

Chapter 5

China's global media in Latin America: Exploring the impact and perception in Mexico and Argentina.

Pablo Sebastian Morales

London School of Economics and Political Science

London, United Kingdom

P.S.Morales@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

This chapter explores the presence of China's global media in Latin America and its perceptions by local populations. It first discusses the phenomenon as part of a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy that seeks to improve its international image, shape perceptions around the globe, and ultimately create positive public sentiment to its advantage (soft power). It then describes how this strategy has been deployed in Latin America, paying particular attention to Spanish-speaking countries. As the success of this strategy depends on the perceptions of local audiences, the core of the chapter is dedicated to exploring the perceptions of Mexicans and Argentinians. The analysis is based on a series of focus groups conducted in September-October 2016 and discusses how, beyond any association to the Chinese government, cultural distance and differences in journalistic style are also important factors that may be hindering acceptance by audiences. The chapter finishes by arguing that the impact is and will be minimal in Latin America unless broadcasters address cultural and journalistic differences. It will also briefly

discuss some of the other avenues that China seems to be taking, such as encouraging collaborations with local broadcasters and production companies.

Keywords

Public diplomacy, soft power, CGTN, China, Latin America

Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CNC	China Xinhua News Network Corporation
CRI	China Radio International
PRC	People's Republic of China

5.1. Introduction

For more than a decade, China has been strengthening its public diplomacy intending to improve its international image and create a soft power advantage. Originally coined to explain the attractiveness of the United States and the willingness of other countries to follow Washington's leadership, Joseph Nye (2004) defines soft power as the ability to persuade others to act in ways that are aligned to one's interests. The concept soon became popular among Chinese scholars and policymakers who recognised its utility in their efforts to improve China's

international image. On the 17th National Congress of the CCP in 2007, even the then President of the PRC Hu Jintao stressed the need to enhance China's "cultural soft power" (CNS 2007), which soon became the focus of Beijing's international communication strategy to counter the negative portrayal of the country by the foreign media – especially by the press and broadcasters from Europe and North America. Scholars from the mainland had long been analysing the "demonisation" of China (Li and Liu 1996) in the foreign press as part of an effort seeking to undermine its rise by either vilifying the country as a military and economic threat both to its neighbours and the entire world (Wu 2009) or even foretelling China's inevitable internal collapse (Duan 2007). China's response was to accelerate its public diplomacy efforts and set up its own international media. In line with Nicholas Cull's (2008) view on international broadcasting as one of the main components of public diplomacy, Cheng and Wang (2011) recognised a direct correlation between international broadcasting, national image shaping, and strengthening China's soft power. For over a decade, scholars around the world have been discussing the scope of China's pursuit of soft power through public diplomacy (J. Wang 2011), how its media are developing (Thussu et al. 2018), and how China struggles to convert the country's rich soft power resources into genuine international affection (Edney et al. 2020).

Since the early 2000s, China has been investing in a comprehensive global media strategy that is both multiplatform and multilingual. Traditional media such as newspapers (*People's Daily*, *Global Times*, *China Today*, etc.), television (CCTV, now rebranded as CGTN for its international channels), radio (CRI), and even news agencies (Xinhua, CNC) have expanded and strengthened its presence online. In recent years, their presence on social media platforms has increased not only on Chinese domestic platforms such as Weibo or WeChat but also on internationally popular social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. By

publishing and broadcasting in the most widely spoken languages across the world, the *multilingual* aspect reflects China's interest to reach audiences both in developed countries in the Global North as well as diverse regions of the Global South across Asia, Africa (see the chapters by Mock and Xiang in this volume), and Latin America.

In the case of Latin America, China's image has largely been influenced by reporting from mainstream Western media (Guo 2016). Ospina Estupinan (2017) identifies EFE, Agence France Presse, and Associated Press as the main sources used by newspapers in five Latin American countries for China-related stories. To influence the way the country is perceived, Beijing first targeted the region with its own international media, from newspapers and news websites to radio stations and a television channel. In the last few years, China has diversified its strategy in multiple ways by organising China-Latin America media summits since 2016 (Xinhua 2016), as well as inviting Latin American journalists to attend training courses in China (An 2018) and signing cooperation agreements between Chinese and Latin American media companies (Empresa Brasil de Comunicação 2019). Between 2019 and 2020, China has also strengthened its digital diplomacy in the region by increasing the interactions of its diplomatic network in the continent on social media platforms such as Twitter (Micolta 2020).

Compared to other regions in the world, studies on China's soft power push in Latin America are scant (see Ellis 2020; Peña González 2015; Rodríguez and Leiva 2013). While a few researchers have focused on how this strategy has been articulated through Spanish-language media (Madrid-Morales 2015; Ye and Albornoz 2018), the reception by audiences is still an underexplored area (see Morales 2018). This study considers soft power as the ability to influence a foreign country's policies to one's advantage by non-coercive means. By examining China's own media presence in Latin America and the perceptions by audiences in Mexico and

Argentina, this chapter argues that international media can hardly contribute to creating a soft power advantage without addressing issues of reception such as negative associations with governments, cultural distance, and differences in journalistic styles.

