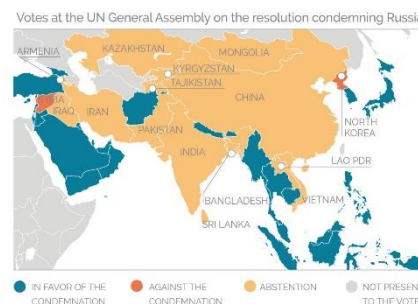


Asian vision of the war in Ukraine

The view of Asian countries on the Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine is ambiguous. In general, the democratic governments of Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, as well as semi-democratic Singapore took a clear pro-Ukrainian position, pointing out the importance of supporting an order based on the principles of international law. Among the countries of Southeast Asia, sanctions against Russia were applied only by the above countries.

When voting for the resolution of the UN General Assembly condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Vietnam and Laos abstained, and on April 7, when voting for the decision of the UN General Assembly to exclude the Russian Federation from the Human Rights Council, Indonesia and Thailand abstained, and Vietnam voted against.

Thus, the risk of a new "Cold War" is high not only in Europe but also in Asia, where two opposing security and economic blocs may emerge: a US-led bloc and a China-dominated bloc.



Among the reasons for such a different position of countries in the region is the fact that it is Asia that has become the market to which Russia is reorienting in the context of Western sanctions.

Sanction pressure from the USA and the EU led to the fact that of the 380 tankers that left the ports of the Russian Federation from February 24 to April 18, 115 were sent to Asia: 52 - to the People's Republic of China, 28 - to South Korea, 25 - to India, 9 - to Japan and 1 to Malaysia.

Compared to the last year, these data indicate an eightfold increase in deliveries to India, a 33% increase in deliveries to China, and, at the same time, a 16% decrease in deliveries to the other mentioned countries. The trend is obvious - while such powerful consumers as Japan are looking for ways to reduce the share of trade with the Russian Federation, China and India are only increasing it. Such positions of countries are reflected not only at the political level, but also at the public level.

Japan

Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, Japan has unequivocally sided with Ukraine, consistently implementing a policy of condemning aggression, imposing sanctions, and providing large-scale aid.



Protests in Tokyo against Russia's invasion

According to a NIKKEI/Tokyo TV poll conducted after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 61% of the Japanese public were in favor of tough sanctions against Russia along with American and European partners. This is double the level of support among the Japanese public in March 2014, after Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea. In May 2022, following the imposition of sanctions and the expulsion of several Russian diplomats, the approval rating for Prime Minister Kishida's Cabinet rose to 61%, the highest rating since he took office in October 2021. In addition, Ukrainians became the first large group of refugees to be accepted in Japan in the last 25 years.

There is practically no media in Japan that does not cover the war in Ukraine. Programs like "Good Morning, Japan", "Sunday Watch" from NHK, also TV Asahi, BS Fuji Prime News, and TBS weekends programs, such as "Mr. Sunday", provide detailed coverage of the war in Ukraine. And the web page of the NHK World news channel even started working in Ukrainian. Thanks to the work of the Japanese mass media, during the first 100 days of the war, more people got acquainted with Ukrainian history, politics, and the names of Ukrainian cities.

The incident on Japanese TV, when anchor Yumiko Matsuo breaks down in tears presenting the news of Putin bestowing honors on the brigade that committed atrocities in Bucha, became very revealing. She had shown clips of children hiding in the bunker of the Azovstal metallurgical plant and was overcome with emotion. Reddit users praised the courage of the anchor, emphasizing a rare gesture for Japanese people to show emotions in public as it is an uncharacteristic trait of Japanese culture. It showed how deeply the cruelties of war resonate to Japanese souls. Many users noted that they also cried.



If we take into account several tens of millions of Chinese and Indian diasporas in the countries of the world, it is worth paying attention to the Chinese mass media, which have influence not only in the country or on the mainland, but also globally. Therefore, we should keep an eye on the info space of China and analyze it in a broader context: what narratives are spread in this space, and how they influence the formation of the world's depiction among its citizens.

China



Despite the fact that China, which is the largest economic and political power in Asia, has chosen a position of "neutrality" for its own interests and personal gain, the Chinese media still present the events in Ukraine according to Russian narratives. At the same time, no Chinese media in any way condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

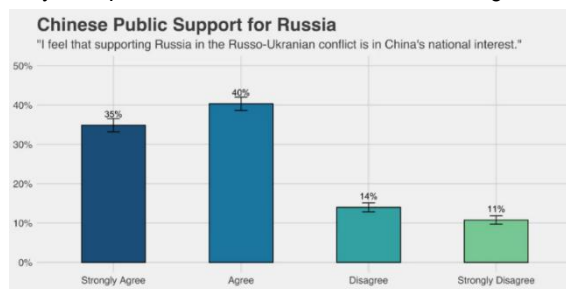
Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine, the Chinese press has been broadcasting very ambiguous messages, and in some places, it has become a platform for the spread of anti-Western propaganda and outright Russian fakes. The apparatus of the Communist Party of China works at full capacity to support Russia. Usually, Chinese propaganda is focused directly on events inside the country. However, in the first weeks of the full-scale Russian invasion, the Chinese press spread not only Russian propaganda and narratives, but also outright misinformation that the President of Ukraine had fled, the Armed Forces of Ukraine had surrendered, and Kyiv had been captured. Readers of the Chinese mass media are convinced that the blame for the invasion of Russian troops into the territory of independent Ukraine actually lies with the West, in particular with the United States. Anti-American and anti-NATO sentiments are constantly covered in People's Daily Online, Global Times, Xinhua, The Paper, Huanqiu, Caixin Global, South China Morning Post, etc.

