

Understanding the Chinese-Language Media Landscape in Southeast Asia

OCTOBER 2026

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The countries of the Indo-Pacific increasingly find themselves on the front line of the long-term strategic competition between the United States and China. In the South China Sea, China has used force and coercion to block Philippine resupply missions, while in the Taiwan Strait it has employed similar tactics to degrade Taiwanese administration of its airspace and waters. At the same time, China—alongside other actors such as Russia—has weaponized the information space across the Indo-Pacific to undermine regional support for the United States, its allies, and the rules-based international order.

China's strategic intent to weaken the U.S. alliance system highlights the need for enhanced cooperation with allies and partners not only to address regional security issues, but also to strengthen the mutual ability to counter foreign information manipulation. Many Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines and Singapore, are vital to maintaining U.S. security, economic, and people-to-people presence in the region. As a result, these countries are also a target of significant influence operations by China, conducted in part through state-affiliated Chinese-language media outlets and efforts by the **United Front Work Department**, the arm of the Chinese Communist Party responsible for conducting influence activities. These outlets have a growing but uneven footprint throughout the region, in some cases gaining market share in local Chinese-language media ecosystems previously led by independent outlets founded by diaspora populations.

The Philippines has been a major target of Chinese state-backed disinformation campaigns and efforts to capture local media since the previous administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. The reach of Chinese media within the region also has the potential to influence the significant Chinese diaspora populations

in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. And across the region, China has established content-sharing agreements with local media, pursued takeovers of local Chinese-language outlets, and sponsored people-to-people initiatives such as sending Southeast Asian journalists to Xinjiang to shape regional perspectives in line with Chinese state messaging.

There is no viable strategy for countering Chinese information warfare that does not involve buy-in from regional partners and an awareness of the scale, scope, and impact of Chinese-language media in Southeast Asia. But a current paucity of information on the issue and a lack of transparency from these organizations points to the need for an enhanced understanding and awareness of Chinese-language media outlets operating within the region.

Country Profiles

This report maps the Chinese-language media ecosystem in the 11 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Due to the lack of census data in many of the countries, some case studies do not have sufficient data to accurately estimate the size of their ethnic Chinese or Chinese-speaking population.

Brunei

Brunei's **official language** is Malay. The **most common Chinese dialects** include Hokkien, Mandarin, Fuzhou, Cantonese, and Hakka. Brunei is home to a small Chinese population: As of 2023, **9.5 percent** of the sultanate's 445,400 people were of Chinese descent. This is a significant decrease from 1960, when that figure was **26 percent**. It should be noted that migrant workers from China are not reflected in the national population census.

Chinese Bruneians have largely **assimilated** into local culture and language. Several Chinese Bruneians who have converted to Islam have become influential in commerce and government.

With growing economic engagement between Brunei and China, many recent Chinese language-speaking **arrivals** have been part of these investment projects. Chinese diaspora populations have **established** several schools in Brunei, drawing increasing interest from the non-Chinese population due to their reputation for high achievement.

Bruneian press is characterized by tight state control on media outlets, all of which are directly owned by the sultan's family. As such, there is very little information available on the extent to which Chinese-language media is created and consumed in Brunei. See *Hua Daily News*, a Chinese-language news source available in both Malaysia and Brunei, is one of the only such

outlets with a presence in the country. Radio Television Brunei, a state-owned outlet, **broadcasts** in Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese, and Gurkhali. With no statistics on readership or media consumption, the influence of Chinese-language media is unclear.

Cambodia

Cambodia's most **widely spoken language** is Khmer, with French still spoken by older Cambodians and English on the rise. Estimates of the number of ethnic Chinese living in Cambodia range from **300,000 to 700,000**. The 2019 Cambodian census showed that **94,450 Chinese Cambodians**, or around 0.6 percent of the country's total population, speak Chinese at home. The largest linguistic groups represented in this population are Mandarin, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, and Hakka. Cambodia historically had a larger Chinese population, but the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s persecuted the community along with other ethnic minorities, killing **around** 230,000 Chinese Cambodians during its genocidal reign.

The “New Chinese,” or Chinese migrants who arrived and settled in Cambodia after the 1990s, are generally received positively in terms of economic contributions. These migrants—who come from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—do not maintain the same communal **affiliations** with regions of China that characterized previous generations of migrants, and overwhelmingly speak Mandarin or Cantonese. Despite the migrants' positive economic contributions, there has been little social integration with the Cambodian population.

China is a key partner to Cambodia, with China's Belt and Road Initiative reshaping the Cambodian economic landscape with direct investments—perhaps best exemplified through China's **development** of Sihanoukville from a small port city into a fully-fledged gambling hub. Chinese-language schools are flourishing in Cambodia, with over 100 throughout the country teaching more than **100,000 students**. In 2022, Cambodia **signed** an agreement with China to include mandatory Mandarin language classes in Cambodian public secondary schools.

Despite these developments, there is scant evidence that Chinese-language media has had an influence on Cambodia. There are a limited number of locally based Chinese-language media companies: Cambodia China Times, a fast-growing online media company, and *Jian Hua Daily*, a popular news website, are two examples. Another is Cambodia Chinese Radio FM 96.5, which began broadcasting in 2008 and provides more than 19 hours of daily broadcasts in Khmer, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Teochew.

