



REPORT

Behind the News: Inside China Global Television Network

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LOWY INSTITUTE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

China's efforts to use state media as a means to increase its soft power around the world have raised concerns in many quarters. With much fanfare in late 2016, China relaunched its global television network, formerly known as China Central Television, as a new global media brand, the China Global Television Network (CGTN). Despite extensive investment and active support from the highest levels of government, including President Xi Jinping, CGTN has had limited success in improving China's international soft power standing.

For many Western observers, it is CGTN's association with the Chinese party-state which limits its ability to shape and influence the global discourse.¹ However, it is CGTN's internal organisational structure and culture which really inhibits its effectiveness as a soft power tool. CGTN and other party-state media with similar structures and cultures will not be able to achieve President Xi's goals without a radical, and extremely unlikely, overhaul.

As China rises, Chinese political elites are increasingly concerned about how it is perceived in the world, and how to shape that global public opinion. Negative public opinion is anathema to China for two reasons. First, domestically, it undermines the narrative of China as a peaceful and unthreatening global actor that is central to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) story of Chinese rejuvenation after the 'century of humiliation' at the hands of hostile Western forces.² Second, a lack of trust internationally has implications diplomatically in terms of support for China on the world stage and economically in relation to trade relationships that are essential for China's continued growth. Both ultimately come back to the central issue for the CCP — its ongoing legitimacy.

Chinese elites, as well as many everyday Chinese people, blame the West for what they describe as misperceptions of China. They argue that any negative reputation China has overseas is due to how it is portrayed by Western media. In their view, the West is so threatened by China's rise that it deliberately hypes up the 'China threat theory' for its own interests.³

The Chinese Government is trying to address what it perceives as inaccurate representations of China by investing in its own international media. The relaunch and rebranding of China Central Television (CCTV) as China Global Television Network (CGTN) in late 2016 is a key element of China's efforts. Many in the West see China's efforts at expanding its state media as part of a broader 'influence campaign' to shape views in a way favourable to the interests of the Chinese party-state.

This report examines the success of the relaunch in increasing the organisation's ability to shape global opinion about China as China would like. It assesses CGTN's potential to achieve President Xi Jinping's goals of moulding the global news agenda and creating a more positive view of China. It argues that ultimately, despite the restructure, heavy investment, and determination at the highest levels of power to start winning on the "public opinion battlefield",⁴ the organisation's internal dynamics continue to undermine its ability to be a true force in shaping global opinion.

NOT ALL STATE MEDIA ARE THE SAME

Research on the use of media as a tool of public diplomacy has for decades noted the importance of the pursuit of "direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments".⁵ How effectively media is used to achieve this goal is highly debatable.

There is a general presumption among Western observers that CGTN cannot function effectively as a tool of soft power because of its association with the Chinese party-state.⁶ This also applies to other Chinese state media such as Xinhua. Most English-language commentary, including by some Chinese analysts, argues that the close

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connection to the Chinese state means CCTV International (and later CGTN) lacks credibility with media consumers, which limits its ability to generate audiences and achieve soft power or influence. The widely held view is that despite substantial government funding and support, indeed perhaps because of it, Chinese international media “struggle to achieve the reputation needed to reach the public diplomacy goals set by the government”.⁷ And because the channel is part of “Beijing’s propaganda machinery”, it is unable to overcome its reputation and be seen as credible and authoritative.⁸ These arguments suggest that because state media is answerable to the party,⁹ “China’s political system just may be the villain of its own piece”.¹⁰ Ultimately, audience perceptions of a broadcaster’s independence is the “single defining factor which guarantees the broadcaster’s credibility and is the foundation for its reputation ... It is on the basis of the broadcaster’s credibility that the international audience will judge and react to the sponsoring government”.¹¹

However, it is possible for state media to be credible, effective and influential. The BBC World Service (BBCWS) is one example. It is highly respected around the world. Indeed, one report has argued that “the two extremes of the credibility spectrum are the BBCWS on the one hand and China’s CCTV on the other”.¹² Yet, the BBCWS is a public service provided by the United Kingdom’s public broadcaster, the BBC. It is funded by the UK Government through licence fees collected from BBC users.¹³ Unlike CGTN, the BBC’s editorial independence is explicitly outlined, in its case, in a Royal Charter. The Charter also lists the BBC’s public purpose, which includes the duty “to provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them”. While emphasising independence, the Charter also requires the BBC “to reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world”, recognising that the BBC has a key role in promulgating UK soft power abroad.¹⁴ Other state media around the world such as Qatar’s Al Jazeera and Russia’s RT also have influence, albeit with different approaches. Even in China, Shanghai-based and state-owned online media Sixth Tone is broadly regarded as a credible and interesting source of information. The case of Sixth Tone will be examined more closely later in this report.

Despite the assumption by many that simply being connected with the state automatically undermines a news organisation’s credibility or influence, in some cases the public funding of news organisations reflects positively on a state’s reputation. The BBC is a powerful example of this. In fact, research on public opinion found the BBC placed ahead of the Premier League, overseas aid, and UK pop culture in fostering positive attitudes towards the United Kingdom.¹⁵ This fostering of positive attitudes is precisely what CGTN is trying to do for China.

CGTN'S MISSION

On New Year's Eve 2016, CCTV International was rebranded as CGTN, and began broadcasting under its new name and revamped style and structure.¹⁶ China media-watcher David Bandurski described the rebrand as the “latest push to develop an international broadcast infrastructure allowing China to advance its messages and flex its ‘discourse power’”.¹⁷ The stated mission of CGTN (like CCTV before it) is to provide an alternative news voice in the world. President Xi sent a letter to CGTN staff for the relaunch, urging them to “tell China’s story well, spread China’s voice well, let the world know a three-dimensional, colourful China, and showcase China’s role as a builder of world peace”.¹⁸ At the time China Global Television Network emphasised its desire to be seen as objective: “Ultimately, we believe facts should speak for themselves and are committed to neutral, objective reporting”.¹⁹ The relaunch aimed to “rebrand our product to the world, to cope with the global trend in media convergence”.²⁰

