

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Chinese Media 'Going Out' in Spanish Speaking Countries: The Case of CGTN-Español

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In the context of an accelerated 'media going-out' policy (SARFT, 2001), China Central Television launched in 2007 its Spanish-language channel: China Global Television Network en Español (CGTN-Español, formerly known as CCTV-Español). Born as a top-down initiative to enhance the country's soft power (Nye, 1990), CGTN-Español has been tasked with promoting Chinese culture, creating an alternative media discourse and making Beijing's official voice heard and understood in Spanish speaking countries.

This article aims to study the development of CGTN-Español, as a vehicle of China's 'multichannel, multiform and multilevel' soft power strategy (CPC Central Committee, 2011), at international level. At methodological level, it mainly draws on the review and analysis of a wide range of materials: official documents of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government, sectoral reports of the State Administration of Press, Publishing, Radio, Film and Television, publications on Chinese TV industry, CCTV's yearbooks and unpublished internal documents.

Firstly, it addresses the economic-political and cultural factors that led to the establishment of the Beijing-based Spanish language service. Secondly, it explores how the general agenda of the 'media going-out' policy has affected CGTN-Español in terms of staff, production, programming and audience strategy, while factors like cultural proximity, content distinctiveness and local audiences' tastes have also been taken into consideration. Finally, the article discusses the reception and audience of CGTN-Español. It concludes that CGTN-Español, with its China-focused and cultural and linguistically adapted offering, contributes to the achievement of the goal of the 'media going-out' policy; however, this contribution is largely limited by its low visibility, which points to some inherent problems of the policy itself.

Keywords: CGTN-Español; 'media going-out' policy; soft power; Spanish speaking countries

Introduction

As China continues expanding its influence on the global economy, it is now originating media flows that might potentially change the global media landscape as well. This is largely due to the accelerated 'media going-out' policy launched in 2009 as part of a government-led drive to accrue 'soft power' (Nye, 1990, 2004). Organisations such as Central China Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI), Xinhua News Agency and the *People's Daily* have therefore been tasked with providing an alternative to dominant Western media discourse and presenting China's own perspective on major international issues and events.

The unprecedented global expansion of Chinese media has become a hotly debated subject in the academic field, for which literature has been produced from disciplines such as media and political studies (e.g. Zhang, 2009, 2011; Sun, 2010; Thusu, De Burgh & Shi, 2017), with much of them concerning CCTV (e.g. Jirik, 2008, 2016; Zhu, 2012; Gorfinkel *et al.*, 2014; Hu, Ji, & Gong, 2017). A lot has been said and written about how Chinese media –state media in particular– within the general framework of the 'media going-out' policy but also motivated by their own interests, strive to generate global impact. However, most academic publications regarding this theme are based on their English-language international offering. This research horizon needs to be extended, since much has changed since Chinese media started their internationalisation, and one of the most significant changes is that they have vastly diversified their international offering in linguistic terms when seeking entry into new territories.

As a representative example, CCTV has grown from an organisation with national scope that broadcast exclusively in Mandarin Chinese into a global network with seven international channels broadcasting in six languages. Its Spanish-language channel China Global Television Network en Español (CGTN-Español, formerly known as CCTV-Español) was put on air in 2007 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'¹ in Spanish speaking countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): this region was long considered of limited significance but in the last decade has been one of the emerging priorities for the Chinese leadership.

This article addresses the following main research question: how is CGTN-Español positioned in relation to China's 'media going-out' policy and soft power strategy? It opens with a review of two related concepts, 'soft power' and 'going-out', as Chinese politicians and academics use them and as they relate to CCTV's international expansion. Secondly, CCTV's practice of broadcasting in the Spanish language is studied within the wider context of the importance of the Spanish geo-cultural region and China's growing interests in LAC. A detailed analysis of CGTN-Español's staff, production and programming follows, demonstrating that the general agenda of the 'media going-out' policy that led to its launch in the first place has also largely determined its development strategy. Finally, the article discusses the reception and audience of the channel. It is concluded that even though CGTN-Español, with a China-focused and culturally and linguistically adapted offering, had achieved better market penetration by 2017, its audience and visibility was still low; therefore, its contribution to the achievement of the goal of the 'media going-out' policy was limited. This provides the base for the discussion of some inherent problems of the policy itself.

At the methodological level, this article mainly draws on the analysis of a wide range of materials: official documents of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese government, sectoral reports of the State Administration of Press, Publishing, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), academic work and press articles on the Chinese TV industry, CCTV's yearbooks and the official website of CGTN-Español. Another important data source consists of two unpublished internal CCTV documents provided by CGTN-Español personnel to the authors in 2014 (CGTN-Español, 2014a, 2014b), which normally remain inaccessible to the

general public. Part of the passages about staffing and the reception of CGTN-Español have been written based on these documents. This article also reflects two in-depth interviews with Professor Hugo de Burgh and Professor Daya Thussu, both experts on the Chinese media and its internationalisation.²

The 'media going-out' policy, soft power, and CCTV's international expansion

China's 'media going-out' policy has its origin in the 'going-out' initiative proposed in October 2000 in the Fifth Plenary Session of the 15th Central Committee of the CPC, which marked the start of a policy shift in the economic field in support of overseas investment by Chinese enterprises. Later, China announced that similar efforts would also be made in the cultural field.³ A more detailed document with concrete measures to promote Chinese culture at international level was launched in 2011 (CPC Central Committee, 2011). According to this planning, the 'multichannel, multiform and multilevel' going-out policy includes support for the launch of overseas bureaux of the main media organisations, the establishment of Chinese Culture Centres and Confucius Institutes in different countries, and the training of export-oriented cultural enterprises and intermediary agencies.

