

CHINESE INFLUENCE OPERATIONS IN SRI LANKA



AN INVESTIGATIVE REPORT BY
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM REPORTIKA

This investigative report reveals how China shapes Sri Lanka's media, influencers, education, and think tanks to push its foreign policy agenda.

Table of Contents

Chinese Influence Operations in Sri Lanka	2
Media Influence.....	2
1. Daily Mirror & Sunday Times (Wijeya Newspapers).....	2
Social Media Reach.....	2
Evidences of recent Pro-China Orientation:	3
Historical Context: Pressure from Chinese Embassy	4
Analysis of the articles published in the month of January 2025:	4
2. Daily FT	11
Pro-China Orientation and Strategic Messaging	11
Editor’s Personal Involvement in China-Backed Media Strategy.....	11
Collaboration with China	12
Social Media Reach.....	13
Analysis of the articles published (September 2024 – March 2025):.....	14
3. Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (ANCL)/Lake House	19
Collaboration with China	19
Pro-China Content in Lake House Publications	20
Sunday Observer (Link).....	21
Daily News (Link)	24
4. Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) & Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)	29
CGTN-Sinhala.....	31
Prominent Influencers	33
Thelikada Kankanamge Asela Prabath Kumara	33
Maya Majueran.....	34
Yasiru Ranaraja	37
Overall Observation.....	43
Think Tanks.....	44
Path Finder Foundation	44
Confucius Institutes in Sri Lanka.....	47
Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo (CIUC).....	47
Confucius Institute at University of Kelaniya	48
Scholarships & Student Exchanges.....	49
Conclusion	50

Chinese Influence Operations in Sri Lanka

In January 2025, newly elected Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake undertook a high-profile state visit to China, marking a symbolic deepening of the bilateral relationship. Described by both sides as a reaffirmation of "everlasting friendship" and "strategic cooperation," the visit culminated in sweeping agreements covering trade, infrastructure, education, tourism, and significantly—"media collaboration".

While headlines focused on economic and diplomatic overtures such as Belt and Road megaprojects and debt restructuring pledges, less attention was paid to a critical component of Beijing's influence operations: **media and information control**. Among the 20 formal cooperation documents signed during the visit, several pertained directly to **joint media production, journalist exchanges, and narrative-building collaborations**. These developments echo a growing global trend—Beijing's strategic use of soft power and state media penetration to shape public opinion abroad, especially in politically vulnerable or economically indebted states.

This is not without precedent. Chinese influence operations in Sri Lanka have been steadily increasing over the past decade, ranging from **content-sharing agreements between Chinese and Sri Lankan news outlets** to **Chinese state-run media establishing formal presence and syndication deals within Colombo-based newspapers**. In 2024 and early 2025, these efforts entered a new phase: not only are pro-China narratives regularly echoed in Sri Lanka's mainstream and digital media, but the Chinese embassy in Colombo has also become a vocal participant in local public discourse—publishing open letters, hosting media workshops, and inviting select journalists and influencers for state-curated tours.

Yet these media engagements have not gone uncontested. Past editorials by independent Sri Lankan outlets questioning China's role in domestic politics, labor disputes around Chinese-funded infrastructure projects, and sovereignty concerns surrounding the Hambantota Port lease have led to diplomatic tensions. Beijing's reaction—ranging from open criticism of media independence to increased outreach and alignment efforts with sympathetic publications—reflects a calculated strategy: **neutralize dissent, co-opt media ecosystems, and entrench a pro-China narrative as default**.

Media Influence

1. Daily Mirror & Sunday Times (Wijeya Newspapers)

- **Founder / Ownership:** Under **Wijeya Newspapers**, founded by Ranjith Wijewardene (en.wikipedia.org).
- Daily Mirror is part of Wijeya Newspapers Ltd, one of Sri Lanka's largest private media houses. It publishes multiple outlets including the *Sunday Times*, *Daily FT*, and *Lankadeepa*.

Social Media Reach

Twitter: [604.4K Followers](#)

Facebook : [648K followers](#)

YouTube : [121K subscribers](#)



Figure 1 Daily Mirror coverage of China

The Daily Mirror's portal features a mix of pro- and anti-China content, strategically placed to reflect Sri Lanka's geopolitical dynamics and its relations with China, India, and Western powers. However, its social media narrative leans more pro-China, as evidenced by a video where Tabita addresses the BRI, stating, "Tabita reckons with the narrative or myths of Chinese Debt Trap. While some projects have failed, others have succeeded. Sri Lanka's BRI challenges may stem from the Government of Sri Lanka's failure to exercise agency in project development," defending China's role and attributing issues to local mismanagement.

Evidences of recent Pro-China Orientation:

1. Positive Framing of Chinese Domestic Achievements

- **"CHINA TACKLES 'relative poverty' after eradicating 'extreme rural poverty'"** (June 2024) :This article portrays China as a global leader in poverty alleviation, echoing Chinese state narratives of social development under the Communist Party. ([Link](#))
- **"China leads global rankings in high-quality research papers"** (March 2025) Reiterates China's scientific leadership, quoting Nature Index rankings without critical context, highlighting China's intellectual dominance globally. ([Link](#))

2. Coverage Favoring China's Global Role

- **"Govt. secures highest FDI from China"** – shared on Daily Mirror's official X (Twitter) handle (@Dailymirror_SL) (January 16, 2025) Amplifies Chinese investment as a national success without highlighting geopolitical strings or debt dependencies.
- **"In celebration of China's 75th National Day – Lanka-China ties an enduring partnership to emulate"** (October 2024) Emphasizes historical solidarity, praising bilateral cooperation through romanticized anecdotes like the 1952 Rubber-Rice Pact. ([Link](#))

3. Strategic Promotion of BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)

- **"The BRI and overcoming the debt crisis"** (October 18, 2023) Defends China's debt role, calling it a "dependable source of support," and praises Chinese restructuring cooperation. ([Link](#))

Historical Context: Pressure from Chinese Embassy

- On April 8, 2020, the Chinese Embassy in Colombo sent a letter to Wijeya Newspapers Ltd., accusing its publications of “stirring hate speech” after articles called for compensation from China over the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Since then, **Daily Mirror** and its sister outlets have shown a noticeable editorial shift toward pro-China reporting, particularly emphasizing Chinese investments and Sino-Lanka relations, while still maintaining critical coverage of China on issues like Taiwan and human rights, avoiding an overtly pro-China stance.

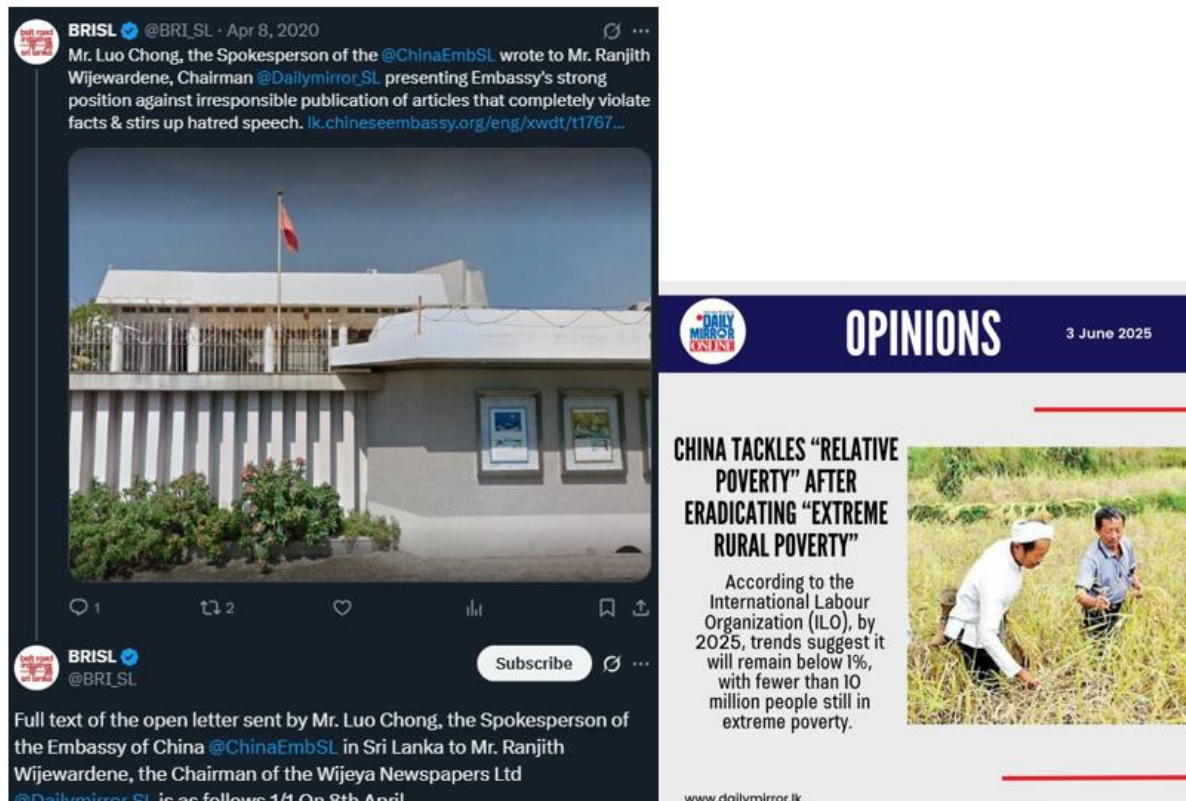


Figure 2 Chinese Embassy open letter to the founder of Daily Mirror (L) and Recent coverage of China in Daily Mirror (R)

Analysis of the articles published in the month of January 2025:

For the period from **January 1, 2025, to January 31, 2025**, we have done the analysis of the articles by categorizing them as **pro-China**, **anti-China**, or **neutral**, and further bifurcating them into **pre-visit**, **during-visit**, and **post-visit** periods based on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's state visit to China (January 13–17, 2025). Here is the detailed analysis.

Time Frame: January 1, 2025 – January 31, 2025

- Total Articles Analyzed:** 39
- Criteria:**
 - Pro-China:** Articles that portray China positively, highlight cooperation, investments, or cultural ties with Sri Lanka, or defend Chinese policies/interests.
 - Anti-China:** Articles that criticize China, highlight tensions, debt traps, human rights issues, or geopolitical concerns involving China.

- **Neutral:** Articles that mention China without clear positive or negative bias or focus on factual reporting without judgment.
- **Pro-China:** 17 articles
- **Anti-China:** 12 articles
- **Neutral:** 10 articles

Pre-Visit (January 1, 2025 – January 12, 2025)

- **Total Articles:** 8

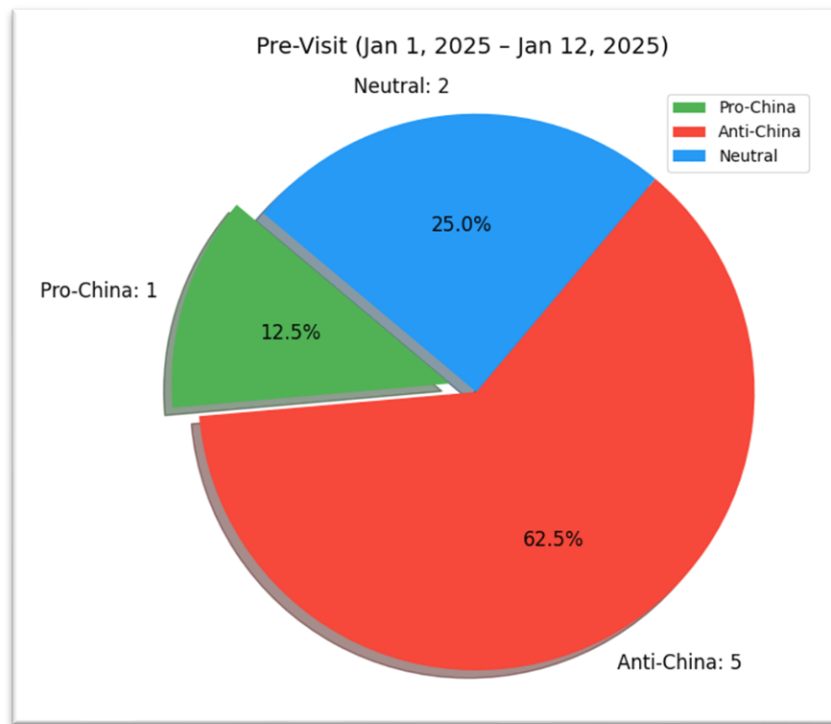


Figure 3 Analysis of the articles published on Daily Mirror before the visit of the SL President

- **Pro-China: 1**
 - **Example:** "China donated Rs. 1.5 billion worth assistance to North and East early this year" (Dec 31, 2024, included due to proximity to Jan 1): Highlights Chinese aid to Sri Lanka.
 - **Category of Focus: Humanitarian aid and goodwill**, emphasizing China's support for Sri Lanka's northern and eastern regions.

- **Anti-China: 5**

Examples:

- "Talkie App ban: A blow to China's AI as global concerns mount" (Jan 1, 2025): Criticizes Chinese AI and data privacy issues.
- "US Treasury says Chinese hackers stole documents in 'major incident'" (Jan 2, 2025): Highlights Chinese cyberattacks.
- "Taiwan reports first Chinese 'combat patrol' of the New Year" (Jan 3, 2025): Reports Chinese military activity with a critical undertone.

- "Ban on foreign research vessels ends, Sri Lanka seeks no extension" (Jan 2, 2025): Mentions Chinese protests over Sri Lanka's refusal of research vessels, implying tensions.
- "China faces Covid-like scare again" (Jan 3, 2025): Reports on health crisis with negative implications.

Categories of Focus:

- **Technology and Data Privacy:** Criticism of Chinese AI apps (e.g., Talkie) and cybersecurity breaches.
- **Military and Geopolitical Tensions:** Focus on Chinese military activities near Taiwan and disputes over research vessels.
- **Public Health:** Negative portrayal of China's handling of respiratory illness outbreaks.
- **Neutral:** 2

Examples:

- "China proposes fresh export curbs on EV technology" (Jan 4, 2025): Reports on policy without strong bias.
- "President to visit China from January 13-17" (Jan 4, 2025): Factual announcement of the visit.

