



Meet the “New” Uyghurs

CGTN's Role in Mediawashing Genocide

UHRP

UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT

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About the Uyghur Human Rights Project

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghur people through research-based advocacy. We publish reports and analysis in English and Chinese to defend Uyghurs' civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights according to international human rights standards.

About the Authors

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I. Executive Summary

From the start of the mass internment campaign in 2017, the Chinese party-state has formulated and promoted narratives of “new” (i.e., “reeducated” and ideologically “correct”) Uyghurs in a “new” East Turkistan.¹ Chinese state media plays a key role in the dissemination of these narratives. China’s flagship international broadcaster, China Global Television Network (CGTN), is central to an influence campaign meant to convince a worldwide public that the Uyghurs and the Uyghur Region have been politically cleansed through reeducation, and that the region is now open for state-approved cultural tourism.

In this report, we refer to the narrative practices undergirding this influence campaign as *mediawashing*. Mediawashing, or the practice of creating and propagating sanitized media for the purposes of influencing the public, is a process which provides cover for Chinese authorities’ genocidal policies directed toward Uyghurs. Meanwhile, mediawashing also allows the party-state to perpetuate the belief that the Uyghur Region has become a space open for engagement in the forms of tourism and business investment.

To engage with reeducated Uyghurs in the “new” Uyghur homeland, one must adhere to Chinese party-state caveats that leave independent examination of the region and its people near impossible. One high-level Chinese official referred to the Uyghur region as a welcome space for unbiased international visitors, yet Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has been repeatedly blocked from visiting the region. This ongoing denial of access is one of many indications that gross human rights violations remain a daily reality for Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples despite the sanitizing discourse that says otherwise.

The current narratives of a cleansed people and land come as Uyghur identity has been deracinated through mass internment, high-tech surveillance, forced sterilization, forced labor, cultural destruction,

¹ Two notes on terminology: 1) Throughout this report, we refer to the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the “party-state” or “Chinese party-state” as a way of emphasizing one-party rule in China and highlighting the difficulties in distinguishing between state and party apparatuses, policies, and actions. 2) Throughout the report, we refer to the Uyghur homeland alternately as “East Turkistan” and the “Uyghur Region.” A vast majority of Uyghurs prefer these toponyms to those of “Xinjiang” and the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” which they see as offensive colonial terms.

and the eradication of organic systems of Islamic faith. The “new” Uyghurs depicted by the Chinese party-state through its CGTN proxy neither speak the Uyghur language nor believe in Islam, but express gratitude to a version of modernization soaked with human rights violations.

The glaring omission in CGTN’s depiction of Uyghurs is an organic voice, i.e., unrehearsed statements by and unstaged depictions of Uyghurs living in the region. Similarly, CGTN output does not meet standards for impartiality in their various false depictions of Uyghurs in their own homeland. Viewers should understand that the rosy depiction of “new” Uyghurs in a “new” homeland is nothing more than a distortion of reality. These narratives exist to provide cover for genocide, helping the party-state to evade accountability for the perpetration of atrocity crimes.

Despite CGTN’s role in obscuring atrocity crimes, the media entity has content-sharing agreements with overseas partners and is available globally via mobile apps, cable, satellite, and streaming television services. The Chinese party-state’s efforts to increase its presence in international media signifies an intent to reframe its abuses in the Uyghur Region while adding the veneer of legitimacy to its reporting through public and private collaboration with foreign news media.

This report outlines CGTN’s role in mediawashing through a text analysis of CGTN media output from 2017 to 2020. It also examines the administrative framework, content reach, and intentions of CGTN with reference to oversight by the Chinese party-state as well as the reach of CGTN’s online platforms. Through an analysis of 307 CGTN media texts from 2017 to 2020, as the Uyghur genocide unfolded, we have charted the evolution of a pair of media narratives centered on cleansing. The first of these narratives is that of Uyghurs as “ideologically pure,” which enables them to participate in state-defined social and economic productivity. The second is of a sanitized Uyghur homeland, which is depicted in staged cultural stories and physical geographies absent of human rights violations.

II. Cleansing Narratives

This report documents and analyzes CGTN’s coverage of the Uyghur region between 2017 and 2020 through a text analysis of

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online content. In total, we collected 307 unique CGTN digital articles and videos from two websites: CGTN.com (the flagship platform for English language reporting) and the CGTN YouTube channel. The texts we selected were produced in English, the primary language of most of CGTN’s internationally focused content. They all date to a period in which human rights conditions for Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim peoples in the Uyghur Region declined sharply, beginning with a mass internment campaign in spring 2017. CGTN-produced content during this period covered a range of economic, social, cultural, and political issues.

We conducted two readings—the first neutral and the second critical—of the 307 texts we collected. Our neutral readings noted the date, genre, source, and URL of each text. In critical readings, we recorded primary keywords (up to three for each text) and quotes detailing core claims. In total, we identified more than 185 unique primary keywords with a combined frequency of 743. We then grouped these primary keywords into 22 secondary keywords to identify clusters of CGTN messaging. For example, we grouped the primary keywords “#stillnoinfo,” “missing Uyghurs,” “Twitter,” and “vlog” into a secondary keyword we labeled *social media*. The table below shows the frequency of these secondary keywords between 2017 and 2020:

Rank	Secondary Keyword	Total	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Soft news	238	6	3	22	207
2	Denials	82	0	2	35	45
3	“Reeducation”	68	0	4	30	34
4	Terrorism	56	1	3	28	24
5	Covid-19	43	0	0	5	38
6	XUAR policies	40	0	0	16	24
7	Development	28	0	0	3	25
8	Foreign organizations	24	0	1	8	15
9	Industry	23	1	0	2	20
10	Entertainment	20	0	0	4	16
11	Labor	20	0	3	1	16
12	Education	18	0	1	3	14
13	Disinformation	13	0	0	2	11
14	Civil society	13	0	0	1	12
15	Overseas Perspectives	9	0	0	0	9
16	Foreign media	13	0	0	5	8
17	Security	9	0	0	2	7
18	Scientific research	7	0	0	0	7
19	Social media	6	0	0	5	1
20	Economics	6	0	0	0	6
21	Technology	4	0	0	0	4
22	Religion	3	0	0	1	2
Total		743	8	17	173	545

Table 1: Secondary keyword frequency of CGTN content on Uyghurs (2017–2020). Compiled by UHRP.