China Global Television Network’s mission is based on a long history. Since at least the Republican era (1912–1949), many Chinese have argued that the way China is portrayed in Western media is biased and inaccurate. And since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, with the exception of a brief period under Deng Xiaoping’s ‘opening up and reform’ in the 1980s, Chinese elites have argued that the country has been under siege from “hostile forces” determined to undermine the CCP by the use of international media.²¹ In response, the Chinese Government has stepped up its own efforts in the international ideas battlefield. Chinese elites have engaged in a media ‘going out’ project to try to manage and combat this “enemy in information warfare”.²² Chinese presidents and propaganda chiefs alike have emphasised the need for Chinese media to take China’s voice into the world and present Chinese perspectives on both Chinese and world affairs to a global audience.²³

Several key incidents have served as lessons for Chinese elites regarding how Chinese media can be used to shape China’s image in the world. For example, in 1989, events in Tiananmen Square caused a severe international downturn in public opinion towards China. Senior propaganda official Zhu Muzhi, who also served as president of the Xinhua News Agency, identified news media in the United States and other Western countries as the source of anti-China sentiment. According to Zhu and the leadership, China needed to “step up the battle for world opinion”,²⁴ warning that “in the current struggle for international public opinion, we should see the United States as our opponent. We should have a clear-cut stand of taking up our sword to defend ourselves.”²⁵ It was seen as essential to defend China for its economic development, a key pillar of party legitimacy and a stated core interest of the Chinese Government, and therefore the CCP’s survival.²⁶ The Foreign

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Propaganda Group (*duiwai xuanchuan xiaozu*), which had been disbanded just a year before, was reopened in 1990 to urgently improve China's foreign image abroad.²⁷

The Beijing Olympics in 2008 was another critical point for Chinese media.²⁸ Billed as China's 'coming out party', China hoped the Olympics would improve its image and gain it admiration from around the world. However, foreign media coverage of anti-China protests along the route of the torch relay, and the games themselves was the trigger for an increased determination to have more say in how China was represented internationally. As Professor Yu Guoming from Renmin University noted, the protests and conflicts encountered during the Olympic torch relay prompted "an ideological shift" among senior Chinese officials. Professor Yu argued that "the embarrassing image revealed in Western media underlined to Chinese officials that while China's economy has a great presence in the global economy, China's voice and cultural influence have not achieved a decent position".²⁹

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Additional funding was provided for international broadcasting, and programming changes were made to increase their appeal.³⁰ And there were results — whereas its coverage of the SARS epidemic in 2003 was highly discredited, CCTV International's coverage of the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province showed that the channel could be a global player. Its footage was rebroadcast by other networks including BBC and CNN³¹ (although CCTV had the advantage of preferential access to the site of the disaster, as happened with coverage of the sinking of the *Oriental Star* on the Yangtze River in June 2015, which claimed 400 lives³²).

Despite these efforts, views of China did not improve in 2009, at least according to evidence available on Western audiences. Polling by the BBCWS, among others, showed that positive views of China were in decline across Europe and the Anglosphere.³³ The foreign media was, again, seen by China to be largely to blame for the gap in perceptions. As a 2009 essay in an important Communist Party journal described it:

"China's efforts and earnestness have met with an international public opinion environment (国际舆论环境) stacked unfairly against it. A small number of Western media have managed to dominate the international news and information order (国际新闻传播秩序), masking the truth, disseminating prejudices, creating through human effort one after another 'iron curtain' and 'vast divide', seriously impeding interaction, conversation and mutual understanding between peoples."³⁴

The author accused the international media of inequality, lack of freedom and fairness, and argued that this lopsidedness was "now impelling a number of victimised nations to strengthen their capacity for projecting information internationally".³⁵ Based on the view that the West could not and would not objectively represent China and Chinese perspectives,

Chinese media was urged to undertake this duty.³⁶ In 2009 the Chinese Government again boosted investment into its media with a widely reported funding injection of RMB 45 billion (around US\$6.6 billion) to be shared among several Chinese state media organisations for the purpose of improving the country's international image.³⁷

Today, President Xi Jinping continues to draw heavily on the narrative of China's victimisation at the hands of Westerners and the idea that Western media is biased against China. Like his predecessors, Xi argues that Chinese international media has a key role — indeed, a moral duty — in defending China's reputation against what he sees as the West's monopoly on storytelling. In August 2013, Xi gave a speech at the National Propaganda and Ideology Work Conference in which he emphasised the critical importance of China's international media. In his speech, Xi said that Chinese media:

“... must strive to move international communications capacity construction forward, innovate foreign propaganda methods, strengthen discourse system construction, strive to forge new concepts, new categories and new expressions that circulate between China and the outside world, tell China's story well, disseminate China's voice well, and strengthen [China's] discourse power internationally.”³⁸

Similarly, when President Xi toured CCTV's Beijing headquarters in February 2016, he urged journalists to pledge their loyalty to China's Communist Party.³⁹ On World Journalists' Day in November 2017, he again took the opportunity to remind Chinese reporters of their duty to promote a positive image of China and its achievements.⁴⁰ According to President Xi, Chinese media must focus on the “positive and vigorous” in the “public opinion battlefield”.⁴¹

The perception that the world has a biased and inaccurately negative view of China, promulgated by Western media, is not just limited to political elites. From taxi drivers and hairdressers to university students and academics, many feel strongly that the West misunderstands China, and that Western media is the cause of the problem. Most mainland Chinese fully support China's efforts to do whatever is needed to, in their view, correct the imbalance, and “optimise a pro-China international environment”.⁴²

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THIS EFFORT BEEN?

So far, Chinese efforts to influence global public discourse are meeting with mixed reviews. While there is no systematic research available on Chinese media audiences and influence,⁴³ most of what is available suggests that there are only small numbers of Western consumers of Chinese media, and those that do exist are largely unmoved by its efforts.