During-Visit (January 13, 2025 – January 17, 2025)

- **Total Articles:** 21

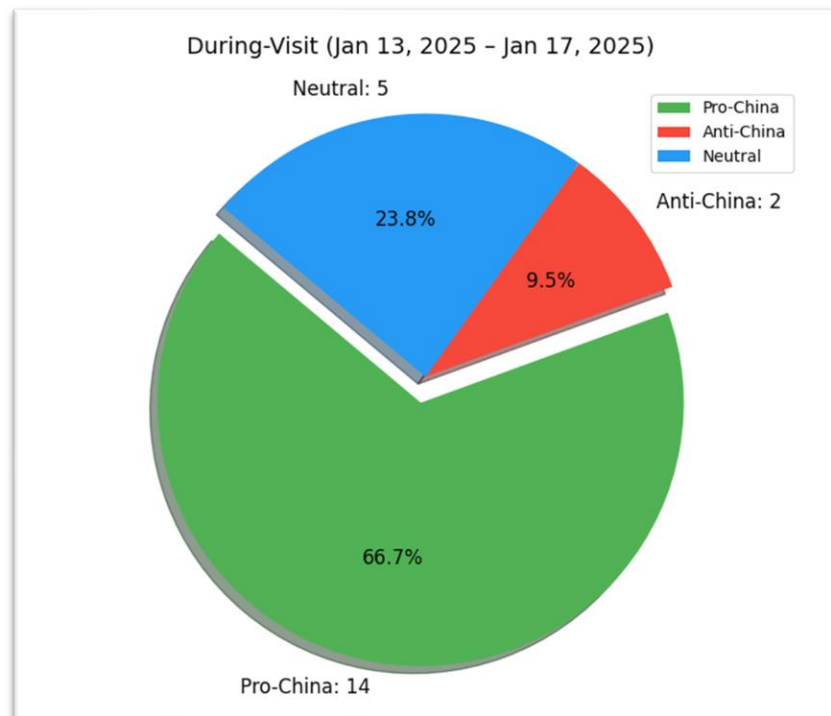


Figure 4 Analysis of the articles published on Daily Mirror during the visit of the SL President

- **Pro-China: 14**

Examples:

- "China has played vital role in Sri Lanka's social and economic development for decades: AKD" (Jan 16, 2025): Positive statement by Sri Lankan President.
- "Sri Lanka secures highest FDI from China's Sinopec" (Jan 16, 2025): Celebrates \$3.7 billion oil refinery deal.
- "Local political hypocrisy holds no bar for Sino-Lanka ties" (Jan 17, 2025, two entries): Defends Sri Lanka-China cooperation.
- "China pledges deeper ties with Sri Lanka" (Jan 16, 2025): Highlights Xi Jinping's support.
- "SL, China agree to push for early conclusion of FTA" (Jan 16, 2025): Promotes trade cooperation.
- "AKD invites Chinese President to visit Sri Lanka" (Jan 16, 2025): Strengthens diplomatic ties.
- "China ready to work closely with Sri Lanka in ushering in new era of development: Xi Jinping" (Jan 15, 2025): Emphasizes collaboration.
- "Winter sports boom in China: a trillion yuan market in the making" (Jan 15, 2025): Economic report without geopolitical slant.

Categories of Focus:

- **Investments and Economic Cooperation:** Emphasis on major deals like the \$3.7 billion Sinopec oil refinery and potential free trade agreements.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Focus on high-level meetings (e.g., AKD-Xi Jinping), invitations, and pledges for stronger ties.
- **Countering Criticism:** Articles defending Sino-Lanka ties against accusations of debt traps or political hypocrisy.

- **Anti-China: 2**

Examples:

- "Sri Lanka's China dilemma: Strategic partnerships and the risk of overdependence" (Jan 16, 2025): Critiques Sri Lanka's reliance on China.
- "More than half a million 'TikTok refugees' flock to China's RedNote as ban looms" (Jan 17, 2025): Highlights TikTok's troubles in the US.

Categories of Focus:

- **Debt Trap Concerns:** Warnings about Sri Lanka's economic dependence on China.
- **Technology and National Security:** Criticism of Chinese apps like TikTok and RedNote over privacy and security issues.

- **Neutral: 5**

Examples:

- "TikTok users flock to Chinese app RedNote as US ban looms" (Jan 14, 2025): Discusses TikTok ban with negative framing.
- "Taiwan's NSB releases report on infiltration tactics used by China" (Jan 15, 2025): Reports on Chinese tactics factually.
- "China's strategic influence in Bangladesh: Soft power with political intent" (Jan 16, 2025): Analytical without strong bias.
- "President leaves to China" (Jan 13, 2025): Factual reporting on the visit's start.
- "President arrives in Beijing" (Jan 14, 2025): Factual update on the visit.

Post-Visit (January 18, 2025 – January 31, 2025)

- **Total Articles: 10**

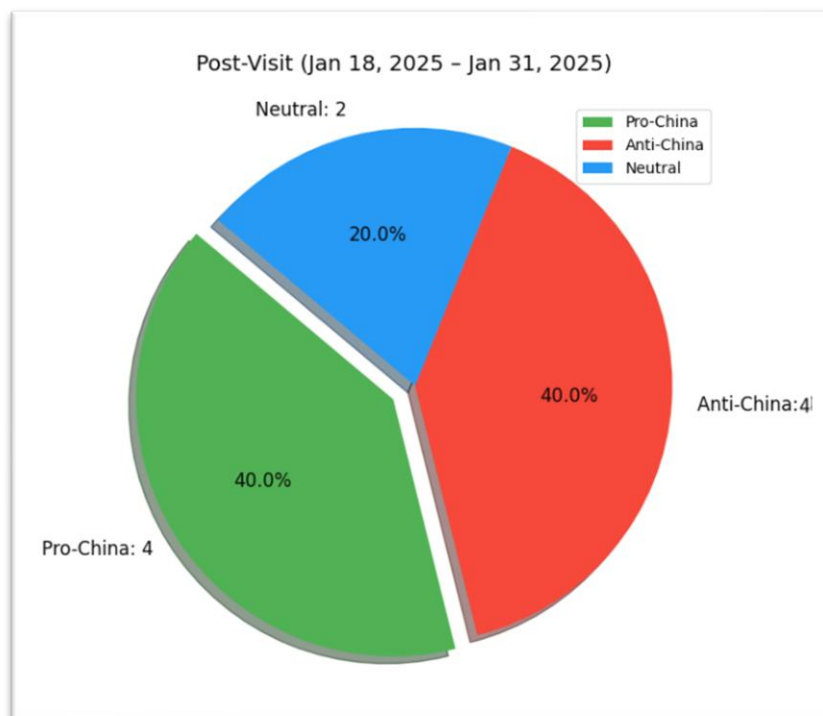


Figure 5 Analysis of the articles published on Daily Mirror post the visit of the SL President

- **Pro-China: 4**

Examples:

- "China ready to bring in US \$ 10 billion to Sri Lanka" (Jan 18, 2025, two entries): Highlights potential Chinese investment.
- "China further extends US \$ 1.4bn currency swap" (Jan 18, 2025): Notes financial cooperation.
- "Philippines holds drills near disputed shoal amid standoff with China" (Jan 20, 2025): Factual reporting on regional tensions.

Categories of Focus:

- **Investments and Economic Cooperation:** Emphasis on large-scale investment pledges and financial agreements.
- **Anti-China:** 4

Examples:

- "Is China trying to further ensnare Sri Lanka in its debt trap?" (Jan 31, 2025): Warns of Chinese debt tactics.
- "US trade envoy finds China's shipbuilding policies warrant 'urgent action'" (Jan 19, 2025): Criticizes China's trade practices.
- "TikTok goes offline in the US hours before ban due to come in" (Jan 19, 2025): Reports on TikTok ban with negative implications.
- "CIA: COVID likely originated in a lab, but agency has 'low confidence' in report" (Jan 28, 2025): Suggests Chinese responsibility for COVID-19.

Categories of Focus:

- **Debt Trap Concerns:** Continued warnings about Sri Lanka's debt to China.
- **Technology and National Security:** Focus on TikTok's ban in the US.
- **Geopolitical Competition:** Criticism of China's trade practices and COVID-19 origins.
- **Neutral:** 2

Examples:

- "President Dissanayake connects with BYD and other global industry leaders in China" (Jan 20, 2025): Reports on business meetings without strong bias.
- "Namal criticises NPP's change of stance on Indian, Chinese deals" (Jan 19, 2025): Mentions China in a balanced critique of Sri Lankan politics.
- **Category of Focus: Regional geopolitics and business engagements**, reported factually.

Notable Observations

- **Critical Articles on China Are Outsourced**
While the outlet occasionally carries critical perspectives on China, such articles are typically penned by **external Indian scholars**.

Example:

- **China's bid to control the Dalai Lama: A spiritual and cultural power grab (April 24, 2025) : Author: By Ankit K, Asst. Prof., National Defence University, India,**
This piece sharply criticizes Beijing's interference in Tibetan religious succession, signalling external commentary rather than internal editorial opposition. ([Link](#))
- **"Is China trying to further ensnare Sri Lanka in its debt trap?" (Jan 31, 2025): Author: Ratish Mehta, Organisation for Research on China and Asia (ORCA).**
Warns that China is deepening Sri Lanka's debt through agreements like the \$3.7 billion Sinopec deal.

- **"Sri Lanka's China dilemma: Strategic partnerships and the risk of overdependence" (Jan 16, 2025): Author:** Vaishali Basu Sharma. Critiques Sri Lanka's reliance on China, highlighting debt traps, human rights concerns, and geopolitical risks.

Trends

- **Pre-Visit:** Dominated by anti-China sentiment (62.5%), focusing on global concerns like Chinese AI, cyberattacks, and military activities.
- **During-Visit:** Strong pro-China tilt (61.9%), driven by coverage of investments (e.g., \$3.7 billion Sinopec deal), diplomatic engagements, and defenses of Sino-Lanka ties.
- **Post-Visit:** More balanced but with persistent concerns on both ends

2. Daily FT

- **Founder / Owner:**
Owned by Wijeya Newspapers Ltd, established by Ranjith Wijewardene in 1979 (former chairman of state-owned Lake House).
- **Editor:**
Nisthar Cassim – a senior journalist and business editor with active engagement in China-backed media forums, reinforcing pro-China media cooperation narratives.

Pro-China Orientation and Strategic Messaging

Daily FT consistently promotes China-positive narratives and defends the Chinese government's foreign policy, particularly:

- Downplaying the “debt trap” diplomacy argument
- Supporting China's position on Xinjiang and the One China Policy
- Portraying China as Sri Lanka's most trustworthy economic partner

Editor's Personal Involvement in China-Backed Media Strategy

- *2024 Media Cooperation Forum on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Chengdu, China on 28 August 2024*
- *Reported by Nisthar Cassim(Editor of Daily FT)*

“The 2024 Media Cooperation Forum on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) kicks off today in Chengdu... Themed ‘Enhance Media Cooperation for Common Development,’ the two-day forum focuses on the new role of media in fostering consensus and gathering collective strengths to promote high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.”

– *Daily FT article by Nisthar Cassim, [link](#)*

- **Organized by:** *People's Daily* (CCP's flagship media) and *Sichuan Government*
- **Objective:** Boost global media alignment with the Belt and Road narrative

Examples of Pro-China Content and Op-Eds in Daily FT

Economic supremacy of China: Towards a new world order? - Daily FT

www.ft.lk > [Economic-supremacy-of-China-Towards-a-new-world-order](#)



Mar 29, 2025 ... The writer believes that the strength gained through economic and financial prosperity led to build the pathway for supremacy.

Retelling the story of China and why it's important - Daily FT

www.ft.lk > [Retelling-the-story-of-China-and-why-it-s-important](#)



Mar 1, 2024 ... Whether or not mass international media will move past political ideology and the one-size-fits-all measurement in this sense, is yet to be seen ...

China: A more trustworthy partner - Daily FT

www.ft.lk > [columns > China-A-more-trustworthy-partner](#)



Apr 28, 2025 ... Amidst change and continuity, the friendship between **China** and Sri Lanka has withstood the tests of time and remains one of good friends, good ...

China's Commerce Minister to visit SL in big boost to ties - Daily FT

www.ft.lk > [China-s-Commerce-Minister-to-visit-SL-in-big-boost-to-ties](#)



May 15, 2025 ... In a major boost to bilateral ties, **China's** Commerce Minister Wang Wentao will visit Sri Lanka in a fortnight, leading a delegation of 115 ...

China: Emerging 'qibla' for struggling Sri Lanka - Daily FT

www.ft.lk > [columns > China-Emerging-qibla-for-struggling-Sri-Lanka](#)



Jun 6, 2025 ... The recent visit by **Chinese** investors to meet Sri Lankan President AKD is a welcoming sign, and **China's** roadmap to deepen its economic relations ...

Figure 6 Recent coverage of China on Daily FT

1. **“What is really happening in Xinjiang?”**

By Chinese Ambassador Cheng Xueyuan | 22 July 2019

- Dismisses reports of repression, justifies Chinese policies, and calls Western media claims “fake news.”
- Quote: “There are 24,400 mosques in Xinjiang... a higher proportion than some Islamic countries.”

2. **Editorials and Features Promoting China:**

- *"China: A more trustworthy partner"* (Apr 2025)
- *"China: Emerging 'qibla' for struggling Sri Lanka"* (Jun 2025)
- *"China expresses hope OCC countries will sign debt deal"* (Mar 2025)
- *"China–Sri Lanka friendship withstands test of time"*
- *"AKD Govt. reaffirms One China Policy"* (Jan 2025)
- *"China's public goods revolutionize global connectivity"*
- *"China and Sri Lanka issue joint statement..."* (Jan 2025)
- Who holds Sri Lanka’s external debt and how China is assisting Sri Lanka (August 2024, [Link](#))

Who holds Sri Lanka’s external debt and how China is assisting Sri Lanka

Tuesday, 6 August 2024 00:01 - 1285

Figure 7 Op-Ed on Daily FT on how China is assisting Sri Lanka with external Debts

Collaboration with China

The Pathfinder Foundation, in collaboration with China's state-run Xinhua News Agency, partnered with *Daily FT* to launch the 'China Watch' series—an initiative to publish curated Chinese news content tailored for Sri Lankan audiences, promoting pro-China narratives and Belt and Road themes.



Figure 8 Collaboration between Xinhua, PathFinder and Daily FT for "China Watch"

- Formal agreement signed in **October 2017**
- **Parties Involved:**
 - **Pathfinder Foundation** (founded by former minister and diplomat **Milinda Moragoda**)
 - **Xinhua News Agency** – China’s state-run propaganda arm at the ministerial level
 - **Daily FT** – Platform for publishing the content
- **Purpose:**
 - Jointly publish ‘**China Watch**’, a recurring **Xinhua-curated news section**
 - Content is **tailor-made for Sri Lankan audiences** to promote **Chinese achievements, development model, and global leadership**
- **Chinese Diplomatic Oversight:**
 - The **Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Yi Xianliang**, was **briefed personally** on the editorial direction and coverage of ‘**China Watch**’ in *Daily FT*

What is ‘China Watch’?

- A **regular column/supplement** featuring:
 - Belt and Road Initiative updates
 - Xinjiang “stability” narratives
 - Chinese technological and economic “miracles”
 - Global South unity, anti-Western sentiment
- Sourced directly from **Xinhua**, functioning as a **soft power content insert**

“This is another pioneering initiative of PF and its China–Sri Lanka Cooperation. Chinese Ambassador Yi Xianliang was personally briefed about the China Watch articles published in Daily FT.”— *Daily FT*, 13 Oct 2017

Social Media Reach

Facebook: [**33K followers**](#)

Twitter: [**91.1K Followers**](#)

YouTube: [**11.2K subscribers**](#)



Figure 9 Daily FT social media being used to amplify Chinese Social Media Narrative

Analysis of the articles published (September 2024 – March 2025):

For the period from **September 1, 2024, to March 1, 2025** (to analyse sufficient sample data), we have done the analysis of the articles by categorizing them as **pro-China**, **anti-China**, or **neutral**, and further bifurcating them into **pre-visit**, **during-visit**, and **post-visit** periods based on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's state visit to China (January 13–17, 2025). Here is the detailed analysis.