The data in table 1 reveals an evolving messaging strategy from 2017 to 2020. CGTN messaging initially described the “negative attributes” of the Uyghur population, mainly economic vulnerability and susceptibility to “extremist” ideologies. As Chinese authorities zeroed in on the region and began implementing “poverty alleviation” programs through a combination of mass internment and “vocational training centers,” Uyghur people were discursively transformed in state-media representations from would-be “terrorists” to “contributing members of society.” The strategy ultimately culminated with the global display of “new” Uyghurs as evidenced in CGTN’s portrayal of “thankful” Uyghur citizens alongside outright denials of abundant evidence to the contrary.

The most common secondary keyword we identified is *soft news*, a category covering stories on human and physical geography, tourism, culture, and heritage sites, and comprising one of the most important elements of CGTN’s mediawashing campaign. Soft news leverages “apolitical” topics to stage an alternate Uyghur Region, one that is distinct from reports of the intrusive surveillance and detention of Uyghurs. Our data show that as reports of atrocity crimes began leaking with greater frequency in 2019, CGTN began to intensify its output of soft news, likely as a method to counter the increased public scrutiny on the region. They further accelerated use of soft news from 2019 to 2020 as external pressure over the party-state’s repressive policies began to mount.

Our second, third, and fourth secondary keywords—*denials*, *reeducation*, and *terrorism*—have a combined frequency of 207, 31 fewer instances than the total for soft news alone. In 2019, the *New York Times* and the *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists* published leaked internal Chinese documents detailing the treatment and mass internment of ethnic minorities in the region.² Subsequent media output by CGTN suggests that their soft news approach appeared as a direct response to international reports based on leaked primary-source evidence. Similar to soft news, the secondary keywords denials, reeducation, and terrorism increased in frequency from 2019 to 2020, a reflection of the overall growth of CGTN coverage on Uyghurs in that

The strategy ultimately culminated with the global display of “new” Uyghurs as evidenced in CGTN’s portrayal of “thankful” Uyghur citizens alongside outright denials of abundant evidence to the contrary.

² Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, “‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>; “China Cables,” International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, November 24, 2019, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/>.

period. In contrast to the increase in frequency of soft news, however, they did not spike sharply in this period.

In 2019, CGTN released two documentaries that focused on Uyghur “terrorism” and “separatist activities,” attempting to strengthen the narrative of a Uyghur society in need of reeducation and “cleansing.”³ Following these documentary releases, Chinese authorities publicly announced that no terrorist incidents had occurred in the region for three years. These two documentaries helped shape the narrative in line with this public announcement. Chinese authorities no longer had terrorist acts to sensationalize. The only other option for the party-state and its media organs appears to have been to shape and disseminate a “new” narrative of Uyghurs and the Uyghur Region which involved a heavy emphasis on soft news.

CGTN stories referencing denials, reeducation, and terrorism have created a parallel narrative of cleansing. While soft news depicts the Uyghur Region as absent of repression, these three secondary keywords work in tandem to narrate the purifying aspects of party-state policy toward Uyghurs. The narratives transform Uyghurs from “extremists” and “obstacles to their own development” into “productive” individuals who have availed themselves of benevolent, state-led economic opportunity. These narratives in turn act as a precursor to and justification for a sanitized Uyghur Region primed for exploitation and consumption through tourism and other activities.

Any permissible “Uyghurness” in CGTN-disseminated stories comes from the state-restructured version of Uyghur cultural expression, as exemplified in the remaining 18 secondary keywords we have identified, which focus on varied political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the CGTN version of the Uyghur experience, including responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, entertainment, and technology.

CGTN’s “Amazing Xinjiang” series is representative of the narratives engendered by soft news and its emphasis on introducing “new” Uyghurs in a rejuvenated Uyghur Region. Videos in the “Amazing Xinjiang” series are marketed with the orientalist tagline “A land unknown” — a strange claim given that the region is home to over 25 million people — and showcase the physical and human geography

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³ CGTN, “Extremism Strikes Xinjiang” [video file], YouTube, December 5, 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjgSOYRZqIo; CGTN, “The Black Hand-ETIM and Terrorism in Xinjiang” [video file], YouTube, December 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuj5yUNW7rg>.

of the region.⁴ Titles of videos in CGTN’s Amazing Xinjiang YouTube playlist include “Xinjiang’s high-speed rail transforms local people’s way of life,” “Warm Uyghur [sic] couples embrace new life after retirement,” and “How has life changed in Xinjiang?”



Screengrab from “Kashgar A place where old meets new,” a CGTN video published on YouTube, September 27, 2020. Party-state narratives often depict Uyghurs as in need of “modernization,” often framing such processes as economic opportunity.

The videos frequently incorporate topics about tourism opportunities and experiences like the following:

In the Kashgar Old Town, the passion of Uyghurs [sic] as they dance to the tunes of the rawap became part of an unforgivable memory for tourists, along with the luring smell of a variety of spices flowing in the streets.⁵

For Yang, it’s not just a cool job to work on a sailboat, but also about making his own contribution to Bortala’s tourism industry. He hopes that more and more travelers will get a

⁴ CGTN, “Amazing Xinjiang,” CGTN video playlist (YouTube), last accessed November 8, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLt-M8o1W_GdRb5HRRTqROkULCZKIE61HO; “Main Data of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region from the Seventh National Population Census,” Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China in Toronto, June 16, 2021, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgtrt/eng/news/t1884310.htm>.

⁵ “Amazing Xinjiang,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/event/2020/Amazing-Xinjiang/index.html>.

chance to enjoy the purity and beauty of Sayram Lake in the future.⁶

In 2018, the euphemistic terms “vocational training centers” and “reeducation” became public following the Chinese government’s acknowledgement of a campaign to intern Uyghurs. CGTN’s output in the months and years that followed amplified Beijing’s denials of research documenting the existence of a vast system of concentration camps. In a video titled “What’s China’s ‘reeducation camp’ in Xinjiang Really About?”, which accompanies a written article published on February 11, 2020, a CGTN anchor explains, “Next time anyone tells you that China doesn’t have a terrorism problem and the only issue is Islamophobia, you’d better ask him where he got his data.”⁷ This discursive sleight of hand is common in CGTN’s denials output. Commentators further deflect criticism by focusing on the counterterrorism records of other countries without setting out to comprehensively examine the possible rationales for the mass internment of Uyghurs in camps.