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China Global Television Network's focus may not ultimately be on influencing narratives about China in the West. Indeed, it may be non-Western markets that are more relevant. For one thing, Western media markets, especially English-speaking ones, are saturated with content, and are widely recognised as being difficult to break into. Non-Western media markets provide more opportunities for international media players to gain access.⁴⁴ Additionally, given China's commitment to identifying as a developing nation, albeit a leader among them, and defining itself against 'traditional' powers, non-Western markets may be more strategically important. This is particularly the case when it comes to China's 'core interests', including continuing economic growth, and protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. Developing support for official People's Republic of China narratives in countries around the South China Sea, or along the 'Belt and Road', for example, are critical to these interests. What limited evidence does exist suggests that CGTN, like other Chinese state media, is gaining some traction in Africa and the Pacific. However, this may be due to the lack of alternatives as much as any particular attraction of what the CGTN has to offer, and the impact may be limited. China Central Television appears to have had few difficulties entering Africa and conveying Chinese soft power.⁴⁵ In some Pacific Island countries such as Vanuatu, then-CCTV was the second most-watched station, with 12 per cent of viewers, ahead of the Australia Network at 2 per cent.⁴⁶ However, in many cases, the results have been mixed, limited by low levels of credibility and the challenge of competing with Western media.⁴⁷ Other researchers have argued that while China has provided valuable technical and infrastructure support to African broadcasters which has been well-received, African audiences have not yet entirely accepted the messaging about China.⁴⁸

There is in fact very little in the way of clear empirical data on how Chinese state-owned television like CGTN, and CCTV International before it, is received by non-Chinese audiences. Data from China tells a positive story. For example, the main body overseeing the state's media activities has reported that more than 100 million people watched programs from four of the CCTV Channels (CCTV Chinese, English, French and Spanish) by 2009.⁴⁹ However, these figures are disputed. As others note, CCTV/CGTN management itself is not clear on international audience size. Their own figures are inconsistent.⁵⁰ Other estimates are closer to 50 million and, of these, many viewers may be Chinese diaspora and Chinese nationals either watching news from home, or practising their foreign language skills.⁵¹ One small-scale study of CCTV International's audience in the United Kingdom showed a very low penetration rate, even among students with a particular interest in China. It is a reasonable assumption that the broader public are not more likely to watch CCTV or CGTN than these students.⁵² Quantifying audience numbers is further complicated by the fact that local channels in other countries may use international newsfeeds as part of their own programming.

Calculating number of viewers is difficult enough, but understanding the qualitative impact of media outreach is even more complex. Despite a lack of data, it is generally accepted both internationally, and within CGTN itself, that its influence is not what it could be, despite generous government funding and a clear strategic goal. Indeed, the revamp of CGTN was in part a recognition of this problem and an effort to boost its ability to shape global discourses.

CGTN'S ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMIC — SIX CHALLENGES

As noted, most English-language analysis argues that CGTN's ineffectiveness is due to its connection to the Chinese party-state. However, the research for this report has revealed that there is another critical component that inhibits CGTN's ability to effectively shape global narratives — its organisational dynamic. The working environment at CGTN results in a communications product that is unappealing to many viewers, and lacks the ability to influence the news agenda, or how the world perceives China.⁵³

There are six main aspects to CGTN's internal culture that undermine its ability to genuinely impact global opinion. These are: confusion around what counts as internationally newsworthy; a focus on outputs over impact; risk-aversion; lack of trust; low staff morale; and an ambivalence about accepting international ideas.

WHAT COUNTS AS NEWSWORTHY

According to the CGTN employees interviewed for this research, one of the reasons CGTN struggles to be effective is because it is attempting to do too much at once. Rather than choosing to focus either on setting a different international news agenda or providing an alternative angle on the existing agenda, it is trying to do both.⁵⁴ This would be difficult at any news organisation, but is particularly challenging at CGTN because, as interviewees explained it, of a lack of a 'nose' for the type of news and the presentation of stories that appeal to international audiences.⁵⁵

Many Chinese and international observers alike agree that China's international communication skills are seriously underdeveloped. It "lacks experience in influencing opinions outside its borders".⁵⁶ As such, many Chinese journalists at CGTN struggle with deciding what topics to cover, and how. The majority of staff have little experience of the international news arena. Older, senior journalists gained their experience in Chinese state media, which operates in quite different ways and in a very different style to Western media.⁵⁷ Lower-level staff tend to be young and inexperienced, often recent university graduates with little or no newsroom experience.

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Despite exhortations from the highest levels to ‘tell a positive story’, and to reshape the news agenda, there is very little clear or consistent editorial direction around what constitutes ‘legitimate’ news. One employee explained that in the past, Chinese staff attended meetings and lectures about how to report ‘with Chinese characteristics’. With the rebrand, they were then told to ‘be international’, but with no real guidance of what that meant in practice.⁵⁸ An international employee described how they were asked by various Chinese colleagues for guidance on what was newsworthy for international audiences. For example, they were asked whether an earthquake story was good for news, and if so, on what basis? Was it geographical proximity to the audience? And how could that work in an international media outlet? Was it number of people killed and injured? Was it access to footage of the destruction? Allegedly, stories of goats escaping from yards made the headlines on one occasion.⁵⁹

In the absence of clear guidelines or a shared understanding of ‘newsworthiness’ using international media as a guide, many Chinese reporters assess the relevance of issues according to their own sense of nationalism.⁶⁰ Many employees — both local Chinese and foreign reporters — feel that while CGTN may have a nationalist agenda, it is a legitimate one, and that indeed, all media operates within an agenda of some sort.⁶¹ Some Chinese CGTN journalists argue that the organisation’s selection of stories to cover, and style of coverage, should support the official line, and not upset stability or undermine China’s image in the world.⁶² For example, high-profile journalist Yang Rui from the primetime CGTN news program *Dialogue* notes that the appeal of his job is that it gives him the opportunity to “present facts”. He continues:

“The picture that the West has about China is incomplete. What we call news gathering is actually a process of selection. We have ten facts about the same truth, but for Western media, they deliberately choose the four negative ones, ignoring the six positive ones. You can’t say their reports are not factual. They are factual, but it’s based on prejudice and it’s highly selective.”⁶³

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The lack of editorial direction means that employees often have to guess what is acceptable, and in such a hierarchical environment, this tends to come down to what they think their boss would want to see. A strong theme among many interviewees for this report was that the criteria for news selection was whether it “would make their bosses happy”.⁶⁴ As one interviewee said, at CGTN, staff “don’t even care about doing propaganda well”.⁶⁵

The problem of adopting an international approach to news is exacerbated by journalists not getting the chance to develop or utilise expertise in a particular subject area. Until late 2017, ‘beats’, or focusing on certain topics, did not exist. Journalists were expected to cover all areas equally, including sport, culture, business or politics. The CGTN staff I spoke to noted that when people were eventually allocated to a particular area, the

process seemed to be more random than strategic. They were rarely assigned to their area of expertise.