5.2. China's global media and Latin America

China's news outlets have targeted Latin America by broadcasting in Spanish and Portuguese for decades. Spanish is ranking only second to Chinese in the number of native speakers worldwide, thus it is no wonder that China's global media have prioritised the use of Spanish over Portuguese. This choice is justified by the fact that out of more than 483 million native speakers worldwide, almost 396 million live in Latin American countries (82 percent). Furthermore, with more than 41 million native speakers of Spanish, the United States has also become increasingly important venue in this strategy.

China's international media in Spanish includes both traditional and new media. Among the traditional print platforms, the magazine *China Today* is one of the most notable propaganda efforts and one of the earliest publications to target Spanish-speakers. Conceived as a window to China and its history, culture, traditions, economy, social progress, and problems, it was founded in 1952 by Soong Ching-Ling, one of the most powerful stateswomen of the Mao era who served then as the Vice-chairwoman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the chairwoman of the Chinese People's Relief Administration. *China Today* was first published in Spanish in January 1960 with the name of *China Reconstruye* (*China rebuilds*), which in 1990 was changed to *China Hoy* (*China Today*). The Mexican branch of the Latin American

Subsidiary opened in 2004 as a distribution centre covering Mexico, Central and South America ('China Hoy México' n.d.).

The popularisation of the internet at the turn of the century opened up a new frontier for China's external communication in Latin America. As new dedicated platforms started to emerge such as the China Internet Information Centre (china.org.cn), the major traditional media platforms also started to migrate online. China's most prominent newspaper, *People's Daily*, launched its Spanish-language website as early as 2000 –and in Portuguese in 2014. China Radio International and CCTV's Spanish channel also started to broadcast online.

China Radio International

Founded in 1941 as Radio Peking, it was renamed in 1983 as Radio Beijing and as China Radio International (CRI) ten years later. In more than 70 years, CRI's production has expanded to 61 languages, either by broadcasting on shortwave, FM or online. The Spanish service started broadcasting on shortwave in 1956 and in 1998 it opened its website, which arguably receives 150 thousand visits per month, primarily from Spain, Mexico, Argentina and the USA, among other countries (CRI 2010). Besides having correspondent offices in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, in 2010 CRI started broadcasting live on Uniradio AM1470 from Tijuana, on the border between Mexico and California, to also target Spanish-speaking audiences in the USA.

CRI's target audience is composed of people from the "middle-higher group, young, diplomats and businesspeople from Spanish-speaking countries living in China" (*ibid.*). Despite the access restrictions to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube within mainland China, CRI has put considerable effort into strengthening its presence on those platforms as a means to promoting its programmes and website (*ibid.*). Acknowledging the

changing habits of its audiences, CRI has been undergoing a process of transformation into a multilingual and multifunctional broadcasting organisation by the name of China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN), which was formally established in 2011 (CRI 2017). The goal is to maximise its global reach by expanding beyond radio broadcasts and strengthening its online presence with audio-visual material. Besides Spanish, CRI also broadcasts in Portuguese both via shortwave and re-broadcasts by local FM radios in Brazil. In fact, CRI's General Bureau in Latin America was established in 2011 in Rio de Janeiro.

CCTV/CGTN

China's Central Television started broadcasting in Spanish in 2004 first via a joint French-Spanish channel (Zhu 2012). In 2007 CCTV-E was launched as a Spanish-only channel (CCTV 2007). On the 31st December 2016, its name was changed to CGTN (China Global Television Network) following CCTV's rebranding of its international channels (M. Wang 2016). The channel is currently known as CGTN Español, despite an announcement in 2018 that CCTV, CRI and CNR would merge and form a new international media organisation known as the Voice of China (Xinhua 2018). Its Latin American regional offices are located in São Paulo, Brazil (Stenberg, 2015).

Besides news bulletins, CGTN Español also broadcasts a wide range of shows that often feature Spanish speakers living in China, including documentaries (*Así es China*), interviews (*Diálogo, Enfoque*), cultural magazine (Café de CGTN, Prisma), current affairs (*América Ahora*), cooking shows (*De China a tu Cocina*), travelling shows (*Diarios de viaje*), entertainment (*Brillando en Escena*), and a show about foreigners (*Extranjeros en China*). The popularity of telenovelas in Latin America has prompted CCTV/CGTN to include drama series

(Silva-Ferrer 2012). While in previous years, drama series were broadcast in Chinese with subtitles, recently it has opted to dub them in Latin American Spanish, following a similar trend of popular Korean and Turkish productions.

