to their reproduction of news from other Western news agencies such as Reuters. Third, diaspora media help the Chinese authorities to expand their reach to new readers who would not typically follow

1 借船出海, alternatively "buying a boat to go out the sea", 买船出海.

them. For instance, Chinese Embassies have encouraged diaspora media to [host party delegations](#), using this media to facilitate dialogue between the party and the diaspora. Fourth, these collaborations risk legitimizing undemocratic narratives in Swedish society. This is because in some of this news content it might not be obvious to the audience who the sender is. When messages are being conveyed by diaspora media, this may create the impression that certain standpoints presented are not only those of the Chinese authorities but society in general. This can have the effect of creating a “neutral landscape” for United Front work.

The two cases of expelled Chinese journalists in Sweden

In April 2024, the Swedish Minister of Justice rejected an appeal against [the decision to expel](#) a Chinese journalist, owner of the aforementioned Chinese-language media outlets *Green Post* and *Chinese Online*. This legal decision, made under the [Special Controls in Respect of Aliens Act](#), includes a lifelong ban on returning to Sweden. The reason given for the decision was that the Swedish Security Service has deemed the journalist a serious threat to Swedish society. However, the specific accusations against the individual have not been disclosed, something commonly the case with Security Service assessments.

The journalist had been working in Sweden since 2006, including a 15-year tenure at China Radio International. In 2015 and 2016, the journalist established the diaspora media outlets *Green Post* and *Chinese Online*, and then later the English-language site *China-Europe Dialogue*. These platforms featured news from Chinese state media and organizations linked with the United Front and provided an option for the Chinese Embassy in Stockholm to [publish articles for a fee](#). The journalist behind the media outlets has been shown to have participated in state-sponsored trips to China. These trips resulted in events and articles that convey a pro-CCP narrative, including photo exhibitions that depict the western Chinese region of Xinjiang, which has been widely reported to be subject to a CCP crackdown involving mass incarceration of citizens, as a safe and prosperous region. The journalist is also reported to have facilitated meetings between Chinese officials and their Swedish counterparts during visits to Sweden.

The public reactions from Chinese authorities to the decision to expel this journalist has, so far, been relatively mild. In a statement, the Chinese Embassy in Stockholm declared that “None of the smears and attacks will stop China's development and progress”. Similarly, the Chinese state-owned media outlet [Global Times](#), which is often hawkish in its coverage, discussed the issue in an article which was relatively toned-down. This article suggested that the decision was politically motivated and due to the deteriorating relationship between Sweden and China in recent years, and it also attributed it to growing negative perceptions about China throughout Europe. The strongest reaction came from the aforementioned [Nordic Chinese Newspaper](#), one of the overseas Chinese-language media outlets in Sweden. This accused Swedish media of “casting a shadow over the many years of friendly relations between Sweden and China, harming the interests of the people of both China and Sweden, and causing tension in the work, study, and normal lives of Chinese nationals in Sweden, resulting in irreparable losses and impacts”.

Notably, this is not the first time a Chinese journalist has been expelled from Sweden. In 2009, a correspondent for the Chinese state-owned newspaper and CCP mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*, and his wife, a Chinese diplomat working as a press officer at the Chinese

Embassy in Stockholm, were expelled. This action followed the revelation that a naturalized individual of Chinese origin had been systematically reporting to them information about [Uyghur activists in Sweden](#). According to a 2012 report from [the Central Intelligence Agency \(CIA\)](#) in the United States, the case marked a notable change in how China conducts intelligence operations. Prior to the case, “no exposed Chinese espionage case occurred without operational activity inside China”. Using a journalistic cover, however, is a known method through which [the Chinese authorities conduct intelligence work](#) abroad. For instance, one of the tasks assigned to the Chinese state-owned news agency Xinhua is to gather information and produce classified reports for the Chinese leadership. In 2020, British authorities [expelled three individuals](#) working for the Chinese Ministry of State Security who were posing as journalists.