CGTN texts also make clear that the state aims to transform Uyghurs. A November 17, 2018 article titled “Xinjiang’s Vocational Training Centers: Helping Victims of Extremism Get a New Life” claims, “Trainees take language classes, learn legal knowledge and develop occupational skills. They come to the centers for a change.”⁸ Yet there is overwhelming evidence that Uyghurs do not voluntarily enter these facilities. Survivor accounts of the camps offer a stark contrast to the sanitized, self-congratulatory CGTN narratives, with reports of sexual violence, torture, and political indoctrination.⁹

CGTN’s reeducation and terrorism stories exist as mutually reinforcing narratives that frequently use anecdotal success stories as

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⁶ “CGTN Home Page,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, <http://www.cgtn.com/>.

⁷ Wang Guan, “Western Double Standards on Xinjiang Busted,” CGTN, February 11, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-12-29/What-s-China-s-reeducation-camp-in-Xinjiang-really-about--MOepa5AKcM/index.html>.

⁸ Sun Tianyuan, “Xinjiang’s Vocational Training Centers: Helping Victims of Extremism Get a New Life,” CGTN, November 15, 2018, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d35416a4e30457a6333566d54/share_p.html.

⁹ First-hand accounts by survivors including Mhrigul Tursun, Zumrat Dawut, Tursunay Ziyawudun, Omer Bekali, Gulbahar Haitiwaji, Gulbahar Jelilova, and others have been instrumental in exposing the horrors of concentration camps in the Uyghur Region. For a near-exhaustive list of testimonies, see pages 2–5 of Magnus Fiskesjö (compiler), “Bibliography,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, last updated September 20, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/bibliography/>.

This discursive switch from Uyghurs as liberated from poverty, rather than extremism, still places the Chinese state as agents of change in Uyghur lives.

evidence of the need for Uyghur transformation. These narratives are largely formulaic: a Uyghur person, often dressed in at least one item of traditional clothing identifying their ethnicity, explains that they previously fell into extremism because of increased participation in Islam. The individual then appears in “classrooms” writing in Chinese characters, memorizing political slogans, and finally speaking about their “graduation” and new employment in factories. For example, the accompanying text to a January 5, 2020, video titled “Ex-Trainee Finds New Hope in Life” reads:

Everything was perfect for a happy family until Mettohti was approached by someone with extremist thinking, and as a simple and poorly educated farmer who didn't know much about the outside world, he was easy prey for the schemers who approached him and told him what his world should be.¹⁰

The state transformation of Uyghurs is also noticeable in narratives centered on poverty. Hassan Hussein, a CGTN foreign affairs commentator, wrote in December 2020, “It is an incontrovertible fact that scores of locals – as early as 2018 were lifted from the shackles of poverty to embrace a new degree of economic mobility.”¹¹ This discursive switch from Uyghurs as liberated from poverty, rather than extremism, still places the Chinese state as agents of change in Uyghur lives.

III. Naturalizing Global Disinformation

CGTN’s Background and Administration

In 1999, the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) initiated a “Going Out” policy that encouraged domestic commercial entities, either state, private, or a combination, to seek

¹⁰ Liu Xinqing, Wu Siyi, and Wang Xiying, “Ex-Trainee Finds New Hope in Life,” *CGTN*, January 5, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-01-05/Ex-trainee-finds-new-hope-in-life--N0ETZGEily/index.html>.

¹¹ Hannan Hussain, “CGP Report on Xinjiang Labor Is Full of Holes,” *CGTN*, December 16, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-12-16/CGP-report-on-Xinjiang-labor-is-full-of-holes-WgHHrIdSc8/index.html>.

opportunities overseas.¹² China's "Going Out" policy anticipated the dilemma of overcapacity in the Chinese economy and globalized Chinese commerce so as to maintain rapid economic growth, a process critical to sustaining legitimacy for the Chinese government. Although public discussion of the "Going Out" policy tends to focus on the management of the domestic economy, China's diversifying interests overseas has also accelerated their pursuits in other sectors, namely the media, and the management of discourse about the Chinese state across borders.

In September 2000, as part of the implementation of the "Going Out" policy, China Central Television (CCTV) launched CCTV-9, a 24-hour English language TV channel offering a range of programming intended for overseas consumption. In 2010, CCTV rebranded CCTV-9 to CCTV News, a channel that was geared towards more general current affairs content while maintaining its international focus. In 2016, CCTV News was itself rebranded to China Global Television Network, or CGTN.

With its headquarters located in CCTV's television center in Chaoyang district, Beijing, CGTN broadcasts a news and documentary channel in English, in addition to Arabic, French, Russian, and Spanish language stations. CCTV-4, a Chinese language channel, is broadcast internationally with regional iterations in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and Oceania. Additionally, CGTN has three production centers located in London, Nairobi, and Washington, DC. In a December 2016 message to the newly launched CGTN, Party General Secretary Xi Jinping counseled the organization to speak from a clear Chinese perspective and to highlight China's attributes as a global leader in economic development, peace-building, and proponent of a fair international order.¹³ Government leadership's public acknowledgement and approval of the rebranded CGTN overtly signaled the intentions of Chinese media abroad.

In March 2018, Chinese state-led media reorganized into a new super-entity called the China Media Group (CMG), which now acts as the holding company for three of China's leading media organizations: CCTV (including CGTN), China National Radio, and China Radio

¹² State Council, "Geng hao di shishi zou 'chuqu' zhanlue" [Better implementation of the "Going out" strategy], March 15, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/node_11140/2006-03/15/content_227686.htm.

¹³ David Bandurski, "New Logo. . . but More of the Same: The Baffling Makeover of CCTV's Global Push," *Hong Kong Free Press*, March 31, 2020, <https://hongkongfp.com/2017/01/07/new-logo-baffling-makeover-cctvs-global-push/>.

International. The reforms placed CMG under the purview of the Publicity Department of the CCP and the State Council. This reorganization indicated a significant shift in that the three media organizations are now accountable not only to the state, but also the CCP. CMG’s President, Shen Haixiong, is also a member of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP. This centralization committed China’s primary international television and radio broadcasters to overt party control.

Media Dissemination

CGTN claims its TV stations “are available in more than 160 countries and regions worldwide.”¹⁴ However, CGTN does not report the audience size of its channels. Furthermore, “Analysts believe that few people outside China have heard of, let alone watch, the channel.”¹⁵ Despite all this, the Chinese government continues to invest into the quality and quantity of CGTN output with the objective to influence not only Chinese diaspora abroad but foreign audiences as well.