As for the media sector, an accelerated 'going-out' policy was launched in 2009 with the adoption of the *2009–2020 Master Plan for the International Communication Capacity Building of China's Major Media* (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2009), which concerns the six main state media – CCTV, CRI, People's Daily, China Daily, Xinhua Agency and China News Agency – and the announcement of a drastic increase in funds destined for the 'media going-out' policy. Although there is no official data on the state investment amount, a press article⁴ published in January 2009 commented that the central government was willing to spend up to approximately 6 billion US dollars during the next few years. The involved media organisations have been focusing their resources on expanding their overseas bureaux as well as creating new outputs – usually in foreign languages and better adapted to their target markets.

This change had to do with the image crisis that China went through during the pre-Olympic Games period in 2008 (Zhu, 2012). Then, when Chinese media focused on issues such as infrastructure, transport, public safety and air quality, most Western media covered China news related to human rights and Tibetan unrest. The government started a media offensive aimed at counteracting negative reporting and protecting the image of the country. As Chinese officials repeatedly stated,⁵ it would be unrealistic to expect that Western media would tell stories from a Chinese perspective; however, Chinese media, once it possessed global reach, would be able to provide different China narratives.

In some senses, China's aim of 'making Beijing's official voice heard and understood in the world' is not new. Influencing the public and leaders of foreign countries and winning over foreign public opinion, so that the values of the represented country can be understood and accepted abroad, have always been at the core of public diplomacy. Moreover, the 'media going-out' policy must also be seen within the framework of new understandings of power: more concretely, in Joseph Nye's theorisation of soft power (Nye, 1990, 2004). Nye conceptualized soft power as the ability of one country to get 'other countries to want what it wants' (Nye, 1990: 167). China is the place where the concept has come to have its greatest influence: since it was introduced into the country in 1993 by Wang Huning, current member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC, it has penetrated into the Chinese political and academic lexicon as deeply and broadly as no other term of international relations ever has (Wang, 2008; Flew, 2016).

It should be noted that when Nye first coined his soft power theory in 1990, he was confident about American soft power and used it as an argument against the 'America is in decline' opinion. In the case of China, this concept was embraced partially because of Beijing's deep concerns that its soft power still lagged behind its international standing.⁶ The pursuit of

greater soft power, thus, has become one of the primary targets of China's foreign policy. Among the three main sources of soft power identified by Nye (2011: 84) – culture, political values and foreign policy – China has attached special importance to culture, particularly traditional Chinese culture: expressions such as 'cultural soft power' are commonly used in Chinese political discourse, academic literature and related media content. Moreover, media have always been one of the focuses of Chinese debates on soft power, as many Chinese scholars (for example, Chen, 2007; Zhao, 2013) have argued that capability and effectiveness in mass communications are essential aspects of a state's soft power.

However, as some analysts (for example, Glaser & Murphy, 2009; Flew, 2016) have observed, China's approach to soft power is not entirely the same as Nye's original proposition, but rather a version with 'Chinese characteristics'. The main difference concerns relations between governmental and popular dimensions of soft power, or the roles assumed by state and non-state actors. When Nye (1990: 2011) argued his case about American soft power, he used primarily examples from civil society, such as American pop music and Hollywood cinema. In the case of China, however, although it has yet to develop a comprehensive and coherent national soft-power strategy (Glaser & Murphy, 2009), most initiatives towards this end have derived from the Party-state. This state-centred approach has made state-owned media organisations key actors of China's soft power strategies, with the 'media going-out' policy one of the most prominent examples and CCTV's international broadcasting services one of its spearheads.

The plan to turn CCTV into a soft power institution began to take shape with the launch in 2000 of CCTV-9, an English-language international channel. It was subsequently turned into a 24-hour news service with the hope that it would eventually become 'China's CNN, only cleverer' (Jirik, 2008: 83). In 2001 – shortly after the launch of the original economic-focused 'going-out' policy – a document issued by the SARFT (2011) made explicit reference to CCTV's overseas expansion while defining the main tasks of the 'going-out' project in the radio, film and television industries:

[...] In ten years, Chinese radio, television and film should be able to compete with the Western media abroad; CCTV's channel, in particular, should broadcast in multiple languages and locally, so that our sound and image can be wherever there is sound and image of Western media. Chinese radio, television and film programmes can make a great impact worldwide, and considerably change the situation of weakness facing Western media in the field of international communication.

With support from the Party-state, CCTV's global broadcasting network grew and diversified in linguistic terms over the next decade. Between 2004 and 2011, six more non-Chinese-language international channels were successively launched, including the bilingual Spanish/French-language channel CCTV-E&F (later replaced by CCTV-Español and CCTV-Français), the Russian language service CCTV-Русский, the Arabic language service CCTV-العربية, and a second English language channel, CCTV- 9 Documentary. Currently, CCTV is the only television broadcaster in the world with a 24/7 offering in all six official languages of the United Nations. On 31 December 2016, CCTV rebranded its international networks and digital presence under the name China Global Television Network (CGTN) as part of a push to consolidate its worldwide reach; all of its non-Chinese language channels were simultaneously relaunched to bear the CGTN name.