Overall Count in the timeframe

- **Time Frame:** September 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025
- **Total Articles:** 33
- **Criteria:**
 - **Pro-China:** Articles that portray China positively, highlight cooperation, investments, or cultural ties with Sri Lanka, or defend Chinese policies/interests.
 - **Anti-China:** Articles that criticize China, highlight tensions, debt traps, human rights issues, or geopolitical concerns involving China.
 - **Neutral:** Articles that mention China without clear positive or negative bias or focus on factual reporting without judgment.
- **Pro-China:** 20 articles (60.6%)
- **Anti-China:** 5 articles (15.2%)
- **Neutral:** 8 articles (24.2%)

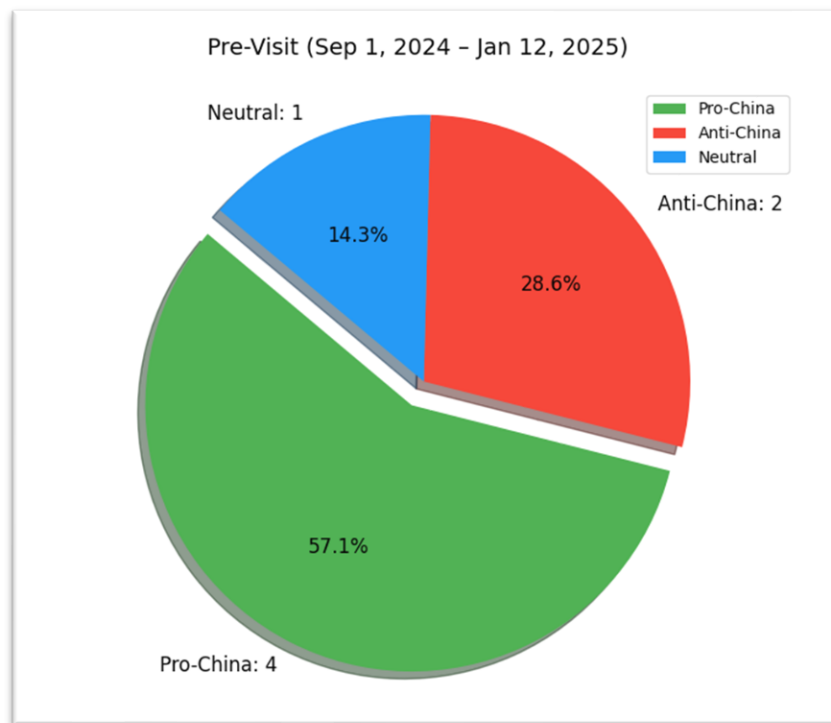
Pre-Visit (September 1, 2024 – January 12, 2025)

Figure 10 Analysis of the articles published on Daily FT before the visit of the SL President to China

- **Total Articles:** 7
- **Pro-China:** 4 (57.1%)

Examples:

- "Ambassador Qi Zhenhong highlights friendship and development at..." (Sep 27, 2024): Emphasizes China-Sri Lanka friendship and cooperation.
- "Towards greater progress of China-Sri Lanka friendship" (Sep 27, 2024): Celebrates historical ties and diplomatic milestones.
- "China confident bilateral relations with Sri Lanka will have brighter..." (Sep 18, 2024): Promotes economic cooperation opportunities.
- "China will fully consider development needs of new Sri Lankan..." (Nov 2, 2024): Signals China's support for Sri Lanka's new government.

Categories of Focus:

- **Diplomatic Relations:** Emphasis on historical and ongoing Sino-Lanka friendship.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Highlights China's willingness to support Sri Lanka's development needs.
- **Anti-China:** 2 (28.6%)

Examples:

- "Role of history and ideology in shaping China's geopolitical..." (Sep 28, 2024): Critically analyzes China's geopolitical strategies, implying influence over Sri Lanka.

- "AKD Govt. reaffirms Sri Lanka's 'One China Policy'" (Jan 8, 2025): While neutral on Sri Lanka's stance, it implicitly critiques China's pressure on Taiwan.

Categories of Focus:

- **Geopolitical Influence:** Concerns about China's strategic motives in Sri Lanka.
- **Taiwan Issue:** Indirect criticism via Sri Lanka's reaffirmation of the One China Policy.
- **Neutral:** 1 (14.3%)

Example:

- "Huawei tops China's contact centre software market for 10th..." (Dec 19, 2024): Reports on China's tech achievements without geopolitical commentary.

During-Visit (January 13–17, 2025)

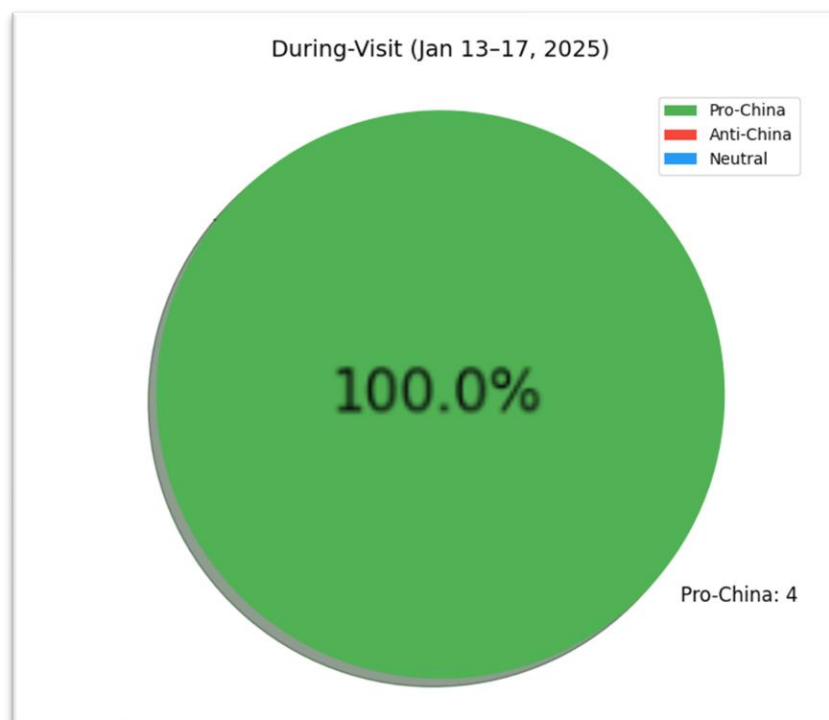


Figure 11 Analysis of the articles published on Daily FT during the visit of the SL President to China

- **Total Articles:** 4
- **Pro-China:** 4 (100%)

Examples:

- "China rolls out red carpet welcome to President AKD" (Jan 15, 2025): Highlights ceremonial welcome and positive diplomacy.
- "China says ready to usher new era of development in Sri Lanka" (Jan 16, 2025): Emphasizes Xi Jinping's commitment to Sri Lanka's development.
- "China and Sri Lanka issue joint statement post-successful visit of..." (Jan 17, 2025): Celebrates mutual respect and cooperation agreements.

- " President holds strategic talks with globally renowned Chinese firms to woo investments " (Jan 17, 2025): Promotes trade cooperation.

Categories of Focus:

- **Investments and Economic Cooperation:** Focus on FTA revival and development pledges.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Emphasis on high-level engagements and joint statements.
- **Anti-China:** 0 (0%)
- **Neutral:** 0 (0%)

Post-Visit (January 18–March 31, 2025)

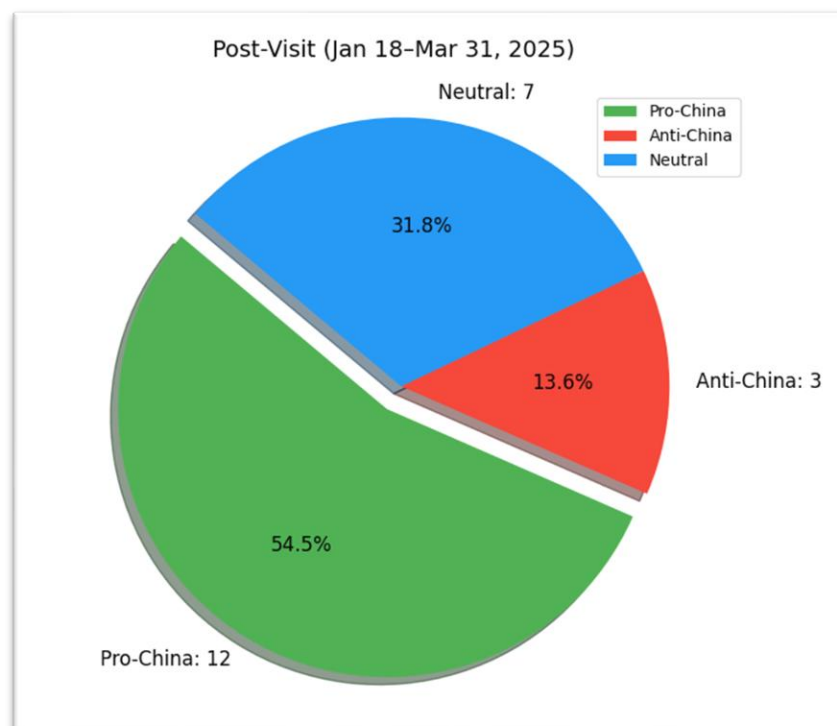


Figure 12 Analysis of the articles published on Daily FT post the visit of the SL President

- **Total Articles:** 22
- **Pro-China:** 12 (54.5%)

Examples:

- "President AKD connects with BYD in China" (Jan 20, 2025): Highlights business engagements with Chinese firms.
- "China affirms strategic trade and investment commitment to Sri..." (Jun 5, 2025): Promotes economic partnerships.
- "Private sector reaffirms commitment to strengthen trade ties with China" (Jun 2, 2025): Notes Chinese business delegation's visit.

- "China: A more trustworthy partner" (Apr 28, 2025): Defends China-Sri Lanka relations as South-South cooperation.
- "China-Sri Lanka ties in a changing world" (May 27, 2025): Praises China's infrastructure contributions.
- "China presents roadmap to deepen economic cooperation with Sri..." (May 31, 2025): Outlines economic plans.

Categories of Focus:

- **Investments and Economic Cooperation:** Emphasis on trade, investment forums, and infrastructure projects.
- **Diplomatic Relations:** Reinforces trust and partnership narratives.
- **Countering Criticism:** Defends China against debt trap allegations.
- **Anti-China:** 3 (13.6%)

Examples:

- "Economic supremacy of China: Towards a new world order?" (Mar 29, 2025): Questions China's global dominance motives.
- "Sri Lanka-China Friendship Association expresses concerns over..." (Apr 21, 2025): Critiques US tariffs impacting Sino-Lanka trade, indirectly questioning China's trade policies.
- "China expresses hope OCC countries including India will sign debt..." (Mar 17, 2025): Implies China's pressure on debt restructuring, with a critical undertone.

Categories of Focus:

- **Geopolitical Motives:** Concerns about China's economic supremacy and influence.
- **Trade and Debt Issues:** Critiques of China's trade and debt restructuring approaches.
- **Neutral:** 7 (31.8%)
 - **Examples:**
 - "Forging unity through media: 2025 SCO Media Cooperation Forum..." (Jun 16, 2025): Notes China's role in SCO without bias.
 - "Beyond the Great Wall: Sri Lankan political journey to modern China" (Jun 15, 2025): Reflects on China visit factually.
 - "Tilvin Silva's China visit and questions Opposition will not raise" (Jun 20, 2025): Reports on JVP visit with balanced commentary.
 - "Sri Lanka and China agree to revive FTA discussions" (Jan 24, 2025, post-visit reporting): Factual trade update.
 - "China vows to retaliate as necessary after Trump threatens another..." (Mar 1, 2025): Factually reports China's trade response without explicit criticism.
 - "China announces 34% retaliatory tariffs on US imports" (Apr 5, 2025): Reports trade policy factually.

- "Trump says US-China relations 'reset' as markets surge on tariff pause" (May 14, 2025): Notes trade de-escalation factually.

Notable Observations

Both Daily FT and Daily Mirror, owned by Wijeya Newspapers Ltd, established by Ranjith Wijewardene in 1979 (former chairman of state-owned Lake House), operate under the same media group but exhibit distinct editorial approaches toward China. Daily FT displays an overtly pro-China stance, actively collaborating with Chinese state entities to promote pro-China narratives. Notably, The Pathfinder Foundation, in partnership with China's state-run Xinhua News Agency, worked with Daily FT to launch the 'China Watch' series, an initiative to publish curated Chinese news content tailored for Sri Lankan audiences, emphasizing Belt and Road Initiative themes and favorable views of China. In contrast, Daily Mirror adopts a more balanced approach, strategically featuring both pro-China and anti-China content. It provides a platform for Indian writers to publish editorials critical of China, particularly on issues like geopolitical influence and human rights, while also including pro-China articles that highlight investments and Sino-Lanka relations, reflecting an effort to navigate Sri Lanka's complex geopolitical dynamics.

Trends

- The portal shows a strategic pro-China shift (60.6%), especially during and post-visit, emphasizing **investments** (e.g., FTA, Sinopec) and **diplomacy**.
- Pre-visit content is pro-China-leaning, setting a positive tone, while anti-China articles reflect Indian/Western concerns.
- During-visit coverage is exclusively pro-China, amplifying economic and diplomatic gains.
- Post-visit maintains a pro-China majority, with neutral trade reports (e.g., tariffs) balancing the narrative.

3. Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (ANCL)/Lake House

- **Founder / Ownership:** State-owned; founded in the colonial era, now public entity.
- ANCL, popularly known as **Lake House**, is a **government-majority owned media group (87%) founded in 1926 by D. R. Wijewardena**. It publishes content across **Sinhala, Tamil, and English**, including three daily newspapers, three weekend editions, various weeklies, and a monthly in Sinhala—all available in print and e-paper formats.

Collaboration with China

A 2025 RTI application revealed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** between ANCL and **Xinhua News Agency**, part of a broader set of media agreements signed with other Sri Lankan state broadcasters:

- **Counterparts:**
 - Xinhua ↔ ANCL
 - China Media Group ↔ Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) & Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)
 - Xinhua ↔ Department of Government Information (DGI) (english.ceylonnewsfactory.lk)

- **Scope of the MoU:**
 - **News & content exchange**
 - **Personnel exchanges**, training programs, and seminars for journalists
 - **Coordinated coverage** of high-level visits and events
 - **Confidential terms** ensuring non-disclosure of MoU contents
- **Strategic Context:**
 - Cemented during **President Dissanayake's January 2025 state visit to China**, as part of broader BRI cultural diplomacy.
 - Reflects China's regional strategy to use media partnerships for soft power influence in countries like **Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Maldives**, via trained journalists and coordinated reporting.

Pro-China Content in Lake House Publications

While specific articles from Lake House in English/Tamil/Sinhala on China are less accessible online, broader trends and context suggest aligned narratives:

- **Frequent use of Xinhua content:** As ANCL directly received syndicated material, readers see China-sourced coverage of BRI projects, development achievements, poverty reduction, and diplomatic events.
- **Positive framing of Chinese projects:** Coverage of debt restructuring, Hambantota Port, Port City Colombo, and BRI was generally favorable—highlighting economic benefits while downplaying sovereignty or sovereignty concerns.
- **Government-aligned worldview:** Lake House is state-controlled and often reflects official positions—promoting BRI cooperation, reinforcing One-China policy, and aligning with cabinet-backed foreign missions (freedomhouse.org).