CGTN America’s U.S. offices in Washington, DC, employ approximately 180 journalists, including 45 anchors and correspondents with experience in media organizations such as the BBC, CNN, Sky News, and Reuters.¹⁶ CGTN America broadcasts for seven hours daily into approximately 30 million American homes.¹⁷ CGTN’s channels in the United States are available through a variety of cable, satellite, and internet protocol television providers, including AT&T U-verse, Comcast, Cox, DirecTV, DISH Network, Roku, Sling TV, Time Warner, and Verizon FiOS.¹⁸

¹⁴ “About Us-China Global Television Network,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, <https://www.cgtn.com/about-us>.

¹⁵ “China Is Spending Billions on Its Foreign-Language Media,” *Economist*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/china/2018/06/14/china-is-spending-billions-on-its-foreign-language-media>.

¹⁶ Paul Mozur, “Live from America’s Capital, a TV Station Run by China’s Communist Party,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/business/cctv-china-usa-propaganda.html>; “Anchors & Correspondents,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, <https://america.cgtn.com/anchors-corresp>.

¹⁷ Paul Mozur, “Live from America’s Capital, a TV Station Run by China’s Communist Party,” *New York Times*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/business/cctv-china-usa-propaganda.html>.

¹⁸ “CGTN America News Expands,” CGTN, January 19, 2018, <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/10/26/cctv-america-news-expanding>.

CGTN's six channels and three production centers maintain websites and a cross-platform social media presence. According to the New York-based web analytics company Similarweb, CGTN's primary website, CGTN.com, ranks 180th in the Similarweb News and Media category.¹⁹ This ranking rates unfavorably in comparison to those of competitor media outlets. For example, bbc.co.uk and bbc.com rank ninth and thirteenth, and cnn.com tenth.²⁰ In terms of total visits, CGTN.com also lags far behind its competitors with 15.11 million, while bbc.co.uk registers 685.77 million visits, bbc.com 461.58 million, and cnn.com 615.35 million.

SimilarWeb records 7.29 percent of traffic to CGTN.com from social media with Twitter and Facebook as the leading platforms on which CGTN channels and production centers operate several social media accounts. On its website, CGTN self-reports that the outlet's "new media platforms host over 115 million active users with a total reading count close to 16 billion. CGTN English's Facebook page is followed by 65 million users, ranking first among single accounts for global news media"²¹—though, as the *Economist* claims, some two-thirds of CGTN traffic originates from English learners within the PRC.²² CGTN clearly wants to legitimize itself as a source for news in the international media sphere.

¹⁹ Similarweb, "Cgtn.com Traffic Ranking & Marketing Analytics," last accessed August 2021, <https://www.similarweb.com/website/cgtn.com/>.

²⁰ Similarweb, "Top News and Media Websites Ranking by Traffic in August 2021," last accessed August 2021, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/category/news-and-media>.

²¹ "About Us," CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, https://partnership.cgtn.com/event/GlobalH5/public/detail_en_a.html.

²² "China Is Spending Billions on Its Foreign-Language Media," *Economist*.

Channel	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	LinkedIn
CGTN	117M	13.7M	411K	2.4M	44K
CGTN Documentary	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
العربية CGTN	16.1M	691.3K	257K	179K	N/A
CGTN Русский	1M	92.5K	53.6K	N/A	N/A
CGTN Español	16.9M	601.5K	227K	91K	N/A
CGTN Français	20.4M	1M	122K	243K	N/A
CGTN Africa	4.5M	146.2K	513K	28.5K	N/A
CGTN America	1.5M	289.3K	411K	62.4K	5.4K
CGTN Europe	1.8M	N/A	6.58K	16.2K	6.6K

Table 2: Social Media Reach of CGTN channels as of September 2021. Compiled by UHRP.

CGTN also maintain accounts on Pinterest and Quora with 2,800 and 83,600 followers, respectively. CGTN Русский (Russia) has a VKontakte (VK) account with 571,946 followers.²³ Individual CGTN programs and employees also have social media accounts, particularly on Twitter. Examples include the following:

- Closer to China with R.L. Kuhn (@closertochina),
- Global Business (@CGTNGlobalBiz),
- CGTN World Insight with Tian Wei (@WorldInsight_TW),
- CGTN America New York City Correspondent, John Terrett (@JT4CGTN), and
- Anchor, Beatrice Marshall (@BmarshallCGTN).

In comparison to BBC and CNN, CGTN’s social media presence falls far behind that of its competitors:

²³ VKontakte (VK) is a Russian online social media and social networking service.

“What Is VK and Why Should You Care?” *Echosec Systems*, last accessed September 26, 2021, <https://www.echosec.net/blog/what-is-vk-and-why-should-you-care>.

Outlet	Twitter	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram
CGTN	13.7M	117M	411K	2.4M
BBC (World)	32.9M	7.8M	10.8M (BBC News)	19.3M (BBC News)
CNN	54.7M	34M	12.8M	15.8M

Table 3: Social Media Reach of CGTN and competitors as of October 2021. Compiled by UHRP.

CGTN maintains a social media presence on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram despite the fact that Chinese authorities have banned those platforms in the PRC. CGTN and CGTN America apps are also available on Google Play and the Apple Store—even after Apple pulled the New York Times app from its China store in 2017.²⁴ Available evidence suggests a high degree of Chinese party-state influence in removing U.S.-based news apps from its domestic population while also making sure its own media applications are available for worldwide consumption—and ensuring its own media companies retain access to global-reaching platforms.

Beijing's Intent for Global Media Influence

Sarah Cook, an analyst specializing in Chinese-language media, calls CGTN “not a normal media organization.”²⁵ In a 2021 report titled *China's Global Media Footprint*, Cook identifies four tactics deployed by the Chinese state to influence overseas discourse: 1) propaganda, 2) disinformation, 3) censorship, and 4) gaining influence over key nodes in the information flow. The first three of these tactics are familiar strategies of narrative promotion, deflection, and suppression; the fourth describes how Chinese state entities build content sharing platforms abroad.²⁶ CGTN offers an example of how a state can use all four of these strategies to steer coverage away from any negative depictions towards new, palatable discourses. As Cook notes, the role

Available evidence suggests a high degree of Chinese party-state influence in removing U.S.-based news apps from its domestic population while also making sure its own media applications are available for worldwide consumption.