While Chinese-language media has little demonstrated impact, Chinese-linked outlets, such as Fresh News and NiceTV, have **contributed** to the glut of **pro-Cambodian government** and pro-Beijing content in the country. The Chinese Foreign Ministry has **allegedly** funded some of these outlets.

Media exchanges bringing Cambodian journalists to China for training are common between the two countries. In December 2024, the Cambodia-China Media Intelligent Communication Forum **convened** in Phnom Penh, offering a platform for press members from the two nations to exchange ideas. In addition, Cambodian media outlets and Chinese outlets such as Xinhua and Global Times have **signed** content-sharing agreements.

Indonesia

As the region's most populous country, Indonesia is home to over **700 extant languages**. Bahasa Indonesia, the nation's official language, is by far the most widely spoken, with approximately 97.2 percent of respondents to **Indonesia's 2020 census** indicating that they had the ability to communicate in the language. But the country's ethnic diversity means that many communities are broadly comfortable using local, Indigenous, or other languages with family, with 73.9 percent of census respondents indicating that they do so.

Reflecting the diversity of Indonesia's Chinese heritage population, Chinese-language speakers in the country make use of a range of dialects, including Mandarin, Hokkien, Hainanese, Hakka, and Cantonese, among others. However, the true scale of Chinese speakers remains unclear and understudied. Estimates **dating back to 1982** posited that the number of Chinese-language speakers was slightly over two million, but more recent **census data** from 2010 indicated only 443,973 respondents (0.2 percent of the population) reported using a foreign language daily—including not only all Chinese-language varieties, but also English, Arabic, Dutch, Hindi, or any other foreign language. If 443,973 really reflects a ceiling for the number of Indonesians who might speak a Chinese language in their daily lives (and given the fact that the true number is likely far smaller due to the range of languages included in this figure), then the proportion of Indonesia's population who consume media primarily in Chinese is likely insignificant relative to the broader population.

The comparatively rare use of Chinese-language varieties in daily life in Indonesia reflects an underutilization of the language by the country's ethnic Chinese population, which as of 2010 stood at **over 2.8 million people**, or roughly 1.2 percent of the total population. The disparity between the number of Indonesians of Chinese origin and the number of Chinese-language speakers can be ascribed to a long history of discrimination against ethnic Chinese communities in the country, most prominently during the New Order

era between 1966 and 1998. The Suharto government, in a bid to **force the assimilation** of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese community, ordered the closure of Chinese schools, restricted the publication of Chinese-language newspapers, and encouraged Chinese Indonesians to abandon their traditional names in favor of more Indonesian-sounding ones. The Suharto government's campaign ultimately resulted in the decline of Chinese usage in the public sphere.

However, changes established by President Abdurrahman Wahid in the early *Reformasi* period, including a revocation of the ban on speaking Chinese, have **revived interest** in Chinese-language education. This not only includes interest by ethnic Chinese individuals seeking to reconnect with their heritage, but also an interest by non-ethnic Chinese seeking to learn Mandarin for professional or pragmatic reasons, reflecting China's increasing importance for Indonesia's economy.

Suharto-era restrictions severely curtailed the availability of Chinese-language media in Indonesia, with *Harian Indonesia* (印度尼西亚日报) being the only newspaper in Chinese allowed to publish during this period. But the post-*Reformasi* era has led to a blossoming of new or revived Chinese-language press, both at the national and local levels. This includes the still-active *Harian Indonesia*—now the oldest continuously published Chinese-language newspaper in the country—as well as the *International Daily News* (*Guoji Ribao*), *Harian Inhua*, *Harian Nusantara*, *Indonesia Shang Bao*, *Xun Bao*, and *Kun Dian Ri Bao*, among other locally based outlets.

Despite the now-broad proliferation of Chinese-language press in the country, readership of such outlets is difficult to ascertain. These outlets rarely release information related to readership or circulation, though **some sources** believe that the number of Chinese-language newspaper subscribers in the country amounts to only 30,000 readers, a number congruent with the above estimates of Chinese speakers in the country. However, these numbers differ from the circulation of 75,000 and 70,000 copies claimed by *Indonesia Shang Bao* and the *International Daily News*, respectively.

Regardless of the true scale of the Chinese-language press audience in Indonesia, the fact remains that these outlets face an increasingly challenging media landscape, with **notable headwinds** including competition among outlets for scarce resources, declining readership, a shortage in editors and writers, and generational differences in media consumption.

Laos

The **official language** of Laos is Lao. While there is **interest** among the Lao public to learn Chinese due to increased Chinese investment and business

opportunities in the country, a lack of language census data means specific percentages cannot be calculated.

The Chinese population in Laos has **always** been relatively small. The country historically did not attract many Chinese traders because of its lack of sea access, which limited the opportunities to develop commerce hubs in the nation. The Chinese population **peaked** at around 100,000 people in the early 1970s due to the economic development brought by French colonization. By the end of that decade, most of the Chinese population had fled after Laos backed Vietnam during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War.