This lack of instinct for international newsworthiness at both mid and higher levels of management means Chinese staff rely on what is being covered in Xinhua, Reuters, and Associated Press to guide them in what to include or exclude. As such, it is almost impossible for CGTN to add something new to the international media landscape.

OUTPUTS OVER IMPACT

Meeting the goal of trying to both shape the news agenda as well as report on events in a 'more positive' way is made more difficult by CGTN management's demand for quantity. Chinese staff report that they are required to do 15–20 stories per 8-hour shift.⁶⁶ One interviewee described it as "always quantity over quality" to the extent that the organisation felt "like a news production factory — a factory that was producing substandard products and the staff were like robots".⁶⁷ To meet their quota, staff tend to cut and paste existing content, for example from other Chinese news sources such as Xinhua, but also from international agencies such as Associated Press. Time-pressed journalists reportedly grab the first stories they come across, with little time to consider issues of quality or messaging.

This 'outputs over impact' approach means CGTN's news is often unoriginal and/or lags behind other reporting, and therefore misses the opportunity to set or influence the news agenda at all. As Chinese media scholar Yu Guoming noted: "We've increased the quantity of the work we do, but not the quality ... We really need a new way to present our story. We can't just use the old logic and throw lots of money at it."⁶⁸

LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH 'THE FOREIGN'

As part of the rebrand, CGTN increased the recruitment of experienced international talent, both for on-screen roles and behind-the-scenes technical jobs. The eventual goal is to have equal numbers of international and local staff as part of CGTN's quest to modernise and increase its ability to communicate effectively to international audiences.⁶⁹ However, in practice, international staff are marginalised, under-utilised, and their inputs are rarely welcomed.

The confusion about how to incorporate international staff becomes apparent from the moment of their arrival in Beijing. Several foreign journalists described how they were left outside the CGTN office building in below-zero Beijing winter temperatures for several hours because no arrangements had been made for foreigners to gain access to the building. Their contact person would come out to greet them, but would not be able to let them in. In one case, it was six months before an entry

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pass could be organised. Arrangements for temporary accommodation while international staff looked for a place to live were similarly disorganised. For some staff, salaries took months to be processed.

For the most part, even highly experienced foreign staff were used as copy editors, whose sole responsibility was to check the accuracy of foreign-language text. Some international staff noted that they felt their role was mostly for symbolic purposes, or to demonstrate a competitive advantage over other areas of the organisation, or other news agencies. One said they would be “wheeled out” to meet high-level official visitors, introduced and then “wheeled” away again. While higher-level international staff would occasionally be given tasks such as writing analyses and recommendations for how to improve the organisation, there was a strong sense that these were ignored, or certain elements brought in over a long period of time clothed as initiatives of the Chinese management. This is also reportedly the case in other Chinese news organisations such as Xinhua and *Global Times*.

While international staff are constrained in terms of creating content, they are also not permitted to make organisational decisions. One foreign employee told me that in response to an inquiry about operating practices they were told, “You’ll never understand. You are not Chinese ... You were born and raised overseas. You will never understand how things work here [in China], especially in a place like CCTV.”⁷⁰

Given that CGTN’s primary purpose is to influence international public opinion, the organisation’s ambivalent attitude to the international is surprising. However, when considered within the broader context in China in which China’s relationship with ‘the foreign’ is highly complex, it is not totally unexpected.⁷¹

LACK OF TRUST

The corporate culture in CGTN is closed, competitive, and characterised by a lack of trust among employees. Interviewees explained that career progression depended not so much on doing a good job of creating quality news as aligning strategically with ‘rising stars’. This is not the same as loyalty. If a person in power shows any sign of weakness, this is seen as an opportunity to take advantage and move oneself forward. As a result, information sharing is highly unusual; staff are reluctant to tell colleagues when they will be out of the office. The organisation operates as a series of silos or fiefdoms, according to one employee.⁷² Disclosing more than was absolutely necessary is seen as putting oneself at a relative disadvantage. Decision-making on almost any matter is protracted, with red stamps and approvals needed from various different areas before implementing change.

Many interviewees noted the strength of the hierarchy, and the way in which individual performance in the eyes of one’s superior was the most

important measure of success. As one interviewee noted, “all I know is that my boss has bosses that he has to impress”.⁷³ And another, “people just care about their job, their benefits, and moving up the ladder”.⁷⁴ To appear successful, an employee needs to look like they are doing something useful in the eyes of their boss. In some cases, that means programs being cancelled or created, or quotas being introduced, for the sake of looking productive.⁷⁵ As another interviewee put it, the “organisation is encumbered by risk-averse people who don’t give a damn, and have no interest in anything but protecting their own job”.⁷⁶

The workplace culture as it was described by interviewees revolves not around loyalty to either the organisation or other staff, but around individual opportunism. While most of an employee’s attention is focused on pleasing the person above, at the same time, employees are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to depose their immediate supervisor by revealing misconduct of some sort to their superior. People are extremely risk-averse about taking a strong position on anything, as if (and often when) the winds shifted, they would find themselves on the wrong side of the political fence. The case of former Chongqing mayor Bo Xilai is an example, in which journalists wrote positive coverage of the one-time darling of the political establishment before he was brought down on corruption charges. The way to get ahead, as one interviewee explained, was not to wait for meritocracy to recognise your good work, but to “hitch your star” to somebody who “looked like they were going places”. However, this was risky, because if this person left for any reason, everyone associated with them “would be left out in the cold”.⁷⁷

RISK AVERSION

Unsurprisingly, given the opportunistic environment, avoiding risk and ‘keeping one’s head down’ is another characteristic of CGTN. Due to the lack of trust, there is an almost total lack of incentive to push boundaries, including in topics and stories being covered, and how particular topics were addressed. Beyond direct censorship, the environment itself acts as a brake on staff’s motivation to engage with ‘sensitive’ issues.

This is not to say that censorship does not exist.⁷⁸ Chinese media is censored through explicit gag orders from the party’s Central Propaganda Department, including regular verbal instructions to editors, pre-publication vetting, and, occasionally, post-publication punishments.⁷⁹ Under President Xi, there is no sign of this control loosening. However, CGTN is not an Orwellian environment of ruthless oppression and control. According to interviewees, both Chinese and international, while they are aware that somewhere, sometimes, meetings were held to decide what could and could not be covered, these rarely directly affect them. The degree of strictness around what topics could be covered depends on individual managers, as some are more open to discussion and being

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convinced of the merits of a story than others. This is ascribed to these managers' own standing within the organisation.

