

# THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF CHINESE TELEVISION: MANIFESTATIONS AND POWER INTERPLAYS, 1978-1991

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the main features and power factors of the initial stage of television globalisation in mainland China. Based on document researches in three Chinese television stations of different administrative levels and in-depth interviews with television managers, producers and scholars, it argues that China's television was internationalised between 1978 and 1991. Television internationalisation was defined as a process driven by the party-state of adopting and reinventing the television cultural forms that were spreading internationally in order to build up national media and dominant ideologies in China. The argument is in three parts. I show first how the party-state relaxed its extreme anti-foreign stance in Chinese television as part of the national modernisation project within a modified party control system. Secondly, I show how these policies introduced international television flows and the transformation of some key aspects of television activities, in particular management practices, production values and program content. Thirdly, I show how the party state and its relations with Western states and international organisations were the primary influence on Chinese television, despite the rising influence of technologies, market forces and liberal intellectuals during the 1980s.

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## Introduction

The evolution taken place in mainland China's television sector has drawn unflinching interests from researchers and policy makers. This interest is due to the unique development model of Chinese television after the reform – business-like operation with party-state ownership and ideological control.<sup>1</sup> One major approach to decipher the changes, often associated with the terms “internationalisation,” “transnationalisation” or “globalisation,” stresses the influence of Western cultural forms on Chinese television (e.g. Chan 1994, 1997; Curtin 2007; Hong 1998, 2009; Weber 2003). Scholars in this approach have two major perceptions through their empirical discoveries. First, the Chinese party-state is able to resist, absorb and reinvent the foreign media influence in its own interests, thus far more active than a passive receiver of Western influence as media imperialism theory has assumed. Second, market factors, emergent during the process of reform and opening-up as a dominant force for shaping Chinese television, have hardly subverted the party-state's television control system. Their findings of the persistence of Chinese party-state policies works in tandem with the renewed interests in the role of “nation-state” in academic discourse since more than a decade ago (e.g. Held et al. 1999, Waisbord and Morris 2001, Price 2002). Indeed, numerous empirical studies demonstrate that states are able to update their way of media governance in order to promote national production and fend off unregulated external influence both in developed countries and “Third World” countries (e.g. Straubhaar 2001, Keane 2002, Rantanen 2007, Hafez 2007, Chan 2009). To Price (2002) and Zhang (2011), pointing out the pertinence of states in the age of globalised communication is just the first step. Moreover, one needs to find out how the (transformed) states have influenced the media and why states have transformed policies in the light of the rise of other power factors. In this way, one can catch the specific configurations of globalisation under different historical and social context.

The key question is thus not whether there is a role for the Chinese party-state as China's television gradually increases its contacts with the outside world, but in what way? And what's the relationship of the Chinese party-state with other power factors? Informed by these two questions, my enquiry starts from the changes of the party-state television governance since the reform era. I approach it as a sub-branch of public policy that will be examined in terms of policy objectives, policy institutions, and policy instruments (Hills 2005). I then look into how the changes in television policies have impacted the different spheres of activity in the television sector, namely, ownership, market structure, management, production logic and content. The analysis of the (di)synchronisation of the policy objectives and the transformations actually taken place (policy outcome) will provide insights for the role of other power dynamics of Chinese television globalisation.

This paper seeks to map out the manifestations and power interplays of the initial stage of Chinese television globalisation. It also aims to illustrate how this process should be brought in to enrich our understanding of globalisation through the critique of dominant theories such as media imperialism. Based on document researches at China Central Television (CCTV), Zhejiang Provincial Television (ZJTV) and Wenzhou Municipal Television (WZTV) together with semi-structured interviews on Chinese television producers, managers and scholars between 2005

and 2007, I argue that the party-state and its relations with the Western states and international organisations were the primary influence on the globalisation of Chinese television during 1978-1991. This pattern of power relations is remarkably different from the later stages, when the market forces play an increasingly critical role. I thus identify the initial stage of Chinese television globalisation as television internationalisation.

CCTV, ZJTV and WZTV are selected as major case studies for the paper based on the consideration that China's television has been structured according to administrative levels. Thus, comparing the influence of globalisation on stations at different levels enabled me to examine the whole picture of Chinese television from the national to the provincial and local.<sup>2</sup> The interviewees included in the study are either deeply involved in or knowledgeable about the Chinese television reforms in the 1980s. Interviews data, used to triangulate the documentary results are cited anonymously to respect the desire for confidentiality of informants.

## The Transformation of Party-state Television Governance

Before the late 1970s, the revolutionary party-state in China had adopted a rigid television control system inherited from the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War, which bore a number of features. First, television stations in China were not granted autonomy, but were highly integrated into their regulators-broadcasting bureaus and under the ultimate control of the party (Qian 2002, 59). Second, the majority of television policies were manifested as directives in the form of "red-headed" documents, internal bulletins, short notices or verbal messages from senior officials and party leaders (Huang 1994, 236). Given the small number of television stations, these policies were always implemented efficiently. Third, cultural protectionism had been adopted as an indispensable part of the television control system (Chan 1994, 70). As other Communist countries, the Chinese television was virtually insulated from influences of the non-Communist west.

Besides, China's television control system had its own characteristics. First, the Chinese system was less centralised and vertical than that in the Soviet Union. It acknowledged the differences between and the autonomy of provinces, as a result of the decentralisation wave in the Mao era (Qian 2002, 52). While the Central Broadcasting Bureau (CBB) managed broadcasting at the national level, the main responsibility for maintaining provincial television stations rested on provincial governments. Second, China's television system was more isolated than the Soviet model. The Soviet Union was an exporter of television systems, programs and production values to Soviet Bloc countries (Rantanen 2002, 22). China, however, cut off its contacts with other Communist countries after its break up with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. Therefore, the period of Communist television imperialism/ internationalism (Lee 1980, 55-7; Rantanen 2007, 170) was very brief in China.