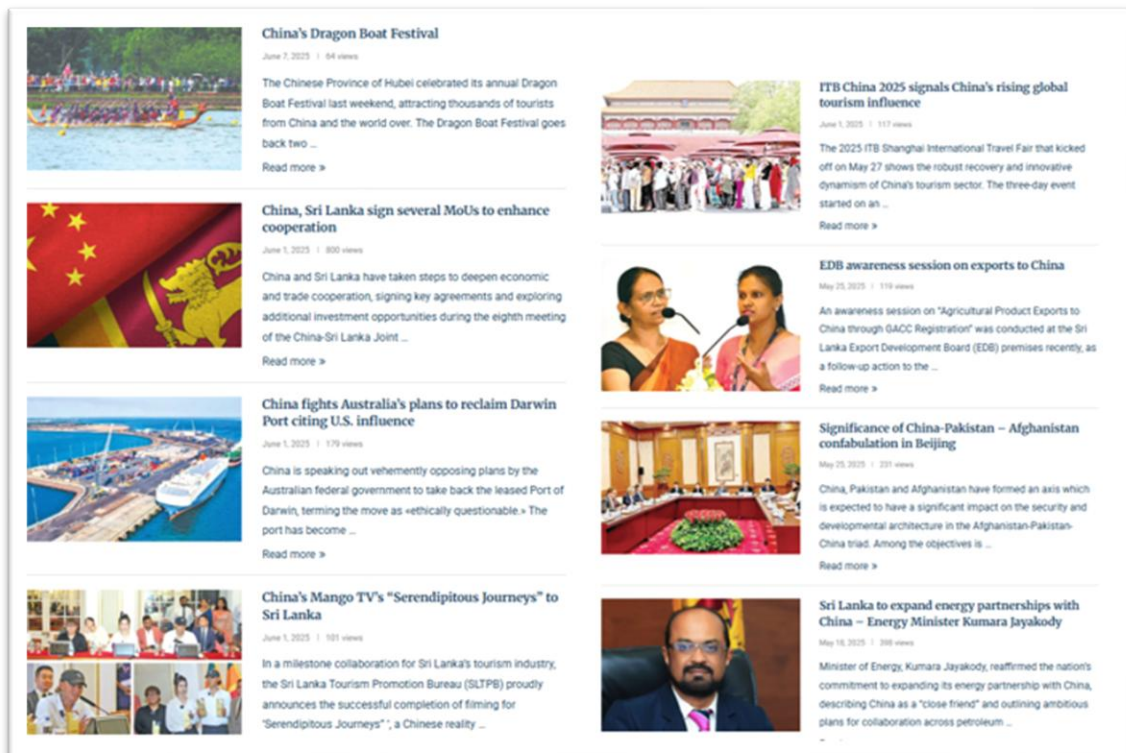
Sunday Observer ([Link](#))

Figure 13 Recent posts on Sunday Observer on China

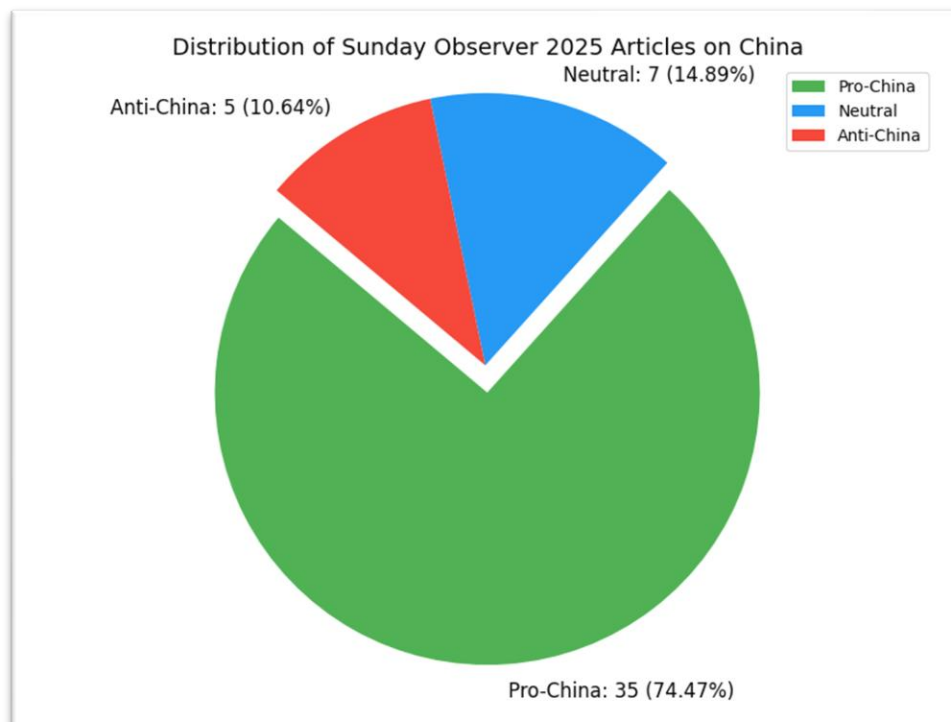
*Analysis of the articles published in 2025 (January 2025 to June 2025)***Total Articles: 47****Pro-China: 35 (74.47%)**

Figure 14 Analysis of the articles published in 2025 (January 2025 to June 2025) on Sunday Observer

Examples:

- January 5, 2025: “Apple offers rare iPhone discounts in China”
- January 12, 2025: “President on State visit to China from January 14”
- January 12, 2025: “Wu Zetian, China’s only female Buddhist Empress”
- January 19, 2025: “A landmark visit”
- January 19, 2025: “Historic landmark in Sino-Lanka relations”
- January 19, 2025: “President holds talks with leading Chinese entities to attract investments”
- January 26, 2025: “China as a global peacemaker”
- January 26, 2025: “Politics of President AKD’s China visit”
- February 2, 2025: “Experiencing China”
- February 9, 2025: “SL missed 20-year window to tap into Chinese market – Expert”
- February 9, 2025: “Xi’s concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics”
- February 23, 2025: “Wuxia: The legacy of Chinese martial arts fiction”
- March 2, 2025: “Chinese scientist honoured in Sri Lanka”
- March 17, 2025: “Port fees on Chinese ships would hit US agriculture, energy and shipping”
- April 20, 2025: “US playing with fire: Chinese envoy warns of global recession risks”
- April 27, 2025: “CATL develops new breakthrough battery”
- April 27, 2025: “BYD unveils new sports car”
- May 4, 2025: “BYD to make Kei car”
- May 4, 2025: “Changan Automobile enters Lankan market”
- May 4, 2025: “Sri Lanka, a good neighbour, trusted brother and reliable partner for China”
- May 4, 2025: “Tax concessions for H’tota oil refinery”
- May 4, 2025: “The language written in pictures”
- May 11, 2025: “Boost to One Belt, One Road initiative”
- May 18, 2025: “Sri Lanka to expand energy partnerships with China – Energy Minister Kumara Jayakody”
- May 25, 2025: “Chinese businesses stick to diversifying away from the US despite trade truce – Survey”
- May 25, 2025: “IChemC holds talks with Chinese universities for grad school opportunities”
- June 1, 2025: “China, Sri Lanka sign several MoUs to enhance cooperation”
- June 1, 2025: “China’s Mango TV’s ‘Serendipitous Journeys’ to Sri Lanka”
- June 1, 2025: “ITB China 2025 signals China’s rising global tourism influence”

- June 1, 2025: “BYD’s luxury brand Denza to enter Sri Lankan market”
- June 7, 2025: “China’s Dragon Boat Festival”
- June 8, 2025: “Sodium-ion batteries to power more electric scooters”
- June 15, 2025: “Chinese, Sri Lankan musicians celebrate cultural harmony in Colombo”
- June 15, 2025: “Deepal EV enters Sri Lankan market”
- June 15, 2025: “JVP delegation meets Chinese Communist Party leaders in Guizhou”

Categories of Focus:

- **Diplomatic Relations and State Visits:** Emphasizing high-level engagements, e.g., “Historic landmark in Sino-Lanka relations” (January 19, 2025).
- **Economic and Investment Partnerships:** Highlighting China’s role in projects, e.g., “Tax concessions for H’tota oil refinery” (May 4, 2025).
- **Cultural and Historical Achievements:** Celebrating China’s heritage, e.g., “Wu Zetian, China’s only female Buddhist Empress” (January 12, 2025).
- **Global Influence and Leadership:** Praising China’s global role, e.g., “China as a global peacemaker” (January 26, 2025).
- **Technological and Business Innovation:** Showcasing advancements, e.g., “CATL develops new breakthrough battery” (April 27, 2025).
- **Positive Framing of Market Opportunities:** Highlighting China’s market, e.g., “Apple offers rare iPhone discounts in China” (January 5, 2025).
- **Cultural and Educational Collaborations:** Promoting exchanges, e.g., “Chinese, Sri Lankan musicians celebrate cultural harmony in Colombo” (June 15, 2025).
- **Defensive Posturing Against External Criticism:** Defending China’s interests, e.g., “US playing with fire: Chinese envoy warns of global recession risks” (April 20, 2025).

Anti-China: 5 (10.64%)

- February 23, 2025: “Panama pulls out of ‘Belt and Road’ initiative”
- May 18, 2025: “Substandard fertiliser case: More arrests soon?”
- May 18, 2025: “Xiaomi’s EV sales drop after fatal accident”
- May 25, 2025: “Who will pay for Sri Lanka’s fertiliser scandal?”
- June 1, 2025: “China fights Australia’s plans to reclaim Darwin Port citing U.S. influence”

Categories of Focus:

- **Fertiliser Scandal (2021):** Criticizing the scandal’s impact, e.g., “Substandard fertiliser case: More arrests soon?” (May 18, 2025).
- **Geopolitical Setbacks or Aggression:** Highlighting failures or aggression, e.g., “Panama pulls out of ‘Belt and Road’ initiative” (February 23, 2025).

- **Negative Business Outcomes:** Reporting adverse incidents, e.g., “Xiaomi’s EV sales drop after fatal accident” (May 18, 2025).

Neutral Articles: 7 (14.89%)

- January 5, 2025: “China proposes fresh export curbs on EV technology”
- February 9, 2025: “Shutdown of USAID, a ‘Gift to China’ - Samantha Power”
- March 9, 2025: “China’s Exim Bank delegation due here today”
- April 27, 2025: “China tells Trump: Cancel tariffs if you want talks”
- April 27, 2025: “China says no ongoing trade talks with the U.S. on tariffs”
- May 11, 2025: “AUDI takes to in China’s roads”
- June 22, 2025: “Russia, China caution against Israeli onslaught on Iran”

Trends

- **Pro-China Dominance:** The 74.47% Pro-China coverage reflects a strong positive framing of China, particularly in Sri Lanka-China relations, cultural heritage, and technological advancements.
- **Limited Anti-China Coverage:** The 10.64% Anti-China coverage focuses on specific controversies, indicating minimal critical reporting.
- **Neutral Reporting:** The 14.89% Neutral coverage includes factual reports on trade and diplomacy.
- The **Sunday Observer**’s social media reach is limited, with only its Facebook page, boasting 26,000 followers, performing well in amplifying its articles.

Daily News ([Link](#))



Figure 15 Recent China related coverage on Daily News

Analysis of the articles published in 2025 (January 2025 to June 2025)

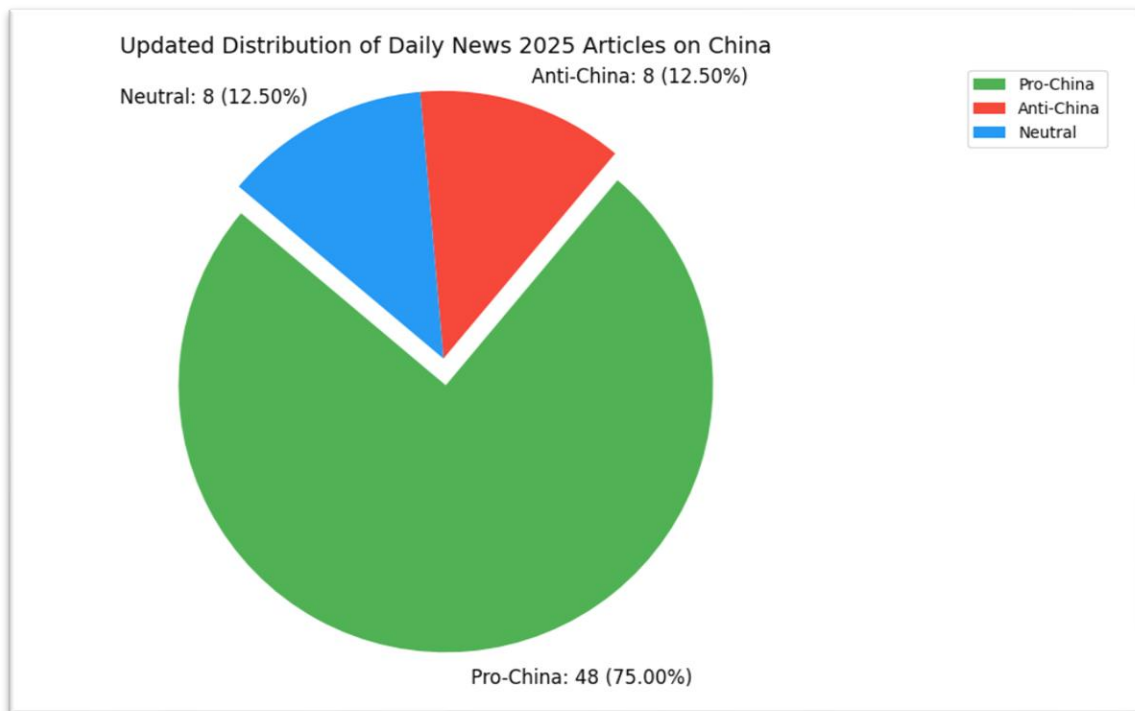


Figure 16 Analysis of the articles published in 2025 (January 2025 to June 2025) on Daily News

Total Articles : 64

Pro-China: 48 (75.00%)

- **January 1, 2025:** “China’s Policy towards Sri Lanka inclusive, open – Envoy”
- **January 6, 2025:** “China’s XAG Agro keen in introducing AI based technology to Sri Lanka”
- **January 8, 2025:** “Ministry to sign MOUs with China’s leading media groups”
- **January 13, 2025:** “President on state visit to China”
- **January 14, 2025:** “President Anura Kumara Disanayake Departs for Four-Day State Visit to China”
- **January 14, 2025:** “Democratic Discipline: How Sri Lanka’s Political Transformation Strengthens China Ties”
- **January 14, 2025:** “President Disanayake’s visit to China in perspective”
- **January 14, 2025:** “Economic collaboration, investment opportunities will grow”
- **January 14, 2025:** “NPP’s ‘look East’ geo-strategy”
- **January 15, 2025:** “President to herald new direction of Sino-Lanka ties”
- **January 16, 2025:** “A landmark visit”
- **January 16, 2025:** “A longstanding friendship”