For the most part, employees draw on their own understanding of what issues are deemed sensitive and what would be acceptable, and judge for themselves if it is worth the risk. Some CGTN journalists treat the issue of censorship as rather like a game, where if you are quick and agile, you can circumvent the rules. In some cases, where journalists suspect an issue might be deemed too sensitive to cover, they move swiftly to write before it is covered in a certain way by Xinhua, or before directives are received that it cannot be reported on. Others note that a subtle shift in wording could sometimes move a topic out of the 'too sensitive' category. For example, topics such as 'labour exploitation' might not be considered appropriate, but 'labour overwork' may be.

At CGTN, censorship is not a blunt, unilateral, non-negotiable instrument. While some issues are outside the realm of discussion — such as regime change in China — room exists for creativity and innovation should journalists wish to make the effort to do so. However, many interviewees noted that after some time in the organisation, the broader culture has worn them out to such an extent that they find it difficult to motivate themselves to make the necessary effort. As Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has noted, "getting by' becomes the supreme value". Individuals develop a "voluntary submission to the system" in order to survive and succeed.⁸⁰

LOW MORALE AND DISSATISFIED STAFF

Eventually, these factors lead to a profound sense of frustration and disappointment among staff. Staff retention is very low, both for international and Chinese staff. The level of turnover of Chinese staff is high, many quitting to join other news organisations or different professions.⁸¹ The high pressure to fulfil demanding quotas unlike those in most media agencies in the West, the tough office environment, and the low and falling salaries does little to motivate them to do more than is necessary. Unlike Yang Rui and others like him, many of the younger and less experienced staff are not particularly interested in telling China's story to the world, or changing people's perceptions. They write as they are instructed to do from higher levels of management. While there are certainly staff at CGTN who aspire to produce quality journalism and change perceptions, interviewees described this as rare, and of their voices being lost in the crowd. For Chinese staff, the issue is compounded by being paid very low wages, around RMB 5000 (A\$1000) per month.

Foreign staff on the other hand receive internationally competitive salaries. Despite this, international staff become quickly disillusioned. As one foreign journalist at CGTN told me, "they're willing to pay Westerners, but they're not willing to listen to them".⁸² International employees reported it was common for new foreign recruits to be excited for the first three months, spend the next three months thinking maybe there's something

they can do, and then either “resign or resign themselves”.⁸³ As one interviewee said, “When I started, I was all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, eager to improve the show. However, I was constantly given false hope, so that faded rather quickly. We basically don’t even bother anymore.”⁸⁴ As these employees see it, time and time again, foreign talent would quit after only a few months due to frustration. However, for those who want to stay in China, the pay and visa are enough to keep them working — albeit as some admitted at the bare minimum — for several years. Some former staff described the reasons that they left as being frustrated by the environment, bored with the topics focused on, and feeling the role was professionally unrewarding.

It was emphasised in several cases that the feelings of dissatisfaction were not because of deliberate political efforts to control ideas, but because of organisational dysfunction.

Some, even many, of these factors that characterise the organisational environment at CGTN can be found in other media or public diplomacy organisations. Risk aversion, an obsession with numbers, and overworked and underpaid staff, for example, are common criticisms. However, the combination of all of these factors outlined above, at the same time as constantly operating under the political exhortations from the highest level, creates an unusual if not unique set of circumstances — particularly for an internationally focused news organisation whose aim is to shape how China is perceived in the world.

THE CASE OF SIXTH TONE

Despite the investment and hype, the CGTN relaunch did little to resolve the internal structural issues that undermine CGTN’s ability to be a truly pro-active and agenda-setting agency. Interviewees noted the rebrand seemed to be a hurried and somewhat haphazard response to fears that the television arm of the organisation might be being outdone by the digital side. One interviewee described the rebrand process as “chaotic”, and a “last-minute thought bubble”.⁸⁵ David Bandurksi of the China Media Project described the relaunch as little more than “an ill-conceived web redesign alongside a simple acronym change”; however, as Bandurksi observes, there are Chinese media media outlets which could have provided inspiration for CGTN’s overhaul.⁸⁶

The example of Sixth Tone shows that state media in China can create credible and appealing news. Sixth Tone is the English-language sister of Chinese online media news outlet, The Paper. Launched in April 2016 and aimed primarily at Western readers, the online publication has a slick website and is highly readable. Like CGTN, it receives state funding (although exact figures are elusive) and is operated by a state-owned enterprise, Shanghai United Media Group.⁸⁷ Also like CGTN, Sixth Tone answers to Chinese censorship regulations.⁸⁸ As the then-editorial

Despite the investment and hype, the CGTN relaunch did little to resolve the internal structural issues that undermine CGTN’s ability to be a truly pro-active and agenda-setting agency.

director, formerly of *The Wall Street Journal* and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, noted in an interview, Sixth Tone faces all the usual constraints and sensitivities of any media in China.⁸⁹ Examination of broad political issues underpinning individual stories tends to be absent from Sixth Tone stories. Despite this, Sixth Tone has an entirely different look and feel to CGTN, and indeed, some savvy China-watchers are not even aware that Sixth Tone is Chinese Government media.

The factors behind this difference relate closely to the internal structural challenges faced by CGTN set out above. One aspect is the choice of content. In order to appeal to international audiences, it aims to “humanise” China news. According to founding editor-in-chief Wei Xing, “If we cover a very big topic, we prefer to cover the topic with people stories ... We want to go beyond the reports, to go to people’s homes.”⁹⁰

None of the stories of exclusion, information-hoarding, lack of motivation, or lack of trust that characterise experiences at CGTN are a feature of the work environment at Sixth Tone.

Appealing content reflects a shared sense of what is newsworthy. It is a function of the organisational culture. None of the stories of exclusion, information-hoarding, lack of motivation, or lack of trust that characterise experiences at CGTN are a feature of the work environment at Sixth Tone. The organisation is of course much smaller than CGTN, so it is easier to have informal interactions among staff. Teams are close, and the atmosphere is described as being relaxed. Interviewees reported that staff at Sixth Tone are passionate about what they do, which is in direct contrast to CGTN.⁹¹ Another contrast is the hierarchy, which while heavy and closed at CGTN, is deliberately flat at Sixth Tone. The appointment of a non-Chinese editorial director is a move that would be extremely unlikely to occur at CGTN. Sixth Tone’s success has been noticed, and it is starting to bureaucratise, imposing organisational structures like those at CGTN. There are signs that it is already beginning to slow down.

