



THREAT ANALYSIS

Chinese State-Linked Information Operation Revealed Social Media Account Takeover Potential



July 2023

RESEARCH



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
Twitter Network Focused on Latin America	5
Accounts' Behavior and Twitter's Previous State-Affiliated Media Policy	5
The Accounts	7
Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior	12
Bypassing Twitter's Previous State Media Labeling Policy	13
Notable Mutual Friend	15
Apps: Suspicious But Not Surprising Permissions	17
Appendix A: List of China News Service-Affiliated Websites	19

DISCLAIMER:

The reporting contained herein from the Nisos research organization consists of analysis reflecting assessments of probability and levels of confidence and should not necessarily be construed as fact. All content is provided on an as-is basis and does not constitute professional advice, and its accuracy reflects the reliability, timeliness, authority, and relevancy of the sourcing underlying those analytic assessments.



Executive Summary

Nisos investigators identified a network of pro-Beijing Twitter accounts likely engaged in state-backed information operation targeting audiences in various countries in Latin America, including Paraguay, Costa Rica, Chile, and Brazil. Some of the accounts promote strategic Chinese state media-linked news content in both Spanish and Portuguese.

The network is linked to China News Service and shows signs of coordinated inauthentic behavior, with accounts posting similar or identical content related to China at close time intervals. This indicates they are likely organized through a common operator echoing content mainly from Chinese state-linked media outlets, in an attempt to improve China's image and enhance its policy and diplomatic efforts.

China News Service is reportedly part of China's "United Front," a strategy aimed at spreading Beijing's influence that simultaneously works as an espionage method for Chinese government agencies. The accounts represent a likely covert effort to promote state media content that bypassed Twitter's previous state media labeling policy.¹

Apps communicating with the IP address of the network's affiliated websites showed permissions to not only gather personally identifiable information from subscribers, but also demonstrated the potential to control subscribers' social media accounts. This could enable China's government to potentially micromanage narratives and obtain information from dissidents residing abroad, which has been reported as common activity by Chinese government-linked actors through other methods. Nisos did not find the same level of invasive permissions among other news agencies, including other foreign state-affiliated media websites.

¹[https://www.npr\[.\]org/2023/04/21/1171236695/twitter-strips-state-affiliated-government-funded-labels-from-npr-rt-china](https://www.npr[.]org/2023/04/21/1171236695/twitter-strips-state-affiliated-government-funded-labels-from-npr-rt-china)



Background

Nisos researchers identified a small social media network focused on countries in Latin America sharing content from Chinese state-linked news agencies using sock puppet social media accounts. The small network is affiliated with a group of Chinese language news agencies targeting Chinese-speaking audiences residing in cities and countries outside of China. Social media content shared by the network includes information, images, and footage from China News Service and other Chinese state-backed media outlets. Whols data also revealed that many of the affiliated websites were registered by a user with an email address attributed to China News Service.

China News Service serves as one of China's largest state-owned news agencies and operates several overseas branches.² China News Service was formerly run by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, which was absorbed into the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party.³ According to France's Institute for Strategic Research at the Military School, the United Front serves as a Chinese government policy that aims to remove perceived internal and external enemies, control dissidents, advance Beijing's interests, and assert its influence abroad.⁴

² [https://www.aspi.org\[.\]au/report/party-speaks-you](https://www.aspi.org[.]au/report/party-speaks-you)

³ [https://www.aspi.org\[.\]au/report/party-speaks-you](https://www.aspi.org[.]au/report/party-speaks-you)

⁴ [https://www.irsem\[.\]fr/report.html](https://www.irsem[.]fr/report.html)



Twitter Network Focused on Latin America

Latin America (LATAM) is no stranger to information operations during times of political unrest and elections.⁵ There have been several instances of local media organizations and “alternative” news outlets echoing content from foreign state media agencies that promote narratives favorable to the foreign state actor and in many cases, not to U.S. government interests in the region. For example, Russia’s influence operations in the media and social media spaces are notable in the region as much of its state media content is found through Cuban, Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, and Mexican media organizations, journalists, as well as “independent” and “alternative” news outlets.^{6 7 8} Similarly, Russia-originating information operations during Colombia’s elections in 2022 shared many similarities to an influential operation led by Venezuelan marketing specialists linked to former Venezuelan government employees.^{9 10 11} Common features included:

- Promoting Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua’s likely preferred candidate, current President Gustavo Petro
- Demonizing the former presidential administration
- Forming divisive narratives around domestic issues and amplifying those during political unrest prior to elections to sow severe discord among the Colombian population
- Shared similar content around one of Colombia’s largest drug cartels, the Gulf Clan’s, armed strike in in May 2022, which undermined the more politically conservative-aligned presidential candidate
- Similar hashtag uses
- Similar bot and sock puppet engagements

Unlike Russia’s government and other proxies, which appear prominent in the information space throughout LATAM, China’s government has yet to reach the same level of domestic engagement but that does not mean it is not trying to influence political and cultural perceptions in the region; especially to counter unfavorable perceptions of China on a global scale following the COVID-19 pandemic, which originated from China.¹²

Accounts’ Behavior and Twitter’s Previous State-Affiliated Media Policy

⁵[https://theglobalamericans\[.\]org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021.10.28-Global-Americans-Disinformation-Report.pdf](https://theglobalamericans[.]org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021.10.28-Global-Americans-Disinformation-Report.pdf)

⁶ [https://www.cima.ned\[.\]org/blog/coordinating_messages_tesur_and_rt/](https://www.cima.ned[.]org/blog/coordinating_messages_tesur_and_rt/)

⁷[https://transparenciave\[.\]org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Russia-and-Venezuela-Allies-in-Disinformation.pdf](https://transparenciave[.]org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Russia-and-Venezuela-Allies-in-Disinformation.pdf)

⁸<https://www.usagm.gov/2023/02/24/new-partnership-provides-fact-checking-support-to-combat-on-russian-disinformation-in-cuba/>

⁹ [https://thecitypaperbogota\[.\]com/opinion/the-kremlins-interference-in-colombias-presidential-election/](https://thecitypaperbogota[.]com/opinion/the-kremlins-interference-in-colombias-presidential-election/)

¹⁰ [https://latinoamerica21\[.\]com/en/bots-do-not-vote-russia-interference-in-colombia/](https://latinoamerica21[.]com/en/bots-do-not-vote-russia-interference-in-colombia/)

¹¹[https://thecitypaperbogota\[.\]com/opinion/the-kremlins-interference-in-colombias-presidential-election/](https://thecitypaperbogota[.]com/opinion/the-kremlins-interference-in-colombias-presidential-election/)<https://thecitypaperbogota.com/opinion/the-kremlins-interference-in-colombias-presidential-election/>

¹² [https://thehackernews\[.\]com/2023/01/google-takes-down-50000-instances-of.html](https://thehackernews[.]com/2023/01/google-takes-down-50000-instances-of.html)



Nisos found three Twitter accounts recycling China state-affiliated media content and targeting audiences in Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Chile. These accounts appeared as independent news agencies with a low number of followers. The network’s methodology bypassed Twitter’s previous state-affiliated media labeling policy, which stated:

*“State-affiliated media is defined as outlets where the state exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution. Accounts belonging to state-affiliated media entities, their editors-in-chief, and/or their prominent staff may be labeled. **We will also add labels to Tweets that share links to state-affiliated media websites.**”¹³*

Nisos did not confirm whether the network operator(s) are linked to China’s government, but the accounts promote state-run media sources (i.e. China News Service and Xinhua News). We assess that this effort was a product of China’s media and political interests in targeted countries.

The accounts identified put effort into applying methodologies to avoid adding links that would take users back to China News Service, the Chinese state-linked media organization from which the majority of their China-related content comes from. Their methodology enabled its content to appear on Twitter without the need to get redirected outside of the platform. For instance, the accounts posted pictures of online documents that included Spanish-translated content from China News Service’s “We Talk” in various instances. Below is an example of one case in which the three accounts simultaneously shared an article translated from Chinese into Spanish using this method.



Graphic 1: Tweet showing strategy to avoid posting links back to China News Service by one of the three accounts that post Chinese state-media content.

¹³ <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/government-media-labels>



The majority of the accounts' China-related content appeared in video and picture forms and focused on Chinese culture, tourist sites, food, entertainment, and events. Such posts often used the hashtag #China and included video clips from Chinese state-affiliated media sources. However, none of the China-related posts provided links or mentions of the contents' original sources in the text.