The expansion in international output has been supported by the development of a global newsgathering and production network, composed of the headquarters based in Beijing, two overseas divisions (CGTN America and CGTN Africa), five regional centres (Middle East, Asia

Pacific, Russia, Europe and Latin America), and 63 overseas bureaux. By 2012, these overseas units employed approximately 500 people (SAPPRFT, 2013: 150). Meanwhile, the creation of CGTN Africa in Nairobi and CGTN America in Washington DC in 2012 marked the formation of CCTV's global centre-hub content production and broadcasting system. The centre, which refers to its headquarters in Beijing, is where international channels share the resources of CCTV with its domestic divisions; this is also where CCTV's general editorial line is defined. As hubs, both overseas divisions enjoy a certain editorial autonomy; each of them produces programmes for CGTN-News, including live newscasts. However, to guarantee ultimate control from the centre, the signals sent from Washington and Nairobi always have to pass through Beijing before they are broadcast (Jirik, 2016: 3539–3540).

Official data show that by 2013, CCTV broadcast in 171 countries and territories, with an estimated potential audience of 314 million households (Zeng, 2013: 67). CCTV's international channels are also carried by the Great Wall Satellite Television Platform (GWTV), a broadcasting platform operated by the state-owned and fully CCTV-funded China International Television Corp (CITVC) that bundles a series of China-based television channels in its different regional service packages. In addition, free live online streaming (formerly via China Network Television and currently via CGTN's own website) is available in more than 210 countries (CCTV, 2017).

However, as we discuss later, CCTV's overseas expansion plan, and even the 'media going-out' policy from which it receives guidance and support, have their limitations. 'Going-out' is but the first step of the task, when 'going-in' – not only into the target markets, but also into the hearts and minds of the audiences – is what ultimately matters. In this respect, Nye (2011: 84) emphasizes that 'with soft power, what the target thinks is particularly important, and the targets matter as much as the agents. Attraction and persuasion are socially constructed. Soft power is a dance that requires partners'. If soft power consists of the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion, then CCTV, as a soft power institution, will only be able to deliver what the Party-state has tasked it with when there are people actually watching, listening and believing.

Spanish language, China-LAC relations and the launch of CGTN-Español

As part of CCTV's international multilingual network, the history of CGTN-Español goes back to January 1, 2004, when CCTV made the first experimental transmission of several programmes in the Spanish language. Nine months later, the bilingual channel CCTV-E&F was launched, broadcasting 12 hours of programmes in Spanish and 12 hours in French a day; most content in both languages was China-focused. The overseas expansion of the channel was rapid: by October 2007, it was distributed in 36 countries and regions and had a potential audience of four million households (CCTV, 2007).

On October 1, 2007, CCTV-E&F was replaced by the Spanish-language CCTV-Español channel and the French-language CCTV-Français. The broadcaster declared that this change was made to satisfy the needs of audiences in Spanish and French speaking regions (CCTV, 2007). Some researchers link this decision with a visit by Li Changchun to Mexico, Venezuela, Suriname and Peru (e.g. Madrid-Morales, 2015). This is because Li, as member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC (2002–2012), was the main responsible for the party's cultural and ideological works and therefore a key figure behind the 'media going-out' policy.

Although there might not be any clearly cut cause-effect relation between Li's trip and the launching of CCTV's Spanish-language service, it makes sense to see the evolution of CCTV's overseas expansion strategy in the broader context of China's pursuit of soft power and the country's global interests. The Party-state made clear that CCTV's international channels exist to promote China's image abroad and influence the conditions under which China

would attempt to expand its international standing. Thus, despite the government's increasing engagement in the international communication field, not all regions of the world are of equal importance to the Chinese agenda.

At least two factors should be taken into account when addressing the position of CGTN in relation to China's 'media going-out' policy and soft power strategy. The first one is the status of the Spanish language: with more than 472 million native speakers and over 567 million potential speakers, it is the world's second language by number of native speakers and the second language of international communication (Cervantes Institute, 2016). Thus, for CCTV, and other broadcasters with international scope, the Spanish geo-cultural region is an undeniable market. Several other transnational operators have launched Spanish-language channels – the most prominent examples include CNN en Español, created in 1997, RT en Español, started in 2009, and France 24 en Español, launched in 2017.

The effectiveness of these initiatives is supported by cultural proximity theory. Studies of scholars as Straubhaar (1991, 2007) or Sinclair (1998, 2000) suggest that despite the inevitable trend of globalisation, nationalism, or at least regionalism, still exists in the international television field. This is reflected, for example, in the preferences of viewers for locally produced content or programmes produced in the same geo-linguistic or geo-cultural region. Such preferences do not only 'lead television industries and advertisers to produce more programming nationally and to select an increasing proportion of what is imported from within the same region, language group, and culture' (Straubhaar, 1991: 36), but also encourage those television channels serving an international audience to linguistically and culturally adapt their offerings (Straubhaar and Duarte, 2005).