The most recent **housing census** for Laos was in 2015, with the **next census** set for release later in 2026. The country's small population of Chinese descent lives mostly in the north, tracing its roots to nineteenth century migrations from southern China. These groups, which Laos' census officially labels "Chinese-Tibetans," comprised 2.9 percent of the country's total population of around 6.5 million people in 2015. The 2015 data also counted 13,400 Chinese nationals living in Laos, making up less than 0.5 percent of the population.

While the influence of Chinese-language media in Laos is limited, it is not nonexistent. In 2018, the Lao News Agency (*Khaosan Pathet Lao*) **signed** a joint agreement with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Vientiane to cooperate on its first ever Chinese-language newspaper. The newspaper targets Chinese nationals who live in Laos, especially those who live in the capital. But with such a small Chinese population and with the dominant language being Lao, Chinese-language media readership in the country remains low.

Despite Laos' tight restrictions on media—the nation ranks **150 out of 180** countries on the Reporters Without Borders' 2025 World Press Freedom Index—China still has a foothold in the country's media ecosystem. Currently, the only two foreign media outlets **permitted** to operate in Laos are from China and Vietnam. State-affiliated outlets including Xinhua and China Radio International have bureaus in Vientiane. Laos has also increased its trust in China as a bilateral partner: The 2025 iteration of the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute's **State of Southeast Asia survey** reported that 68.9 percent of Lao participants predicted Laos' relations with China will improve or improve significantly in the next three years, a 20.9 percentage point **increase** from 2023. Given the current media landscape and growing trust in China, the influence of Chinese-language media should be expected to grow modestly over time.

Malaysia

Malaysia's **official language** is Malay, or Bahasa Malaysia, with English as a popular second language. Mandarin and Tamil are also commonly spoken among ethnic Chinese and Indian populations, respectively.

Malaysia has a large ethnic Chinese population, making up around **23.2 percent** of the country's total population of around 32.5 million in 2020. Like Indonesia, Malaysia's Chinese population is diverse: The main language groups include Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Fuzhou, Hainanese, Taishanese, and Henghua. Chinese-language schools in Malaysia, however, primarily **teach** in Mandarin.

Malaysian Chinese cultural identity remains strong in the country. A study published in 2018 reported that **80 percent** of Chinese Malaysian families surveyed spoke multiple languages at home. Out of the remaining families who spoke only a single language, 94 percent reported speaking either Mandarin or another Chinese dialect at home.

Chinese-language media is very popular in Malaysia, which is considered to be one of the **most active** media environments for these outlets outside of China. Its popularity is attributed to both the large Malaysian Chinese population as well as the significant numbers of Chinese nationals in the country. China also **offers** training programs for Malaysian journalists as an attempt to increase its influence on Malaysia's Chinese-language media landscape. Chinese-language media outlets, like those in English and Tamil, face **less censorship** than their Malay-language counterparts. This is because they cover fewer issues touching upon Malaysia's "**3R rule**," which prevents critical coverage of race, religion, and the country's royalty.

There are at least 13 Chinese-language newspapers in Malaysia, with 4 locally-based outlets accounting for 90 percent of the country's Chinese-language media consumption: *Sin Chew Daily*, *China Press*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *Guang Ming Daily*. All four are **owned** by Tiong Hiew King of Media Chinese International, whom Freedom House describes as "a Chinese-Malaysian tycoon with strong business interests in China." As a result, Chinese-language media in Malaysia skews strongly toward pro-Beijing narratives, often including coverage of Chinese President Xi Jinping's speeches and positive news about economic cooperation between Malaysia and China.

These outlets have also spread pro-Beijing disinformation, including by citing unfounded claims criticizing Hong Kong's 2019-2020 pro-democracy movement, as reported by **Freedom House**. One such story **alleged** that a meeting between protesters and a U.S. diplomat proved that the movement was controlled by

foreign entities. These stories were **reposted** to social media by Chinese-language media outlets to their hundreds of thousands of followers.

Due to sensitivities stemming from Malaysia's multiethnic population, some topics, most notably the South China Sea disputes, are **avoided** entirely in Chinese-language media. Outlets fear pro-China engagement will aggravate ethno-nationalist sentiments, such as the belief that Malaysian Chinese and Indians are foreigners who should return to their countries. Sensitive topics can lead to repercussions stemming from the 3R rule.

Chinese-language media in Malaysia has also consistently covered some stories differently from English- and Malay-language counterparts. A 2023 Radio Free Asia **report** looked at the example of coverage of the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. English and Malay media at the time included reports from Western news sources that cited UN findings. The Chinese-language media, however, made it a point to elevate Chinese government views alongside those of Western and UN experts.

Myanmar (Burma)

Myanmar's **official language** is Burmese, with many other Indigenous languages spoken throughout the country. Historically, English, Chinese, and Hindi have also played a role in country's language landscape, but they have decreased in significance in modern day. A lack of reliable census data on languages means exact percentages cannot be accurately calculated.

Modern, large-scale Chinese migration to what was then known as Burma began in the 1930s, driven by the business opportunities from a booming maritime trade. Most Burmese Chinese are **descendants** of Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka speakers from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. The country's **latest wave of Chinese migrants** began arriving in the late 1980s, when the border was opened for economic development. But many ethnic Chinese have adopted Burmese and other local languages, and some even identify as Bamar, Myanmar's largest ethnic group, to avoid discrimination. This trend, along with public schools teaching in Burmese and **not designed** to preserve Chinese culture, means the percentage of those speaking Chinese has diminished. Most ethnic Chinese living in Myanmar today **reside** in Mandalay and Yangon.