The Accounts

Nisos researchers assess that the three accounts engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior targeted audiences in Paraguay, Chile, and Costa Rica likely because these countries align with Beijing's foreign policy interests. For instance, in Paraguay, two leading presidential candidates that participated in the country's recent presidential election had opposing policy plans regarding Taiwan and China. The candidate that succeeded promised to make Taiwan the preferred partner over China whereas the candidate who received the second most votes sought to change the relationship with Taiwan to be closer to China. Costa Rica and Chile also appeared to be of interest to China as its telecommunications firm, Huawei, demonstrated interest in implementing services and 5G in these two countries.^{14 15 16}

@Hoy_Paraguay



Graphic 2: Hoy_Paraguay's Twitter profile. Translation: "Learn news about Paraguay-China from here"

@Hoy_Paraguay was created in July 2021, about four months prior to the other two accounts that shared the same China-related information. Its profile includes a cover photo of Paraguay's Presidential Palace and states "Get to know Paraguay-Chinese news from here" in Spanish. Its network encompasses a variety of accounts, including Chinese diplomats, embassies, and LATAM-based individuals that embrace China's culture. For example, this account is followed by former Chinese

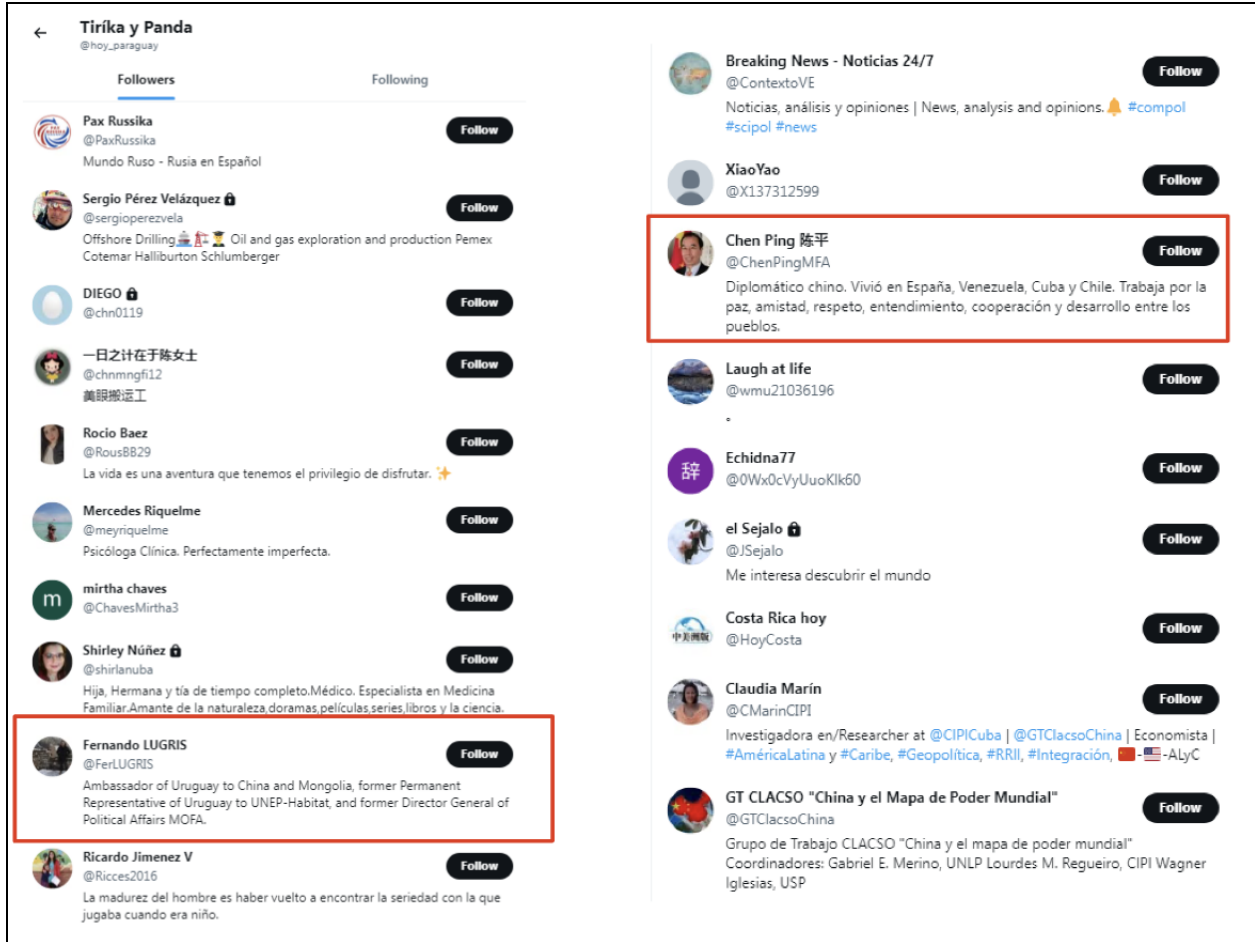
¹⁴[https://www.bnamericas\[.\]com/en/news/racs-resolves-and-rejects-objections-from-claro-and-huawei-to-the-second-5g-procedure](https://www.bnamericas[.]com/en/news/racs-resolves-and-rejects-objections-from-claro-and-huawei-to-the-second-5g-procedure)