Following the party-state's economic reforms and introduction in 1979 of an open-door policy to tackle serious economic problems and a crisis of political legitimacy after the Cultural Revolution, the 1980s witnessed reforms of China's television system. The following focuses on how the party-state changed its television governance in terms of policy objectives, policy institutions and policy instruments.

**Policy Objectives.** According to Price (2002 32, 39, 239), media policies in most countries aim to reinforce a political status quo by justifying the sale to the rest of society of a set of ideologies in favour of the dominant power. While this ultimate goal of media policies remains intact in China, the justifications had transformed as the party-state shifted its orthodoxy from class struggle to economic construction in the late 1970s. The party-state thus encouraged the Chinese media, especially television to promote the economic reform under the rubric of the “four modernisations,” that is, the modernisation of industry, agriculture, science and national defence (Deng 1994, 4). But Chinese television was hardly able to shoulder this responsibility after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution. “Television reform” was then put forward by the party-state at the 11<sup>th</sup> national radio and television conference (NRTC) in 1983, aiming to establish a modern television system in China (CRTHEC 2003, 214).

As for other aspects of Chinese society, modernisation required that the previous anti-foreign stance be relaxed. Despite resistance from the party hardliners, Deng Xiaoping adopted an open-door policy and launched diplomatic visits to developed countries. For the television sector, China signed agreements with the US and Japan on technological and cultural cooperation (Guo 1991, 127-8). This opening up was said to pave the way for international flows to China during the 1980s of modern television technologies, as well as programs and values (e.g. Guo 1991, 128; Chan 1994, 70; Hong 1998, 94-6).

Nevertheless, unlike Soviet’s perestroika, the objective of “opening up” was to strengthen television’s role as a mouthpiece and eventually the power of the party. Initiated by the hardliners, the party-state had launched three campaigns against the inflows of Western culture during the 1980s. Even top party leaders of the reformist fraction (e.g. Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang) were committed to the party leadership of television (CRTYEC 1988, 3). However, since the reformist faction had reduced socialism largely to a matter of economic growth, in their view the propagation of economic achievement would reinforce the party’s legitimacy (Kelly 1998, 60-1). Thus, during most of the 1980s, when the reformist fraction dominated the CCP politburo—the core of the CCP Central Committee, the focus of ideological work was on the promotion of economic reform.

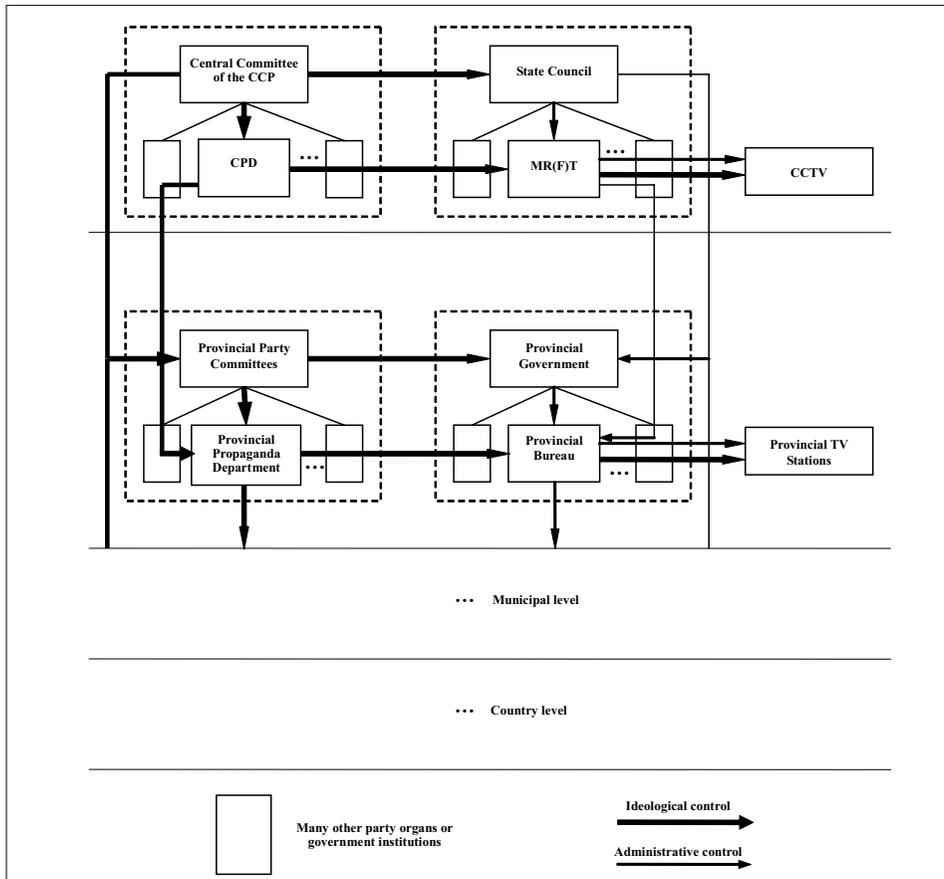
**Policy institutions** refer to the structure of the media system, within the limits of which (party) state policy makers take decisions and also strive to change those limits in their own favour (Majone 1989, 95-6). The party-state carried out a number of institutional reforms to accommodate its new policy objectives in the 1980s. Besides the replacement in 1982 of the CBB by the Ministry of Radio and Television (MRT)<sup>3</sup> as the national regulator, other changes are as follows:

First of all, the party-state decentralised the main responsibility for managing television stations further to the county level governments in order to activate local resources (Figure 4.1). While the MRT maintained its power to license all broadcasters, decide on technological standards, direct international television flows and distribute important party propaganda issues on behalf of the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), local governments were responsible for policy enforcement and modification via local broadcasting bureaus (CRTYEC 1989, 131). They were also concerned with the finance, employment and propaganda work of local television stations (CRTHEC 2003, 351).