The second factor consists of the increasing interest of China in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). For China, this region can not only provide it with abundant extractive raw materials, but also with growing markets that Chinese products can enter without much difficulty. Consequently, contacts between China and LAC have been significantly strengthened during the last decade, particularly regarding trade and investment. The volume of bilateral trade between China and LAC reached its historic peak in 2013 with an annual total of 278 billion dollars – 20 times greater than that of 2000 (CEPAL, 2015: 19). China also conducted 303 foreign direct investment (FDI) transactions in this region between 2001 and 2016, with a total volume of more than 113 billion dollars (Dussel Peters & Ortiz Velásquez, 2017: 2) in a wide range of industries, from oil and metals extraction to information technology, electricity, and infrastructure. China has overtaken the European Union to become LAC's second-largest trading partner and third largest source of investment.⁷

In the political field, two policy papers on Latin America and the Caribbean (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008, 2016) have been released by the Chinese government to establish the long-term goals of China's policy in this region. Between 2013 and 2016 President Xi Jinping paid three state visits to LAC. Shortly after his second visit in 2014, a new cooperation framework⁸ was proposed by the Chinese government to strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation and promote common development. In January 2015, the China-CELAC Forum, which includes China and the 33 member states of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), was founded. It aims to promote 'the development of the comprehensive cooperative partnership based on equality, mutual benefit and common development between China and LAC states' (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016).

Cultural exchanges between China and LAC have been increasing as well, with language-learning the main vehicle. While Spanish has become one of the most popular second languages among Chinese people, Mandarin Chinese learning has been bolstered in LAC by the establishment of 39 Confucius Institutes and 11 Confucius Classrooms in the region, with over 50,000 students currently learning Mandarin and other aspects of Chinese culture (Huang, 2018).

North America and Western Europe were once the priority of the 'media going-out' policy and the main target markets of the going-global Chinese media (SARFT, 2001) due to their great influence in international relations (Tang & Liu, 2011). As China gradually deepens its understanding of the international media scene, however, it has become aware that it is an extremely arduous task to dislodge Western media from their global dominance, at least in the short term. Nevertheless, this dominance may be challenged in territories where the public has not yet been conquered by Western media giants, or in regions of Chinese influence.

The LAC region could be, in this sense, one of these areas. Although the region was traditionally under the influence of the United States and Western Europe, as China and LAC countries become more connected in political and economic fields, Beijing's influence in the region is expanding steadily. Moreover, as some analysts noted, China has become attractive for LAC given 'the widespread perception that the PRC, because of its sustained high rates of economic growth and technology development, will present tremendous business opportunities in the future, and will be a power to be reckoned with globally' (Ellis, 2011: 86). An increasing interest in China can be expected among the people of Latin America and the Caribbean, who would find themselves in increasing need of up-to-date information about China and its people. There would be, thus, a chance for Chinese media and cultural agents to succeed.

CGTN-Español: A closer look

As a vehicle of China's soft power strategy and part of CCTV's growing global network, CGTN-Español has been tasked with promoting Chinese culture, proposing an alternative media discourse and making Beijing's official voice heard and understood in the Spanish speaking countries. The original agenda of the 'media going-out' policy has also largely determined the organisation, production, programming and audience strategy of the channel.

Organisation and staff

Like other CGTN channels, CGTN-Español is based at CCTV headquarters in Beijing, where it employs a mix of Chinese and native Spanish-speaking staff. Under the administration of a general director, the channel is organized into three news programme departments, three non-news programme departments, an interview department, a report department, and a general planning department, each run by a producer and an assistant-producer. CGTN-Español collaborates closely with correspondents of overseas bureaux that CCTV has been establishing in Spanish speaking countries since 2010 – so far, CCTV has five bureaux in the Spanish geo-cultural region (in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela) – as well as the Latin America Centre launched in December 2010 in São Paulo, Brazil.⁹

By mid-2014, in CGTN-Español had 98 employees (CGTN-Español, 2014a). Just like most Chinese state media, its staff is mainly (approximately 75 percent) made up of Chinese nationals (CGTN-Español, 2014a). Proficiency in Spanish is essential for all Chinese employees except camera operatives. Thus, since CCTV first recruited for its future Spanish-language service in 2003, a BA (or higher) degree in Spanish Language has always been required for Chinese candidates; previous experience of studying or living in Spanish-speaking countries has also been positively valued. A BA in Journalism or Media Studies, however, is not a necessary requirement. This is partially because there are few Chinese nationals who speak Spanish, and even fewer are Chinese nationals proficient in Spanish and with media-related educational background or work experience. Consequently, CCTV has decided to recruit university graduates proficient in Spanish hoping that they will grow into qualified journalists, reporters or hosts. However, as Li Zhongyang the CCTV executive pointed out, compared to employees from CCTV's domestic channels, those from its international channels are younger and more highly educated, but their lack of media-related knowledge and work experience

has resulted in amateurism that may have a negative impact on the development of the channel (Li, 2014).

Of the foreign employees of CGTN-Español, 23 in mid-2014 were native Spanish speakers but with quite diverse nationalities (Spanish, Mexican, Colombian, Cuban, Chilean and Venezuelan). Just as in other Chinese state media, these employees are referred to as 'foreign experts'. They are responsible for the philological aspect of the channel's programmes: their duty includes translation, proofreading, dubbing and presenting. Those who work as anchors and hosts – currently five of the 14 anchors and hosts of CGTN-Español are native Spanish – are probably the most visible faces among them. It is expected that they will help to create a friendly and more culturally close image of the channel and this strategy appears to have worked: in a survey conducted by CCTV-Español in 2015,¹⁰ most of them were very well evaluated for their personal image and professionalism.

However, noteworthy is that all the key positions of CGTN-Español – director, vice director, producer and vice producer – are occupied only by Chinese nationals, which implies that the foreign staff are normally excluded from the planning and decision-making processes of the channel. This is not a surprise in Chinese state media organisations such as CCTV, although CGTN (grouping CCTV's foreign language channels) is clearly internationally oriented. This organisational structure is essential to guarantee that the Party-state has ultimate control over the media.