²⁴ Katie Benner and Sui-lee Wee, “Apple Removes New York Times Apps from Its Store in China,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/business/media/new-york-times-apps-apple-china.html>.

²⁵ “See the difference? CGTN in the Dock,” October 6, 2020, in *Little Red Podcast*, podcast, accessed at <https://omny.fm/shows/the-little-red-podcast/see-the-difference-cgtn-in-the-dock>.

²⁶ Sarah Cook, “China's Global Media Footprint: Democratic Responses to Expanding Authoritarian Influence,” National Endowment for Democracy, February 2021, 1-6, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Chinas-Global-Media-Footprint-Democratic-Responses-to-Expanding-Authoritarian-Influence-Cook-Feb-2021.pdf>.

of media outlets such as CGTN “go beyond simply ‘telling China’s story.’”²⁷

Besides generating original content on Chinese state platforms, Beijing is integrating sympathetic narratives through a series of content-sharing arrangements and cooperative agreements with overseas media organizations. Their goal is to maintain a degree of control over how foreign media outlets report on China with the effect of denying access to independent coverage. As a result, consumers of news and documentaries about China may be unaware of the role the party-state plays in their origin.²⁸ Because CGTN was designated a foreign agent under the FARA Act in 2019,²⁹ users of U.S. based media platforms may maintain a higher awareness of the Chinese government’s influence in its published pieces. However, unattributed media such as photos, quotes, or videos might not always retain their clear link to CGTN.

Beijing is integrating sympathetic narratives through a series of content-sharing arrangements and cooperative agreements with overseas media organizations.

Beijing has compelling reasons not only to tell China’s story but also to tell a sanitized version of this story, given its desires to convince a domestic audience of its own legitimacy while also ensuring worldwide economic and political reach. Critical reporting by non-PRC sources has tended to challenge the notion that the rise of the China on the global stage is peaceful, thereby impacting diplomatic and economic cooperation.³⁰ As one scholar notes, “[CGTN] seeks to persuade audiences to think positively about China’s participation in the trend of economic globalization.”³¹ Illustrative of this is CGTN’s rebuttal reporting, in which the platform broadcasts news reporting to directly counter narratives that project China in a poor light.

²⁷ Sarah Cook, “China’s Global Media Footprint: Democratic Responses to Expanding Authoritarian Influence,” National Endowment for Democracy, February 2021, 1, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Chinas-Global-Media-Footprint-Democratic-Responses-to-Expanding-Authoritarian-Influence-Cook-Feb-2021.pdf>.

²⁸ Sarah Cook, “China’s Global Media Footprint: Democratic Responses to Expanding Authoritarian Influence,” National Endowment for Democracy, February 2021, 7-8, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Chinas-Global-Media-Footprint-Democratic-Responses-to-Expanding-Authoritarian-Influence-Cook-Feb-2021.pdf>.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Justice, “Exhibit B to Registration Statement,” November 2019, 1-3, e.fara.gov/docs/6633-Exhibit-AB-20191106-3.pdf.

³⁰ Merriden Varrall, “Behind the News: Inside China Global Television Network,” Lowy Institute, January 16, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/behind-news-inside-china-global-television-network>.

³¹ Yang Zhang, “China Global Television Network’s International Communication: Between the National and the Global,” (Unpublished doctoral thesis, 159) (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2018), https://prism.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/handle/1880/106362/ucalgary_2018_zhang_yang.pdf.

Further, party-state control over Uyghur-related narratives offers a further layer of cover for the Chinese governing apparatus. Given the magnitude of the documented atrocity crimes committed in the region, Chinese officials and companies have a self-serving interest to delay, deny, and deflect accountability. Building diplomatic support through media manipulation not only ensures the Chinese state is able to promote its interests, but also creates protection for complicity in the Uyghur genocide. In brief, despite its self-identification as a “global news channel,” CGTN cannot be extricated from the Chinese party-state and its interests.³²

CGTN’s Cooperation with International Entities

CGTN has several partnerships with overseas organizations, maintained through CGTN-established initiatives or entities, as well as agreements to share or host content with other media outlets. In all of these partnerships, CGTN operates as a platform of overseas influence that amplifies party-state messaging.

On December 4, 2019, CGTN launched the “CGTN Think Tank,” an organization designed to promote dialogue among Chinese and foreign think tank members, as a venue for “international dialogue to promote a better understanding of the world.”³³ The launch was announced at the third CGTN Global Media Summit in Beijing, an event comprising 300 participants representing both PRC and foreign media.³⁴ Iterative reporting in Chinese party state-linked media magnified the event: *China Daily*, *Global Times*, and *Xinhua* published pieces in English.³⁵ CGTN also reported that a number of former

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³² Yang Zhang, China Global Television Network’s International Communication: Between the National and the Global (Unpublished doctoral thesis, 160-161) (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2018), https://prism.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/handle/1880/106362/ucalgary_2018_zhang_yang.pdf.

³³ “CGTN Think Tank: A New Platform for International Dialogue to Promote a Better Understanding of the World,” CGTN, December 5, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-12-05/CGTN-Think-Tank-A-new-platform-for-international-dialogue-MbidrIk5W/index.html>.

³⁴ “ChinaEU Joins Launch of CGTN Think Tank in Beijing, Attends 3rd CGTN Global Media Summit Themed ‘Media vs Technology,’” *ChinaEU* (blog), December 4, 2019, <https://www.chinaeu.eu/chinaeu-joins-launch-of-cgtn-think-tank-in-beijing-attends-3rd-cgtn-global-media-summit-themed-media-vs-technology-%e4%b8%ad%e6%ac%a7%e6%95%b0%e5%ad%97%e5%8d%8f%e4%bc%9a%e5%8f%82/>.