Second, the 1980s witnessed the delegation of some autonomy in financial management from the MR(F)T and its local bureaus to television stations at various levels (CRTYEC 1989, 129). Consequently, there emerged a few television stations/channels with autonomous financial departments.

Nevertheless, the party maintained ultimate authority over MR(F)T and Chinese television (Figure 1). Therefore, the tug of war between the party fractions also reflected in media policies. Moreover, many important policies with ideological implications were stipulated by the Central Party Committee and the CPD or jointly stipulated by party organisations and government regulators (e.g. CCP, 1983).

Figure 1: The Control Structure of China's Television System



Source: Combined Data of Pan and Chan (2000, 238) and CRTHEC (2003, 349-56).

**Policy Instruments.** In China, as elsewhere, policy instruments or the means by which policy makers choose to distribute and implement policies (Hills 2005, 140) depend not only on the technical properties of the approaches, but also in large measure on the institutional framework of the state, since policy instruments are seldom ideology-free (Majone 1989, 117). During the 1980s, leaders' speeches, conference reports and political campaigns still dominated the Chinese television regulatory system (CRTYEC 1986-1992). But those administrative orders could hardly deal

with emerging issues such as the import or co-production of television programs, and copyright disputes that need to be standardised in content and form.<sup>4</sup>

This, together with the nationwide legislative reform waged by the party-state to construct a “rule by law” society in the mid-1980s, compelled the MR(F)T to establish a legal department and classified the legal framework of Chinese television into three tiers: (1) the broadcasting law promulgated by the national people’s congress; (2) administrative regulations proclaimed by the State Council; and (3) regulatory documents issued by the Ministry (CRTYEC 1988, 179). By 1990, the State Council and the MR(F)T had promulgated three administrative regulations and 66 departmental rules (CRTHEC 2003, 358).

However, the introduction of legal documents into the Chinese television regulatory system by no means reversed China’s party controlled television structure. First, legal documents touched primarily on a small number of issues concerning China’s international television inflows.<sup>5</sup> Second, while the Soviet Union issued its press law in 1990, the drafting of the Broadcasting Act was deferred in 1991 after numerous revisions (CRTHEC 2003, 358). By 1991, all legal documents concerning Chinese television were stipulated by government administrations rather than by the National Congress, and were thus vulnerable to the party’s interventions.

How did television internationalisation take place within such a limitedly modified television system?

## The Impacts of Party-state Policies on Chinese Television

This section assesses the impacts of party-state policies on the main dimensions of the transformation of Chinese television, i.e. ownership, market structure, management, production and content. It explores how party-state policies have influenced the inflows and the reinvention of Western television cultural forms in Chinese television. I analyse first party-state policies in the context of each dimension and then the transformation, with evidence focusing on CCTV, ZJTV and WZTV.

**Ownership.** Modelled after the Soviet system, all television stations were party-state owned public units (*shiye danwei*) following its launch in 1958, operating under state budgets and shouldering all responsibility for content production and distribution. No private or foreign investment was permitted to flow into the Chinese television sector.

This unilateral party-state ownership system continued during the 1980s. At the 10th NRTC in 1980, the top policy makers maintained that Chinese television was owned by the party-state and should serve the party and the working class (CRTHEC 2003, 190). The conference report of the 11th NRTC confirmed that only governments above county level were entitled to establish television stations in China (CCP, 1983).

In practice, party-state ownership was realised through subsidies from various levels of governments to television stations. Commercial funding by means such as (foreign) advertising, sponsorships and (international) co-productions was permitted, but these only accounted by 1990 for one third of all operating costs (Chan 1994, 81). For a national service like CCTV, the huge cost of whose distribution system, development and maintenance fees was primarily covered by the central government.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, most television stations in China did not directly manage their own commercial revenues in the 1980s. For instance, ZJTV had to submit commercial revenues to the Zhejiang bureau and WZTV to the Wenzhou bureau. These broadcasting bureaus then established annual budget plans and reallocated the revenues to television stations in a way similar to state subsidies.<sup>7</sup> Thus, indirect capital flows such as those from advertising did not bring about returns in the form of “ownership,” that is, they did not bring advertisers the power to influence how resources were used and allocated. The ownership of Chinese television remained in the hands of the party-state, without direct challenges from private or foreign capital.

**Market Structure.** Before the 1980s, a rudimentary two-level, national and provincial monopoly television structure was established.<sup>8</sup> Except for CCTV, which covered the whole country, each province had just one television station. Competition was not allowed either within or between provinces. At the 11th NRTC, the party-state introduced a four-tier television system, aiming to harness material resources at the municipal and county level to improve the coverage rate of CCTV (CCP, 1983).

The four-tier television policy aroused enthusiasm for the establishment of television stations. Transmission infrastructure, such as microwave circuits and satellite systems, was imported from Western countries such as the US and Japan and installed around the country. Indeed, local governments welcomed the launch of television stations because these were effective for local propaganda (Qian 2002, 136). Between 1982 and 1990, the number of Chinese television stations increased from 47 to 509 and television signal coverage among the population increased from 57.3 percent to 79.4 percent (CRTHEC 2003, 328; CRTYEC 1991, 521). All television stations were obliged to transmit CCTV programs so as to maintain the party-state’s ideological dominance. Further, all programs made by lower level stations could only reach their prescribed administrative areas (MRT, 1984).