¹⁵<https://www.prnewswire.com/ae/news-releases/wom-of-chile-and-huawei-jointly-usher-in-the-adn-era-of-optical-networks-841379134.html>

¹⁶ [https://www.borgenmagazine\[.\]com/belt-and-road-initiative-in-chile/](https://www.borgenmagazine[.]com/belt-and-road-initiative-in-chile/)



Diplomat to Spain, Venezuela, Cuba, and Chile - Chen Ping and Uruguay’s Ambassador to China - Juan Fernando Lugris Rodriguez despite having less than 80 followers and minimal influence in the information space.



Graphic 3: Sample of @Hoy_Paraguay’s followers.

@Hoy_Paraguay mainly provides external links to Paraguayan news outlets when mentioning news about LATAM or United State-related topics. As mentioned, it omits links to Chinese articles and websites when posting positive content about China. The Paraguay and LATAM-focused news are minimal compared to posts about China.



Tirika y Panda
@hoy_paraguay

[Cuento Chino]
Gao Song, de 32 años, es la primera mujer piloto de helicópteros de extinción de incendios en #China.
Ella dijo que convertirse en una piloto no sólo quería llevar la luz de la esperanza a los atrapados, sino que también volar hacia la luz de la fe en su carrera.
[Translate Tweet](#)

Una joven entrena duro para convertirse en la primera mujer piloto de helicóptero de extinción de incendios de China

Gao Song, una mujer nacida después de 1990, es la primera mujer piloto de helicópteros de extinción de incendios en China.



Gao es miembro del equipo de rescate de aviación de un destacamento de bomberos en Qingdao, provincia de Shandong, este de China. Antes de este trabajo, fue inspectora de desastres de incendios en un equipo de rescate de incendios en el distrito Laoshan de la ciudad. En 2018, Gao aplicó como piloto de helicóptero en el equipo de rescate de aviación, el primero de su tipo en el país que el destacamento de rescate de incendios estaba estableciendo en ese momento.

Gao fue cuidadosa y tranquila cuando trabajó como topógrafa de desastres de incendios. "Mi abuelo una vez sirvió en la fuerza aérea. Influenciado por él, siempre pensé que ser piloto era un trabajo genial, y también es un sueño que quería cumplir", dijo Gao.

Gao entrenó muy duro para cumplir con los estrictos criterios, que incluían la capacidad de los candidatos para mantener el equilibrio y superar el vértigo.

Gao ha participado en varias misiones de extinción de incendios. En abril de 2020, Gao y sus colegas realizaron 34 despegues en cuatro días durante una misión de extinción de incendios forestales, con un total de más de 85 horas en el aire, arrojando más de 1.000 toneladas de agua exactamente sobre los lugares del incendio y, finalmente, sofocando las llamas.

Gao tiene que lidiar con un terreno montañoso especial durante sus misiones, ajustando constantemente el helicóptero en el aire de acuerdo con el flujo de aire y la elevación de los picos de las montañas mientras escapa del humo. "Debo llevar las cinco toneladas de agua a un lugar por encima de los lugares del incendio y también garantizar la seguridad de los miembros de la tripulación", dijo Gao.

Gao es uno de los siete pilotos de helicóptero del destacamento de rescate de incendios de Qingdao. Puede conducir cuatro tipos de aeronaves: HU-269, AS-350, AW119 y Ka-32.

Tirika y Panda
@hoy_paraguay



lanacion.com.py
La Nación / Día del ambiente: por buen camino, pero se deben implementar ...
Cada 5 de junio se conmemora el Día Mundial del Medio Ambiente, como un llamado a las personas de todo el mundo a involucrarse con acciones para ...