To expand its online presence, former CCTV Español opened accounts on mainstream social networks, albeit with little traction. After the rebranding as CTGN, it opened new accounts on the most popular social media platforms. By 17 December 2020, it has over 16.8 million followers on Facebook (@cgtneenespanol) and almost 600 thousand followers on Twitter since opening its new account (@cgtneenespanol) in August 2016. CGTN *en Español* broadcasts live on YouTube and its official account has more than 236 thousand subscribers and over 80 million views. On Instagram, it has over 91 thousand followers. While initially the content published on social media tended to be replicated across platforms, in the last few years there is evidence of a greater effort to adapt messages to the different platforms and their unique style, thus increasing audience attention and interaction.

In 2015, CCTV *en Español* included an online survey on its website. By 7 April 2017, it was still possible to participate, but only 132 people had taken part. Although the quality of the survey is dubious due to numerous mistakes, it is possible to point out some key facts (CCTV n.d.): When asked about how participants heard about CCTV, 22.64 percent said it was “by chance”, followed by “rebroadcasts by other channels” (13.21 percent). Most respondents (51.55 percent) had accessed the channel through its website, followed by cable TV (16.77 percent). An 85.47 percent said watching CCTV-E had improved the image they had about China. When asked about CCTV-E’s presence on social media, 43.66 percent knew CCTV’s Facebook account, followed by 30.99 percent that knew its YouTube channel. The two largest groups of viewers describe themselves as “professionals (physician, lawyer, teacher)” (33.88 percent) and

“students” (13.22 percent). Besides the low number of respondents, the main issue with this survey is that it is not clear whether the respondents would classify as *sinophiles* or not, and to what extent their opinions would be biased positively towards China due to a previous interest in the country and its culture.

5.3. Methodology

To test the likelihood of CCTV being accepted by audiences in Latin America and having an impact in the region, a series of focus groups were conducted in Mexico and Argentina between September and November 2016, with participants being recruited from a total of seven universities in both countries: Colegio de México (Colmex), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Universidad de Congreso (UC), Universidad Torcuato di Tella (UTdT), Universidad de Belgrano (UB), and Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires (UBA). The sessions started with a discussion about the participants’ news consumption habits and their knowledge of international news organisations. In the second part, they were shown a total of eight excerpts selected from different programmes broadcast by CCTV-E in 2016, from which six were shown to all groups and two were country-specific. The participants were encouraged to make notes about their impressions regarding three aspects: presenters, style and content.

The compilation started with a video about a report published by the Chinese government about human rights issues in the United States. Because China itself is often targeted by the media due to human rights violations (Ruz 2015), this excerpt was considered appropriate to test

the participants' reaction. Two videos (i.e., second and fifth) were selected because, besides covering news from Latin America, they featured newsreaders from the region. One (published 10 April 2016) is led by the Mexican Jorge Octavio Fernández Montes and the other (published 17 April 2016) by the Peruvian Lourdes Fernández Esquivel. The third excerpt focuses on Africa and was selected to show how China's attention is not solely directed to news from the industrialised countries, but also to the Global South. The video (published 10 April 2016) reports on the Angolan Nadir Tati and her successful career as a fashion designer, thus portraying Africa in a positive light through what has been called a "Constructive Journalism" approach (Greenslade 2015; Wekesa and Yangqiu 2014). Two excerpts relate to China itself (the fourth and sixth): one (published 19 April 2016) is a report on reading habits in China and the other one (published 18 April 2016) was extracted from the programme *Puntos de Vista* (Points of view) and features a female host and two female guests –a Chinese and a Venezuelan– discussing the issue of demography and gender imbalance in China, and the concern over the so-called "leftover women". The country specific videos (seventh and eighth) were selected from the magazine-format programme *América Ahora*, which showcases reports from the American continent. Therefore, the videos selected were related to Mexico and Argentina respectively.

The video clips were followed by a discussion prompted by questions from the moderator. The analysis of emerging themes shows that an association with the Chinese government and other cultural differences are some of the main factors hindering acceptance by audiences.

5.4. Association to the government

Compared to other international broadcasters, CCTV was perceived as being distinctively focused on China and Chinese news. Described by some participants as “auto-referential”, this practice was also related to the use of Chinese sources even when reporting about other countries. Furthermore, the association with the Chinese government appeared as the detrimental factor that undermined the channel’s credibility and weakened its efforts to attract viewers. In Mexico, Cristian (M3) expressed his dislike of CCTV since “all the information they quoted were studies inside China”, which instilled mistrust about their reliability. He suggested he would rather trust reports using a variety of both Chinese and non-Chinese sources. Although this would help balance out any bias, Cristian was also dubious about information provided by government agencies in general. Similar opinions were echoed in other focus groups in Argentina, where Jimena and Javier (A2) expressed their mistrust of China’s statistics agency. In Marcelo’s (A4) opinion, the sources quoted by CCTV were unknown to viewers in Argentina, which would hardly inspire trust.