This four-tier monopoly structure was evident during the 1980s. Table 1 shows there was one broadcaster at each administrative level. Television broadcasting did not go beyond administrative areas. Nor was there any transnational broadcasting except in part of Guangdong and Fujian provinces, where terrestrial signals spilled over from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chan 1994, 72). One could argue that the creation of city and county level television stations also provided a mass platform for the dissemination of counter messages, including those of international programs. Indeed, most local stations served as relay stations for CCTV and provincial television during the 1980s thanks to the lack in both channel spectrums and resources to obtain alternative programs.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1: Channels Received in Wenzhou City and Ruian County (Wenzhou Municipality) in 1986

	Wenzhou City	Ruian county
National Broadcaster	CCTV	CCTV
Provincial Broadcaster	ZJTV	ZJTV
Municipal Broadcaster	WZTV: occasionally inserted city news	WZTV news
County Broadcaster	N/A	Ruian County Television: Occasionally inserted county news

Source: Archive of WZTV, Accessed in Wenzhou, March 2006.

As Table 1 indicates, WZTV and Ruian county television occasionally inserted local news into channels designated for CCTV or ZJTV. My archive research of Wenzhou Radio and Television Newspaper (1988-1991) found that in most cases, these replaced ZJTV because of the policy priority for CCTV. Therefore, CCTV was the biggest beneficiary of the four-level television policy.

**Management.** Before the economic reform, China's television services were totally dependent on state subsidies. Television stations had no autonomy in terms of financial management. From the late 1970s, advertising along with program sponsorship and co-productions was allowed on Chinese television in order to supplement the deficiency of state subsidy (CPD 1979; CRTHEC 2003, 513). These, together with the approval of the party-state for the delegation of some autonomy to television stations (CRTYEC 1989, 129) contributed to the emergence of experimental reforms in the financial system of Chinese television stations.

One significant reform initiated by CCTV was its launch of the economic channel (CCTV 2) in 1987 (CRTHEC 2003, 235). The channel was different from Western commercial channels because it was owned by the party-state and operated according to state budgets. But CCTV 2 had adopted a more flexible financial system than CCTV 1. Guo (1991, 276-7) found that, after submitting its quota of advertising revenue to the state, CCTV 2 was able to retain a small proportion of the revenue. Indeed, during its first years of operation, CCTV 2 allocated part of its advertising revenues to local television stations as a strategy, for encouraging these stations to transmit its programs. A CCTV research director confirmed that this pattern of operation followed the practice of major Western commercial networks such as the Columbia Broadcasting system (CBS) and Independent Television Networks, as a consequence of early state level contacts with these television stations.<sup>10</sup>

Soon after the launch of CCTV 2, many television stations in economically developed areas such as Shanghai, Guangdong, Zhejiang and Tianjin followed suit. For instance, ZJTV established a second channel in 1988, which concentrated on business news and entertainment. This channel went further than CCTV 2 in financial reform because it linked commercial revenues to staff salaries. After submitting 55 percent of its commercial revenues to the Zhejiang Broadcasting Bureau, it allocated the remaining revenues to staff welfare and incentives.<sup>11</sup>

Although Western experience did not directly influence the financial reform of ZJTV2, several domestic pioneers inspired this reform. One prominent example, as a senior manager of ZJTV pointed out was the highly successful Pearl River Economic Radio in Guangzhou, which modelled on the practices of Hong Kong commercial radio.<sup>12</sup> As noted elsewhere, Hong Kong media made its impact felt in the daily operation of Chinese television, especially in Guangdong (Chan 1994). Since Hong Kong radio and television are highly westernised, the reform could be regarded as an indirect influence of Western patterns. However, while advocates of the media imperialism theory (Boyd-Barrett 1977, 119; Kivikuru 1988, 13) argue that there is no real choice for developing countries but to absorb Western cultural forms, the remodelling in China involved an active reinvention of international models.

**Production.** Influenced by the Soviet Union, early television production in China overemphasised propaganda, often telling empty stories to mobilise class struggle. After the inception of economic reform, Chinese media circles, with the support of the party-state, initiated discussion of "respecting news values" to regain

authoritative status for the news media (CRTHEC 2003, 215). At the 11<sup>th</sup> NRTC in 1983, the then MRT Minister, Wu Lengxi, proposed the truth principle – recording society in an objective way and the party principle – serving the Communist party as the two guidelines for television programming in China (CCP, 1983).

Consequently, China dispatched delegations of producers to visit and receive training at Western and international organisations. China also invited foreign professionals to give lectures on production techniques (CRTYEC 1988, 625). For instance, Chan (1994, 79) found that since the reform a great number of media personnel had visited Hong Kong, which offered them a space on how media worked in a freer system. Guo (1991, 158) observed that these, combined with early program imports and international co-productions had an “eye-opening effect” on domestic producers who had long been isolated from the outside world.

In terms of news reporting, Chinese journalists modelled themselves after the Western news providers, such as Visnews and United Press International Television News (UPITN) to reflect diverse aspects of society in a timely fashion. CCTV even introduced field journalists – a feature previously condemned as highly bourgeois in its weekly news magazine *Observation and Thoughts* to strengthen the “objective” flavour of the programs. In parallel to changes in practice there were changes to values or assumptions about what constitutes a good piece of news. A survey conducted in the mid-1980s found that few Chinese journalists accepted a sheer propaganda role for the news media; instead, they preferred a certain degree of autonomy and “objective reporting” (Polumbaum 1991, 63).