Content production and programming

As a full-time general channel, CGTN-Español's offering features a variety of content, including news and current affairs programmes, documentaries, entertainment programmes and educational programmes. All the programmes are dubbed into Spanish with the exception of Chinese TV dramas, which are issued with subtitles in Spanish. To meet the needs of viewers in different time zones – there is a considerable time difference between Spain and various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean – CGTN-Español arranges its offering into four units of six hours, so that most programmes have, in addition to a first broadcast, retransmissions throughout the day.

News and current affairs programmes, including the main newscast 'CGTN Noticias', the economic news bulletin 'Economía al día', the cultural news bulletin 'Prisma' and the two news magazine shows, 'América ahora' and 'Puntos de vista', take up about 25 per cent of overall airtime. During the first years of broadcasting, there was hardly any production within CGTN-Español; its news output depended almost entirely on content produced by CCTV's domestic channels and its English-language international service. Thus, the job of employees from CGTN-Español's news departments was limited to translating news stories from Chinese and English into Spanish.

However, things have changed since CCTV began to build bureaux in Spain and the LAC region. CGTN-Español is now regularly fed with content produced by correspondents based in these bureaux,¹¹ including latest news and in-depth reports featuring the most debated topics in the region. Meanwhile, CGTN-Español's own reporters (all of them Chinese and now much more experienced) have begun to report on important political, economic, social and cultural events in China. This has led to a significant increase in in-house production (Ye, 2016, 2017).

In line with the general agenda of the 'media going-out' policy, when CGTN-Español started operations in 2007, it made China-related topics the focus of both its news and non-news programmes. This principle has mainly remained intact. An analysis of CGTN-Español's main newscast showed that news stories related to China counted for over 50 per cent of the airtime of the programme, and that the channel's news offering tended to present a Chinese perspective in its coverage on major international issues by foregrounding

the pronouncements of Chinese officials and scholars (Ye, 2017). Generally speaking, major Chinese political events, activities of political leaders and remarkable achievements that China makes in economic and scientific fields, are topics that CGTN-Español's news and current affairs programmes pay great attention to. These topics are also discussed in 'Diálogo', an in-house produced interview programme that brings together government officials, political figures and scholars and intellectuals from China and abroad. However, as Ye (2017) noted, given the role of CGTN-Español as part of the Party-state's external publicity system, its news discourse about China is largely marked by favourable comments towards the Party-state. Critical or negative narrative about the government or the CPC is rather unlikely. If the 'media going-out' policy tasks CGTN-Español with telling China's story, this story appears to have only one version: the one approved by the promoter of the policy. Meanwhile, Chinese culture stands as the pillar of CGTN-Español's non-news offerings. Documentary programmes, for which about 34 per cent of overall airtime is reserved, deal with traditional and folkloric Chinese art, Chinese history, touristic destinations in China, and other topics of the country appealing to foreign viewers. Some of the documentaries have already been distributed in CCTV's domestic channels, including internationally famous titles such as *The Forbidden City* (2006), *A Bite of China I* (2012) and *A Bite of China II* (2014); others come from the documentary-specialized English-language channel CGTN-Documentary. Non-news production within CGTN-Español is still infrequent. Among the few in-house produced titles is a series of short documentaries about traditional Chinese sports, aired in 2009 in 'Tiempo deportivo', a programme dedicated to traditional sports and the development of contemporary sport in China. Other content related to Chinese culture includes 'El proyector' for Chinese television dramas; 'Hora infantil' for Chinese cartoons; the Mandarin Chinese language teaching programme 'Nihao China'; and the cooking show 'De China a tu cocina', which is fed (so to speak) entirely with content produced by the channel.

CGTN-Español's China-focused programming strategy gives it a distinctive profile by making its offering differ significantly from those of its competitors: this may constitute an important comparative advantage in the increasingly crowded international television market. In fact, it has been proved an effective strategy: the cited 2015 survey showed that more than 90 per cent of the respondents considered the channel their main source of information about China and one of the main ways of reaching Chinese culture from abroad.

As a complementary programming strategy, CGTN-Español adapts part of its non-news content to the cultural tradition, tastes and viewing habits of its target audiences. For example, because of the passion of Spanish-speaking sports fans, after the rebranding carried out in mid-2013, CGTN-Español dedicated the second half of two editions of 'CGTN Noticias' to sports news (Ye: 2016, 2017).

As discussed before, Latin America and the Caribbean are one of the priorities of CCTV's international broadcasting; CGTN-Español has a greater interest in this region than in Spain. Thus, the channel has been dedicating most of its resources to the production of scheduled content for the time slot between 5:00 am and 2:00 pm (Chinese local time), which corresponds to prime time in countries such as Mexico, Cuba, Argentina and Venezuela. Another effort from CGTN-Español to meet the needs of the LAC audiences is to allocate an important part of its airtime (19 per cent) to television dramas, given viewers' enthusiasm for *telenovelas*.

In addition, the weekly 30-minute news magazine 'América ahora', launched in 2013, provides in-depth analysis of some of the most debated topics in LAC. It has the same style as 'Americas Now' of the English-language CGTN-News, but its offering is not a simple dubbing of the latter, but a combination of topics selected according to the interest of the LAC audiences and content produced by CCTV's correspondents based in this region.