Participants in both Mexico and Argentina expressed mistrust towards news channels’ objectivity regarding the country they were based in. For example, if a channel was reporting about the G20 Summit in Hangzhou (China) on 2-5 September 2016, some participants said they would rather trust an Argentinian correspondent than a TV channel with links to the Chinese government:

Nadia (A5): [...] the Chinese State does not instil a lot of confidence, in general. And regarding their policies, especially issues such as Human Rights and that, I would not trust a channel from the government [...]. The Argentinian correspondent would report information that will be interesting to me. I am not interested in anything that has to do with South Africa, but it would be interesting for me [to know] what the Argentinians think, or about Brazil, or maybe the USA.

Similarly, some participants in Mexico expressed their trust in Mexican journalists, because arguably they would have no vested interests that could influence their reporting. Such was the opinion of Fernanda (M6), who elaborated on this opinion saying they probably “would not have any interest in presenting the news in a biased way, because they are not from the country, and it does not match either private or public interests of the Mexican foreign policy”.

The assumption that correspondents from local media would pay more attention to how international news affects the country added an extra layer of complexity to this apparent preference. Martín (A4) suggested that he would trust more an Argentinian correspondent reporting from China because they would focus more on matters related to Argentina than maybe a journalist from another country would deem insignificant. In contrast, Mauricio (A4) argued that journalists from CCTV may be better prepared to cover international affairs and elaborated on his argument by saying:

Mauricio: [...] I think the Chinese channel would look at it from a different angle than an Argentinian one that is not used to reporting that kind of news. The news bulletins in Argentina, for instance TN (Todo Noticias), they have five or ten minutes of international news, and I am not exaggerating. And that news... are not meaningless, but they are not really that relevant. [They present international news in a segment such as] “Round around the world in 80 seconds”, which is nonsense. [...]

María (A4): When I mentioned that I watch international news on other channels is exactly because I see what you are talking about. There is a lack of...

Mauricio: ...of training, of interest [in international news] ...

María: ...[lack] of space for international news because they are not seen as important and therefore, I would go to foreign sources. [...]

Consequently, María’s opinion was that even a Chinese channel would report news about China with a too strong focus on a local outlook; therefore, she would rather look for other sources than

relying on either CCTV or an Argentinian correspondent. Some participants in Mexico expressed a similar concern regarding the lack of interest in international news by the local media. For example, Alejandro (M1) said that he would not trust Mexican media reporting on international news, “because they do not even have a section of their team that is dedicated to international issues; in other words, they actually copy reports from other [news] agencies”.

Respondents also negatively related the association with the Chinese government to perceived tight control over the news media. Pre-conceived images of China and its censorship system appeared to influence the participants’ first impressions of CCTV by undermining its credibility. Fernanda (M6) described China as a country where the information published by the media is highly biased, due to tight control by the government. In her understanding, this control extends to the internet by blocking access to foreign websites and search engines such as Google. She believed all these limitations, in turn, would weaken Chinese people’s awareness of current affairs. Fátima (M6) added that even access to Western social media platforms such as Facebook was blocked. María (A4) also pointed out the censorship as the reason for her negative impression of China.

A final association with the Chinese government was related to the country’s human rights record. Manuel (A4) considered that there were many important issues that CCTV should address such as “the violation of human rights or the situation that China is going through in the conflicts it may have with its neighbours than a cultural exhibition in Cuba”. Regarding a report compiled by China about the human rights situation in the USA, Martín (A4) thought it was hypocritical of China to talk about this topic. Manuel did not question CCTV’s right to talk about anything but criticised the fact of not addressing the same issue within China. In his opinion, this rendered CCTV unqualified to discuss Human Rights violations in other countries. The

discussion concluded with most of the participants agreeing that reflecting on China's issues would help CCTV gain authority and make it more trustworthy in the eyes of viewers. This seems to demonstrate Joseph Nye's (2004: 107) view that "information that appears to be propaganda may not only be scorned but also may turn out to be counterproductive if it undermines a country's reputation for credibility."

5.5. Cultural differences and journalistic style

The first cultural difference noticed by the participants was the presence of newsreaders, presenters and reporters from China. As non-native speakers of Spanish, the fluency of the Chinese presenters was a matter of discussion among participants, with some describing their command of Spanish as "very bad" (Esteban, M5) or even "terrible" (Enrique, M5). Others pointed out that the problem was elocution or a lack of clarity when speaking, marked by the pronunciation and articulation (Germán, M7). The opinion of the participants ranged from "some words were difficult [to understand]" (Esteban, M5) to "[I] did not understand anything of what one of the girls that were there said" (Juan, A2). While university students would make the effort to grasp the essence of the discussion, Esteban pointed out that the general public would easily get distracted by the superficiality of a foreign accent and not pay attention to the content itself. This entailed the risk of losing their patience and deciding to watch a different channel. For example, while Manuel (A4) felt their way of talking was very boring, María (A4) admitted she would not hesitate to switch it over to another channel. To avoid this problem, some participants suggested Chinese presenters could speak Chinese and the translation could be provided with

subtitles (Fátima, M6; María, A4). However, this led to another discussion about viewers being less inclined to read subtitles, particularly while watching news programmes. Another suggestion was to include more presenters that were native speakers (Josefina, A2).