New production values also diffused into documentaries. One telling example was *Silk Road*, a co-production by CCTV and the Japanese company, Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) from 1980 to 1983. During the making of this documentary, different production values caused tensions. It was said the Chinese producers, influenced by the Soviet “special topic program” (zhuanti pian) had a tendency to make the program as an illustrated lecture, focusing on beautiful things such as women and flowers on the road, while the Japanese producers favoured natural settings, such as peasants on the barren land.<sup>13</sup> They ended up with two versions and the NHK version was more successful in terms of audience ratings (Guo 1991, 258). A participant in this co-production said:

*This experience had made us jump out of our old lecture style and learn to judge things from a foreigner’s perspective. We gradually became aware that the flavour of propaganda was too strong in our previous documentary making.<sup>14</sup>*

The following years witnessed the updating of production values in Chinese documentaries. From *The Yangtze River* to *The Great Canal* and later *River Elegy*, Chinese documentaries started to reflect things in a more objective and balanced way. The popular *Great Canal* in 1986 not only documented the canal’s achievements in history, but also its current backward situation (CCTVTEC 2003, 112).

As regards to television dramas, a discussion sponsored by *People’s Daily* in 1983 suggested that the quality ones should depict realistic subjects such as rural or industry reforms (Yu 1991, 81). Lin (2004, 1) points out that the success of ZJTV in television drama production during the 1980s largely relied on its reflection of a transformed society and of people during the economic reform, such as the *Voiceover of a Female Journalist* and *News Revelation*.

Nevertheless, the internationally prevalent production values such as “objective reporting” did not replace the Communist propaganda values in program production during the 1980s. While Golding (1977, 306) argued in accordance with media imperialism theory that Western production values are imposed on developing countries, a former producer at CCTV pointed out:

*In most cases, the government required us to integrate objective reporting techniques into the promotion of its socialist modernisation. We were not given tangible autonomy and freedom for objective reporting ... the party principle was always the touchstone.*<sup>15</sup>

As discussed, the party-state did not issue a Broadcasting Act for fear of losing its ideological control once producers’ professional autonomy was legalised. In the late 1980s, when the party’s propaganda machine was paralysed by the conflicts between party hardliners and reformists, many Chinese television producers took to the street, demanding media freedom. They also covered the student demonstrations in 1989 with a great deal of sympathy.

**Content.** Before the economic reform, Chinese television was full of political propaganda with few imported programs. After the reform, the party-state encouraged television producers to diversify program genres under the policy of program reform. This policy also permitted television stations to exchange programs with foreign media (e. g. MRT, 1985; MRFT, 1990). As a result, there was an increase in imported programs and a diversification in domestic programming.

**The Increase of Imported Programs on Chinese Television.** Despite several short “down” periods caused by the party-state’s campaigns against Western culture, the 1980s witnessed an overall increase in imported programs on Chinese television screens. For instance, there was only 2 percent foreign programs on CCTV in 1980, but by 1991 that figure had risen to 12 percent (Hong 1998, 71). Nationwide, it was estimated that by the same year around 20 percent of television programs originated from abroad (Lynch 1999, 111).

In terms of television dramas (including plays, series and serials), the share of imported dramas with Chinese subtitles or dubbings of the total dramas “made in China” had risen from 16 percent in 1985 to 34 percent in 1990. The great majority of imports were originated in a small number of developed Western countries that China had normalised diplomatic relations, they were, the U.S, Japan, the UK, France, West Germany etc. (CRTYEC, 1986-1991). Hong (1998, 69) found that China also imported dramas from Third World countries to show its support of anti-colonialism, such as the Brazilian soap opera *Slave Girls*. However, since audience preference was not a major consideration for program imports during the 1980s, the so-called regionalisation of program trade (e.g. Straubhaar 2007, 171) was not evident in China although imports from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore did exist.<sup>16</sup>

News imports increased dramatically too. It was reported that China stopped its news imports after its split with the Soviet Union during the pre-reform era (CRTYEC 1986, 1043). But from 1979, not only did CCTV start to receive the international news via satellite communication, but also its range of providers had widened to include Visnews, UPITN, Worldwide Television News (WTN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) and news

agencies in the Soviet Union (CRTYEC, 1986-1991). The dramatic increase in the sources to provide international news had enabled CCTV to telecast international news daily since 1980.

Imports also included documentaries, cartoons, sports and educational programs. A television anchorperson turned-into scholar used the word “exotic” to describe Chinese television screen in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> This exotic characteristic was reinforced by my archive research, suggesting that quite a few of flagship programs during the era consisted of foreign program materials such as *World Sports* and *One World* (documentary introducing world cultures and scenery) on CCTV and *Around the Globe, Sports Sights* on ZJTV.<sup>18</sup>

**The Diversification of Programs with Focus on the Reform.** With the inflows of foreign programs, Chinese television producers started to imitate the genres and themes of imported programs. There emerged prototypes of “critical news” dealing with official corruption, “societal news” concerned about ordinary people’s daily life, “bad news” such as natural or artificial disasters, and “development news” recording the economic progress of the country. As for entertainment programs, there was a rise in television dramas, variety shows and various festival galas. Meanwhile, different types of documentaries emerged, from those introducing history, scenery and cultural heritage, to those with strong political connotations.

One major feature of the diversified television programs was its focus on the economic reform. For example, the news magazine *Observation and Thought* on CCTV commented on both malpractices of official corruption and new phenomena of a private market development (CRTHEC 2003, 234). In 1988, ZJTV received the “top programme prize” for its in-depth news report on the Zhejiang salt industry (ZJRTEC 2004, 699-700). The report pointed out that the slow development of the industry was caused mainly by the high price of the raw salt.

Discourse about the economic reform also influenced television dramas, demonstrated by the popularity of political dramas such as *News Revelation* and *New Star*. The latter told a story about the struggle between local bureaucrats and a young reformist in county-level government. It was reported that in Beijing around 73.8 percent of the audience watched *New Star* when CCTV 1 broadcast it in 1986 (Guo 1991, 235).