CONCLUSION

While most Western analysts argue that it is the connection with the Chinese party-state that fundamentally challenges CGTN’s international legitimacy, the Sixth Tone example demonstrates that there is more to the story. The research for this paper shows that rather than party-state control, it is certain factors within the organisational culture, that prevents CGTN from achieving its goals of shaping the global news agenda and telling a positive story of China to the world.⁹² The combination of political and institutional constraints, differences in media and cultural traditions, and levels of knowledge and skills are a common — but not inevitable — challenge to much Chinese international communication.⁹³

There is considerable concern about Chinese influence in Australia and around the world. This concern is largely articulated in terms of China as an authoritarian party-state engaging in Leninist-style ‘propaganda warfare’ to actively shape and constrain ideas and public opinion in the global arena. Australian researchers, among others, argue that media can

be an effective tool of public diplomacy and soft power when underpinned by a coherent strategy, resources, and a sophisticated approach.⁹⁴ Chinese state media such as CGTN comes under scrutiny for its potential to shape global narratives. And using its media to shift the West's perceived monopoly over discourse power is precisely China's stated aim.

An examination of the workplace culture of state-owned media like CGTN shows that the working environment for employees greatly undermines the style and substance of what the organisation produces. The organisational culture within CGTN actually hinders it in achieving its ambitions as a source of global influence. The example of Sixth Tone highlights CGTN's ineffectiveness.

While a radical organisational transformation of CGTN might be possible, no-one among the interviewees for this research thought that was likely. For many, changes such as hiring more international staff and the rebrand are little more than cosmetic adjustments. Rather, CGTN is likely to continue on its current path for the foreseeable future. With this approach, China's ability to either shape global opinion or enhance its own image — in the West at least — is unlikely to be successful.

NOTES

¹ The term ‘party-state’ is used in this paper to describe the complex combination of the Chinese Communist Party and the structures of government and administration (state). Many Western commentators tend to try to make sense of the Chinese party-state system by using familiar terminology such as ‘president’ and ‘party’. However, using these kinds of classifications to describe Chinese political structures hides important differences. Politics, power, and governance in China are in many ways simply not comparable to their Western counterparts.

² For more on the narratives that underpin China’s worldview, see Merriden Varrall, *Chinese Worldviews and China’s Foreign Policy*, Lowy Institute Analysis Paper (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2015), <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/chinese-worldviews-and-china-s-foreign-policy>.

³ See, for example, “China Says US Hying Threat to Justify Own Rising Defense Spending”, Reuters, 22 March 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-defence/china-says-us-hying-threat-to-justify-own-rising-defense-spending-idUSKCN1R315E>; Li Ruohan, “Time to bury ‘China threat theory’: FM”, *Global Times*, 3 August 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1092448.shtml>.

⁴ “Xi Jinping’s 19 August Speech Revealed? (Translation)”, China Copyright and Media, 12 November 2013 (updated 22 December 2014), <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/11/12/xi-jinpings-19-august-speech-revealed-translation/>.

⁵ See, for example, Gifford Malone, “Managing Public Diplomacy”, *The Washington Quarterly* 8, No 3 (1985), 199.

⁶ I am using the notion of soft power in the basic Joseph Nye sense; that is, efforts to attract others to want what you want: see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004). William Callahan argues convincingly that China does not understand soft power in the same way as Nye. Callahan demonstrates that China also uses soft power “negatively” for domestic messaging to maintain regime legitimacy: see William Callahan, “Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream”, *Politics* 35, Issues 3–4 (2015), 216–229. However, despite this being the case, it does not preclude China from also attempting to achieve soft power externally in the fundamental Nye sense, or attempting to influence global debates to be more aligned with its preferred discourse.

⁷ Annmarie O’Keeffe and Alex Oliver, *International Broadcasting and Its Contribution to Public Diplomacy*, Lowy Institute Policy Analysis paper (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2010), 32, <https://archive.lowyinstitute.org/publications/international-broadcasting-and-its-contribution-public-diplomacy>.

⁸ Zhang, Xiaoling, “China’s International Broadcasting: A Case Study of CCTV International”, in Jian Wang ed, *Soft Power in China: Diplomacy Through Communication* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 57–72.

⁹ Anna Nelson, *CCTV International Expansion: China’s Grand Strategy for Media? A Report to the Centre for International Media Assistance* (Washington DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2013),

https://www.centerforinternationalmediaassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CIMA-China-Anne-Nelson_0.pdf.

¹⁰ Sambuddha Mustafi, "Sino the Times: Can China's Billions Buy Media Credibility?", *Colombia Journalism Review*, May/June 2012, https://archives.cjr.org/feature/sino_the_times.php.

¹¹ O'Keeffe and Oliver, *International Broadcasting and Its Contribution to Public Diplomacy*, 40.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ It was fully funded by government through the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) until 2014. The licence fee is now supplemented by additional funding from the FCO. See National Audit Office, "BBC World Service: Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General presented to the BBC Trust Value for Money Committee", 14 June 2016, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BBC-World-Service-1.pdf>.

¹⁴ BBC, "The Royal Charter", <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/charter>.

¹⁵ See, for example, Mark Thomson, "Mark Thompson: BBC News Vital to UK's Overseas Image", *The Guardian*, 12 May 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/may/11/mark-thompson-bbc-image>. Thomson cited research commissioned by the BBC which found that four out of five opinion-formers in four countries said that the corporation made them think more positively about Britain. That places the BBC above the Premier League, overseas aid, and UK pop culture in a list of the most influential British institutions. The research was conducted by Human Capital.

¹⁶ The rebranded CGTN includes both digital and television, but follows a "mobile-first" strategy with the goal of fulfilling "the demands of global viewers and users for easier access to content on different platforms": "Who We Are", CGTN website, <https://www.cgtn.com/about-us>, accessed 3 August 2017; see also Patrick Frater, "CCTV International Channels Relaunched as CGTN", *Variety*, 4 January 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/tv/asia/cctv-international-channels-relaunch-cgtn-1201952228/>.