China’s engagement with news media in Sweden

[Between 2018 and 2021](#), the Chinese Embassy in Stockholm under the direction of Ambassador Gui Congyou (桂从友) carried out an extensive campaign that targeted, among others, Swedish news media and journalists. The methods that it used included strongly worded statements published on its website and social media accounts, personal letters, op-eds, and interviews with the Chinese ambassador. All of these statements sought to justify China’s conduct and to influence Swedish media reporting on China. A report by the Swedish public television broadcaster SVT found that four of the eight Swedish media outlets which were included in their investigation had been [contacted by the Chinese Embassy](#) on multiple occasions, with the Embassy criticizing their reporting. The Embassy also sent [criticism directly to journalists](#). In one case an e-mail stated that the journalist in question should stop reporting on China or eventually “[face the consequences](#)”. [The Swedish public broadcaster SVT](#) has also received threats from the Embassy concerning the continued possibility of obtaining China visas for its staff.

In 2022, the CCP appointed Cui Aimin (崔爱民) as its new ambassador in Stockholm. With this change in ambassador, the Chinese Embassy underwent a [shift in its public diplomacy](#), adopting a more diplomatic tone in its official communication. Nonetheless, critical statements from the Embassy persist, particularly regarding interactions between [Swedish politicians and representatives from Taiwan](#). Notably, Ambassador Cui’s presence in mainstream Swedish media seems to have decreased, when compared to his predecessor who frequently made statements in different Swedish media outlets. Nonetheless, he occasionally contributes to mainstream media outlets with op-eds, discussing topics such as sustainability and China’s development. Ambassador Cui also engages with more niche media platforms, such as the Marxist-Leninist weekly newspaper *Proletären* and the publication *FokusKina*, which is focused on Sweden-China relations and is run by an organization with the same name that aims to spread knowledge about China through op-eds and interviews.

Chinese propaganda efforts have also penetrated Swedish national TV. In 2020, the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR) aired a documentary series titled “[Himalaya – neighbor in the clouds](#),” produced by amongst others the China Intercontinental Communication Center (CICC), a company operated by a Chinese government organ, the State Council Information Office. The series presents an image of Tibet as a tourist destination, omitting significant issues such as strict censorship and severe political repression by the Chinese regime. After it was revealed that CICC was one of the producers, the media company removed the series from its platforms.

The Chinese authorities have also placed paid-for content in Swedish news media. Between 2005 and 2013, *GB Times*, a Finnish-Chinese joint venture which is majority owned by a subsidiary of the Chinese state-owned radio broadcaster China Radio International, produced segments for a range of different radio stations discussing current and cultural events in China without disclosing their nature. In 2016, the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* published a full-page paid feature, written by the Chinese ambassador to Sweden at that time, which sought to justify China's territorial claims in the South China Sea (a region where multiple Asian states have competing sovereignty claims). Similarly, during the 2019 democracy protests in Hong Kong, the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published a full-page paid-for feature by the Beijing-controlled government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China which was part of [a global campaign](#) asserting China's narrative. The feature declared, "What you read, see, hear – or share on social media – is just part of a complex social, economic, and political puzzle. A puzzle we will solve on our own".

Expanding the outreach efforts to alternative media in Sweden

In November 2023, representatives from *NewsVoice* and *Nya Dagbladet* participated in a [sponsored trip to China](#) paid for by the Chinese Embassy in Stockholm. Both outlets were launched in 2012. *NewsVoice* could be described as a news site catering to conspiracy theorists and vaccine sceptics, while *Nya Dagbladet* is a right-wing news site. During their visit to China, the representatives met with researchers from a Chinese state think-tank, the [Shanghai Institute for International Studies](#), which is affiliated with the Shanghai Municipal Government. They discussed, among other things, "how independent media in the West are oppressed by the West's establishment". Representatives from the media outlets have also [participated in Chinese Embassy receptions](#) to commemorate China's founding.

Following the sponsored trip, *NewsVoice* has notably [increased its publication of articles](#) depicting China's development and governance in a positive light. Some of the articles are based on reporting in Chinese official media, such as a piece from February 2024 that asserts that "Beijing has managed to stabilize the political situation in its northwestern province of Xinjiang". No articles expressing negative sentiments towards China have been found. This is a notable shift from before, when the outlet published articles that, for instance, problematized China's increased surveillance of its citizens.

Prior to the China trip made by *NewsVoice* and *Nya Dagbladet*, we have not found any other cases of non-diaspora media professionals in Sweden traveling to China on state-sponsored journalist trips. This new development may be connected to what has been reported as [a broader pattern](#) where there are growing connections between China and individuals who are associated with far-right political movements in Europe. For instance, there is the case of the politician Maximilian Krah, who serves as a representative for the Alternative for Germany in the European Parliament since 2019. Krah was reported to have received funds from Chinese state-owned companies and gone on trips to China funded by these companies. He has made political statements which align with the CCP's interests, for example [downplaying criticism of the internment camps](#) in Xinjiang province as "anti-China propaganda", something which is also the standard CCP response to this criticism.