Probably no media text more forcefully expressed the aspirations for reform than documentaries. *Silk Road, Great Canal* and *Great Wall* all promoted a patriotic attitude towards the country’s modernisation. In 1985, CCTV and ZJTV co-produced China’s first political documentary, *Facing Challenges* (CCTVTEC 2003, 115). This documentary drew upon historical sources and images, arguing that China needed to learn from history so as to achieve success in the current economic reform.

The above analysis reveals party-state policies have causal efficacy for the shape and influence of international television inflows in China (e.g. Chan 1994, 80; Price 2002, 29). In a sense, television technologies, management practices, production values and content were imported from the Western countries because policy makers considered them a strategic priority for the development of Chinese television. Largely as a result of the country’s party controlled regulatory system, international television flows did not transform party-state television ownership and the monopoly market structure. Even in those aspects with greatest penetration by international television flows, such as production values and content, the transformation manifested

strong Chinese characteristics, rather than homogenisation with Western television.

This dominant role of the Chinese party-state presented a strong counter argument to the media imperialism theory (e.g. Kivikuru 1988, 13; Boyd-Barrett 1998, 157) on the defencelessness of developing countries against developed Western states in the international television flows. However, the internationalised Chinese television had not only promoted the Chinese party-state's modernisation project, but also challenged its ideological control, manifested by the rise of programs like *River Elegy*, which, as Zhao and Guo (2005, 525) argued, critiqued China's river-based agricultural civilisation and expressed an aspiration for the modernisation and global integration of Chinese society. Hong (2002) thus interprets the post-reform Chinese television system as a hybridised developmental-type television model, characterised by a mixture of elements of the authoritarian, the communist and, to a lesser degree, the libertarian media model. As will be analysed, a variety of power factors emergent during the reform contributed to such a transformation.

### The Interplays of Party-state Policies with Other Power Factors

During Mao's socialist heyday, the party-state influence pervaded every domain of social life. Deng's regime transformed Mao's totalitarianism into a more flexible authoritarianism, permitting the emergence of other power factors on society. For Chinese television, I argue that the reform policies resulted in the rise of technologies, market forces, Western states and international organisations, and liberal producers as four power factors in its transformation. This section explores how these interacted with party-state policies in the initial stage of Chinese television globalisation.

**Technologies.** Since the reform, the Chinese party-state had encouraged inflows of television transmission technologies from the West. By the end of the 1980s, China had established its national television transmission network, expanding television coverage to 79.4 percent of total population (CRTYEC 1992, 671). China had also become one major producer of television sets in the world by 1989 thanks to imported television sets manufacturing assembly lines from Japan and the US (Huang 1994, 217). How had these technologies impinged on Chinese television?

Above all, the rapid development of infrastructures and the high penetration of television sets had enabled the establishment of sub-provincial level television stations in the 1980s. Second, the upgraded transmission networks proved effective for transmitting domestic programs. For example, by the end of the 1980s, television viewers in Wenzhou city started to watch ZJTV via microwave circuits and almost simultaneously CCTV via satellite earth stations.<sup>19</sup> Even the most remote parts of China, such as Tibet and Xingjiang, could receive CCTV signals via Chinasat 2. In addition, technologies had facilitated international program flows. CCTV used satellite communication to pick up news materials from a number of foreign news providers via Intelsat's Indian Ocean Satellite and Pacific Ocean Satellite (CRTYEC 1991, 547).

However, as Straubhaar (2001, 138) found with regard to their role in television globalisation in Brazil, technologies alone could hardly have enabled change had they not been accompanied by other developments in China. First, the party-state

introduced advanced Western television technologies to China. Second, China impressed the world in the 1980s with the average annual increase in gross domestic product of 9.8 percent and annual per capita wage growth of 12.38 percent from 1981-1989 (NBSC 1990, 42). Had there been no rapid economic growth, there would have been no huge investments from the state and non-state sectors (e.g. advertising revenues) on television infrastructures. Nor would the rapid penetrations of television sets into ordinary Chinese households have been possible.

The subsidiary role of technologies was also shown by the way in which, during the 1980s, satellite communication did not lead to the direct reception by Chinese individuals of outside channels. An equipment manager pointed out that in the 1980s few individuals in China could afford satellite dishes. Moreover, no transnational television channels were specifically targeting the Chinese television market with mandarin broadcasting.<sup>20</sup> This also explains why few subnational television stations retransmitted transnational satellite signals to audiences in the 1980s, in sharp contrast to that in the 1990s. In sum, technologies development was in line with the party-state's policies for the modernisation of Chinese television. It was not, in the 1980s, a direct force for challenging the party-state's ideological dominance.

**Market Forces.** In the decade following party-state approval of the commercial funding of Chinese television in 1979, commercial revenues had become an indispensable source of finance for the operation of Chinese television stations. Accordingly, market forces – mainly refer to the economic interests of domestic television stations and transnational media corporations in this paper, started to play a role in the internationalisation of Chinese television.

First of all, economic interests resulted in financial reforms of Chinese television. As discussed, the second channels of CCTV and a few provincial television stations borrowed successful managerial experiences from Western commercial media in order to expand program coverage or to motivate workers. However, these reforms did not challenge the party-state ownership because state subsidies remain the major finance for all Chinese television stations. Meanwhile, since Chinese television stations had to remit (part of) their commercial revenues to broadcasting bureaus, they lacked an economic impetus to strive for private status.