China News 中国新闻网
Ecms
March 13 · 🌐

Gao Song, the first female firefighter pilot in China, serves in Qingdao Fire and Rescue. Inspired by her PLA Navy grandfather, she's living her childhood dream of becoming a pilot while blazing a trail for women in her field. #ChinaStory





Graphics 4 - 6: (Top left) @Hoy_Paraguay's China-related post recycling China News Service information (no external link). (Top right) @Hoy_Paraguay's post from a Paraguayan news source discussing climate change (external link provided). (Below) The content in this example used to illustrate @Hoy_Paraguay's China-related post also appeared on a social media page pertaining to China News Service.^{17 18}

¹⁷ https://twitter.com/hoy_paraguay/status/1656106780936802304

¹⁸ https://twitter.com/hoy_paraguay/status/1665666299664449536



Following Paraguay's Presidential elections, the account congratulated the winner, Santiago Peña Palacios, who expressed a pro-Taiwan policy throughout his campaign. However, following his victory, Peña announced the intent to return to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), "a consensus mechanism involving Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela... Its purpose is to develop a South American forum for addressing political, social, economic, environmental and infrastructure issues, that will reinforce the identity of South America and will contribute to the strengthening of Latin America and the Caribbean, based on a sub-regional perspective and in consonance with other regional integration experiences, to provide it with greater pull and representation in international forums."^{19 20}

China would likely benefit from Paraguay's membership in UNASUR despite Paraguay's relationship with Taiwan. Currently, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Lula) seeks to lead and strengthen the union and mission within UNASUR.²¹ Lula's government's increased engagement with China indicates it to be the preferred partner to help Brazil improve its economy and enable it to become a leader within the tech industry in Latin America.²² Additionally, Lula expressed interest in adopting 5G and in developing Huawei technology in Brazil, which the previous Brazilian presidential administration strongly rejected.²³

@Hoy_Chile



Graphic 7: @Hoy_Chile's Twitter profile.

@Hoy_Chile was created in November 2021, four months after @Hoy_Paraguay and it appears as if minimal effort went into creating the profile. For instance, it lacks a cover photo and its profile picture appears blurry and out of focus. It is followed by @Hoy_Paraguay and @HoyCosta, which share the same China-related content within the same minute. Similar to @Hoy_Paraguay, it provides external links to domestic news sources when it posts about LATAM and United States-focused content and

¹⁹ [https://www.cancilleria.gov\[.\]co/en/union-south-american-nations-unasur](https://www.cancilleria.gov[.]co/en/union-south-american-nations-unasur)

²⁰ [https://spanish.news\[.\]cn/20230517/c377ca97f67c45499f053f0f6b7f2a9f/c.html](https://spanish.news[.]cn/20230517/c377ca97f67c45499f053f0f6b7f2a9f/c.html)

²¹ [https://theglobalamericans\[.\]org/2023/01/lula-and-the-revival-of-unasur-and-celac/](https://theglobalamericans[.]org/2023/01/lula-and-the-revival-of-unasur-and-celac/)

²² [https://apnews\[.\]com/article/china-brazil-lula-xi-jinping-91c34b4a9fb78f263d6f81f1e9a16f49](https://apnews[.]com/article/china-brazil-lula-xi-jinping-91c34b4a9fb78f263d6f81f1e9a16f49)

²³ [https://www.reuters\[.\]com/technology/brazil-paves-way-semiconductor-cooperation-with-china-2023-04-14/](https://www.reuters[.]com/technology/brazil-paves-way-semiconductor-cooperation-with-china-2023-04-14/)

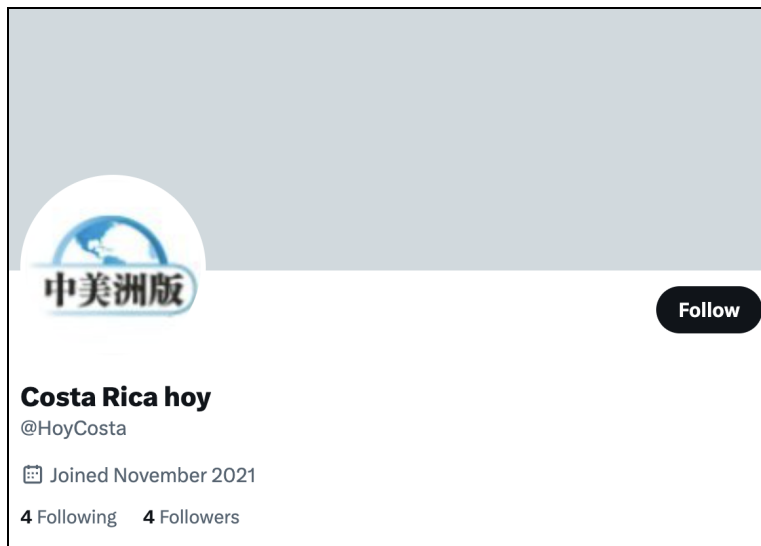


omits external links to Chinese news websites for its China-related content. @Hoy_Chile's posts below illustrate the difference in its China-related and non-China-related posts.