- **January 16, 2025:** “China ready to help Sri Lanka towards a new era of development – President Xi”
- **January 16, 2025:** “China, Sri Lanka bolster BRI bond”
- **January 16, 2025:** “President Encourages Chinese Investment in Sri Lanka”
- **January 16, 2025:** “Sri Lanka Secures \$3.7 Billion FDI During President’s Visit to China”
- **January 17, 2025:** “President extends invitation to Chinese investors to explore opportunities in SL”
- **January 17, 2025:** “President wraps up third day with US\$ 3.7 Bn landmark investment”
- **January 17, 2025:** “China pledges continued support for Sri Lanka – People’s Congress Chairman”
- **January 17, 2025:** “China to support Government achieve ‘A Thriving Nation – A Beautiful Life’ – Chinese Premier Li Qiang”
- **January 17, 2025:** “US\$ 3.7 Bn FDIs secured during President’s China visit”
- **January 18, 2025:** “President concludes China visit with significant benefits”
- **January 18, 2025:** “President ends China visit from Chengdu”
- **January 18, 2025:** “SL to broaden ties between leading economic hub, Sichuan Province”
- **January 22, 2025:** “President meets with BYD leaders in China”
- **January 23, 2025:** “Dissanayake’s Beijing Triumph”
- **January 23, 2025:** “Sri Lanka upholds ‘One China’ policy – Minister”
- **January 23, 2025:** “China’s economy grows 5% in 2024” – Highlights positive economic growth.
- **January 23, 2025:** “Sri Lankan Consulate office in Chengdu”
- **March 7, 2025:** “Yunnan Office in SL donates Rs. 12 Mn worth two drinking water stations to Peradeniya University”
- **March 13, 2025:** “China supports Sri Lanka’s Sports and Youth Affairs development”
- **March 17, 2025:** “China’s large unmanned cargo aircraft TP1000 completes maiden flight” – Highlights technological advancement.
- **March 18, 2025:** “Scholarly Discussion on China’s 2025 National Sessions Held in Colombo”
- **March 18, 2025:** “Large scale China funded development projects to commence soon”
- **March 18, 2025:** “China expands school uniform grant to SL”
- **March 24, 2025:** “China signals willingness to aid Ukraine’s post-war reconstruction” – Highlights positive diplomatic initiative.
- **March 25, 2025:** “Bimal Elected Chair of Sri Lanka-China Parliamentary Friendship Association”
- **March 26, 2025:** “Sri Lanka-China Business Council promotes Lankan entrepreneurs”

- **March 26, 2025:** “Envoy reaffirms China’s commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation”
- **March 31, 2025:** “China, Japan and South Korea to strengthen free trade” – Highlights positive trade cooperation.
- **April 2, 2025:** “JRDC, a symbol of friendship between Sri Lanka, China – Envoy”
- **April 3, 2025:** “Cultural exchange, a bridge connecting peoples of China, Sri Lanka – Envoy”
- **April 19, 2025:** “China ready to support SL against economic coercion – Ambassador”
- **April 19, 2025:** “China races robots in Beijing half marathon” – Highlights technological innovation.
- **April 22, 2025:** “Discussions over widening China-Sri Lanka relations held”
- **April 22, 2025:** “Sri Lanka, China Explore Deeper Ties in Key Sectors During High-Level Visit”
- **April 26, 2025:** “Colombo Port City brings strategic value to both countries”
- **January 13, 2025:** “President on state visit to China” (distinct from January 14 article, focuses on departure)

Categories of Focus

- **Diplomatic Relations and State Visits:** Emphasizing high-level engagements, e.g., “Dissanayake’s Beijing Triumph” (January 23, 2025), “A landmark visit” (January 16, 2025).
- **Economic and Investment Partnerships:** Highlighting Chinese investments, e.g., “Sri Lanka Secures \$3.7 Billion FDI During President’s Visit to China” (January 16, 2025), “Colombo Port City brings strategic value to both countries” (April 26, 2025).
- **Cultural and Educational Collaborations:** Promoting exchanges, e.g., “Cultural exchange, a bridge connecting peoples of China, Sri Lanka – Envoy” (April 3, 2025).
- **Support for Sri Lanka’s Development:** Showcasing Chinese aid, e.g., “China expands school uniform grant to SL” (March 18, 2025), “Yunnan Office in SL donates Rs. 12 Mn worth two drinking water stations” (March 7, 2025).
- **Technological and Economic Achievements:** Highlighting advancements, e.g., “China’s large unmanned cargo aircraft TP1000 completes maiden flight” (March 17, 2025), “China races robots in Beijing half marathon” (April 19, 2025).
- **Global Cooperation and Trade:** Promoting China’s role, e.g., “China, Japan and South Korea to strengthen free trade” (March 31, 2025), “China signals willingness to aid Ukraine’s post-war reconstruction” (March 24, 2025).

Anti-China: 8 (12.50%)

- **January 4, 2025:** “Ministry monitoring new virus outbreak in China”
- **February 7, 2025:** “China Defends DeepSeek AI Amid Potential Global Bans” – Frames China’s AI defense as controversial amid bans.
- **February 10, 2025:** “Twenty-nine missing after landslide in SW China”

- **February 21, 2025:** “200 Chinese fraud suspects repatriated to Nanjing from Myanmar via Thailand”
- **February 23, 2025:** “New Bat Coronavirus Discovered In China”
- **January 27, 2025:** “Nearly three million Chinese Restaurants, Cafes shut down”
- **April 29, 2025:** “Restaurant fire kills 22 in northeast China’s Liaoning”
- **May 1, 2025:** “China rejects Britain’s Hong Kong report calling it interference” – Frames China’s response as defensive and potentially aggressive.

Categories of Focus

- **Health and Safety Incidents:** Reporting virus outbreaks and accidents, e.g., “Ministry monitoring new virus outbreak in China” (January 4, 2025), “Restaurant fire kills 22 in northeast China’s Liaoning” (April 29, 2025).
- **Crime and Controversial Actions:** Highlighting negative incidents, e.g., “200 Chinese fraud suspects repatriated to Nanjing” (February 21, 2025), “China rejects Britain’s Hong Kong report calling it interference” (May 1, 2025).
- **Tech Controversies:** Highlighting disputes, e.g., “China Defends DeepSeek AI Amid Potential Global Bans” (February 7, 2025).

Neutral Articles 8 (12.50%)

- **January 28, 2025:** “Fossils found in China may add a new branch to the human family tree”
- **January 30, 2025:** “OpenAI says Chinese rivals using its work for their AI apps”
- **January 31, 2025:** “China based AI, DeepSeek sends shockwaves through global tech”
- **January 15, 2025:** “President Dissanayake gets warm welcome in Beijing” – Reports hospitality factually without praising China’s broader role.
- **March 20, 2025:** “China executed four Canadians for drug crimes, says Ottawa” – Reports executions factually without explicit criticism.
- **April 25, 2025:** “China launches 3 astronauts to replace crew on Chinese space station”
- **April 30, 2025:** “Twenty-two killed, three injured in restaurant fire in China” – Reports fire factually without emphasizing blame.
- **January 23, 2025:** “Sri Lankan Consulate office in Chengdu” (distinct from Pro-China entry, focuses on factual establishment without praise).

Trends

- **Pro-China Dominance:** The 75.00% Pro-China coverage reflects a strong positive framing of China, particularly in Sri Lanka-China diplomatic relations, economic investments, cultural exchanges, and technological advancements, with significant emphasis on state visits, foreign direct investment, and cooperative initiatives.
- **Limited Anti-China Coverage:** The 12.50% Anti-China coverage focuses on specific controversies, including health incidents, crime, and contentious diplomatic responses, indicating minimal critical reporting.

- **Neutral Reporting:** The 12.50% Neutral coverage includes factual reports on scientific discoveries, technological developments, and diplomatic events, maintaining a balanced but limited scope of impartial coverage.
- The **Daily News'** social media reach is limited, with only its Facebook page, boasting 127K followers, performing well in amplifying its articles.

4. Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) & Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)

Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC)

Overview

- National television network established in 1982, operating under the Ministry of Information and Mass Media.
- Operates multiple channels including the main Sinhala-language channel, **Channel Eye** (English/sports), and **Nethra TV** (Tamil).

China Cooperation Agreement

- In **May 2025**, Cabinet approved an MoU between **SLRC** and **China's Chongqing Transmission Corporation**, part of **China Media Group (CMG)**.
- Agreement includes:
 - Joint media content production
 - Training and exchange programs for media personnel
 - Collaborative television programming and tourism promotion
- The Chinese MoU is part of CERLA's broader package of media agreements sealed during President Dissanayake's January 2025 China visit, including with other Sri Lankan state media.

Editorial Implications

- SLRC, as a government broadcaster, will likely integrate **CMG-backed programming**, adopting China-aligned narratives on tourism, culture, and strategic diplomacy.
- Signals a **deepening editorial alignment** with Beijing within Sri Lanka's state broadcasting.

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)

Overview

- Established in 1925 (originally Radio Ceylon); now Sri Lanka's leading state radio network.
- Broadcasts in Sinhala, Tamil, and English across multiple FM channels.

China Cooperation Agreement

- A MoU was approved aligning **SLBC** with **China Media Group**, similar to SLRC's arrangement.
- Pressed through cabinet approval in early 2025, the agreement involves:
 - Capacity-building for SLBC staff
 - Program exchanges and joint production possibilities
 - Coordination during visits and official Sino-Sri Lankan events.

Editorial Implications

- SLBC may begin carrying **CMG-produced radio features** on Chinese development, Belt & Road, disaster relief, or science & technology achievements.
- Ties strengthen government control over state narratives, with Chinese messaging integrated into national radio programming.

CGTN-Sinhala

CGTN Sinhala is the Sinhala language service of the China Global Television Network (CGTN), a state-run international media organization under the China Media Group (CMG), controlled by the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Launched in 2023 to target Sri Lanka's Sinhala-speaking audience, CGTN Sinhala aims to provide news and cultural content with a Chinese perspective, promoting communication and understanding between China and Sri Lanka. The service operates across multiple platforms, including a dedicated Facebook page and a website (<https://sinhala.cgtn.com/>), delivering content on topics such as Chinese culture, economy, environmental initiatives, and global news with an emphasis on China's contributions.

Facebook Presence

The CGTN Sinhala page on Facebook (@CGTNSinhala) boasts an impressive **1.7 million likes and 1.8 million followers**, making it one of the largest CGTN language-specific pages. However, this large following does **not translate into meaningful engagement**. Recent posts, shared in June 2025, cover diverse topics such as **China's zero-tax policy for 53 African countries, wheat straw recycling in Shanxi, and cultural events like the Hami Watermelon Festival in Xinjiang**. Despite the high-quality visuals and translations into Sinhala, these posts consistently receive an **average of only 15 views**, with occasional comments from users but not driving significant interaction. For example, a June 24, 2025, post about straw recycling in Shanxi had minimal likes and no comments, while a live stream about Kashgar's ancient city garnered just one comment. This stark contrast between follower count and engagement suggests that the page's audience may include inactive or purchased followers, a common tactic to inflate social media metrics.

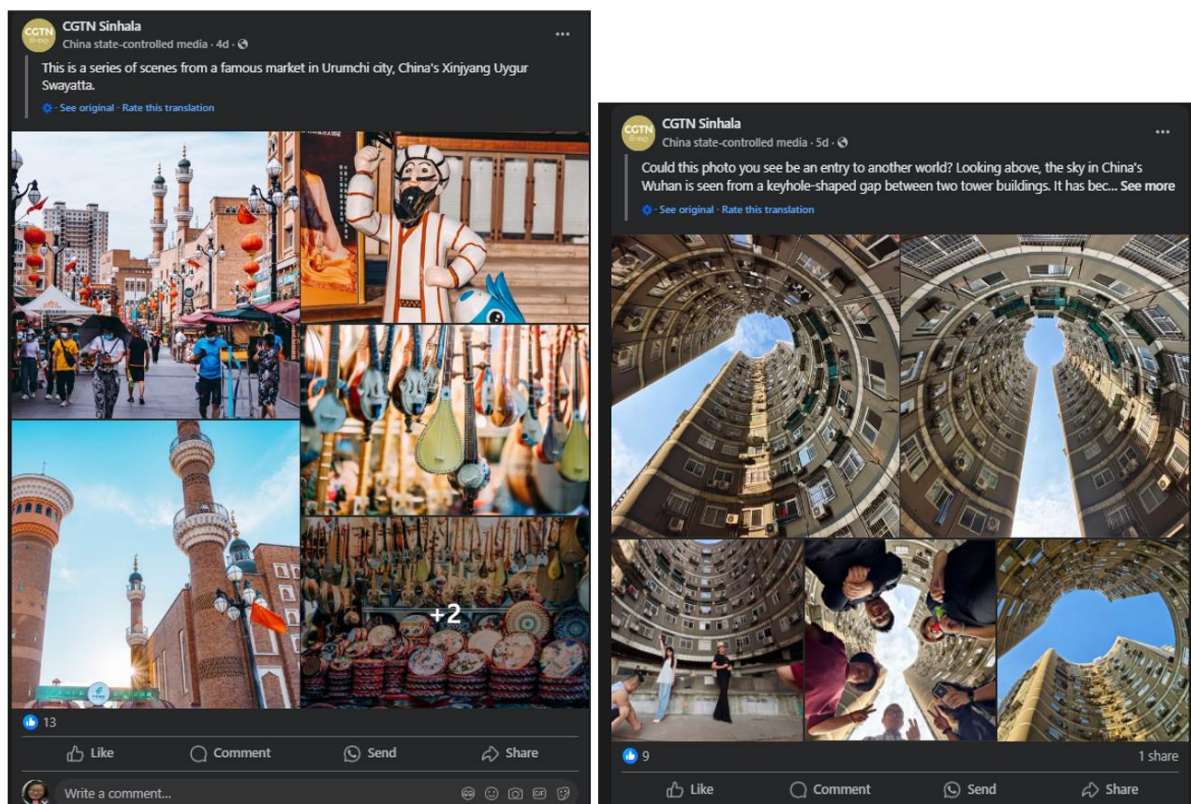


Figure 17 Lacklustre response on the handle of CGTN Sinhala

Website Traffic

The CGTN Sinhala website (<https://sinhala.cgtn.com/>) serves as a digital hub for news articles, videos, and live streams, mirroring content from its social media platforms. The site features stories like “Kenyan President joins interview with China Media Group” (May 27, 2025) and coverage of China’s environmental and cultural initiatives. However, the website experiences extremely low traffic, with analytics indicating minimal visits compared to CGTN’s main site (www.cgtn.com), which has high global traffic. **The lack of user engagement on the Sinhala website aligns with the low interaction on Facebook, underscoring the platform’s limited reach in Sri Lanka.**

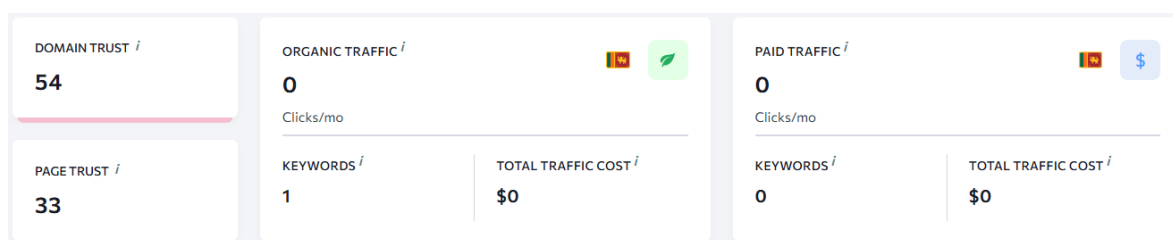


Figure 18 Traffic on the CGTN Sinhala website in June 2025

Low Engagement Among Sri Lankans

Despite CGTN Sinhala’s efforts to produce high-quality, culturally relevant propaganda content tailored for Sri Lanka’s Sinhala-speaking population, the platform has failed to capture significant attention. The Facebook page’s posts, despite a massive follower base, receive negligible interaction, with an average of 10 views and rare comments. This lack of engagement is mirrored by the website’s poor traffic, which struggles to attract visitors. The minimal response from Sri Lankans can be attributed to lingering skepticism about China’s intentions, particularly following the 2022 economic crisis, which was partly triggered by excessive debt, including Chinese loans for projects like the Hambantota Port. Public comments on CGTN Sinhala’s posts and related propaganda handles often express distrust or indifference, reflecting a broader sentiment of caution toward Chinese influence.