Since 2023, China's ambassador to Sweden, Cui Aimin, has also published multiple opinion pieces in both *NewsVoice* and *Nya Dagbladet*. In general, the themes of these articles

revolve around China's economic and technological development, encouraging [Sweden to cooperate with China](#). In one op-ed, the Ambassador states that [false Xinjiang-related information](#) has been deliberately spread by individuals in an attempt to deceive the international community and hinder Xinjiang's development. During 2023, we found there was also a rise in articles, primarily published on the *NewsVoice* website, which were authored by organizations and individuals associated with the Chinese United Front network. These articles include pieces such as one titled "Swedish decision-makers have an irrational faith in NATO, the G7, and the EU", which was [penned by the chairman of the Belt and Road Institute](#) in Sweden.

Notably, a news website with a Swedish domain, [Luddpress.se](#), was featured as one of at least 123 identified websites in a 2024 report by the Canadian research institute, [the Citizen Lab](#), posing as local news outlets while being operated from the PRC. According to the report, these websites disseminate pro-Beijing disinformation and attacks against individuals concealed within much larger volumes of commercial press releases and news content from different news agencies. In connection to this brief, it is not possible to identify articles containing pro-Beijing disinformation. However, the Citizen Lab report states that articles are routinely removed from the website after publication, so it may be that such articles were published but have since been taken down.

The effectiveness of the CCP's efforts to influence the Swedish media landscape

China's influence within the Swedish information landscape appears limited. Yet there are notable indicators suggesting potential avenues for future influence. [Analysis reveals](#) that specific narratives in Swedish news media align with China's official messaging. For instance, there are narratives that depict China as a crucial global power and emphasize the costly consequences of opposing it. This alignment raises significant concerns regarding China's potential to shape Swedish perceptions.

The effectiveness of persuasive efforts hinges on a pre-existing baseline of agreement between the persuader and the persuaded. In the Swedish context, effective CCP persuasion could manifest through actors' pre-emptive alignment with Chinese interests. For instance, this might involve Swedish media or political figures engaging in self-censorship or avoiding actions that could provoke retaliation from China. Were these actors to engage in such self-regulation as a result of CCP influence, this could create a more favourable environment for further CCP influence over time.

The specialized platforms that have been mentioned in this report, including both Chinese-language diaspora media and Swedish niche media outlets, despite having smaller audiences compared to mainstream media, still pose a distinct risk by amplifying and reinforcing pro-China narratives. These platforms subtly influence public opinion and shape attitudes within Sweden about China and the CCP. The CCP's targeted approach, utilizing niche media outlets, ensures that pro-China narratives reach specific segments of the population, thereby gradually shifting public discourse.

[Recent studies](#), particularly those from Australia, underscore the significant role played by Chinese-language diaspora media in influencing views among recent Chinese migrants. This

is because platforms like WeChat are central to these migrants' news consumption. Furthermore, the presence of CCP-friendly outlets within the diaspora serves as a constant reminder of the Party's influence in the host country, which can potentially impact on the ability and willingness of the Chinese diaspora to express dissenting opinions. The potential for self-censorship within the diaspora further extends the CCP's control beyond China's borders.

The expulsion of Chinese journalists from Sweden, alongside other documented connections between the Chinese authorities and various media outlets – mainstream, specialized, and alternative – accentuates the complex dynamics at play. This intricate interplay between the Swedish media landscape and the Chinese authorities' efforts to influence public perceptions of China underscores the critical need for continued scrutiny.

Future monitoring should particularly focus on the CCP's engagement with alternative media. This strategy might seem counterintuitive because some of this media has previously appeared quite critical of the CCP, especially given the historical scepticism towards China among European right-wing parties. However, the way in which the CCP has managed to develop relations with some alternative media outlets illustrates the adaptability and sophisticated nature of its influence operations. By engaging with alternative media, the CCP leverages diverse channels to disseminate its narratives, ensuring broader reach and deeper penetration of its messaging.

Overall, the nuanced and multifaceted approach that the CCP has been found to take in its influence operations highlights the importance of a vigilant and analytical response. Understanding and countering these efforts requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses both overt and covert methods of influence.



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About NKK

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