The linguistic situation for those living near the Chinese border in Myanmar's northern Shan State is notably different than that of ethnic Chinese in the Bamar-majority lowlands. The **Kokang ethnic group**, numbering perhaps a few hundred thousand, is 90 percent ethnically Chinese and mostly live in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone along the border. This population consists primarily of the descendants of migrants from China's Yunnan Province who

began moving into Shan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), an ethnic resistance organization seeking autonomy or independence for the Kokang, pushed government forces out of most of the zone—including its capital, Laukkai—in late 2023 and early 2024. Most Kokang **speak** the southwestern dialect of Mandarin spoken in Yunnan, and many do not speak Burmese at all. The MNDAA **declared** in 2024 that Chinese would be the official language in all areas of northern Shan that it controls. Cities such as Lashio have faced hardships under this rule, as large amounts of the population do not speak Chinese.

Mandarin is also widely spoken in two other autonomous zones in northern Shan, the Wa Self-Administered Division and the Mong La area, governed by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), respectively. Like the MNDAA, these groups are descendants of the China-backed Communist Party of Burma, which fractured in 1989, and maintain close political and economic ties to China. The UWSA consists primarily of ethnic Wa and its mission is to ensure the community's independence or autonomy. But many Wa officers and soldiers have taken Chinese names, and Mandarin is a widely used **language** throughout the group's territories to allow communication between Wa groups, who often speak different dialects. The NDAA's senior leadership include officers with ethnic Chinese ancestry, and Mong La serves as a center of gambling and illicit activity catering largely to Chinese visitors. While most Mong La residents are from Tai-speaking groups, Mandarin serves as the lingua franca. Both Wa and Mong La **rely** on Chinese electricity and telecommunications infrastructure, giving their residents easier access to Chinese than Burmese media.

The overall Chinese population in Myanmar is difficult to confirm. While most sources estimate that ethnic Chinese make up about **3 percent** of the population, these sources are out of date, dating back to 1997. This figure also does not necessarily include the migrant worker population or those of Chinese descent who choose to identify as Bamar or another ethnicity.

The main audiences for Chinese-language media in the country are ethnic Chinese, whether citizens of Myanmar or Chinese nationals living in the country. Currently, the **only Chinese-language newspaper** approved to operate by the Myanmar junta is *Golden Phoenix*. Since it is approved by the military junta, the paper's coverage must consistently align with the regime's interests.

The Philippines

The Philippines is a linguistically diverse country of **over 120 languages**. Its official languages are Filipino, a standardized form of Tagalog, and English. Filipino Chinese predominantly speak Philippine Hokkien. With growing

Filipinization and integration, the number of Chinese speakers is slowly declining. Moreover, pure Philippine Hokkien, much like Tagalog and other Philippine languages, has fallen out of use in favor of **codeswitching**, similar to the use of English words or phrases in everyday Tagalog speech known as Taglish. Mandarin is primarily used by recent immigrants or expatriates from China or Taiwan.

Around 90 percent of Chinese Filipinos can **trace their heritage** to Fujian Province, and 70 percent can trace their heritage to the city of Quanzhou. The first wave of Chinese immigrants came to the Philippines in the sixteenth century, with the world's oldest Chinatown **established** in Manila in 1594. Under the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Sr.—the father of current President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.—many Chinese Filipinos gained citizenship under the **1975 naturalization decree** and largely integrated into Filipino society; however, discrimination and stereotypes about them persist.

The size of the Chinese population within the country is unclear. The Philippines does not **specifically list** non-Philippine ethnicities in its census surveys. Chinese nationals living in the Philippines are counted, but not Chinese Filipinos. With no exact numbers, 2013 estimates suggest that about **1 percent** of the population, or around 1.2 million Filipinos, are of Chinese descent. With minimal statistical information on different ethnicities and spoken languages from the Philippine census, it is unclear how this figure has evolved in the subsequent 13 years.

With a small ethnic Chinese population, there are only a few locally based news outlets in any Chinese language in the Philippines. *World News* and the *Chinese Commercial News*, for instance, are long-running Chinese-language newspapers. The *Chinese Commercial News* translates articles into Mandarin. Another outlet, *United Daily News*, is a standalone Chinese-language publication that provides news translated from Western sources. The *Manila Bulletin*, a prominent Philippine news outlet, also has a Chinese-language website that appears to be aligned with the outlet's English content. Chinese News TV, a Filipino-Chinese media company, **entered** an agreement in 2021 with major broadcaster ABS-CBN to deliver a nightly weekday news program in Mandarin. The influence of these outlets is likely minimal, as English- and Filipino-language media dominate most news coverage.

Chinese state-affiliated outlets such as Xinhua and the *People's Daily* have **established** local operations in the Philippines. Since 2000, 12 content-sharing partnerships have been **negotiated** between Chinese state media and Philippine outlets. Chinese outlets operating in the Philippines typically use English and Filipino to reach more local audiences, and have increasingly **relied** on local content creators to spread their narratives.