CCTV-E's style failed to attract the attention of the participants. The word "boring" was first uttered by Antonio (M1) during the first focus group and echoed at later sessions both in Mexico and Argentina. Carlos (M3) linked this to CCTV's use of the traditional news bulletin format featuring an anchor reading the news, which was less appealing to younger audiences such as the focus group participants. In Damián's (M4) opinion, reading from a teleprompter proved that newsreaders strictly followed a predefined script, alluding to tight state control over the content. In contrast, other participants seemed to like the formality of both the presenters' outfits as well as the studio, which according to Luis and Leticia (A3), resembled a "spaceship".

CCTV-E's choice of the colour red and the design of its logo prompted some participants to draw comparisons with CNN. Estefanía (M5) bluntly described CCTV-E as a Chinese CNN, and Fernanda (M6) argued it was a visual strategy to borrow legitimacy by association, i.e., viewers may believe CNN's journalistic values and other features also apply to CCTV. Fernanda also noticed the similarity between the colours used for the visual design of the studio and those of the Chinese flag: red and yellow. However, after CCTV-E was rebranded as CGTN Español, the visual design also changed, with the red being abandoned in favour of different shades of blue.

5.6. CGTN's future in Latin America

The future of CGTN in Latin America greatly depends on the degree of acceptance by audiences in the region. The most compelling finding that shows the level of difficulty faced by CGTN is that, despite it has been broadcasting for more than a decade, none of the participants had watched the Spanish-language channel and most were unaware of its existence. This is even more troubling when considering the participants' profile as university students of international relations and politics. Nevertheless, these findings are not unique and bear a certain degree of similarity to other regions. In her study in Kenya, Jacinta Mwendu Maweu (2016) observed that most respondents were either not aware of the existence of CCTV or, if they were, they seemed not to be watching it. Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018) suggested that despite limited effect, "some students, both in Kenya and South Africa, were receptive toward some of the news values and journalistic norms that characterize Chinese news reporting in Africa" (2226). As such, the first key challenge for CGTN will be to increase its visibility, by expanding its distribution channels and making it accessible to more viewers across the region (Morales 2018).

Although the brief exposure to CCTV's programmes during the focus groups seemed to generate some curiosity among participants, very few expressed positive opinions about its chances of success in the region. Andrés (M1) believed China was increasingly more present in Latin America and therefore CCTV could win viewers interested in China. Nancy (A5), a Peruvian student in Argentina, thought that CCTV's positive news approach with a "frivolous and uncontroversial way of looking at things" could attract some viewers dissatisfied with the constant flow of negative news on the local media. Similarly, Estefanía (M5) believed the topics could be attractive to certain audiences such as housewives but stressed the need to solve the language barrier issue. Esteban (M5), however, dismissed completely the idea that CCTV could become a source of news, saying "the way they read the news or speak the language" would

make viewers find it too funny to take it seriously. His pessimistic opinion was shared by many participants across different groups. Daniel (M4) doubted CCTV could succeed in being accepted by audiences in Latin America even if modifications were put in place because the channel would be unable to remove influence from the government. He mentioned racism against Asians as being another barrier to its acceptance. In a similar vein, Héctor viewers would hardly accept being lectured by Chinese people. Other participants stressed the cultural and geographical distance would be major obstacles, saying the “news was not interesting” (Nadia, A5) and “everything was very schematic and kind of far” (Natalia, A5).

Being perceived as controlled by the government together with a rather negative pre-conceived image of China among participants, proved to be undermining the effort of making the country attractive to the eyes of viewers. This finding is in line with the idea that “being perceived as a government mouthpiece does not resonate with a global audience” (Geniets 2013: 145), which seems to apply even more so when governments are perceived as authoritarian. Similarly, disregarding other factors such as cultural differences may undermine its acceptance by audiences. Beyond the packaging of the product, cultural proximity has other dimensions, and it also affects the viewer’s perceptions at other levels, e.g., the way certain stories are framed and the way characters in those stories are portrayed may not correspond to what is standard practice in the culture where audiences are based. Thus, understanding how stories are read or de-codified by audiences in different cultural and developmental contexts can help these broadcasters tailor their productions in a way that preserves the original message, but that is relatable to viewers and their socio-economic context. Deciphering cultural differences can help fine-tune international broadcasting strategies in a way that the messages can be easily de-codified by the audiences. The challenge will be then to make global messages resonate with local audiences (Geniets

2013). This does not equal feeding audiences ideologically easy-to-digest information, nor it means feeding audiences what they are supposed to like. It means navigating cultural differences, acknowledging them, and re-codifying messages to ensure a successful de-codification by the audiences. The ultimate goal of exerting soft power is to have an effect that is persuasive enough to shape policy in the long term. This depends on how messages are received and processed by audiences. Joseph Nye (2004: 111) warns about the risks of not paying attention to how messages are received:

Preaching at foreigners is not the best way to convert them. Too often political leaders think that the problem is simply that others lack information, and that if they simply knew what we know, they would see things our way. But all information goes through cultural filters, and declamatory statements are rarely heard as intended. Telling is far less influential than actions and symbols that show as well as tell.