Graphics 8 & 9: (Left) @Hoy_Chile's China-related post recycling China News Service information (no external link). (Right) @Hoy_Chile's post from a Chilean news source discussing U.S. politics (external link provided).^{24 25}

@HoyCosta



Graphic 10: @HoyCosta's Twitter profile.

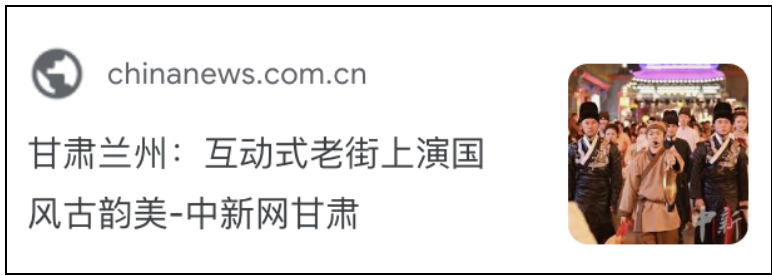
Similarly, @HoyCosta was created in November 2021, four months after @Hoy_Paraguay, and is followed by @Hoy_Paraguay as well as @Hoy_Chile. Little effort went into its profile creation as well. Its profile picture is out of focus and the account lacks a cover photo. Nevertheless, it actively posts the same China-related content as the other two accounts within the same minute. Similar to @Hoy_Paraguay and @Hoy_Chile, it provides external links to domestic news outlets when posting

²⁴ https://twitter.com/hoy_chile/status/1661250694362591233

²⁵ https://twitter.com/hoy_chile/status/1638573724797489152



about LATAM and United States-focused content and omits external links to Chinese news websites for its China-related posts.



Graphics 11 - 13: (Top left) @HoyCosta’s China-related post recycling China News Service information (no external link). (Top right) @HoyCosta’s post from a Costa Rican news source discussing negative activities related to Costa Rica’s economy (external link provided). (Below) The content in the example used to illustrate @HoyCosta’s China-related post also appeared on a China News Service’s website.^{26 27}

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior

Below are examples of coordinated inauthentic behavior by the three accounts in a likely attempt to improve China’s image and enhance its diplomatic efforts in targeted countries in Latin America.



²⁶ <https://twitter.com/HoyCosta/status/1665666490081656832>

²⁷ <https://twitter.com/HoyCosta/status/1633933032901038080>



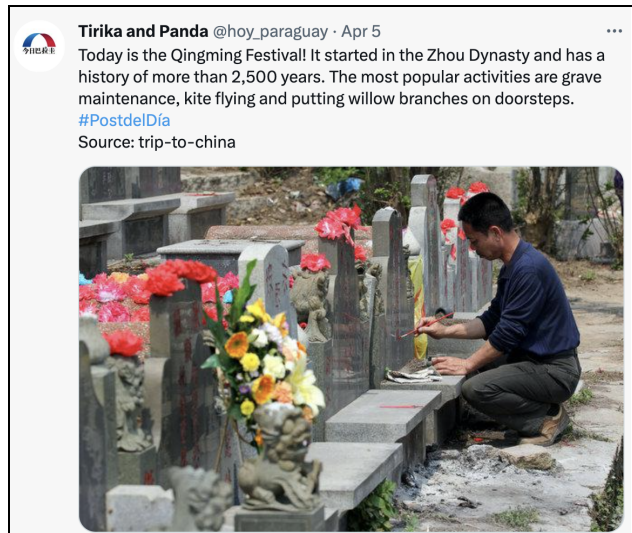
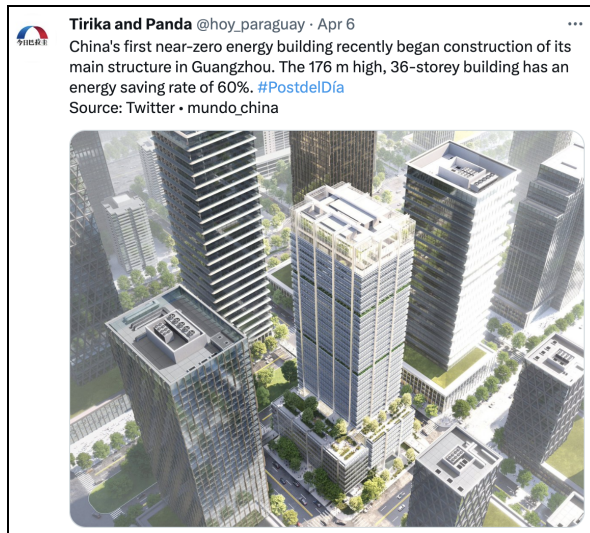
Graphics 14 - 16: Example of LATAM-focused Twitter accounts' China-related posts that published the same content at the same time. This particular update discusses China's space endeavors.^{28 29 30}