³⁵ Du Juan, “CGTN Launches Think Tank in Beijing,” *China Daily*, December 5, 2019, www.china-daily.com.cn/a/201912/05/WS5de87556a310cf3e3557c30c.html;

“CGTN Think Tank Launched to Provide Dialogue Platform for Global Researchers,” *Global Times*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1172305.shtml>; “CGTN Think

foreign officials offered their congratulations to the newly established think tank, including former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho, and former New Zealand Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, among others.³⁶

A report about the launch posted to the CGTN website claimed that “some 50 renowned international think tanks” had agreed to partner with the organization.³⁷ However, details on these organizations are scarce. The Schiller Institute, a small German think tank, declared its role as a founding member. In an accompanying publication on the Schiller Institute website, chief Helga Zepp-LaRouche reproduced official talking points when she wrote, “In Xinjiang, China has a positive approach that the Western media have taken no notice of.”³⁸ This replication of party-state talking points coupled with the veneer of legitimate support from a European organization is the type of support CGTN seeks in its relationships abroad.

In September 2020, the CGTN Think Tank hosted an event marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The seminar focused on China’s experience in “poverty alleviation and the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.”³⁹ The event was jointly organized by the Carter Center (United States), Schiller Institute (Germany), China-Europe Digital Association (Belgium), Bridge Tank

Tank Launched in Beijing,” *Xinhua*, December 4, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/04/c_138605816.htm.

³⁶ “CGTN Think Tank: A New Platform for International Dialogue to Promote a Better Understanding of the World,” CGTN, December 5, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-12-05/CGTN-Think-Tank-A-new-platform-for-international-dialogue-MbidrIk5W/index.html>.

³⁷ “CGTN Think Tank: A New Platform for International Dialogue to Promote a Better Understanding of the World,” CGTN, December 5, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-12-05/CGTN-Think-Tank-A-new-platform-for-international-dialogue-MbidrIk5W/index.html>.

³⁸ International Schiller Institute, “Schiller Institute Becomes Founding Member of CGTN Think Tank,” December 10, 2019, <https://schillerinstitute.com/blog/2019/12/10/schiller-institut-wird-grundungsmitglied-der-cgtn-denkfabrik/>.

³⁹ “Poverty alleviation” is often a euphemistic indicator of rights violations in the Uyghur Region (as elsewhere in the PRC), including forced labor and mass internment. For more on “poverty alleviation” measure and ties to mass internment and forced labor, see Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, and Nathan Ruser, “Uyghurs for Sale: ‘Reeducation,’ Forced Labour and Surveillance beyond Xinjiang,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, March 1, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>; Adrian Zenz, “Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Long-Term Scheme of Coercive Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, 7, no. 12, (December 10, 2019), <https://www.jpplrisk.com/beyond-the-camps-beijings-long-term-scheme-of-coercive-labor-poverty-alleviation-and-social-control-in-xinjiang/>.

(France), South African Institute for International Affairs, and the Dialogue of Civilizations (Russia).⁴⁰

In a 2020 report, analyst Nadège Rolland describes how most think tanks in China “are either built into or closely affiliated with CCP organs and government agencies. Their research topics are framed by detailed guidelines and oriented to reflect governmental priorities.”⁴¹ The CGTN Think Tank fits this framework with its party-state oversight and uncritical coverage of Chinese government policies. Rolland further expounds on the influential role that think tanks and the media play as they publicly discuss China’s image, policies, and actions as a global leader.⁴²

CGTN also runs a Global Partners Program and International Talent Program that seeks to partner and recruit organizations and individuals. The latter program aims to hire “influential English-speaking news anchors,” news editors, and a pool of reporters based in over 60 countries.⁴³ The Global Partners Program focuses on “Strategic Partners” and “Content Partners.” Strategic partners include news agencies, news media agencies, communication service providers, media device manufacturers, hotel chains, terminal device managers, international broadcasting unions, think tanks, and research institutions.⁴⁴ Content partners work on production, as well as exchanges of content, such as the agreement between Euronews and CGTN in 2018.⁴⁵

In September 2020, PBS SoCal in the United States broadcast a documentary co-produced with CGTN titled “Voices from the

The collaboration between the American taxpayer-funded PBS and CGTN not only enabled a broader audience for party-state narratives but also provided a veneer of legitimacy to narrative claims perpetuated in the documentary [...]

⁴⁰ “Jiaqiang guoji hezuo fenxiang jian pin jingyan tuijin ke chixu fazhan-‘lianheguo 2030 nian ke chixu fazhan mubiao yu zhongguo jian pin jingyan’ xian shang yantao hui juxing [An online seminar was held about enhancing international cooperation, sharing poverty reduction experiences, and promoting sustainable development-“United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and China’s Poverty Reduction Experiences”], September 16, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-09/16/c_1126500305.htm.

⁴¹ Nadège Rolland, “Commanding Ideas: Think Tanks as Platforms for Authoritarian Influence,” National Endowment for Democracy, December 2020, 2, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Commanding-Ideas-Think-Tanks-as-Platforms-for-Authoritarian-Influence-Rolland-Dec-2020.pdf>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “CGTN International Talent Program,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, https://partnership.cgtn.com/event/GlobalH5/public/detail_en_c.html.

⁴⁴ “CGTN Global Partners Program,” CGTN, last accessed September 26, 2021, https://partnership.cgtn.com/event/GlobalH5/public/detail_en_b.html.

⁴⁵ “Euronews and CGTN Exchange Content,” Press Club Brussels Europe, June 28, 2018, <https://www.pressclub.be/press-releases/euronews-and-cgtn-exchange-content/>.

Frontline: China’s War on Poverty.”⁴⁶ The collaboration between the American taxpayer-funded PBS and CGTN not only enabled a broader audience for party-state narratives but also provided a veneer of legitimacy to narrative claims perpetuated in the documentary, many of which reinforced harmful stereotypes about “minority” ethnic groups in China.⁴⁷ Moreover, in a tactic employed by CCP-owned media outlet *China Daily*, CGTN’s Inno China content is hosted by the Wall Street Journal,⁴⁸ yet another instance of the Chinese party state-affiliated media proxying a U.S.-based media entity in order to secure legitimacy for its content.

CGTN operates the CCTV Video News Agency (CCTV+), offering content to media outlets overseas via the cctvplus.com website and affiliated distributors.⁴⁹ According to the CCTV+ website, content has been shared with “1,800 TV channels and 1,000 digital media platforms in more than 130 countries and regions.”⁵⁰ This wide distribution suggests that video from inside China has become more restricted, therefore confining overseas news organizations to using CGTN footage. In April 2021, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China reported that at least 20 journalists have been forced or chosen to leave China since the first half of 2020, which further shrinks coverage of independent reporting in the country.⁵¹

⁴⁶ “CGTN Documentary ‘China’s War on Poverty’ Broadcasts on PBS across the U.S.A,” CGTN, September 20, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/7a49544d7930575a306c5562684a335a764a4855/index.html>.