The latest developments in China's communication strategy in Latin America reveal a gradual movement towards an approach that is mindful of audiences by learning from local media. Besides organising media-summits and training local journalists, China Media Group (merger of CCTV, CNR and CRI) has signed cooperation agreements with broadcasters in Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil. In some cases, this has led to the co-production of TV programmes with local broadcasters. For example, CCTV/CGTN and the Venezuela-based international broadcaster Telesur collaborated in the production of *Prisma*, a monthly programme first broadcast in August 2016 and focused on cultural news and reports from both China and Latin America. In Argentina, China Media Group (CMG) and Argentina's public broadcaster TPA co-produced the series of documentaries *Sorprendente Argentina/Meili Agenting* (surprising Argentina) and *Sorprendente China/Meili Zhongguo* (Surprising China) and other TV programmes such as *China en una mano* (China in the palm of a hand) and *Sorprendente ArgenChina* (Xinhua 2019). In Brazil, Grupo Bandeirantes signed agreements with

both CGTN (2015) and CMG (2019). Since 2019, BandNews has been broadcasting *Mundo China* (China World), a five to ten minute-long daily segment on China produced by CCTV and anchored by presenters from both broadcasters (de Sá 2019). This novel approach has the potential of assisting Chinese broadcasters bridge the cultural gap with viewers in Latin America.

5.7 Discussion and Conclusion

China's global media strategy has created several channels of communication with audiences around the world. Aiming to counter narratives from both dominating western international news organisations and local media, China's determination to establish alternative flows of information contributes to the much-discussed shift towards a new cartography of global communication, i.e., "media flows and contra-flows form part of the wider struggle over information flows which define power relations in the global information economy" (Thussu 2007: 27). As increasingly active actors in the global *mediascapes* (see Appadurai 1996: 35), Chinese media offer image-centred, narrative-based, and ideologically charged accounts of China and the world that inevitably reproduce state interests and expand the latitude of global *ideoscapes*. Furthermore, even news production practices reflect the hegemonic ideology of the political apparatus. Even so, the findings show that the impact in Latin America remains limited due to major challenges at the level of access, in terms of both accessibility to the platform as well as a disjuncture between the encoding practices of the broadcaster and the decoding processes of audiences. As discussed in this chapter, perhaps the most important challenge is that many participants were unaware of the existence of CCTV/CGTN's Spanish-language channel.

A short exposure to it proved helpful to identify a series of issues that may undermine CGTN's future in Latin America. It was perceived as autoreferential, i.e., not merely a news channel *from* China, but fundamentally *about* China. The participants' average impression was that CCTV-E's main task was to disseminate a particular vision of the country in line with PR activities of self-promotion, rather than striving to adhere to shared journalistic values. Newsreaders were seen as formal and constrained by a predefined script, which made viewers associate the channel with the Chinese government and subsequently doubt its credibility. Were it to go ahead, the channel's planned name-change to the Voice of China would further consolidate this image.

CGTN's future in Latin America depends on how effectively it adapts its approach to align its content and style to the audiences' preferences. A perceived cultural distance and the failure of some presenters to convey their message further demonstrated a disjuncture between the encoding processes of the broadcaster and the decoding processes of audiences, which constitutes an additional barrier to attract viewers. The place of CCTV/CGTN in the Latin American mediascape is largely dependent on its capacity to adapt to a distinct cultural environment. Even though technology and broadcasting practices may appear to be similar around the world, audio-visual products are shaped by the cultural context where they have been produced. For a message to have an 'effect', "it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (Hall 2005: 109). Originally a product of the Chinese media system, CCTV/CGTN needs to understand its role at a transcultural level and how it fits within the media systems in Latin America and their regional and/or national variations. This is because, once messages are encoded, CCTV/CGTN is unable to prescribe how these will be decoded by viewers. In line with Stuart Hall's (2005) encoding-decoding theory, the data shows that audiences in Latin America decode messages and produce culturally sensitive readings,