Likewise, on October 8, 2016, 'Prisma', a cultural news bulletin co-produced by CGTN-Español and TeleSur,¹² was put on air. It is devoted to presenting the major cultural events that take place in LAC and the cultural exchanges between this region and China. With this more sophisticated and extensive form of 'localisation' (Chalaby, 2002), CGTN-Español took a significant step in the process of brand building in LAC.

In sum, significant progress in terms of production and programming has been made by CGTN-Español during its 14 years of broadcasting. First of all, as a full-time Spanish-language channel can better meet the needs of the LAC audiences than its bilingual Spanish/French predecessor. Then, through rebranding carried out in 2011 and 2013, CGTN-Español developed more culturally adapted programming. The significant increase of in-house-produced contents also helped, as they were expected to be more in line with the target audience's needs and tastes than translated and dubbed feeds. However, it may still be too early to say that CCTV's international Spanish-language service has evolved from a largely unprofessional service into a full-scale channel with a diversified and appealing offering. The key concern lies with audience.

Struggles with 'going-in': The audience problem

It is difficult to know how many people are watching CGTN-Español, since there is hardly any data available regarding its potential viewers or its actual audience. During the CCTV-E&F period (2004–2007) and the first years after the launch of the Spanish-language service, CCTV preferred to release only information about its geographical coverage – that is, the extent of the areas covered by the communication satellites that carry CGTN-Español's signal. Official data indicate that by 2012, CGTN-Español was transmitted by PanAmSat 8, 9 and 10 (the current Intelsat 8, 9 and 10) and the Galaxy 3C communication satellites, and thus reached about 98 per cent of the world's countries and territories (Zeng, 2013).

However, such satellite coverage does not necessarily guarantee the penetration of the channel into the markets that it has reached, since 'landing rights permission' is required for most countries. Efforts to 'land' the channel were initiated soon after the launch of CCTV-E&F, firstly in those countries that have traditionally maintained close relations with China. On 17 October 2004 – only 16 days after CCTV-E&F started operations – the channel began to broadcast in Cuba via Telecable's cable platform, although the reception was limited to hotels authorised to receive foreign guests (Xinhua Agency, 2004). As a stand-alone and full-time channel, CGTN-Español has claimed that it has expanded rapidly at international level since its launch in 2007. However, no detailed and up-to-date information about the specific countries in which it has made its entry has been made available by CCTV.

Data from various sources¹³ show that by 2014, CGTN-Español broadcast in 21 countries, including Spain, USA and 15 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where it is commonly available as a subscription-based channel via cable, satellite and IPTV platforms. In most of its target markets, especially in the LAC region, CGTN-Español found itself struggling with 'going-in'. The reception universe remains small, a fact that, according to CCTV, is largely due to the high level of concentration of the pay-TV market and the slow process of digitisation in this region (Zeng, 2013). In addition, despite the relatively high pay-TV penetration rate in LAC the sector is largely taken up by the American operator DirecTV,¹⁴ whose pay-TV platform is saturated with international channels based in the United States and Western Europe and thus very difficult to enter.

Besides local television service providers, CGTN-Español is carried by the cited GWTV platform. Currently, the channel is available to subscribers in the United States, Europe and LAC. CGTN-Español also provides free access and live online streaming of all its content. Between 2009 and 2016, its online broadcasting was through China Network Television (CNTV), the

online division of CCTV, created in 2009. Since 2017 CGTN-Español has synchronised its programming through the website of the new CGTN. In addition, a YouTube channel was launched in 2010, with a selection of regularly updated programmes from the channel. There is no official data about the number of potential viewers of CGTN-Español. In fact, this number is not easy to measure, even for the countries where figures of subscription of the providers carrying the channel are available, since the channel may only be available as part of their add-on packages.¹⁵ Thus, the number of potential viewers of CGTN-Español through one provider – the 'reach' of subscribers – could be smaller than the overall number of subscribers of this provider.

Even more difficult is to know the actual audience of CGTN-Español, because making a channel available does not mean people are watching it. Existing information related to CGTN-Español's audience (CGTN-Español, 2014a, 2014b; Jia, 2010; Madrid-Morales, 2015; Dai & Ding, 2009) suggests that it appears to have an extremely low viewership. First of all, it is not always easy to watch CGTN-Español, even for subscribers to those platforms that carry the channel, because to discover it may take a great effort and a little bit of luck as well.¹⁶ The low viewership may also have to do with the lack of promotion of CGTN-Español and its consequent limited visibility. A survey conducted in 2009 in Lima (Peru) came up with the result that only 19.2 per cent of the participants had ever watched the channel, while over 69 per cent of them had never heard its name (Dai & Ding, 2009). Although the survey was conducted only in one city and with a relatively small sample (only 360 participants), it pointed out the fact that CGTN-Español had not been delivering what the media going-out' policy had tasked it with.

Likewise, three online surveys in Spanish were carried out by CGTN-Español in 2012, 2013 and 2015,¹⁷ in which participants were asked to give information about how often they watched the channel and how they accessed it, and to evaluate different aspects of its offering. Only 15 people participated in the first survey in 2012, of whom 10 had watched the channel at least once; most of the participants had contact with China. In the 2013 survey, the number of participants increased significantly, to 230. More than 40 per cent of them had watched the channel almost every day during the previous week, while nearly 35 per cent of them had watched it more than three times. Finally, the 2015 survey showed that 114 of the 127 participants knew about CGTN-Español. A total of 106 participants said that they had watched the channel: 33 of them had watched it almost every day. They were mostly motivated by wanting to learn about global and Chinese opinion of their own countries, the interest in the channel's offering and the desire to travel to or to live in China. For those who had never watched CGTN-Español, among the main reasons were the impossibility of access to the channel, the lack of interest and the high price of the pay-TV subscription.