Graphics 17 - 19: Example of LATAM-focused Twitter accounts' China-related posts that published the same content at the same time. This particular update describes China's 5G technology as the best (globally) and discusses how it can allegedly transform a country and lead to growth.^{31 32 33}

Bypassing Twitter's Previous State Media Labeling Policy

The accounts involved in spreading Chinese government propaganda through coordinated inauthentic behavior used strategies to bypass Twitter's previous state labeling policy. The pictures below demonstrate a method in which the accounts exclude mentions of state-linked accounts, including posts that originate from Chinese embassies (ex see: 'Source: embaixadachina' - China's embassy in Brazil).



²⁸ https://twitter.com/hoy_paraguay/status/1663792756328636416

²⁹ https://twitter.com/hoy_chile/status/1663792684882968577

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/HoyCosta/status/1663792721180409857>

³¹ https://twitter.com/hoy_chile/status/1664516629936459776

³² https://twitter.com/hoy_paraguay/status/1664516558582870017

³³ <https://twitter.com/HoyCosta/status/1664516594511360000>



Graphics 20 - 22: Tweets demonstrating a tactic used to avoid Twitter previous state media labeling policy.

Although briefly mentioned in the previous section, another tactic involves omitting links and mentions to Chinese state-linked sources in tweets that include images and video footage from Chinese state-linked media outlets. Nevertheless, such posts often include logos from the outlet within the video. The example below highlights a post describing the source as a Twitter user @mundo_chino (Translation: ‘China world’) while the image shows Chinese state-owned news outlet Xinhua News’ logo on the bottom-right of the photo.





Graphic 23: Example of @HoyCosta attempting to bypass Twitter's previous state labeling policy.³⁴

Notable Mutual Friend

The three accounts identified are part of a larger social media network that includes Chinese government accounts, China-LATAM think tanks in LATAM, sock puppets, self-described “independent” journalists, academics, and accounts involved in international business. Notably, all three accounts share a mutual following with @NmqbNews (China-linked news outlet publishing in Portuguese focused on China-Brazil relations).



Graphic 24: @nmqbNews' Twitter profile.

@NmqbNews' posts do not appear to be engaged in their coordinated inauthentic activities although Nisos found overlapping content when discussing Chinese culture and events.

³⁴ [https://twitter\[.\]com/HoyCosta/status/1658497550612062211](https://twitter[.]com/HoyCosta/status/1658497550612062211)



Graphics 25 & 26: Examples of posts covering the same event in China. @NmqbNews and the three accounts used similar hashtags to draw attention to the content on the same day even though the event took place two days prior to the posts.

@NmqbNews frequently posts about geopolitical events related to Brazil and China's close-knit relationship, especially under Lula's presidency. Nevertheless, it uses similar hashtags as the other identified accounts in a likely attempt to enhance China's image in the region.

The Twitter account lists a website in its biography, Br-cn[.]com, which is registered to the South America Overseas Chinese Press Network, according to the website's landing page. Br-cn[.]com shares the same IP address and SSH certificates as several other Chinese language news agencies targeting Chinese speaking audiences outside of China in several geographic locations of strategic importance [to China].

- IP Address: 69.28.62.34




One of those affiliated websites targets Europe-based Chinese speakers, oushinet[.]com ('European Times'). The website's registration information includes an email address associated with China News Service (ch*****@chinanews[.]com.cn) and previous website, which appears inactive as of June 2023 - oushinet[.]net). An associated app developer also appears within the website's Whois, Peking (also known as 'Beijing') Zhongxin Chinese Media Service Ltd.




chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn

The list below contains all domains related to the email address chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn. The listed domains are showing the mentioned email address in their whois records. We have chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn listing since April, 2011.

Sort: best popularity [newly registered](#)

1	oushinet.com		<p>European Times-European Times-European Times Daily visitors: 6 587 Alexa Rank: 108 875 More info</p> <p>As chen qiang of PEKING ZHONGXIN CHINESE MEDIA SERVICE LTD. chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn since April, 2011</p>
2	oushinet.net		<p>More info</p> <p>As lei fan of bei jing zhong xin tang feng wen hua chuan bo you xiang gong si chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn since April, 2011</p>
3	chine-info.com		<p>www.chine-info.com Daily visitors: 534 More info</p> <p>As qiang chen of PEKING ZHONGXIN CHINESE MEDIA SERVICE LTD. chenqiang@chinanews.com.cn since March, 2018</p>

 chinanews.com.cn
https://www.chinanews.com.cn › ab... · [Translate this page](#) ⋮

About us

China News Service; Chinanews.com; Contact us. **China News Service (CNS)** is a state-level news agency in China providing news coverage to the world.