Commercial activities also contributed to the diversification of television programs in China. Advertising revenues, sponsorship had become an important source for program making although domestic programs in the 1980s were hardly determined by commercial interests thanks to their focus on the economic reform. In terms of program imports, affordability had been the primary consideration except the criterion of acceptability, that is, no explicit sex, violence and anti-government messages involved in the programs (Hong and Deng 2009, 35). Therefore, US programs dominated imports at the early stage of reform because of their low prices.

The role of the market forces was also demonstrated by the fact that a few transnational corporations had started to place economic stakes in China's television market in the 1980s. Lull (1991, 151-2) found that companies such as CBS, Twentieth Century Fox and Paramount made profits from selling advertising time on CCTV to big-name companies such as IBM, Boeing, Procter & Gamble etc. In 1987 alone,

American advertisers had put about \$16 million-worth of advertising on Chinese television. However, those companies should not be regarded as the major vehicle for Chinese television globalisation during the 1980s. The reason can be understood from the following statement of a Beijing-based scholar:

*Before the 14<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1992, China was a planned economy despite the introduction of market mechanism as supplement (...) Many foreign companies, including large transnational firms, were hesitant to do business with China because they were not familiar with the system and worried about the volatile economic and political environment.*<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, political forces played an upper hand, for most companies cut off contacts with Chinese television in line with their governments' sanction policies after the Chinese party-state's crackdown on student demonstrations in summer 1989.

**Political Forces.** Thompson (1995, 15) argued that the primary institutions of political power in modern history is nation-states. In this paper, besides the Chinese party-state, other political factors include Western states and international organisations, whose major members are nation-states. How did they influence Chinese television in the 1980s?

Since the early 1970s, the strained relations between China and the Soviet Union had made the former move toward the US-led Western Bloc. Soon after the famous "Pingpong diplomacy" and Nixon's visit to China, the People's Republic of China (PRC) replaced Taiwan at the United Nations and the PRC began to normalise its relationship with key Western countries. During Mao's era in the 1970s, this shift of diplomacy was mainly motivated by international geo-politics, attempting to constrain the expansion of the Soviet Union (Gong 2005, 6).

Deng Xiaoping's regime was more interested in economic development and his foreign diplomacy aimed to create a favourable international environment for the country (CCP Archives Research Office 1986, 218). As a result, by the end of 1985 China had signed contracts/memoranda of television cooperation with 42 countries (CRTYEC 1986, 1046). By 1987, CCTV alone had conducted television exchange activities with media organisations in 84 countries (CRTYEC 1988, 637). Archive research found the majority counterparts of Chinese television were Western national or public organisations such as NHK in Japan, the Missouri Journalism School in the United States, the British Council in the UK and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in West Germany (CRTYEC, 1986-1991). Meanwhile, a dozen of international organisations accepted China as a member. Among these the most important were the UNESCO, the World Telecommunication Union (WTU) and the ABU, which provided China with the benefits of free technological consultations, professional training and program exchange with other member states (CRTYEC 1986, 1051-2; CRTHEC 2003, 305-6). In a sense, Western states and international organisations had facilitated the modernisation of Chinese television.

However, as Price (2002, 52) argued, "external support is not a lottery, but a strategy to establish a particular cartel or to ensure a specific voice." This was true during the 1980s when Western states had made great efforts to publicise ideals of freedom and democracy, known as "peaceful evolution" or "psychological warfare" (Thussu 2006, 18-26). For instance, it was reported that the sympathetic coverage of the 1989 student demonstration by major Western television was crucial for the spread of

the movement in China (Zhao 2004, 207). However, while foreign media in general and television in particular were acknowledged as contributing to the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the CEE countries (Rantanen 2002, 26; Hu and Wu 2005, 138), they did not have similar effects on China during the 1980s.

First, while in the Soviet Union ordinary people had access to Western film and music through video and audiocassettes during the 1980s (Rantanen 2002, 26), in China these were confined to the urban rich because ordinary citizens could not afford the equipment (Lull 1991, 28-9). Moreover, the party-state banned private trade in cassettes under the banner of anti-pornography campaigns (e.g. MRFT 1986, 1987). Moreover, from the mid-1980s, Soviet perestroika provided a more relaxed control on foreign programs. For instance, in 1987 Soviet television showed a live ABC broadcast of the Satellite *Space Bridge*, entitled “capital to capital” that transmitted discussion between American and Soviet citizens (Rantanen 2002, 26). Paasilinna argued that this program contributed to a positive attitude toward the US citizens among the Soviet citizens (Quoted in Rantanen 2002, 26). In contrast, the Chinese party-state resorted to a strict preview and censorship system. As stated in a normative document published by the MRFT, even for entertaining dramas, cultural and artistic considerations should be subordinate to issues of China’s international relations (CRTYEC 1991, 75). Thus, the 1980s witnessed ups and downs in program imports in accordance with the political climate.

The above analysis demonstrates the power of Western states and international organisations, but challenges the argument of media imperialism on the dominance of external dynamics in media internationalisation (Schiller 1976, 9). During the 1980s, the Soviet Union enfranchised political power to citizens and lowered the wall between the country and the West. The Chinese party-state introduced Western technical accomplishments within the framework of party control. Therefore, Western media had less formidable effects on the wider public and the communist regime in China, although they had considerable effects on Chinese intellectuals and producers.

**Cultural Forces.** Cultural or symbolic power “stems from the activity of producing, transmitting and receiving meaningful symbolic forms” (Thompson 1995, 16). For television, Straubhaar (2001, 2007) identifies producers and audiences as two major forces of cultural power. As discussed, in the 1980s, television audience preferences in China had not been counted as an important consideration for programming. Television producers, many of whom influenced by liberal ideals thus played an important role. How?