It should be noted that these data could be compromised by the fact that these surveys were only available on CCTV's website: compared to the general public, visitors to the CCTV site who had already watched the channel or heard of its name were more likely to learn about these surveys and participate. Thus, the data for CGTN-Español may fail to reveal its actual viewership. Apart from this, informal comments from CGTN-Español's workers indicated the difficulty in obtaining information about its actual audiences; their knowledge regarding this aspect is based mainly on the data occasionally provided by the GWTV platform, and the number of clicks on CNTV's Spanish-language website, which hosted the channel's online broadcasting until the end of 2016. In mid-2014, the daily figure was around 24,000 clicks (CGTN-Español, 2014a).

Within CGTN, CGTN-Español is not the only channel that faces an audience problem. Whereas official information from CCTV tends to use 'potential audience' – understood as the number of households that have access to CGTN's channels – instead of actual audience,

there is hardly any up-to-date data of the latter from academic or industry sources. Flew (2016) noted that there tends to be a 'distributional bias' in Chinese research on media and soft power, where evidence of reach is taken to be synonymous with reception and even with influence. He argued, at the same time, that this bias may have to do with the Chinese understanding of soft power, from which the dimension of reception – the engagement with Chinese cultural and media contents of publics in other countries – is missing. Meanwhile, de Burgh¹⁸ noted that it was not a surprise that there was little study (at least published study) from the Chinese side about the overseas viewership of CCTV, because the results could be embarrassing. Yet Jirik noted, in his doctoral thesis on the English-language news service CCTV-9, that its viewer figures were 'very low' and not high enough to justify carriage of the channel by commercial operators (Jirik, 2008: 85).

Final remarks: reconsidering the 'media going-out' policy

China has made it clear that it wants to reshape its national image, to expand its soft power and to have a stronger voice in major international issues. Great importance has been attached to the mass media: while Western media have long been blamed for their hold on international discourse and what China perceives as their negative and biased framing of the country, a whole globalisation agenda has been launched for Chinese media to convey China's own voice to the world and to shape global opinion. During recent years, the Chinese government has been investing heavily in developing its own globally influential media system under the framework of the 'media going-out policy', with CCTV as one of its spearheads. Several international outputs broadcasting in various languages have been created within CCTV to reach audiences in different territories: the Chinese state broadcaster can now try to compete with already well-established global players such as BBC or CNN in terms of coverage, number of operating channels and diversity of broadcasting languages.

In this context, the Spanish language international service CGTN-Español was launched to make Beijing's official voice heard and understood in Spanish speaking countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), a region with which China has become increasingly connected in economic, political and cultural terms during the last decade, and where China is seeking greater influence. During its 14 years of operation, CGTN-Español has been dedicated to linguistically and culturally adapting its offering as well as improving its production capacity. Nevertheless, the channel faces several challenges in carrying out its mission to project soft power. As an initiative of 'going-out', it has been struggling with the arduous task of 'going-in'.

The first challenge consists of 'going into' the target markets. So far, CGTN-Español is not transmitted via terrestrial television, but through pay-TV operators acting as intermediaries between the channel as its potential viewers. In the case of LAC, the main target market of CGTN-Español, the region is largely taken by American operator DirecTV, while the leading Latin American platforms such as Claro, Cablevision or VTR are also saturated with US-based channels, with little space left to 'outsiders'.

Even more difficult could be 'going into' the hearts and minds of the target audiences. Once carried by these pay-TV operators, great efforts are needed to make their subscribers actually watch the channel. Although the actual audience of CGTN-Español is not entirely clear, since no reliable rating systems appear to be in place, existing data point to an extremely low viewership of the channel: it seems that CGTN-Español fails to find a position in the increasingly crowded field of international broadcasting.

Given the clear relation between CCTV's international expansion and Beijing's pursuit of soft power, a question emerges almost inevitably when reflecting on the struggles of CGTN-Español: how should the going-out Chinese media cope with their commitment to the government and the CPC? In the case of CGTN-Español, this commitment has produced

bittersweet results in its development at international level. There is no doubt that the channel has benefited from its ties to the Party-state, which, as the most dynamic economic power in the world today and one with an ambitious plan for a greater influence in the international arena, is providing extensive resources for its global expansion. However, functioning as part of the external publicity system, the channel has been left with very limited editorial autonomy. Like CCTV's domestic services, CGTN-Español is obliged to give a positive image of China; criticism of the government or the CPC is unlikely to be allowed. Thus, its ability to produce sharp news content and address contentious topics is largely restricted, except in a manner that does not bluntly question the Party-state's position on the issue. In the context of Western perspectives on communication and journalism, in which the critical attitude of the media is appreciated, CGTN-Español's institutional and uncritical discourse will, in addition to making its offering unappealing to the viewers, affect its credibility in a negative way. In this regard, Nye (2013) suggested that China had made:

the mistake of thinking that government is the main instrument of soft power. In today's world, information is not scarce but attention is, and attention depends on credibility. Government propaganda is rarely credible. The best propaganda is not propaganda. For all the efforts to turn Xinhua and China Central Television into competitors to CNN and the BBC, there is little international audience for brittle propaganda.