⁴⁷ CGTN, “China’s War on Poverty” [video], YouTube, December 14, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuaJGPZCBYU>.

⁴⁸ “Paid Program: Inno China,” *Wall Street Journal*, last accessed September 26, 2021, <https://partners.wsj.com/cgtn/inno-china/>. The website has the following disclaimer: “This content was paid for by an advertiser and created by The Wall Street Journal advertising department. The Wall Street Journal news organization was not involved in the creation of this content.”

⁴⁹ “About Us,” CCTV Video News Agency, last accessed December 4, 2021, <https://www.cctvplus.com/aboutus.shtml>.

⁵⁰ “About Us,” CCTV Video News Agency, last accessed September 26, 2021, <http://www.cctvplus.com/aboutus.shtml>.

⁵¹ William Yang, “Why Are Foreign Journalists Fleeing China?” *Deutsche Welle*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-foreign-journalists-fleeing-china/a-57075732>.

IV. Cover and Complicity

Implications

CGTN's reporting on Uyghur-related issues maintains a balance between refuting Uyghur human rights abuses and presenting the Uyghur people and homeland as cleansed of assumed malign influences. CGTN achieves this rhetorical balance by developing dual narratives. The first centers how Chinese government policies have transformed Uyghurs from "extremists" to state-compliant, economically productive individuals. The process is effected by dispossessing Uyghurs from core aspects of their distinctiveness from Han Chinese people—e.g., belief in and practice of Islam, use of the Uyghur language, participation in Uyghur epistemologies and economic livelihoods, and tangible heritage, such as neighborhoods, places of worship, and historical landmarks.

The second narrative focuses on a restructured state version of the Uyghur identity and homeland deemed safe for exploitation and consumption, particularly in tourism, where visitors are invited to meet the "new" Uyghurs in a pristine physical landscape. Past attempts by the party-state apparatus to "develop" the Uyghur Region did not involve the reconstruction of Uyghur identities. Following these failed attempts at development, the Chinese state has opted to reinvent Uyghurs as a precursor to priming their homeland for external and internal investment. In the process of mediawashing policies international actors have judged as genocidal,⁵² CGTN is a narrative enabler of party-state policy aims.

One aim of CGTN mediawashing is to provide shelter, not only for Chinese officials but also for other foreign governments, from the possibility of prosecution on genocide charges through the construction of an alternative "body of evidence" on conditions in the Uyghur Region. CGTN, as China's leading international television

Past attempts by the party-state apparatus to "develop" the Uyghur Region did not involve the reconstruction of Uyghur identities.

⁵² To date, seven countries have issued government and/or parliamentary resolutions condemning the atrocities perpetrated by Chinese authorities with some going so far as to formally declare that the Chinese government has committed genocide as defined international statutes and regulations. Further, on December 9, 2021, the independent Uyghur Tribunal issued a judgment that the party-state is committing crimes against humanity and genocide in the Uyghur Region. For more on these and other international actions, see "International Responses to the Uyghur Crisis," Uyghur Human Rights Project, last accessed December 16, 2021, <https://uhrp.org/responses/>.

broadcaster, is critical in inserting this “evidence” into the global discourse on Uyghurs. While CGTN’s modest audience, in comparison to the audience of the BBC or CNN, limits the reach of this message, the broadcaster is nonetheless able to establish on-the-record cover for the party-state’s genocidal policies. CGTN conveys this message in a format familiar to consumers of news programs, bolstering its credibility in a tactic familiar to other outlets broadcasting overtly biased content. Moreover, CGTN’s reporting offers Uyghur genocide denialists “proof” that claims of human rights violations are without basis, muddying the waters of what is knowable regarding the Uyghur crisis.

By lending credibility to CGTN’s media output, international partners provide cover for the biased reporting CGTN uses to distract from party-state atrocity crimes. Cooperation with CGTN thus leaves international partners open to the charge of complicity in the Uyghur genocide. Social media platforms, Google Play, and the Apple Store, as well as cable, satellite, and streaming television services, act as distributors of CGTN disinformation. CGTN’s “Strategic Partners” and “Content Partners” similarly run the risk of complicity in the Uyghur genocide.

Euronews should reconsider its role in amplifying content denying the Uyghur genocide, and publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* should end the veneer of credibility they offer by hosting CGTN content on its website. Now that numerous governments, parliamentary bodies, and even an independent tribunal have officially recognized the Uyghur genocide, media services must do their due diligence to reduce their compliance in perpetuating any counter-narratives that downplay the Chinese state’s illegal acts.

The International Response to CGTN

CGTN’s politically directed content, overseas influence ambitions, and role within the Chinese party-state has led to increased attention from governments and regulators in states where the media outlet broadcasts. The United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have taken measures in response to CGTN’s broadcast of forced confessions or for lack of editorial control over CGTN’s reporting.

In December 2018, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) notified CGTN America of its obligation to register as a foreign agent

Cooperation with CGTN thus leaves international partners open to the charge of complicity in the Uyghur genocide.

due its “political activities and its actions as a publicity agent and information-service employee in the United States for the Chinese government, Chinese Communist Party, China Media Group, and its predecessor CCTV.”⁵³ The DOJ document outlines the basis for its determination including CGTN’s role as a “mouthpiece for Chinese state policy,” and how CGTN America “operates for the financial benefit of the Chinese government and Communist Party” through annual remittances of income to the Chinese Ministry of Finance.⁵⁴ Despite opposition to the DOJ’s request, CGTN America registered as a foreign agent in February 2019.⁵⁵

A year later, in February 2020, the U.S. Department of State informed China that employees of five media outlets—Xinhua, CGTN, China Radio, China Daily, and The People’s Daily—would be treated as part of Beijing’s diplomatic mission to the United States. Under such conditions, individuals affiliated with the designated media entities would have to inform the State Department of meetings with educational institutions and local government representatives.⁵⁶ Four other organizations, China Central Television, China News Service, People’s Daily, and Global Times, were added in June 2020. Despite the FARA designation, CGTN continues to reach global audiences through the Wall Street Journal, PBS, Euronews, and other platforms, potentially reaching millions of users across the globe with little to no oversight directed towards its publications.⁵⁷

In August 2013 and July 2014, CGTN aired the forced confessions of British reporter Peter Humphrey in the United Kingdom. Prior to any trial or conviction on charges of “illegal information gathering,” CCTV filmed Humphrey’s two forced confessions, the first in August

⁵³ U.S. Department of Justice/National Security Division, *Re: Obligation of CGTN America to Register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara/page/file/1282146/download>, 17.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Justice/National Security Division, *Re: Obligation of CGTN America to Register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/nsd-fara/page/file/1282146/download>, 15.