which can reproduce dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions (as also seen with regards to African audiences in the previous chapter by Xiang). Thus, to reduce any degree of incompatibility at the level of media systems, transcultural media ought to adjust their output according to the political and societal structures that determine audiences' expectations of the role of the mass media in society. This can be an arduous process, especially when considering the complexities of the media systems in Latin America, which "are not static structures of power, but organic and dynamic bodies that change, integrate and mutate, both internally and externally, especially in relation to global phenomena as a whole" (Lugo-Ocando 2008: 10). While some countries lean towards liberal models and are close to what Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) call *internal* or *external pluralism* —i.e., the plurality of voices and opinions at the level of media outlets or the level of the media system—, in others the media are still subject to greater control by the government (e.g., Cuba and Venezuela). Censorship and tight control are still prevalent in many countries, even when freedom of speech is enshrined in the Constitution (Lugo-Ocando 2008: 3). Additionally, at an international level, "the USA still exercises a quasi-hegemonic presence in Latin America's media systems, although with different degrees of influence and power" (Lugo-Ocando 2008: 10). Consequently, for any other international news channels seeking to enter the region, CCTV/CGTN needs to evaluate the media ecosystem within national borders, as well as assess regional and international flows of information.

China has successfully created multiple channels of communication that potentially can help Beijing re-frame issues of interest to it and respond to hegemonic narratives of Western media. However, this is no guarantee of soft power gains. Joseph Nye (2004) reminds us that the countries more likely to gain soft power are those "...whose dominant culture and ideas are

closer to prevailing global norms (which now emphasize liberalism, pluralism, and autonomy); and whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international values and policies” (31). Thus, China’s global media may become a resource of soft power only when viewers perceive their values reflected on the screen of CGTN. While the continent’s cultural diversity may pose a challenge to effectively identify values that are shared both across Latin America and with China, the signature of cooperation agreements with local media organisations, together with the organisation of media summits and the invitation of local journalists to participate in training courses in China constitute a clear attempt to increase mutual understanding and narrow down the cultural gap between China and the region. In any case, since “soft-power resources often work indirectly by shaping the environment for policy and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes” (Nye 2004: 99), future research is needed to assess the success of this new approach, which would ultimately also contribute to further test the effectiveness of government-led public diplomacy efforts seeking to create soft power.

References

- An, X. (2018, May 22). Zhong guo guoji xinwen jiaoliu zhongxin Lamei fenzhongxin 2018 nian xiangmu zai Jing kaiban. *China Today*.
http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/zw2018/zgysj/201805/t20180522_800130433.html
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large : cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

CCTV. (n.d.). *Encuesta 2015 CCTV en Español - Resultados*.

<http://app1.vote.cntv.cn/viewResult.jsp?voteId=14720>.

CCTV. (2007, September 27). *Zhongyang dianshitai Xiyu, Fayu guoji pindao jiang yu shi yue yi*

ri kaibo. <http://news.cctv.com/science/20070927/105325.shtml>

Cheng, M., & Wang, W. (2011). *Duiwai chuanbo ji qi xiaoguo yanjiu*. Peking University Press.

China Hoy México. (n.d.). <https://www.chinahoy.mx/>

CNS. (2007, October 15). Hu Jintao: Tuidong wenhua da fazhan da fanrong tigao ruanshili.

China News Service. <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2007/10-15/1049126.shtml>

CRI. (2010, March 10). *CRI en español*. <http://espanol.cri.cn/742/2009/03/10/1s174183.htm>

CRI. (2017, February 16). *History*.

<http://chinaplus.cri.cn/aboutus/aboutcri/62/20170216/391.html>

Cull, N. J. (2008). Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and histories. *Annals of the American*

Academy of Political and Social Science, 616(1), 31–54.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311952>

de Sá, N. (2019, November 12). O que imprensa mostra de Hong Kong está longe da verdade,

diz executivo chinês. *Folha de São Paulo*.

[https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/11/o-que-imprensa-mostra-esta-longe-da-](https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/11/o-que-imprensa-mostra-esta-longe-da-verdade-diz-executivo-chines.shtml)

[verdade-diz-executivo-chines.shtml](https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2019/11/o-que-imprensa-mostra-esta-longe-da-verdade-diz-executivo-chines.shtml)

Duan, P. (2007). *Guojia xingxiang jiangou zhong de chuanbo celüe*. Communication University

of China Press.

Empresa Brasil Comunicação. (2019, November 13). *EBC e China Media Group firmam acordo*

para troca de conteúdos Institucional - EBC. <https://www.ebc.com.br/institucional/sala-de->

[imprensa/noticias/2019/11/ebc-e-china-media-group-firmam-acordo-para-troca-de-conteudos](https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/imprensa/noticias/2019/11/ebc-e-china-media-group-firmam-acordo-para-troca-de-conteudos)

- Edney, K., Rosen, S., & Zhu, Y. (2020). *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>
- Ellis, R. E. (2020). The evolution of Chinese soft power in the Americas. In K. Edney, S. Rosen, & Y. Zhu (Eds.), *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds* (pp. 171–187).
- Geniets, A. (2013). *The global news challenge: Market strategies of international broadcasting organizations in developing countries*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203082607>
- Greenslade, R. (2015, August 20). Chinese media in Africa illustrate difference from western media. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2015/aug/20/chinese-media-in-africa-illustrate-difference-from-western-media>
- Guo, C. (2016). Zhongguo de guojia xingxiang goujian: Lamei de shijiao. *Lading Meizhou Yanjiu*, 38(5), 43–58. https://doi.org/10.20805/micromechatronics.42.1_93
- Hall, S. (2005). Encoding/Decoding. In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (2nd ed., pp. 107–116). Routledge.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini: (2004). *Comparing media systems three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, X., & Liu, K. (1996). *Yaomohua Zhongguo de bei hou*. China Social Science Press.
- Lugo-Ocando, J. (2008). An introduction to the maquilas of power: media and political transition in Latin América. In J. Lugo-Ocando (Ed.), *The Media in Latin America* (pp. 16–27). Open University Press.