Prominent Influencers

Thelikada Kankanamge Asela Prabath Kumara



Figure 19 TK Asela as the part of Students delegation to Xinjiang

As China expands its global influence, a key strategy lies in recruiting and cultivating foreign influencers—especially those embedded in academia and media—to act as amplifiers of its official narratives. One such figure is **Thelikada Kankanamge Asela Prabath Kumara**, a Sri Lankan national who has become a recurring presence in Chinese state-linked platforms and soft power initiatives.

Currently a **PhD student at Beijing Foreign Studies University** and a **lecturer at the Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo**, Kumara embodies the profile of a foreign academic nurtured through China's educational diplomacy. His entire academic trajectory—from **undergraduate studies at Yunnan University of Finance and Economics** to a **master's degree from Xiamen University**—was shaped within China's higher education system, particularly in programs designed to train non-Chinese speakers to teach Chinese as a foreign language.

Kumara is now a consistent voice in **Chinese state-run outlets** and **official programs designed to showcase positive narratives** of politically sensitive regions like **Xinjiang** and **Ningxia**, often echoing Beijing's portrayal of ethnic harmony, cultural richness, and development success. His writings and appearances carry the veneer of grassroots, personal reflection, but functionally serve as tools in China's foreign propaganda architecture.

1. Published Propaganda Letter on Xinjiang – Tianshan.net (June 2024)

In a glowing piece titled *"Letter from the heart: A Sri Lankan student's endearing memories of Xinjiang,"* published by **Tianshan.net**, Kumara recounts his journey through Xinjiang in romanticized, poetic detail. The article reads like a love letter to a region under global scrutiny for human rights violations, yet it **completely omits** any mention of the Uyghur persecution or surveillance. Instead, it mirrors state narratives that present Xinjiang as peaceful, multicultural, and thriving under Communist Party leadership. ([Link](#))

2. Coverage by State Media Outlets

- **China Daily (May 2024):** Kumara was featured in a report on sustainable development in Ningxia, expressing surprise and admiration at the desert greening efforts—again reinforcing Beijing’s message of eco-responsibility and modernization in western China. ([Link](#))
- **Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) and China Services Info (April 2024):** Covered extensively as part of a 5-day tour in Xinjiang, framed as an academic initiative to explore the region’s “diverse heritage.” The presence of participants from developing nations like Sri Lanka, Iran, and Nigeria further helps Beijing position its policies as globally accepted. [BFSU Coverage](#)
[Study China coverage](#)

3. Academic Publication in Chinese Linguistics

While not directly political, Kumara co-authored a paper titled “*The Production of Chinese Tones: An Investigation of Pronunciation Errors Among Sri Lankan University Students*”—a topic aligned with China’s cultural expansion through language education, particularly via **Confucius Institutes**, long known to be channels of Chinese government influence.

4. Institutional Role at Confucius Institute (Colombo)

Kumara currently lectures at the **Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo**, a soft-power arm of the Chinese government accused globally of restricting academic freedom and spreading sanitized versions of Chinese history and politics. His dual role as educator and influencer ensures the continuity of China-positive narratives within Sri Lanka’s academic ecosystem.

Maya Majueran

Maya Majueran, the **Founding Director of Belt and Road Initiative Sri Lanka (BRISL)**, has emerged as one of the most active public voices promoting China’s geopolitical and economic narratives in South Asia. While BRISL presents itself as an “independent and pioneering” think tank, Majueran’s public commentary, social media output, and regular contributions to **Chinese state-owned media** tell a consistent story: unwavering support for Beijing’s strategic ambitions, both regionally and globally.



An aerial drone photo taken on March 28, 2024 shows the Hambantota Port, one of the signature projects of Belt and Road cooperation, in Sri Lanka. (Xinhua/Xu Qin)

“China is fully committed to the human community with a shared future and its obligation to be a key partner and a member of the developing countries and support its socioeconomic development,” said Maya Majueran, director of the Belt and Road Initiative Sri Lanka.

Figure 20 Maya Majueran op-ed in Chinese Media (L) and his anti-India op-ed featured in Global Times



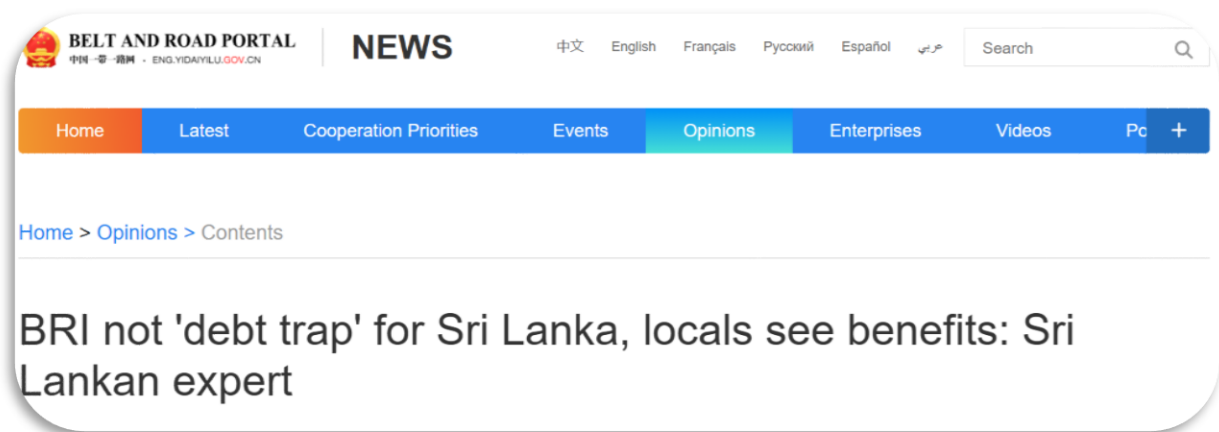


Figure 21 Maya Majueran's op-ed in the Belt and Road Portal whitewashing the impact of BRI on Sri Lanka

The BRI Promoter-in-Chief

Majueran frequently portrays the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** as a benevolent framework for development, ignoring growing evidence of debt dependency, strategic port takeovers, and weakened democratic institutions across BRI partner nations. His views often align directly with Beijing's official lines, including in international interviews and op-eds.

In an interview with **Xinhua**, China's official state news agency, Majueran asserted:

"China brings positive influence to developing countries through win-win cooperation, which is entirely different from the traditional Western way of doing it with hidden agendas."
[Xinhua, Aug 29, 2024](#)

In a **Global Times** article titled *"BRI helps shore up Sri Lanka's economic resilience"*, he defended China's investments, ignoring rising concerns around environmental destruction, lack of transparency, and sovereignty erosion:

"The BRI has significantly contributed to Sri Lanka's infrastructure modernization and long-term development."
[Global Times, Jan 17, 2025](#)

Loyal Contributor to Chinese State Media

Majueran's **opinion pieces and interviews regularly appear** in some of China's most high-profile propaganda outlets:

Media Outlet	Sample Headline	Date
Global Times	<i>India shouldn't poke nose into affairs of its small neighbours</i>	Feb 26, 2024
Global Times	<i>BRI not 'debt trap' for Sri Lanka, locals see benefits</i>	Jun 28, 2021
China Daily	<i>Ancient civilizations can seek modernization together</i>	Nov 8, 2024
China Focus	<i>Tariff Wars and Double Standards Are Threatening Global Economy</i>	May 14 2025

These articles frequently echo Beijing's preferred narratives—deflecting criticism of the BRI, minimizing human rights issues, and challenging the role of the U.S. and India in South Asia.

Influence in Sri Lankan Media

In addition to his prolific commentary in Chinese outlets, Majueran has also contributed to mainstream Sri Lankan publications, notably **Daily FT**.

In an op-ed titled *"Who holds Sri Lanka's external debt and how China is assisting Sri Lanka"*, he strongly defended China's role in Sri Lanka's debt restructuring, claiming that China has been unfairly targeted in Western narratives:

[Daily FT – April 2024](#)

His commentary in Sri Lankan media often mirrors the same talking points he shares with Chinese state media, particularly in framing China as a misunderstood ally rather than a debt-enforcing superpower.

Social Media Propaganda Machine

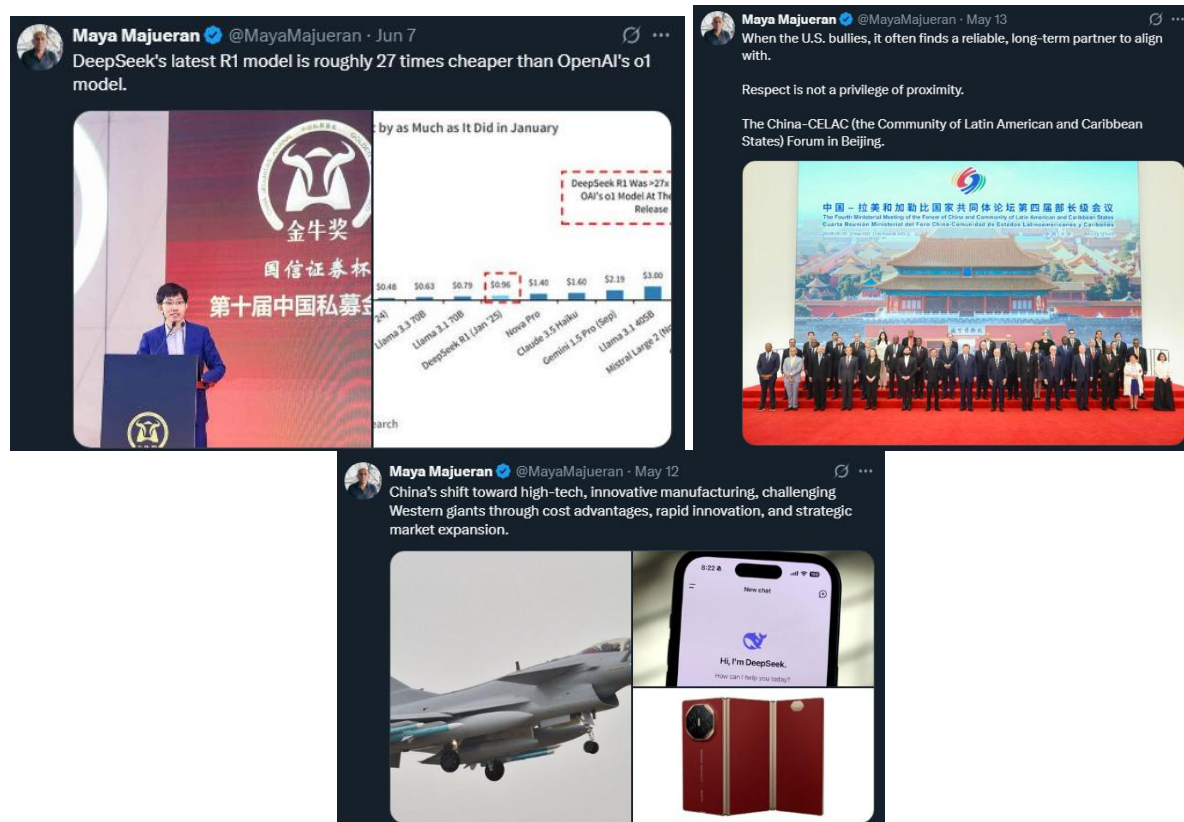


Figure 22 Maya Majueran's social media used for pushing Chinese narratives

Majueran uses his X (formerly Twitter) handle [@MayaMajueran](#) to broadcast pro-China content to both domestic and international audiences. Some key examples:

- **Praising Chinese technological dominance:**

"China's shift toward high-tech, innovative manufacturing, challenging Western giants..." (May 12, 2025)

- **Framing China as a counter to U.S. 'bullying':**

"When the U.S. bullies, it often finds a reliable, long-term partner to align with. Respect is not a privilege of proximity." (May 2025)

- **Positioning China as global leader:**

“China promotes a vision of inclusive development, non-interference... Leadership in Green Energy Transition...” (2025 summary thread)

His threads portray China as a wise, stabilizing force, conveniently omitting any mention of Beijing’s coercive diplomacy, human rights abuses, or surveillance exports to authoritarian regimes.

Yasiru Ranaraja

Yasiru Ranaraja, as the **Founding Director of the Belt & Road Initiative Sri Lanka (BRISL)**, has emerged as a prominent figure in promoting narratives aligned with China’s geopolitical and economic interests, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). His activities, including his social media presence, contributions to Chinese state media, and engagement with Chinese government officials, suggest a role as a pro-China influencer used to advance China’s propaganda in Sri Lanka and beyond. Below is an analysis of how Ranaraja’s actions align with China’s efforts to shape global perceptions, drawing from the provided data and additional context.

Background and Role at BRISL

Yasiru Ranaraja is a Sri Lankan researcher specializing in maritime affairs and BRI development, with academic credentials from **Dalian Maritime University and Ocean University of China**, where he earned an **LLM under a Chinese Government Scholarship in 2016**. As the Founding Director of BRISL, a platform established in 2019 to foster cultural, business, and technological cooperation under the BRI, Ranaraja has positioned himself as a **key advocate for China’s infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka**.

Social Media Presence and Engagement

Ranaraja maintains a significant online presence, with 6,495 followers on his personal **Twitter account (@YRanaraja)** and **2,186 followers on LinkedIn**, indicating a modest but influential reach. BRISL’s Twitter account (@BRI_SL) has 8,695 followers, and its Facebook and YouTube channels also engage audiences, though the **overall traffic and following can be termed as below average**.

Despite this, Ranaraja receives disproportionate attention from Chinese state media and official channels, such as the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka’s Twitter account (@ChinaEMB_SL), which has directly engaged with his posts. For example, a tweet by @BRI_SL on June 21, 2025, highlighted **Ranaraja’s interview with China Media Group (CMG)**, discussing China’s economic development and maritime affairs, which was amplified by Chinese state media. This interaction underscores how China leverages Ranaraja’s platform to promote its narratives.