¹⁷ David Bandurski, "The Baffling Makeover of CCTV's Global Push", Medium, 5 January 2017, <https://medium.com/@cmphku/cgtn-another-soft-power-conflagration-c1cb30525057>.

¹⁸ "China's State Broadcaster CCTV Rebrands International Networks as CGTN in Global Push", *South China Morning Post*, 31 December 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2058429/chinas-state-broadcaster-cctv-rebrands-international>.

¹⁹ "Who We Are", CGTN website, accessed 3 August 2017; see also Frater, "CCTV International Channels Relaunched as CGTN".

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 153.

²² Ibid., 151.

²³ Ying Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 169.

- ²⁴ Zhu Muzhi, *Dali jiaqiang guoji yulun douzheng [Vigorously Strengthening the Struggle for International Public Opinion]* (Beijing: Intercontinental Publishing House, 1995), 232.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.
- ²⁶ *Shandong sheng duiwai xuanchuan gongzuo huiban ziliao 1992–1998 [Shandong Province Foreign Propaganda Work Reference Materials 1992–1998]*, Shandong: n.p., 1998.
- ²⁷ Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, 156.
- ²⁸ Yiyi Lu, “Challenges for China’s International Communication”, in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu eds, *China’s Soft Power and International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104. See also Sun Wanning, “Mission Impossible? Soft Power, Communication Capacity, and the Globalization of Chinese Media”, *International Journal of Communication* 4 (2010), 54–72.
- ²⁹ “Beijing in 45b Yuan Global Media Drive”, *South China Morning Post*, 13 January 2009, <http://www.scmp.com/article/666847/beijing-45b-yuan-global-media-drive>.
- ³⁰ Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 174.
- ³¹ Nelson, *CCTV International Expansion: China’s Grand Strategy for Media? A Report to the Centre for International Media Assistance*, 15.
- ³² Justin Heifetz, “Beijing and the Nonsense News Hour: A View from Inside China’s Propaganda Machine”, 19 August 2015, <http://www.metroweekly.com/2015/08/beijing-and-the-nonsense-news-hour/>.
- ³³ “Views of China and Russia Decline In Global Poll”, BBC Press Release, 6 February 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/02_february/06/poll.shtml.
- ³⁴ Guo Ji, translated by David Bandurski, “Freedom of Speech and the Media’s Responsibility”, *Qiushi*, 16 August 2009, *China Digital Times*, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/08/guo-ji-%E9%83%AD%E7%BA%AA-freedom-of-speech-and-the-media%E2%80%99s-responsibility/>.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 169.
- ³⁷ “Beijing in 45b Yuan Global Media Drive”.
- ³⁸ “Xi Jinping’s 19 August Speech Revealed? (Translation)”.
- ³⁹ Edward Wong, “Xi Jinping’s News Alert: Chinese Media Must Serve the Party”, *The New York Times*, 22 February 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/world/asia/china-media-policy-xi-jinping.html>.
- ⁴⁰ “‘Sing for the New Era’: Chinese Journalists Told to Spread the Word on Xi Jinping’s Ideology”, *South China Morning Post*, 8 November 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2118958/sing-new-era-chinese-journalists-told-spread-word-xis>.
- ⁴¹ “Xi Jinping’s 19 August Speech Revealed? (Translation)”.

⁴² Interview by Anne-Marie Brady with senior Public Relations Association official, December 2002. Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, 169.

⁴³ As noted in Yiyi Lu, “Challenges for China’s International Communication”, in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu eds, *China’s Soft Power and International Relations*, 116.

⁴⁴ Si Si, “Expansion of International Broadcasting: The Growing Global Reach of China Central Television”, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, July 2014, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-01/Expansion%20of%20International%20Broadcasting.pdf>.

⁴⁵ As John Jirik notes, Chinese state media including CCTV is widespread in Africa. While it is unclear how many people actually watch it, what matters for soft power is who is watching. Even if the audience is small, if the viewers are opinion-makers with influence, it could still result in some policy influence. “CCTV News and Soft Power”, *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016), 3544–3545.

⁴⁶ O’Keeffe and Oliver, *International Broadcasting and Its Contribution to Public Diplomacy*, 33.

⁴⁷ Si, “Expansion of International Broadcasting: The Growing Global Reach of China Central Television”.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Yu-shan Wu, “The Rise of China’s State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa”, China in Africa Project, South African Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper No 117, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/146130/saia_sop_%20117_wu_20120618.pdf.

⁴⁹ Si, “Expansion of International Broadcasting: The Growing Global Reach of China Central Television”, 15. There does not appear to be more recent data than this available. Note: until early 2018, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, or SARFT, was under the State Council, but since March 2018, the functions of the movie and TV industry regulation have been moved to report to the CCP’s Propaganda Department.

⁵⁰ John Jirik, “The PRC’s ‘Going Out’ Project: CCTV International and the Imagination of a Chinese Nation”, Lehigh University, https://www.academia.edu/10789811/The_PRC_s_going_out_project_CCTV_International_and_the_imagination_of_a_Chinese_nation.

⁵¹ Terry Flew, “CGTN: China’s Latest Attempt to Win Friends and Influence People”, *Asia Dialogue*, 1 May 2017, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2017/05/01/cgtn-chinas-latest-attempt-to-win-friends-and-influence-people/>.

⁵² Yiyi Lu, “Challenges for China’s International Communication”, in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu eds, *China’s Soft Power and International Relations*, 117.

⁵³ The research findings explored here are based on an extensive literature review of Chinese and English-language sources. In addition to a number of conversations in person and over email and phone with media scholars and analysts and discussions in Beijing with expats and Chinese with knowledge of this topic, I also interviewed ten current and former employees of CGTN/ CCTV, and current and former employees of other state-owned media including *Global Times* and *China Daily*. I interviewed employees from both CGTN’s digital and

news channel, male and female. The majority of interviews were with international staff. It was very difficult to get interviews, and my requests were turned down in several cases. All interviewees insisted on total anonymity. As such I have needed to be deliberately vague about ascribing comments to individuals.

⁵⁴ This opinion was held by several of the international staff interviewed in Beijing in August 2017.

⁵⁵ Interview with CGTN employee (international) #1, Beijing, August 2017.