China is also making an effort to grow the number of China-trained journalists in the Philippines: For example, a May 2019 seminar for Filipino journalists was **held** in Beijing by the Chinese National Radio and Television Administration's Radio Training Institute. But despite their effort, Chinese state media has not made a significant **impact** in influencing television or radio, which are two of the most-trusted sources for Filipinos.

Singapore

Reflecting its status as a multiethnic and multicultural society, Singapore has **four official languages**: English, Tamil, Mandarin, and Malay. While English tends to be the most commonly spoken language within households—as well as a lingua franca for Singaporeans across ethnic lines—Chinese-language varieties are a close second, with **38.6 percent** of respondents to the country's 2020 census indicating that they spoke either Mandarin or another Chinese dialect at home. And within households that primarily speak English but also make use of a second language, Chinese-language varieties again dominate, with 63.3 percent of census respondents noting that they speak either Mandarin or another Chinese dialect at home to complement their use of English.

Similar to neighboring Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore is home to a diverse ethnic Chinese population that employs a range of Chinese-language varieties, including Mandarin, Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, among others.

According to the **2020 census**, nearly 1.1 million respondents (29.9 percent of the total) reported speaking Mandarin Chinese at home, while 157,000 spoke Hokkien (4.4 percent), 79,000 Cantonese (2.2 percent), 59,000 Teochew (1.7 percent), and 17,000 another Chinese dialect (0.5 percent).

As of the 2020 census, Singapore's ethnic Chinese community numbered just over **3 million individuals**, or approximately 74.3 percent of the country's resident population. This figure accounts for Singaporean citizens of ethnic Chinese descent (2.7 million individuals, or 76 percent of all citizens) as well as a sizable population of noncitizen permanent residents of Chinese descent (331,000 individuals, or 64 percent of all permanent residents). Among Singapore's resident population of **Chinese descent**, approximately 1.2 million individuals identify as Hokkien (39.3 percent), 583,000 as Teochew (19.4 percent), 429,000 as Cantonese (14.3 percent), 259,000 as Hakka Chinese (8.6 percent), 183,000 as Hainanese (6.1 percent), 59,000 as Foochow (2 percent), 26,000 as Henghua (0.9 percent), 22,000 as Shanghaiese (0.8 percent), 17,000 as Hockchia (0.6 percent), and 244,000 as some other Chinese group (8.1 percent).

In contrast to other Southeast Asian countries, where Chinese-language media companies tend to operate in a fairly limited market, Singapore is home to a range of Chinese-language outlets, which cater not only to residents but also to

audiences beyond the borders of the city-state. Both SPH Media and Mediacorp, the country's two primary media companies, publish Chinese-language newspapers or operate television networks that broadcast in Mandarin. SPH Media's *Lianhe Zaobao* is the country's most popular Chinese-language broadsheet, with an estimated daily circulation of 136,900 (85,200 in print and 51,700 in digital) in 2021, according to the [most recently available figures](#). SPH Media's other Chinese-language publications, *Lianhe Wanbao* and the *Shin Min Daily News*, which have since [merged](#), also received wide daily circulation of 63,400 and 90,400, respectively (with 35,700 in print and 27,700 in digital for *Lianhe Wanbao* and 62,700 in print and 27,700 in digital for the *Shin Min Daily News*). However, these still [pale in comparison](#) to daily circulation for the *Straits Times*, SPH Media's flagship English-language newspaper, which had an estimated daily circulation of 460,800 in 2021, consisting of 145,700 in print and 315,100 in digital.

Chinese-language broadcast networks operated by Mediacorp, Singapore's state-owned media company, also maintain a significant audience. In 2017, Mediacorp's Chinese-language Channel 8 had an audience reach of [approximately 2.1 million individuals](#), ahead of the Mediacorp's English-language networks Channel News Asia (over 1.5 million individuals) and Channel 5 (994,000 individuals).

Given the size of Singapore's Chinese-speaking population, the impact of Chinese-language media in the country is more pronounced than in neighboring markets. Moreover, a [report](#) published by the *Washington Post* in 2023 noted that *Lianhe Zaobao* "enjoys rare access for a foreign publication to audiences in China."

Thailand

Thailand's **official language** is Thai. It is home to around [7.5 million people of Chinese ancestry](#)—the largest Chinese diaspora population in the world. The largest Chinese-language groups are Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, and Hakka, with Teochew being the most commonly [spoken](#) Chinese dialect. Most Thais of Chinese descent have largely [assimilated](#) into Thai language and culture, and the younger generations do not generally speak a Chinese language. Though Chinese Thais [wield](#) significant influence over the economy, very few speak their ancestral languages due to regulations imposed between 1930 and 1950 on Chinese educational institutions. Chinese have been present in Thailand for centuries and Chinese Thais were [given](#) citizenship in 1913, but growing nationalism led to mandated assimilation laws, prohibitions on teaching Chinese, and forced adoption of Thai last names. Toward the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, [pushback](#) against Chinese-language education was rooted in a fear of communism taking root in the country.