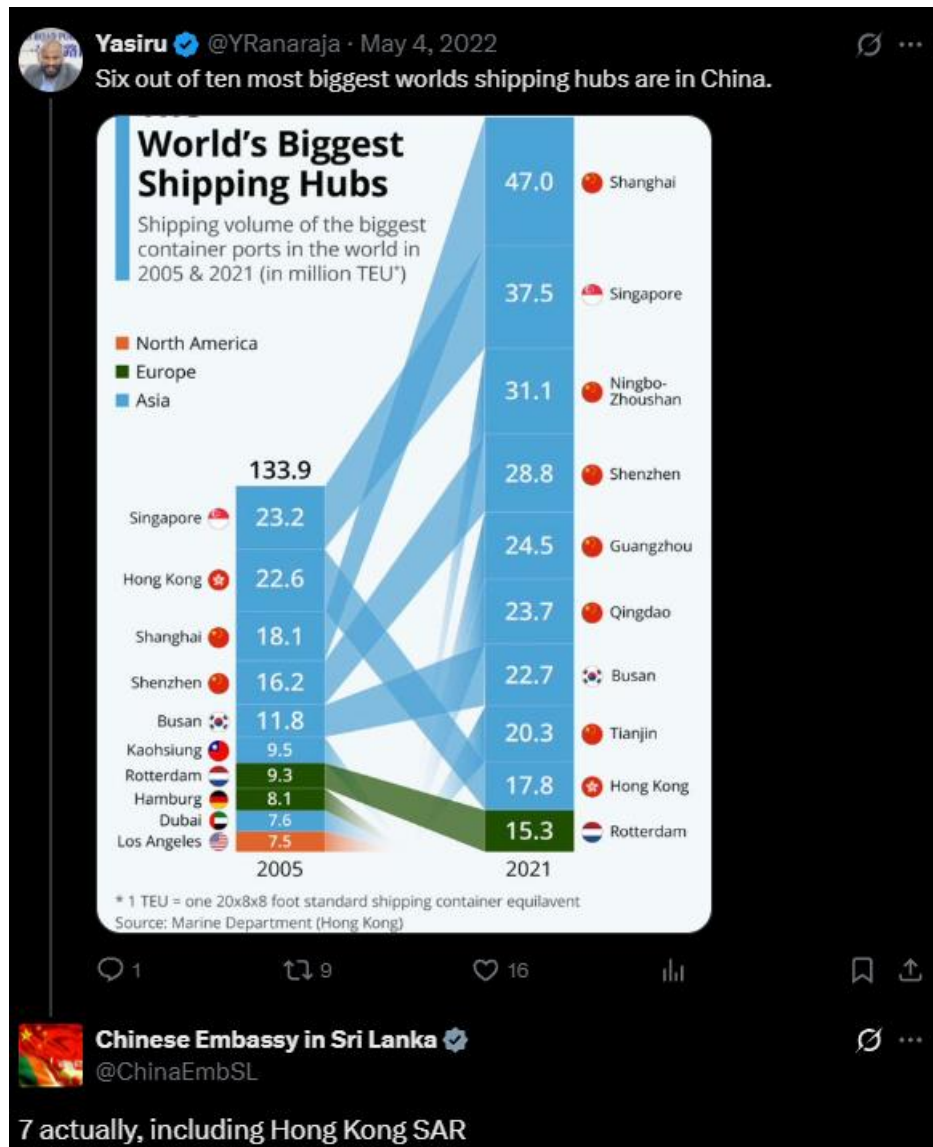


Figure 23 The official account of Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka replying to Yasiru's tweet

Contributions to Chinese State Media

Ranaraja is a frequent contributor to Chinese state-controlled and propaganda media outlets like CGTN, Xinhua, and China Daily, where he is often presented as a “Sri Lankan expert” or “special commentator.” His articles and interviews consistently praise China’s policies and initiatives, aligning with Beijing’s propaganda goals. Notable examples include:

- **CGTN Contributions:**

- **June 5, 2025:** In “China’s efforts in ecological civilization and global environmental governance,” Ranaraja lauded China’s environmental policies, emphasizing Xi Jinping’s ecological civilization theory and China’s leadership in global environmental management. He framed China’s approach as a model for sustainable development, aligning with Beijing’s narrative of global leadership. (Link: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-06-05/China-s-role-in-ecological-and-global-environmental-governance-1DXkoaSKbO8/p.html>)
- **April 6, 2025:** In “Staggering U.S. tariffs a wake-up call for Sri Lanka,” Ranaraja criticized U.S. trade policies while highlighting China’s role in supporting Sri Lanka’s

economic growth, positioning China as a reliable partner. (Link: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-04-06/Staggering-U-S-tariffs-a-wake-up-call-for-Sri-Lanka--1Cl5Fisr7sQ/p.html>)

- **November 12, 2024:** In “Addressing climate injustice: A global responsibility unmet,” Ranaraja emphasized China’s contributions to global climate goals, reinforcing its image as a responsible global actor. (Link: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2024-11-12/Addressing-climate-injustice-A-global-responsibility-unmet-1yrGPT8Ohhe/index.html>)
- **Xinhua Interviews:**
 - **October 26, 2024:** Ranaraja discussed Sri Lanka’s application to join BRICS, praising the group’s “one member, one vote” system and framing it as a fairer alternative to Western-led institutions like the IMF. He highlighted China’s role in amplifying the voice of developing nations, aligning with Beijing’s push for a multipolar world order. (Link: <https://english.news.cn/asiapacific/20240530/21524ff7d66d4836bdc0a540481e825b/c.html>)
 - **May 30, 2024:** In an interview titled “China’s overcapacity theory contravenes market economy principle,” Ranaraja defended China’s production capacity in new energy vehicles, dismissing Western criticisms as trade protectionism. He emphasized China’s technological advancements and their benefits to Sri Lanka, such as improved infrastructure and energy security. (Link: <https://english.news.cn/asiapacific/20240530/21524ff7d66d4836bdc0a540481e825b/c.html>)
 - **June 13, 2024:** Ranaraja was quoted in Xinhua’s “Dialogue among civilizations critical for maintaining world peace, development,” where he praised China’s establishment of the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations, promoting Beijing’s narrative of cultural diversity and global governance. (Link: <https://english.news.cn/20240613/2d3ecf0642b24ff9a2f2abffbfdabee9/c.html>)
- **China Daily:**
 - **June 22, 2021:** In “BRI to overhaul Sri Lankan infrastructure, lift living standards,” Ranaraja highlighted the transformative impact of BRI projects like the Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City, framing them as drivers of economic growth and social development in Sri Lanka. (Link: <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/22/WS60d15331a31024ad0bacaa5e.html>)
- **Inzhejiang:**
 - **March 03, 2021:** Sri Lankan scholar Yasiru Ranaraja: An excellent retreat for Sri Lankan tourists to visit Zhejiang (Link: http://inzhejiang.com/ZhejiangFocus/GlobalWatchZhejiang/202103/t20210311_22230722.shtml)

These contributions consistently portray China as a benevolent partner, countering criticisms such as the “debt-trap diplomacy” narrative and emphasizing the BRI’s benefits. Ranaraja’s role as a commentator for CGTN and Xinhua, which are under the editorial control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), suggests he is a trusted voice for disseminating China’s perspective.

Engagement with Chinese Government and Media

Ranaraja's interactions with Chinese officials and media further illustrate his role in advancing China's propaganda. He has been featured in high-profile settings, such as:

- **Meetings with Chinese Officials:** Ranaraja met with Mayor and city representatives from Yulin, Guangxi Autonomous Region, to discuss BRI-related cooperation, covered by Chinese media like Yulin News.



Figure 24 Ranaraja met with Mayor and city representatives from Yulin



Figure 25 Coverage on the Yulin News (Promoting Regional Connectivity and Integrated Supply Chains, Source https://www.facebook.com/100057753695790/videos/1628536981140906?_so=permalink)

- **CGTN Radio Appearance:** On CGTN's "The Bridge" with Jason Smith, Ranaraja discussed BRI projects like the Colombo Port City and Hambantota Port, reaching a global audience of over 500 million across multiple countries. (YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/JRoRh->

09U44?si=aTmSKQP2ez3_35Dd,

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/4UvBGxkCVRQD0VNJSol17i>)

- **Belt and Road Initiative Platform:** In a 2021 webinar, Ranaraja emphasized the BRI's role in implementing long-shelved infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, reinforcing China's narrative of developmental success. (Link: <https://beltandroadinitiativeplatform.net/2021/06/30/the-belt-and-road-webinar-series-two-the-pre-bri-china-sri-lanka-verse-post-bri-with-yasiru-ranaraja/>)
- **China Belt and Road Network:** Ranaraja's comments on the BRI's impact were featured, highlighting its benefits for Sri Lankan society. (Link: <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/177128.html>)

The “red carpet” treatment from Chinese media and embassy handles, despite BRISL's modest online following, raises questions about Ranaraja's role as a selectively amplified voice to promote China's agenda.

Propaganda in Regional Media

Ranaraja's influence extends beyond Sri Lanka to regional media, particularly in Bangladesh, where he co-authored articles in outlets like *Dhaka Courier* and *United News of Bangladesh (UNB)*. For example, in “Can the Global South create a unified vision for modernization?” (March 2025), Ranaraja subtly praised China's role in fostering interdependent regional cooperation through forums like the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA), aligning with Beijing's narrative of leading Global South development. These articles frame China as a driver of modernization, contrasting it with Western governance inefficiencies, thereby advancing China's soft power in South Asia. (Link: <https://www.dhakacourier.com.bd/news/Reportage/Can-the-Global-South-create-a-unified-vision-for-modernization/9118>, <https://www.unb.com.bd/category/opinion/can-the-global-south-create-a-unified-vision-for-modernization/156429>)

Editorial Contributions in Sri Lankan Media

Ranaraja's editorials in Sri Lankan outlets like *Daily FT* and *Daily News* further demonstrate his pro-China stance:

- **Daily FT (April 22, 2024):** In “Sri Lanka-China research vessel saga and maritime diplomacy in Indian Ocean,” Ranaraja contextualized China's maritime presence historically, downplaying concerns about Chinese research vessels like Yuan Wang 5 and framing them within international law (UNCLOS). He subtly defended China's actions while acknowledging India's security concerns, presenting a balanced but China-friendly narrative. (Link: <https://www.ft.lk/columns/Sri-Lanka-China-research-vessel-saga-and-maritime-diplomacy-in-Indian-Ocean/4-760847>)

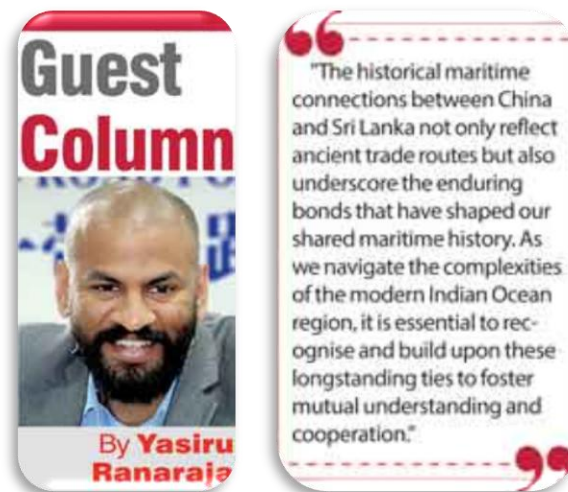


Figure 26 Yasiru's comments and editorial in the Daily FT

- Daily News (May 27, 2025):** In “A centenary vision for Sri Lanka? A people’s journey towards national rejuvenation,” Ranaraja drew parallels between Sri Lanka’s development goals and China’s “Two Centenary Goals,” praising China’s strategic planning under Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping. He advocated for Sri Lanka to emulate China’s model of economic pragmatism and rural revitalization, reinforcing China’s image as a developmental model. (Link: <https://www.dailynews.lk/2025/05/27/featured/785893/a-centenary-vision-for-sri-lanka/>)

These editorials align with China’s propaganda by highlighting its historical ties with Sri Lanka, defending its modern initiatives, and promoting its governance model.

Critical Observations

Despite BRISL’s modest online presence (e.g., 8,695 Twitter followers for @BRI_SL and average website traffic), Ranaraja’s prominence in Chinese state media suggests selective amplification by Beijing to project influence through a credible local voice. This raises concerns about his role as a conduit for Chinese propaganda, particularly given the CCP’s documented efforts to shape narratives in Sri Lanka through platforms like the Sri Lanka-China Journalists’ Forum and coercive diplomacy. Ranaraja’s articles often counter Western criticisms, such as the “China overcapacity theory” or debt-trap narrative, aligning with Beijing’s goal of reshaping global perceptions.

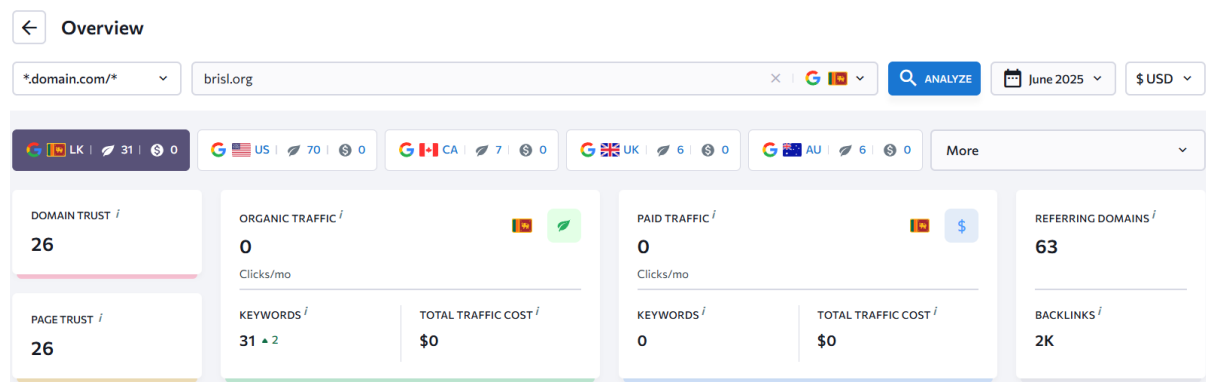


Figure 27 Poor traffic on the website of BRISL

Yasiru Ranaraja, through his role as Founding Director of BRISL and his extensive contributions to Chinese state media, regional outlets, and Sri Lankan publications, serves as a pro-China influencer amplifying Beijing's propaganda. His work consistently praises China's BRI, environmental policies, and global governance initiatives, countering Western criticisms and promoting China as a benevolent partner for Sri Lanka and the Global South. His engagement with Chinese officials, amplified presence in state media despite modest social media reach, and alignment with CCP narratives indicate a strategic role in advancing China's soft power. While some of his arguments align with academic critiques of Western narratives, the pattern of his activities—particularly the “red carpet” treatment from Chinese media—suggests he is a key figure in China's efforts to shape perceptions in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Overall Observation

Despite China's concerted efforts to shape public perception through a sophisticated propaganda campaign involving local influencers like Yasiru Ranaraja, state-affiliated media outlets such as CGTN Sinhala, and contributions to Sri Lankan and regional newspapers, public sentiment in Sri Lanka remains skeptical. Comments on social media posts, articles, and propaganda handles like CGTN Sinhala reveal persistent doubts among Sri Lankans about China's intentions, particularly following the 2022 economic crisis exacerbated by excessive debt, including significant Chinese loans. While influencers and Chinese media platforms promote a positive image of China—highlighting BRI projects, cultural ties, and global initiatives like ecological civilization—they notably avoid overt criticism of India or the United States, focusing instead on building a favorable perception of China as a benevolent partner. This strategic restraint suggests a deliberate effort to prioritize China's image rehabilitation in Sri Lanka over direct confrontation with other global powers.