Graphics 27 & 28: The email address found in oushinet[.]com's Whols points to China News Service and Peking Zhongxin Chinese Media Service Ltd., an app developer.

Apps: Suspicious But Not Surprising Permissions

The IP address shared among the identified China News Service websites communicates with apps that grant it permission to invasively access (via request and access tokens) and potentially take over subscribers' Twitter, Sina Weibo, and Weixin accounts.

- **Twitter:** Twitter is a social media platform often used as a means for rallying vast awareness to political activism and events. Many media organizations and heads of states, as well as other official government entities, use Twitter to communicate with global audiences. From a security standpoint, due to the nature of being a popular source of information during high profile events, especially political in nature, it has been used in information operations by government-linked entities and users.
- **Weibo:** Weibo is a Chinese microblogging platform that is popular within China and among Chinese expat communities residing abroad. The platform's details share similarities with features found on Twitter.
- **Weixin:** Weixin (also known as WeChat) is an instant messaging, social media, and mobile payment app developed by Tencent. There are over a billion monthly users. It allows its users to do things like book flights and hotels as well as develop in app games called "mini-programs." To use important features like payments, Chinese citizens abroad need to have a Chinese phone number and input their national identification number (身份证) and link a China-based bank account. Not having access to Weixin severely limits the ability to send money home and an ever growing number of Chinese-owned businesses located abroad.



```
https://api.twitter.com/1.1/followers/list.json
https://api.twitter.com/1.1/friends/list.json
https://api.twitter.com/1.1/statuses/update.json
https://api.twitter.com/1.1/statuses/update_with_media.json
https://api.twitter.com/1.1/users/show.json
https://api.twitter.com/oauth/access_token
https://api.twitter.com/oauth/authorize?oauth_token=
https://api.twitter.com/oauth/request_token
https://api.weibo.com/2/friendships/create.json
https://api.weibo.com/2/friendships/followers.json
https://api.weibo.com/2/friendships/friends.json
https://api.weibo.com/2/friendships/friends/bilateral.json
https://api.weibo.com/2/statuses/user_timeline.json
https://api.weibo.com/2/users/show.json
https://api.weibo.com/oauth2/access_token
https://api.weibo.com/oauth2/default.html
https://api.weixin.qq.com/sns/oauth2/access_token
https://api.weixin.qq.com/sns/oauth2/refresh_token
https://api.weixin.qq.com/sns/userinfo
```

Graphic 29: Example of network communications performed by an app developed by Beijing Zhong Xin Chinese Media Service Co Ltd, showing authentication related activity with Twitter and Weibo.

Most people are aware of the invasive nature of apps' data collection activities. However, to assess whether this degree of invasiveness is common practice among other news agencies, Nisos examined apps associated with five other news websites, including but not limited to state-linked news agencies in the United Kingdom and Russia, and found that none of them requested the extensive permissions requested by these apps that have potential for social media account takeover.



Appendix A: List of China News Service-Affiliated Websites

- Africachdaily[.]com
- Au123[.]com
- Azchinesenews1[.]com
- Br-cn[.]com
- Ccbestlink[.]com
- Cgw[.]gr
- Chine-info[.]com
- China-info24[.]com
- Chinanews[.]se
- Chinesetimes[.]info
- Covusarnm.sinoing[.]net
- Dragonnewsru[.]com
- Europechinesenews[.]com
- Fenghuavoicedot[.]ca
- Gcmcu[.]com
- Homevoice.co[.]nz
- Huashangnews[.]cc
- Jpchinapress[.]com
- Jrlamei[.]com
- Lianhenews[.]com
- Livejapan[.]cn
- Mexicohuawentimes[.]com
- Mmgpmedia[.]com[.]mm
- Newsduan[.]com
- Newtimesnet[.]com
- Offstoremedia[.]com
- Offshoremedia[.]net
- Ouhuaamedia[.]com
- Oushivoyages[.]com
- Puxinbao[.]top
- Sino-mau[.]com
- Uschinapress[.]cn
- Uschinews[.]com
- Usqiaobao[.]com
- Vps.xindb[.]com
- Xindb[.]com