Still, Chinese is the **second-most spoken foreign language** in Thailand after English, and Chinese-language education is present throughout the education system. Educational cooperation between Thailand and China is strengthening, with China **providing** strong support for Chinese-language education in Thailand through Confucius Institutes, Confucius Classrooms, volunteer teachers, scholarships, and exchanges. In 1992, the Thai government **approved** the use of Chinese-language education in private schools while also adding it to the national education strategy, given the growing economic ties between Thailand and China. By 1999, the National Education Act formally listed a Chinese-language curriculum.

With most Mandarin speakers being Chinese **expatriates** and the native Thai Chinese population deeply assimilated, the impact made by Chinese-language media outlets is minimal. As of 2021, six locally based Chinese-language newspapers **survived** in paper form in Thailand: *Sing Sian Yer Pao*, *Shijie Ribao*, *Jinghua Zhongyuan Lianhe Ribao*, *Zhonghua Ribao*, *Xinzhongyuan Bao*, and *Yazhou Ribao*, with *Shijie Ribao* having ceased publication in 2025. Meanwhile, state-affiliated Xinhua Thailand, *China Daily*, CRI, and China Central Television cater to the local Chinese-speaking community by **producing** content in Thai and Mandarin. Global CAMG Group, a subsidiary of CRI, has owned Bangkok's popular 103 Like FM radio station since 2011, broadcasting popular music and Chinese news in Thai.

Chinese-affiliated media, however, is deeply embedded in the Thai information ecosystem. Chinese influence in Thai media follows a three-pronged approach: (1) outreach to local Thais in Thai, (2) outreach to Mandarin speakers in Thailand in Mandarin, and (3) investments in Thailand's telecommunications infrastructure. At least 13 content-sharing agreements **between** Chinese and Thai media companies were signed between 2015 and 2019, enabling Thai outlets to republish content from Chinese sources. Chinese state-run media is available through TV, radio, newspapers, and online platforms in Thai and Mandarin.

Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste's **official languages** are Portuguese and Tetum, while English and Indonesian are working languages. The most prominent Chinese language is Hakka. Due to the lack of language census data, specific percentages cannot be calculated.

Timor-Leste's Chinese heritage is long and complex. During its **colonial period**, Timor-Leste was the southernmost point of Chinese trading voyages in Southeast Asia. Timor-Leste's Chinese population peaked in the nineteenth century, when Chinese merchants were the country's **first foreign visitors**. Hakka quickly became the dominant Chinese language by the twentieth

century, where a majority of the Chinese immigrants were Hakka speakers from Xiangshan County (now Zhongshan) and Jiayingzhou (now Meizhou). However, the Chinese-Timorese population sharply declined around the Indonesian invasion and occupation in 1975, when they were **targeted** on suspicion of communist sympathies.

By the end of the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste, 90 percent of the Chinese-Timorese population had **fled** the country. The current Chinese population in Timor-Leste is difficult to determine due to inadequate data, but an **estimated** 4,000 Chinese migrants were living there as of 2019. The Chinese-speaking population in Timor-Leste is even more unclear, with the most current statistic being a 2015 population census, which reported that less than 1,000 people in Timor-Leste spoke Hakka. Due to the low Chinese-speaking population in Timor-Leste, Chinese-language media has minimal readership and little to no impact on the country's population.

Vietnam

Vietnam's **official language** is Vietnamese, with English increasingly **avored** as a second language. French and Chinese are also spoken, but due to lack of language census data, specific percentages cannot be calculated. It is therefore difficult to gauge the size of the population who speaks English, French, and Chinese, as well as which version of the Chinese language is most popular.

Vietnamese Chinese heritage has a complicated history. Large numbers of Chinese settlers **first migrated** to Vietnam in the eighteenth century, primarily from Guangdong Province, making Cantonese the nation's dominant Chinese language. The 1979 **Sino-Vietnamese War**, however, significantly decreased the Chinese population in Vietnam due to a rift in relations between the two countries—one of the many origins of anti-China sentiments seen in Vietnam today. By the end of 1979, an **estimated** 450,000 ethnic Chinese had fled Vietnam, with this decline continuing through the 1980s. Today's generation of Vietnamese Chinese face difficulties **preserving** Cantonese as a spoken language in their community. As a result, Cantonese proficiency continues to decline with each generation.

Data for the ethnic Chinese population in Vietnam is outdated. The last substantial source was from 2015 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which reported that Vietnam's population was around 93 million, and ethnic Chinese residents **accounted** for 1.1 percent of the total population. The statistic did not differentiate between Chinese nationals living in Vietnam and Vietnamese citizens of Chinese descent. Vietnamese Chinese people today **self-identify** in different ways; some refer to themselves as “Vietnamese

Chinese” while others identify only as “Vietnamese.” As a result, the actual Vietnamese Chinese population may be larger than indicated by the last census.

Chinese-language media has minimal traction in Vietnam for two key reasons: the government’s **strong control** over Vietnam’s media landscape and widespread anti-China sentiment among the public. Vietnam’s media freedom is extremely limited, **ranking** 173 out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders cites that “only the state and affiliated entities have the right to own media outlets,” with the lone sources of independent media being bloggers and freelance journalists whose work is under increasing pressure.