⁵⁵ Kate O’Keeffe and Aruna Viswanatha, “Chinese State Media Giant CGTN Registers as Foreign Agent in U.S.,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-state-media-giant-cgtn-registers-as-foreign-agent-in-u-s-11549387532>.

⁵⁶ Lara Jakes and Steven Lee Myers, “U.S. Designates China’s Official Media as Operatives of the Communist State,” *New York Times*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/18/world/asia/china-media-trump.html>.

⁵⁷ Following its FARA designation, Google, the parent company of YouTube has started labeling CGTN content with a banner that reads, “CGTN is funded in whole or in part by the Chinese government” with a link to a Wikipedia page about CGTN.

2013 and the second in July 2014. In the 2013 forced confession, Humphrey was restrained and confined. In November 2018, Humphrey lodged a complaint to Ofcom, the national communications regulator after his return to the UK. His petition outlined the conditions of his “confession,” which he argued were breaches of the UK’s Broadcasting Code’s standards on fairness and privacy.⁵⁸ In July 2020, Ofcom upheld the complaint on all counts.⁵⁹

In May 2020, Ofcom found CGTN in breach of impartiality provisions of the Broadcasting Code for its reporting on Hong Kong, and in February 2021, Ofcom revoked the media outlet’s broadcasting license on the grounds that it was under the control of a political body.⁶⁰ One month later, Ofcom upheld complaints about CGTN’s airing of three additional forced confessions, one by Hong Kong-based U.K. consulate employee Simon Cheng and two by Swedish book publisher Gui Minhai. CGTN was subsequently fined £225,000 for contravening standards on fairness, privacy, and due impartiality.⁶¹

Despite losing their license to broadcast in the UK, CGTN was able to resume broadcasts in Europe under the provisions of a Council of Europe agreement.⁶² As a result of its problems in the United Kingdom, CGTN is considering moving the European production center to Brussels, where China Media Group is setting up operations. In September 2020, Politico reported on CGTN’s relocation, noting, “The leadership at China Media Group believes ‘the climate in [the] U.K. turned against them’ and that ‘they can better undermine [the] EU in its own backyard,’ according to one person at CGTN with knowledge of the group’s motivations.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Peter Humphrey, “‘I Was Locked inside a Steel Cage’: Peter Humphrey on His Life inside a Chinese Prison,” *Financial Times*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/db8b9e36-1119-11e8-940e-08320fc2a277>.

⁵⁹ “Complaint by Mr Peter Humphrey about China 24 and News Hour,” Ofcom Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin, July 6, 2020, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0033/197254/Complaint-by-Mr-Peter-Humphrey-about-China-24-and-News-Hour,-CCTV-News,-27-August-2013-and-14-July-2014.pdf.

⁶⁰ “Ofcom Revokes CGTN’s Licence to Broadcast in the UK,” Ofcom, February 4, 2021, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/ofcom-revokes-cgtn-licence-to-broadcast-in-uk>.

⁶¹ Patricia Nilsson, “Chinese State Broadcaster CGTN Fined £225,000 by UK Regulator,” *Financial Times*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/f657400c-a128-4a76-8e92-22307931d705>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jack Parrock, “Voice of China’s European Ambitions,” *Politico*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/china-europe-media-voice-ambitions-global-television-news-cgtn-global-television-news/>.

Following a complaint submitted by Safeguard Defenders about forced confessions on CGTN, the Australian SBS broadcasting network suspended use of CGTN and CCTV content in March 2021.⁶⁴ In June 2020, Safeguard Defenders detailed how the group had created 16 petitions concerning CGTN broadcasts to several entities, including the U.K.'s Ofcom, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, and agencies at the United Nations. Among the complaints, which they made largely on the grounds of breaches of standards and ethics, only the United Kingdom ruled with the Canadian regulatory body, refusing to review a submission on forced confessions.⁶⁵

On December 12, 2019, Safeguard Defenders lodged a complaint to Ofcom about CGTN's broadcast of the documentary "Fighting Terrorism in Xinjiang," noting that their complaint was "on the grounds of misleading the viewer, derogatory treatment of individuals and failure to show due impartiality and due accuracy." The submission also described complaints regarding forced confessions and biased reporting regarding the accurate conditions of mass internment camps disguised as "vocational training centers."⁶⁶

Responses like those by Safeguard Defenders are vital in holding CGTN to account for its mediawashing of the Uyghur genocide and promotion of narratives depicting a transformed people and region to the world. States and regulators do not necessarily need to apply pressure directly to CGTN but instead can bring pressure to bear on CGTN partners.

CGTN's continued mediawashing of genocide has broader implications as a blueprint for nervous authoritarians. China's innovation of totalizing high-tech surveillance and reconfiguration of universal human-rights standards have been critical to the endurance and projection of party-state power at home and overseas. Similarly, mediawashing through broadcast and print proxies such as CGTN not

States and regulators do not necessarily need to apply pressure directly to CGTN but instead can bring pressure to bear on CGTN partners.

⁶⁴ Kirsty Needham, "Australian Broadcaster Suspends China's CGTN Citing Human Rights Complaint," *Reuters*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-china-media-idUSKBN2AX0GJ>.

⁶⁵ Safeguard Defenders, "Resource: Chinese TV Forced Confessions Campaign Timeline," December 3, 2020, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/resource-chinese-tv-forced-confessions-campaign-timeline>.

⁶⁶ Safeguard Defenders, "Campaign against Chinese State TV CGTN Expands to US, Canada," July 3, 2020, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/campaign-against-chinese-state-tv-cgtn-expands-us-canada>.

only provides cover for genocide but also acts as a platform for disinformation and future narrative control. As media corporations find ever more salient methods for speaking to global audiences and shaping narratives in the process, sound reporting may be lost in a sea of discursive tactics by state-sponsored media entities. CGTN’s narrative creation of “new” Uyghurs and a “cleansed” East Turkistan is one example of a type of information warfare that threatens freedom around the globe.



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