Chinese media have become aware that their long-standing image as leading party mouthpieces has been doing no good to their pursuit of global impact. When all media discourses are projections of interests and thus are never objective, a possible way of facing the crisis of credibility would be to distance oneself from the funding authority and to maintain a minimum editorial independence. In this sense, the launch of CGTN can be considered a new approach to make China's 'media going-out' policy more effective. Despite the obvious links between CGTN and CCTV, this reveals that the Chinese state broadcaster wants to rebrand its international services by giving them a more independent profile.

Still there are questions that should be answered before asking if this will change the 'media going-out' policy, such as: will this lead to any change in the funding of CGTN? Further, facing the recent creation of Voice of China,¹⁹ which is planned to take over from all the CGTN channels, how will the relationship between this new major state-run broadcaster and CGTN be defined? One thing is for sure: as long as censorship and editorial independence continue to be the focus of the international debate on the Chinese media system, it should not be a surprise that the nature of the 'media going-out' policy is still contested.

Notes

- ¹ Congratulatory letter sent by Chinese President Xi Jinping to CGTN on its day of inauguration. See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-12/31/c_135946550.htm.
- ² These interviews were conducted by Peilei Ye during her stay as Visiting PhD Student at the China Media Centre of the University of Westminster in 2015. The interview with Prof. Hugo de Burgh was conducted on June 11 and that with Prof. Daya Thussu on June 12.
- ³ In December 2003, the former Chinese President Hu Jintao said in the National Publicity and Ideology Meeting that China would vigorously develop foreign-related cultural industries and participate actively in global cultural competition. See: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/67481/78096/78101/5372325.html>.
- ⁴ See: <http://www.scmp.com/article/666847/beijing-45b-yuan-global-media-drive>.
- ⁵ See, for example, Hu Jintao and Li Changchun's congratulatory letters for the 50th anniversary of CCTV (<http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90785/6558264.html>).

- ⁶ Several Chinese officials have spoken of China's shortage of soft power. See, for example, Hu Jintao's speech at the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CPC in 2011 (http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2011-07/01/content_1897720.htm).
- ⁷ Data cited in: <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/i/jyj1/1/201802/2018022710448.shtml>.
- ⁸ Commonly referred by the Chinese government as the 1+3+6 cooperation framework. See: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjzxcxjzgjldrdlchwdxbxagtwnrlgbjxgsfwbcxzlldrhwt1176650.shtml.
- ⁹ Although Brazil is not a Spanish speaking country, given its political and economic position in the LAC region, it is where several Chinese state media –Xinhua Agency and *People's Daily*, in addition to CCTV – have built their Latin American Centres. Brazil is still considered one of the target countries of CGTN-Español, as CCTV does not broadcast in Portuguese language yet.
- ¹⁰ For more information of the survey see: <http://espanol.cntv.cn/special/encuesta2015/index.shtml>.
- ¹¹ Before the creation of CGTN, all correspondents based in these bureaux were resident CCTV reporters and therefore Chinese. However, CGTN has been recruiting local reporters (native Spanish speakers) since 2017.
- ¹² TeleSur is a multi-state funded pan–Latin American terrestrial and satellite television network, with headquarters in Caracas, Venezuela. It is run by La Nueva Televisora del Sur, C.A., a public company sponsored by several Latin American governments. The Venezuelan government is its main sponsor. It also receives funding from Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Bolivia, etc. Formerly, Argentina was its second main sponsor.
- ¹³ CCTV does not release detailed and up-to-date information about the specific countries in which CGTN-Español has made its entry or its potential audience in these territories. Therefore, we have compared and combined all available data that we collected from different academic works (Jia, 2010; Madrid-Morales, 2015), press articles and CCTV's unpublished internal documents (CGTN-Español, 2014a, 2014b).
- ¹⁴ By the end of 2016, DirecTV was the pay-TV operator with the largest number of subscribers in Latin America, when the Mexican company Claro ranked second. Together they accounted for nearly half the region's pay-TVsubscribers. See: https://www.digitaltvresearch.com/ugc/LatAm%20Pay%20TV%20Operator%20Forecasts%202016%20sample_sample_152.pdf.
- ¹⁵ For example, in Spain, when CGTN-Español firstly entered into an agreement with the telecommunication giant Telefónica (Martínez, 2017), it was only available to subscribers to the 'Favoritos asiáticos' add-on package of its IPTV platform Movistar TV. Currently, Vodafone-ONO only carries CGTN-Español as part of its high price package 'Vodafone TV Total'.
- ¹⁶ For example, in Spain, CGTN-Español is on channel 96 in Telecable, 79 in Movistar TV, 202 in Vodafone-ONO and 210, in R. In Peru, it is distributed by Movistar TV on channel 834.
- ¹⁷ ForCGTN-Español's 2012, 2013 and 2015 surveys see: http://espanol.cntv.cn/special/special/special/Encuesta_internet/index_A/index.shtml, http://espanol.cntv.cn/special/encuesta_cctvespanol/index.shtml, <http://espanol.cntv.cn/special/encuesta2015/index.shtml>.
- ¹⁸ Prof. Hugo de Burgh is director of the China Media Centre at the University of Westminster.
- ¹⁹ Voice of China, also known as China Media Group, is a Chinese state-run broadcasting network created in March 2018 combining CCTV, China National Radio and China Radio International. See: <https://america.cgtn.com/2018/03/21/china-to-merge-state-media-broadcasting-giants>.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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