The Vietnamese government also has **strict regulations** dictating how foreign media outlets can operate in the country. First, foreign outlets require an operating license, which can be revoked by the government at any time and must be renewed annually. Vietnam also tightly controls the activities of foreign journalists on visas, including where they can travel within Vietnam and what they can report on. Foreign media outlets are not allowed to make up more than 30 percent of the available television channels in Vietnam, and live foreign programs run on a 30-to-60-minute delay for content monitoring purposes. Most notably, all foreign programs must be translated into Vietnamese by government-approved translators.

Vietnam’s tight regulations make it difficult for Chinese-language media to penetrate Vietnam’s media landscape. But these regulations do not mean the door is entirely closed to Chinese media outlets. In 2024, the Vietnam News Agency **signed** an agreement on professional cooperation with Xinhua, which aims to strengthen the exchange of multimedia information at regional and international journalist forums, support reporters, and collaborate on advanced press technologies. No further details on how the outlets plan to support reporters have been disclosed.

Still, Chinese-language media has limited influence on Vietnam’s public. Most Vietnamese consume Vietnamese-language media, and due to the small Vietnamese Chinese minority, the consumers of Chinese-language media in Vietnam are most likely the Chinese nationals residing in the country. With all broadcasts closely monitored, it is incredibly difficult for any Chinese-language media to exert influence on topics that do not align with Vietnamese state goals.

Due to Vietnam’s complicated historical relationship with China, as well as contemporary economic and security disputes, anti-China sentiment is widespread among the Vietnamese public. In 2018, tens of thousands of people led protests against Vietnam’s Special Zone Act, which the public had **interpreted** as facilitating Chinese nationals acquiring land in Vietnam. The protests **spanned** the country, from Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to smaller

cities like Danang, Nha Trang, Binh Thuan, and Tai Ninh. In the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute's [2025 State of Southeast Asia survey](#), Vietnamese elites were among the most distrusting of China. When asked why, their top concern was that China's economic and military power could be used to "threaten" Vietnam's interests and sovereignty. This public suspicion toward China and any efforts to increase its influence in the country severely limits the potential impact of Chinese-language media.

Conclusion

Chinese-language populations in Southeast Asia are not a monolith. Across the region, Chinese diaspora communities differ in size and scale, their ability to express their culture free from marginalization, and their relationships with Beijing. And in parallel, the Chinese-language media outlets that cater to these communities operate in a fractured media landscape, facing shrinking readership as successive generations of diaspora communities shed their Chinese-language abilities or gain fluency in local languages. At the same time, shifts in public and elite perceptions of the United States in Southeast Asia highlight the critical need for analysts and policymakers to better understand what drives change in regional views of the great powers and politically sensitive topics. ■

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This white paper is made possible with support from the U.S. Embassy Manila.

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Appendix

Table 1: Chinese-Language Media Outlets in Southeast Asia

Outlet name (English/ Romanized)	Outlet name (Chi- nese)	Primary country of operation	Distribution method						Estimated print circu- lation	Estimated social me- dia reach	Estimated monthly web visi- tors	Web traffic by country
Jian Hua Daily	柬华日报	Cambodia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~115,000 followers	9.9K	■ Cambodia: 78.2% ■ United States: 9.0% ■ Malaysia: 4.6% ■ Thailand: 4.2% ■ Taiwan: 2.2%
Cambodia China Times	柬中時報	Cambodia	□	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	N/A	~581,000 followers	53.9K	■ Cambodia: 73.7% ■ Thailand: 4.6% ■ United States: 4.2% ■ Vietnam: 4.0% ■ Taiwan: 3.0%
Harian Indonesia	印度尼西亞 日报	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~2,500 followers	1.1K	■ Indonesia: 87.3% ■ United States: 8.2% ■ Malaysia: 4.5%
Guo Ji Ri Bao/ International Daily News	國際日報	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~1,300 followers	2.5K	■ Indonesia: 60.5% ■ United States: 23.9% ■ Hong Kong: 15.6%
Harian Inhua	印华日报	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~541 followers	N/A	N/A
Harian Nusantara/ Qiandao Ribao	千岛日报	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	□	Social media	No data available	N/A	15.1K	■ Indonesia: 60.5% ■ United States: 25.8% ■ Hong Kong: 13.7%
Indonesia Shang Bao	商报	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~1,270 followers	15.7K	■ Cambodia: 19.2% ■ Indonesia: 18.7% ■ United States: 17.6% ■ Singapore: 13.2% ■ Hong Kong: 10.5%
Xun Bao	讯报	Indonesia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~365 followers	N/A	N/A
Kun Dian Ri Bao	坤甸日报	Indonesia	✓	Print	□	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~512 followers	N/A	N/A