⁵⁶ Lu Yiyi, "Challenges for China's International Communication", in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu eds, *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, 106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 109.

⁵⁸ Interview with former CGTN employee (international) #1, Beijing, August 2017.

⁵⁹ Western media outlets can also be guilty of this kind of reporting. See, for example, Reuters/AP, "More than 100 goats escape corral", ABC, 4 August 2018: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-04/more-than-100-goats-escape-in-boise-and-feast-on-local-lawns/10073600>.

⁶⁰ Email interview with Sixth Tone employee (international) #1, January 2018.

⁶¹ In addition to comments from interviewees, see also Mustafi, "Sino the Times: Can China's Billions Buy Media Credibility?". Mustafi quotes a Chinese journalist as saying, "We are doing news here, not propaganda, and people must know that. No media is without an agenda. If you look at BBC or CNN, they won't harm their national interest. So you cannot expect CCTV to go against Chinese interests." Prominent Chinese journalist and host of *Dialogue*, Yang Rui, expresses similar views in an interview, noting that "Professionals from the same media industry, Western and Chinese, agree universally that there's no absolute impartiality": Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 183.

⁶² Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 179. The idea that Chinese media had an important role to play in rebalancing international discourses was shared among a number of interviewees. It reflects a debate in journalism studies about different journalistic models, and what therefore constitutes legitimate 'news'. While it is the dominant model, the Anglo-American approach to news that Australian, North American and British audiences are familiar with is only one of several options. In China, newsmaking differs from the Anglo-American approach, which is usually described as "objective, adversarial, balanced and predominantly focused on 'bad' news". In China, the media is traditionally less confrontational, more government-oriented, selectively balanced, and tends to focus on the positive: see Dani Madrid-Morales, "La internacionalización de los medios de comunicación chinos: un estudio de la producción periodística en CGTN África [The Internationalization of Chinese Media: A Production Study of CGTN Africa]", *Communication Papers* 6, no 11 (2017), 51–69.

⁶³ Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 182.

⁶⁴ Email interview with Sixth Tone employee (international) #1, January 2018.

⁶⁵ Interview with former CGTN employee (international) #4, Beijing, August 2017.

⁶⁶ While there are many factors influencing output levels and direct comparisons cannot be made, in top-tier Australian media, it is uncommon to have a set quota,

but expectations could range from filing several stories across the course of a week to six pieces per day.

⁶⁷ Email interview with Sixth Tone employee (international) #1, January 2018.

⁶⁸ John Pomfret, "From China's Mouth to Texans' Ears: Outreach Includes Small Station in Galveston", *The Washington Post*, 25 April 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/24/AR2010042402492.html?noredirect=on>.

⁶⁹ Interview with CGTN employee (international) #2, Beijing, August 2017.

⁷⁰ Email interview with CGTN employee (international) #3, January 2018.

⁷¹ There is considerable literature on the complex attitude towards the foreign in China, but see, for example, Geremie Barme, "To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic: China's Avant-garde Nationalists", *The China Journal* 34 (1995), 209–234.

⁷² Interview with CGTN employee (international) #4, Beijing, August 2018.

⁷³ Email interview with CGTN employee (international) #3, January 2018.

⁷⁴ Interview with international media journalist #1, Beijing, August 2017.

⁷⁵ Interview with CGTN employee (international) #1, Beijing, August 2018.

⁷⁶ Interview with former CGTN employee (international) #4, Beijing, August 2018.

⁷⁷ Interview with former GTN employee (international) #4, Beijing, August 2018.

⁷⁸ For more on Chinese media censorship at CGTN, see for example Pál Nyiri, *Reporting for China: How Chinese Correspondents Work with the World* (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2017), 31–35, and Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 23–27, 99–103.

⁷⁹ Nyiri, *Reporting for China: How Chinese Correspondents Work with the World*, 31.

⁸⁰ Ai Weiwei, "How Censorship Works", *The New York Times*, 6 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/06/opinion/sunday/ai-weiwei-how-censorship-works.html>.

⁸¹ Interview with CGTN employee (international) #1, Beijing August 2017.

⁸² Interview with CGTN employee (international) #2, Beijing, August 2018.

⁸³ Communication with CGTN employee (international) # 3 over WeChat, December 2017.

⁸⁴ Email interview with CGTN employee (international) #3, January 2018.

⁸⁵ Interview with CGTN employee (international) #4, Beijing, August 2017.

⁸⁶ David Bandurski, "The Baffling Makeover of CCTV's Global Push", Medium, 5 January 2017, <https://medium.com/@cmphku/cgtn-another-soft-power-conflagration-c1cb30525057>.

⁸⁷ There are considerable complexities around state involvement in media ownership, and how various media organisations report to the government or party, that are beyond the scope of this paper to examine. Fundamentally, all media is 'official'. Media transformation and reform in China has not created an independent, private media, rather, media organisations are always under central control, even when an element of editorial freedom can be observed (Zhao Yuezhi, 2004). See also Maria Repnikova 2017 and Yu Haiqing 2009.

⁸⁸ For more on Chinese media censorship at CGTN, see for example Nyiri, *Reporting for China: How Chinese Correspondents Work with the World*, 31–35, and Zhu, *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*, 23–27, 99–103.

⁸⁹ “Voices on China — Colum Murphy: Editorial Director of Sixth Tone”, Young China Watchers, <http://www.youngchinawatchers.com/voices-on-china-colum-murphy-editorial-director-of-sixth-tone/>

⁹⁰ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Explained: A New Chinese Media Start-up Hopes to Appeal to US. Readers. But Beijing’s Censorship May Get in Its Way”, *Foreign Policy*, 3 June 2016,

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/03/china-explained-sixth-tone-is-chinas-latest-party-approved-outlet-humanizing-news/>

⁹¹ Email interview with Sixth Tone employee (international), #1, January 2018.

⁹² Following the research of Wu, “The Rise of China’s State-led Media Dynasty in Africa”.

⁹³ Lu Yiyi, “Challenges for China’s International Communication”, in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu eds, *China’s Soft Power and International Relations*, 106.

⁹⁴ This is a key finding in a report by the Commonwealth of Australia, *Australia’s Public Diplomacy: Building our Image*, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, August 2007, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/Completed_inquiries/2004-07/public_diplomacy/report/index.

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