- Madrid-Morales, D. (2015). China's International Broadcasting and the Spanish Speaking World. In Q. Luo (Ed.), *Global Media Worlds and China* (pp. 187–203). Communication University of China Press.
- Maweu, J. M. (2016). Journalists' and Public Perceptions of the Politics of China's Soft Power in Kenya under the "Look East" Foreign Policy. In X. Zhang, H. Wasserman, & W. Mano (Eds.), *China's media and soft power in Africa: promotion and perceptions* (pp. 123–134). Palgrave.
- Micolta, M. C. (2020). *La comunicación de China con el público extranjero*.
<https://fundacionandresbello.org/es/la-comunicacion-de-china-con-el-publico-extranjero/>
- Morales: S. (2018). Could Chinese News Channels Have a Future in Latin America? *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 13(1), 60–80.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.276>
- Nye, J. (2004). *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs.
- Ospina Estupinan, J. D. (2017). The coverage of China in the Latin American Press: Media framing study. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 4(1), 1287319.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2017.1287319>
- Peña González, M. A. (2015). El poder blando de China y sus expresiones en América Latina. *Jiexi Zhonguo. Análisis y Pensamiento Iberoamericano sobre China.*, 17(3), 44–53.
www.politica-china.org
- Rodríguez, I., & Leiva, D. (2013). El soft power en la política exterior de China: consecuencias para América Latina. *Polis*, 35.
- Ruz, C. (2015, October 21). Human rights: What is China accused of? *BBC News Magazine*.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34592336>

Silva-Ferrer, M. (2012). Para verte mejor, América Latina. *Nueva Sociedad*, 240, 41–52.

<http://nuso.org/articulo/para-verte-mejor-america-latina-las-mutaciones-en-la-geopolitica-del-poder-y-el-escenario-comunicacional-globalizado-de-habla-hispana/>

Stenberg, J. (2015). An Overseas Orthodoxy? Shifting towards Pro-PRC media in Chinese-speaking Brazil. In W. Sun & J. Sinclair (Eds.), *Media and communication in the Chinese diaspora: rethinking transnationalism* (pp. 48–68). Routledge.

Thussu, D. K. (2007). *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*. Routledge.

Thussu, D. K., de Burgh, H., & Shi, A. (2018). *China's Media Go Global*. Routledge.

Wang, J. (2011). *Soft power in China: public diplomacy through communication*. Palgrave.

Wang, M. (2016, December 30). CCTV to launch CGTN. *CGTN*.

http://news.cgtn.com/news/3d4d6a4e3555544d/share_p.html

Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (2018). How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 2212–2231. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7809/2355>

Wekesa, B., & Yangqiu, Z. (2014). *Live, talk, faces: an analysis of CCTV's adaptation to the African media market*. Stellenbosch.

Wu, Y. (2009). *Zhongguo guojia xingxiang suzao he chuanbo*. Fudan University Press.

Xinhua. (2016, November 23). China, LatAm media should increase cooperation, says Cuban leading newspaper chief. *Global Times*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1019718.shtml>

Xinhua. (2018, March 21). *Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa 'shenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige fang'an'*. http://www.xinhuanet.com/2018-03/21/c_1122570517_3.htm

Xinhua. (2019, October 18). *Documentary looks at lives of Chinese in Argentina*. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/18/c_138482729.htm

Ye, P. & Albornoz, L. A. (2018). Chinese Media ‘Going Out’ in Spanish Speaking Countries: The Case of CGTN-Español. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 13(1), 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.277>

Zhu, Y. (2012). *Two Billion Eyes: The Story of China Central Television*. New Press.

Author’s Short Biography

Pablo Sebastian Morales

London School of Economics and Political Science

London, United Kingdom

P.S.Morales@lse.ac.uk

Dr Pablo Morales is a Fellow in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE. After obtaining a master’s degree at Zhejiang University, he worked as a journalist and translator for *China Radio International* and *People’s Daily Online* in Beijing. He holds a PhD degree from the University of Westminster, UK. His research interests lie in the impact of globalisation on international media flows and journalistic cultures in the global South, with a particular focus on China and Latin America. His research has featured in *Media, Culture and Society* and *Global Media and China*, among other international journals.