Think Tanks

Path Finder Foundation

The **Pathfinder Foundation (PF)** is one of Sri Lanka's most prominent think tanks operating in the areas of foreign policy, maritime security, regional cooperation, and economic development. While it brands itself as independent and policy-focused, evidence suggests the organization plays a significant role in **promoting Chinese strategic interests** in Sri Lanka and the broader Indian Ocean Region.

Founded by **Milinda Moragoda**, a former Cabinet Minister and Ambassador to India, Pathfinder has developed deep ties with **Chinese institutions**, regularly co-hosting forums, publishing favorable analysis, and advocating for stronger Sino-Lanka ties through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

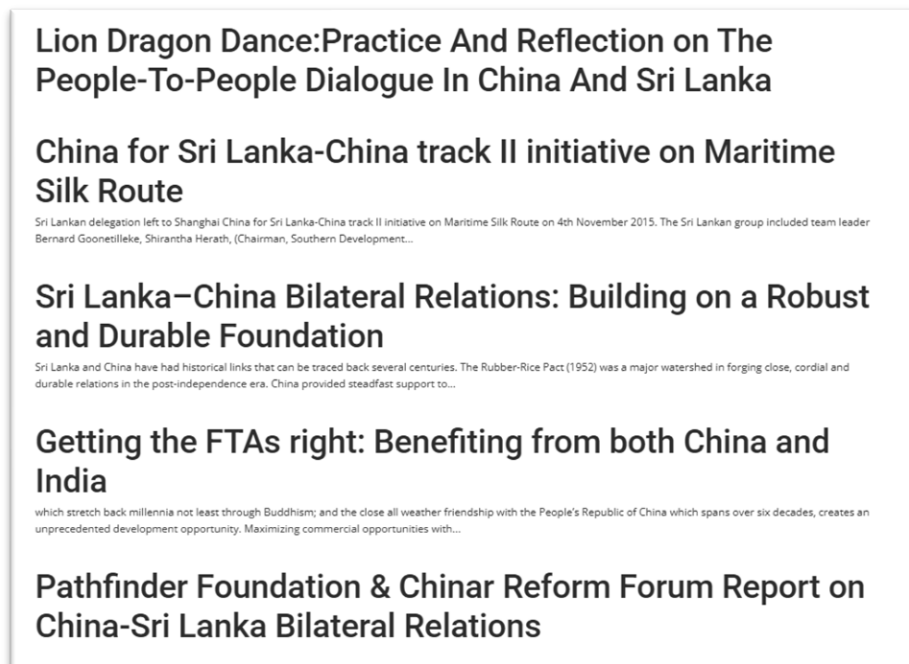


Figure 28 Coverage of China on PathFinder

Formal Collaboration: 'China Watch' with Xinhua

- In **October 2017**, PF's **China-Sri Lanka Cooperation Studies Centre** partnered with **Xinhua News Agency** and *Daily FT* to launch the "**China Watch**" series — a syndicated Chinese-government-backed news section tailored for the Sri Lankan audience (Already covered in the report).
- **Founder Milinda Moragoda** personally briefed Chinese Ambassador **Yi Xianliang** on the project's content and role.

Deep Institutional Ties with Chinese Think Tanks

- In **April 2016**, PF signed an MoU with **CICIR** (China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations), a reputed Party-aligned think tank, formalizing long-term cooperation (lankaweb.com).

The Island of the Lion and the Land of the Dragon

Events | 16/01/2018



The Pathfinder Foundation and China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) launched a joint publication titled "THE ISLAND OF THE LION AND THE LAND OF THE DRAGON". This CICIR-Pathfinder joint publication consists of academically enriched articles by both Sri Lankan and Chinese experts in their respective fields focusing on different facets of Sri Lanka and China relations. This treatise is published as a contribution to the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and China and in addition to the 65th anniversary of the "Rubber-Rice Pact".

CICIR and Pathfinder confer on strengthening China-Sri Lanka cooperation

Friday, 17 January 2020 00:00

🔊 - 📶 - {{hitsCtrl.values.hits}}



Assistant President Professor Zhang Li together with his team representing the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations and PF Founder Milinda Moragoda and team

Figure 29 Pathfinder and CICIR collaborations and meetings

- PF regularly co-hosts programs and publications with **CICIR**, including “The Island of the Lion and the Land of the Dragon: Essays on Sri Lanka–China Relations” (2016).
- PF officials, including **Executive Director Luxman Siriwardena**, have met high-powered Chinese delegations—such as from SIIS and Sichuan University—to explore policy and educational collaboration (pathfinderfoundation.org).



Figure 30 Guo Yezhou, Vice Minister, International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC), welcomed by Milinda Moragoda, Founder of Pathfinder Foundation

- PF's **China-Sri Lanka Cooperation Studies Centre** was inaugurated at a ceremony attended by Chinese Ambassador **Cheng Xueyuan**.

Ownership & Leadership: Milinda Moragoda

- Former **Cabinet Minister, Ambassador to India**, and founder of PF, Moragoda has positioned the think tank as a lead node in China–Sri Lankan policy dialogue (pathfinderfoundation.org).
- PF runs **Track 1.5 dialogues** with Chinese institutions, emphasizing maritime security and BRI cooperation.

Beijing-Endorsed Publications & Advocacy

- PF's **China Watch** issues praise Chinese infrastructure investments, describing BRI projects like Hambantota Port, power plants, and highways as “utterly commendable” (pathfinderfoundation.org).
- PF has hosted multiple high-profile events such as the **Indian Ocean Security Conference (2020)** and maritime dialogue roundtables with Chinese experts.

Recognition by Chinese Authorities

- In **2014**, the Chinese Embassy in Colombo named PF among its **Top 10 partners** during a Chinese New Year ceremony.

The Pathfinder Foundation (PF), under the leadership of Milinda Moragoda, has evolved from a local policy think tank into a pivotal node within China’s soft power architecture in Sri Lanka. While Moragoda was previously criticized for [harboring anti-China leanings](#), the foundation’s activities in recent years reflect a significant shift toward promoting pro-China narratives. This transition is visible through formal partnerships with Chinese state-linked institutions, co-publication agreements (such as the *China Watch* series with Xinhua and *Daily FT*), and high-profile dialogues supporting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In sum, Pathfinder Foundation’s role in Sri Lanka today mirrors China’s broader global approach to narrative shaping—utilizing elite networks, think tanks, and media partnerships to construct favorable public opinion and policy orientations aligned with Beijing’s strategic interests.

Confucius Institutes in Sri Lanka

Unit	Institution	Key Activities
Confucius Institute (Colombo, CIUC)	University of Colombo	Full HSK/YCT/BCT syllabus, cultural events, teacher/student exchange programs
Confucius Institute (Kelaniya)	University of Kelaniya	Scholarship hub, HSK/HSKK exams, Chinese Bridge competition participants
Confucius Classroom (Sabaragamuwa)	Sabaragamuwa University	Classroom instruction, teacher training, cultural education
Lumbini Confucius Classroom (Colombo 5)	Lumbini College	Weekend/intermediate classes, low-cost offerings, CFL teachers from mainland China

Confucius Institute at the University of Colombo (CIUC)

- **Location:** Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo
- **Affiliation:** In partnership with Beijing Foreign Studies University & Honghe University, China
- **Offerings:**
 - **Structured Chinese stream & standard HSK, YCT, BCT courses**
 - **Cultural programs:** festivals, exhibitions, teacher training, university teaching spots opened in places like Ruhuna
- **Online Presence:** Active Facebook page (“CIUOC”) with updates on HSK tests, events, and exhibitions

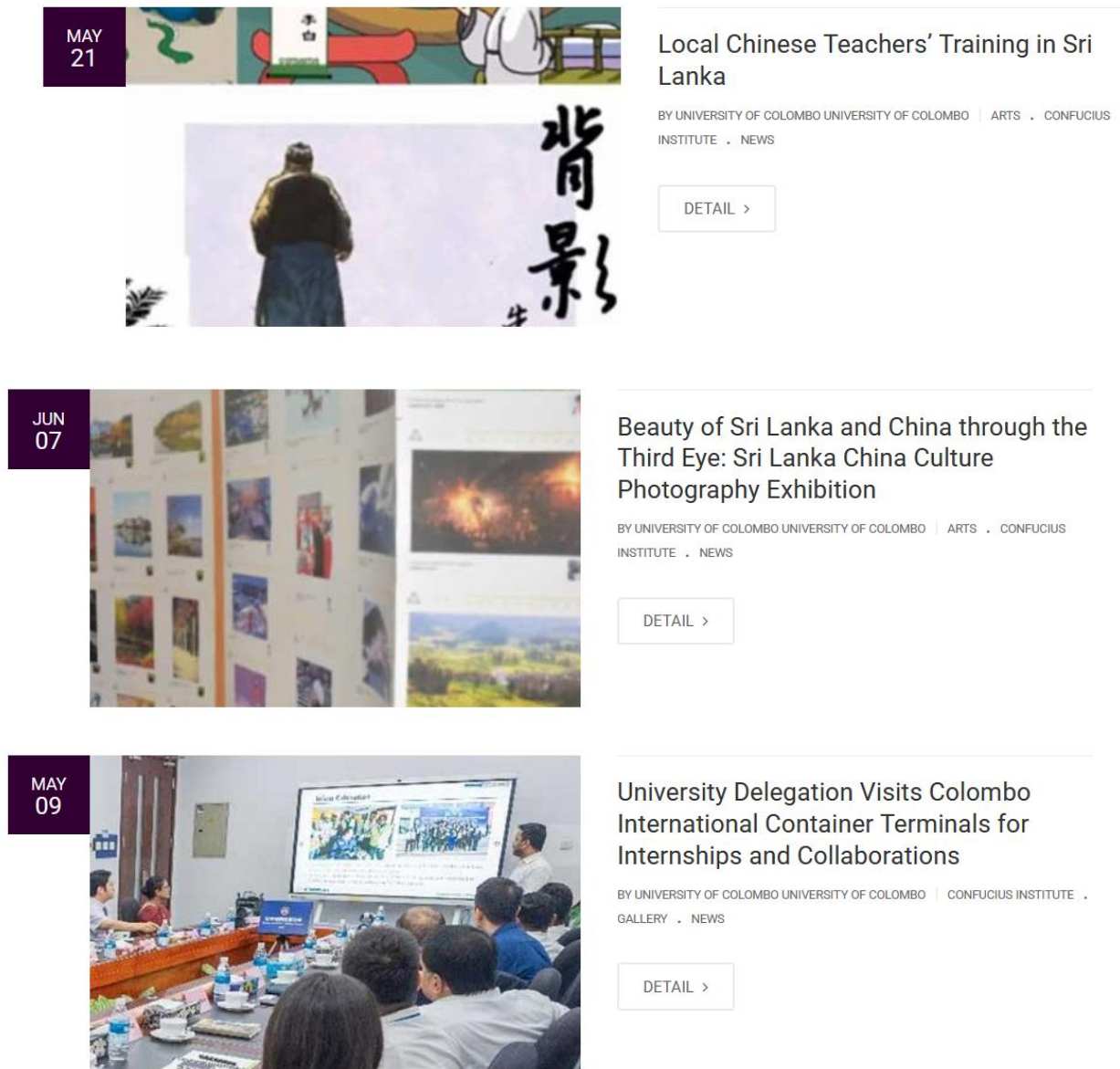


Figure 31 University of Colombo Confucius Institute Recent Posts on its Official Website

Confucius Institute at University of Kelaniya



Figure 32 Confucius Institute at University of Kelaniya

- Confucius Institute (CI) was founded in 2006 to promote Chinese language and culture. at that time Prof. Kulathilaka Kumarasinghe was the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. The University of Kelaniya (UOK) signed a memorandum of understanding with Yunnan National University, P.R. China on the 15th of November 2006.
- Hosts events like the annual “Chinese Bridge” competition; in June 2025, Sri Lankan students from Kelaniya, Colombo, and Peradeniya won first prizes, earning a spot at the finals in China (english.news.cn).
- "The Confucius Institute offers scholarships that are often awarded to university students perceived as 'friendly toward China' or supportive of its initiatives."

1. International Chinese Language Teachers Scholarship

Eligibility

- a) Be a non-Chinese citizen;
- b) Be friendly to China, have no criminal record, abide by the laws and regulations of China and the rules and regulations of the Host Institution;
- c) Be in good physical and mental health, be in good academic and behavioral standing;
- d) Be interested in Chinese language education and related work;
- e) Be aged between 16 and 35 years on September 1, 2025. The maximum age limit for in service Chinese teachers may be extended to 45, but those who apply for a scholarship for a Bachelor's degree shall be younger than 25 under most circumstances.

Figure 33 Scholarship Eligibility on the website of Confucius Institute at University of Kelaniya

Scholarships & Student Exchanges

- **Chinese Government Scholarships** have supported over 4,000 Sri Lankans since 1975 (english.news.cn).
- Annually, around 200 Sri Lankan students receive scholarships (80 via CGS, others via local initiatives).
- A 2024 Xinhua report highlighted recipients pursuing PhDs in fields like rehabilitation medicine (english.news.cn).
- As part of China's soft power strategy, Sri Lankan students participating in educational exchange programs are sometimes taken on guided tours to politically sensitive regions such as Xinjiang, with their experiences subsequently highlighted in Chinese state-run media to support official narratives

Conclusion

Chinese propaganda in Sri Lanka was particularly active in the years leading up to 2020, with a strong presence through cultural institutions, media partnerships, and academic exchanges. However, following Sri Lanka's severe economic crisis and increasing scrutiny of its foreign debt—much of which was linked to large-scale Chinese-funded infrastructure projects—the public perception began to shift. A significant segment of the Sri Lankan population started attributing the crisis, at least in part, to China's so-called “debt trap diplomacy,” leading to a noticeable decline in overt Chinese soft power activities.

Despite this temporary setback, China is once again steadily reasserting its influence. With high-profile state visits, renewed investments, and diplomatic overtures, Beijing is working to rebuild its image and sway in Sri Lanka. This resurgence is reflected in the alignment of local media narratives, Chinese state-run media content, and the voices of social media influencers—particularly among students who studied in China or have been shaped ideologically through Confucius Institutes.

Together, these actors help amplify a narrative that positions China as a benevolent economic superpower, essential for national development, and possessing a clean human rights record—conveniently glossing over or outright whitewashing international criticisms. This coordinated messaging, though subtle, reflects a broader effort by China to reestablish its soft power foothold in Sri Lanka and reshape public perception in line with its foreign policy objectives.