The government news agency Xinhua wrote in mid-April that the US is instigating a war in Ukraine in order to weaken Europe. People's Daily Online also repeatedly accused NATO of provoking the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In early April, the outlet published an article claiming that the United States staged the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Maidan in 2014, supported a pro-American government in Ukraine, and encouraged Ukraine to join NATO, turning it into a pawn in the confrontation with the Russian Federation. As is known, this is a typical narrative of Russian propaganda.

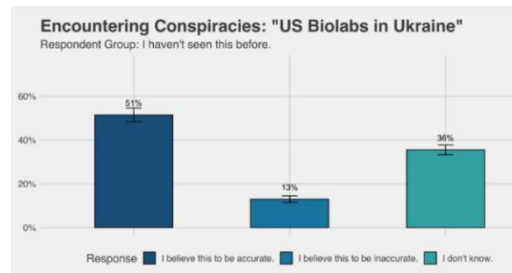
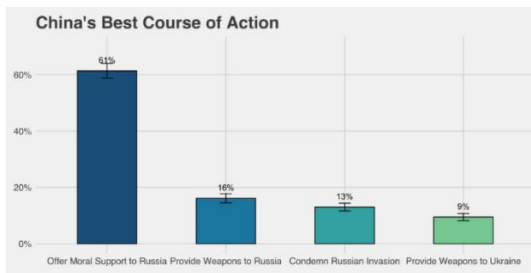
Also, mass media, and official channels, do not show videos or photos of the destruction in Ukraine, do not interview Ukrainians, who describe difficulties or losses due to the war.

According to a WSJ report, only 2% of newscasts included a direct speech from Ukrainian President Zelensky. However, among them, we are talking only about those quotes of the Ukrainian president, where he reproached the West for not helping Ukraine enough and asked to intervene. In this way, the Chinese media hinted at the "participation of the West" in fomenting the war.

As for the bloody events in Irpin and Bucha, which had appalled international community, Chinese journalists mentioned them only to repeat the Kremlin's thesis that the huge number of victims among the civilian population is only a "Ukrainian staging" and "fake".



Between March 28 and April 5, 2022, the Carter Center China Focus conducted a survey of Chinese public opinion regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The results show that 75% of respondents agree that supporting Russia in Ukraine is in China's national interest and that approximately 60% of respondents support China's mediation in ending the conflict.



Thus, China is trying to use the war in Ukraine to advance its own anti-Western propaganda theses

India

Although India belongs to the democratic world, it does not always behave accordingly in the international arena and rather prefers cooperation with authoritarian, anti-Western regimes.



With the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India officially took a neutral position. On the one hand, the country does not support Russian aggression openly and calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and resolution of the conflict by diplomatic methods. On the other hand, India avoids open criticism of the actions of the Russian Federation, refuses to join Western sanctions or introduce its own, and on the contrary, it increases cooperation with Russia.

Along with this, the country participates in the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and a significant proportion of the soldiers of the International Legion of Ukraine are from India.

Unlike in Japan or China, in India, there is no consensus between the government and the population regarding the war in Ukraine. Most pro-government media in India repeat the Russian narrative of events. Anti-Western rhetoric is also often heard in the local media. However, among the more liberal media, there is a strong condemnation of Russian aggression, terror against the civilian population, and violence by the Russian military.

The public in India, unlike citizens of many other major democracies, has generally supported India's neutrality and New Delhi's efforts to balance between maintaining friendly relations with Russia and the West. At the same time, the public has largely pro-Russian position, which aligns with the position of the current national government and the mainstream local media that support it. Thus, 62% of the population supports the continuation of friendly relations with Russia.



In March, members of the Indian right-wing organization Hindu Sena organized a demonstration in New Delhi in support of Russia and its invasion of Ukraine. The main calls of the demonstration were: "Russia, you fight, we are with you" and "Long live India-Russia ties." Other signs explicitly supported the invasion and an "undivided Russia." Although the Hindu Sena is a relatively small political group, it is active in 16 states in India and has over 1 million followers on social media.

No major anti-war protests have erupted in the country since the start of the invasion, and since the start of the war, there have been few voices criticizing India's refusal to participate in supporting Ukraine and calling on the government to condemn Russia for invading a sovereign country.

Comparison of the reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in individual Asian countries reveals a noticeable division between their positions. The Sino-US rivalry and underlying power dynamics currently complicate the partnerships, alliances (notably the new AUKUS pact), and counter-alliances in the region which influences the governments' response to the Russian war against Ukraine. In general, US-allied countries support Ukraine, while others try to balance or openly support Russia. For example, India's strategic rivalry with China could lead the country to side with Ukraine, but it did not condemn Russia because of its traditional defense partnership with the Russian Federation. Therefore, not only foreign policy considerations but also additional factors play a decisive role in the response of governments and the public to the war in Ukraine.