<i>Sin Chew Daily</i>	星洲网	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	323,616 daily (2016)	~4.7 million followers	3.5M	■ Malaysia: 82.0% ■ Singapore: 4.6% ■ Australia: 4.2% ■ United States: 1.8% ■ Germany: 1.5%
<i>China Press</i>	中國報	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	180,425 daily (2016)	~8.2 million followers	3.3M	■ Malaysia: 80.3% ■ Singapore: 7.6% ■ Australia: 2.7% ■ Hong Kong: 2.4% ■ United Kingdom: 1.3%
<i>United Daily News</i>	联合日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	58,495 daily (2016)	~44,000 followers	43.3K	■ Malaysia: 21.2% ■ United States: 9.5% ■ Cambodia: 7.1% ■ Taiwan: 7.0% ■ Brunei Darussalam: 6.7%
<i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>	南洋商報	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~908,913 followers	1.1M	■ Malaysia: 88.8% ■ Australia: 1.7% ■ United States: 1.6% ■ Cambodia: 1.4% ■ Hong Kong: 1.3%
<i>Guang Ming Daily</i>	光明日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	68,477 daily (2016)	~1.44 million followers	475.2K	■ Malaysia: 87.3% ■ Singapore: 5.6% ■ Taiwan: 1.7% ■ Hong Kong: 1.6% ■ United States: 0.8%
<i>Overseas Chinese Daily News</i>	华侨日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	12,821 daily (2016)	~94,000 followers	8.8K	■ Australia: 40.5% ■ Taiwan: 20.2% ■ Hong Kong: 14.4% ■ Malaysia: 12.8% ■ United States: 8.8%
<i>Kwong Wah Yit Poh</i>	光华日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~1.65 million followers	518.1K	■ Malaysia: 63.65% ■ United States: 11.92% ■ Netherlands: 10.15% ■ Singapore: 6.49% ■ Australia: 3.9%
<i>Oriental Daily News</i>	东方日报	Malaysia	□	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	N/A	~4.43 million followers	5M	■ Malaysia: 80.5% ■ United States: 6.5% ■ Singapore: 6.49% ■ Taiwan: 0.96% ■ Australia: 0.87%
<i>International Times</i>	国际时报	Malaysia	□	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	N/A	~40,000 followers	1.2K	■ Malaysia: 100%
<i>Morning Post</i>	斗湖晨报	Malaysia	✓	Print	□	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~30,000 followers	N/A	N/A

<i>Merdeka Daily News</i>	自由日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	☐	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~32,000 followers	N/A	N/A
<i>Asia Times</i>	亚洲时报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~21,000 followers	2.6K	- Malaysia: 51.8% - United States: 48.2%
<i>See Hua Daily News</i>	诗华日报	Malaysia	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	93,546 daily (2016)	~419,800 followers	176.9K	- Malaysia: 86.3% - Hong Kong: 2.4% - United States: 2.0% - Singapore: 1.8% - Brunei Darussalam: 1.7%
<i>Myanmar Golden Phoenix</i>	缅甸金凤凰报	Myanmar	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~1,960 followers	8.4K	- Myanmar: 34.61% - Australia: 15.06% - Hong Kong: 11.33% - Thailand: 10.5% - Taiwan: 9.59%
<i>United News Philippines</i>	聯合日報	Philippines	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~12,000 followers	11.8K	- Philippines: 75.1% - Taiwan: 13.4% - United States: 5.7% - Hong Kong: 5.4% - India: 0.4%
<i>World News</i>	菲律賓世界日報	Philippines	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~2,500 followers	N/A	N/A
<i>Chinese Commercial News</i>	菲律賓商報	Philippines	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~71,000 followers	10.7K	- Philippines: 46.9% - Taiwan: 22.5% - Hong Kong: 12.4% - United States: 11.8% - Singapore: 3.8%
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	聯合早報	Singapore	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	85,200 daily (2021)	~7 million followers	3.8M	- Singapore: 33.2% - China: 31.2% - United States: 13.2% - Taiwan: 4.0% - Malaysia: 3.1%
<i>Shin Min Daily News</i>	新明日報	Singapore	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	62,700 daily (2021)	~550,000 followers	9.9K	- Singapore: 87.9% - Malaysia: 12.2%
<i>Thailand Headlines</i>	泰国头条新闻	Thailand	☐	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~71,240 followers	19.8K	- Thailand: 25.2 - Taiwan: 16.7% - United States: 12.7% - Vietnam: 8.3% - Cambodia: 7.8%
<i>Sing Sian Yer Pao</i>	星暹日報	Thailand	✓	Print	✓	Digital	✓	Social media	No data available	~2 million followers	530	Thailand: 100%

<i>Zhonghua Ribao</i>	中华日报	Thailand	☐	Print	☒	Digital	☒	Social media	No data available	~2,300 followers	2.1K	- Thailand: 57.9% - United States: 30.7% - Hong Kong: 11.4%
<i>Xinzhongyuan Bao</i>	新中原报	Thailand	☒	Print	☐	Digital	☐	Social media	No data available	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Thai Chinese News</i>	泰國新聞	Thailand	☐	Print	☒	Digital	☐	Social media	N/A	N/A	2.5K	- Taiwan: 53.9% - Thailand: 28.9% - Hong Kong: 17.2%
<i>Jinghua Zhongyuan Lianhe Ribao</i>	京华中原联合日报	Thailand	☒	Print	☐	Digital	☐	Social media	No data available	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Yazhou Ribao</i>	亚洲日报	Thailand	☒	Print	☐	Digital	☐	Social media	No data available	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: These web traffic figures should be interpreted as approximations. Estimated social media reach figures in the database represent the sum of an outlet's followers across its social media platforms—including Facebook, Instagram, X, Weibo, and Telegram, among others.

Source: Website traffic figures are derived from publicly available estimates sourced from the marketing platform Similarweb.