During the 1980s, Chairman Mao’s class struggle had been replaced by a developmentalist orthodoxy based on Deng Xiaoping’s theory of “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” While Mao launched mass campaigns one after another in pursuit of his ideological vision, Deng preferred to maintain his regime by means of economic growth and a certain degree of ideological diversity under the premise of the party’s monopoly of power (Kelly 1998, 57). This diversity was demonstrated by Deng’s tolerance of different fractions within the party system, the hardliners most concerned about the party’s power and reformists most concerned about the modernisation reforms. Before 1989, Deng tilted the balance toward the reformists, giving them his support of progressive reforms (Lam 1998, 22-3).

After the reformist fraction took an upper hand in the Politburo during the 1980s, there was arising of reform-minded intellectuals (e.g. Wang Ruoshui, Yan Jiaqi, Hu Jiwei) who overwhelmed the orthodox Marxist intellectuals in public discourse (Fewsmith 1994, 135-44). My interviews discovered that television producers, especially those at CCTV and provincial stations, formed a strong force in the liberal camp.

Some producers I interviewed attributed this influence of Western media practices to the exchange program and on-the-job training offered by international and Western organisations.<sup>22</sup> Others attributed this influence through university education, for most Chinese journalism departments introduced Western journalism theory and practice during the 1980s. The universities also invited foreign experts from prominent institutions such as Columbia Journalism School, Missouri Journalism School in the US and BBC in the UK to give lectures.<sup>23</sup> Chang (1989, 244-6) found students' graduation papers in the 1980s indicating a broad range of interests, especially journalism values in Western countries.

These, together with exposure to the products and practices of Western media organisations through imported programs or co-productions, helped to disseminate program genres, production techniques and principles of "objectivity" to Chinese producers. With the support of the reformist fraction in the Party, television producers incorporated some elements of Western production ideologies into their "objective" depiction of the reform process in line with the grand modernisation project.

However, Chinese television in the 1980s had also become a forum for debate on problems in the modernisation process, the direction of Chinese society and aspirations for Western modernity. Were television producers powerful enough to challenge the country's party-controlled television system?

Above all, most of the so-called liberal intellectuals were merely enthusiastic about a new knowledge system that could be used to critique the conservative orthodoxy that they thought would otherwise hinder reform and economic development.<sup>24</sup> According to Pan and Lu (2003, 222), for media and television producers the Western ideals of journalistic autonomy and editorial independence were easily accepted because they bore partial similarities to the grander intellectual mission of enlightening the public through truth inherited from the Confucian tradition. However, their original aim, according to a participant of *River Elegy*, was to express aspirations to rapid reform that could bring wealth and power to China rather than subvert the Communist leadership.<sup>25</sup> The study by Lull (1991, 143) reinforces my finding that *River Elegy* did not decisively question China's political system. This contrasted markedly with Soviet television in the 1980s which provoked discussions in favour of Western democracy.

Moreover, unlike the Soviet leaders in the 1980s, the reformist leaders (e.g. Party Secretaries Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang) who nurtured the liberal intellectuals in China wished to carry out reforms within the framework of the party leadership (e.g. CRTYEC 1986, 5-17; 1988, 1-4). Thus, despite divisions between the conservatives and reformists about the extent to which China should reform and open up, for most of the 1980s a compromise standpoint had been reached that media such as television must be controlled in order to protect the party's monopoly power. Thus, television programs on the economic reform, though not necessarily in line

with socialist propaganda, were not allowed to challenge the party-state.<sup>26</sup> Discussions about Western democracy and freedom only appeared in restricted academic spheres such as elite newspapers, academic journals and books.

However, in the late 1980s the party control of television was relaxed. Party conferences and student demonstrations were fully covered on Chinese television. The controversial documentary *River Elegy* was broadcast twice on CCTV. Indeed, it was reported that Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang supported the relaxation of news censorship in May 1989. He even presented the videotapes of *River Elegy* as a gift to Premier Lee Kuangyao in Singapore (CRTYEC 1990, 119-21).

On the surface, he was conducting media reforms similar to those in the Soviet Union. But an official of SARFT, the current incarnation of MRFT argued that Zhao's view of media reform in 1989 was as a means to win public support for his own political survival.<sup>27</sup> His remarks were reinforced by the study of Shirk (1993, 37, 74), who contended that in the late 1980s Zhao Ziyang's status in the party was challenged because of Zhao's political mentor Deng's advanced age and of economic inflation. The party hardliners seized the opportunity to critique Zhao's fast pace of reform for causing public confusion and frustration. Nevertheless, Zhao's loosening of media censorship did not turn things around, but caused a loss of effective ideological control. In the latter part of the student demonstrations in 1989, the demand for Western freedom and democracy replaced slogans against official corruption, which worried not only conservatives, but Deng himself (CRTYEC 1990, 119). The political drama ended in June 1989 when martial law was imposed on the student demonstrations at the Tiananmen Square and Zhao was put under house arrest. Soon afterwards, the party leadership re-emphasised the role of media in maintaining ideological control. Consequently, the Chinese television was filled with news and documentaries that glorified the party and its crackdown on student demonstrations, such as the famous documentaries *Truth of the Demonstrations*, *Summer of Beijing* and *One hundred Mistakes of River Elegy* (CRTHEC 2003, 317-9). In fact, before the redefining of the mass media as a tertiary industry in 1992, the development of Chinese television stagnated with sluggish contacts with the outside world and positive propaganda of the party-state.

Liberal television producers seemed to play an important role in adopting Western production ideologies and disseminating alternative ideas in the late 1980s. But as Curran (2000, 134) argued with regard to the rise of media diversity in Western societies, the initial impetus comes not from the "people" but from within the power structure. In China's case, the findings suggest that Chinese producers' rare autonomy in the late 1980s owe much to the then international and domestic political environment, in particular the divisions between party hardliners and reformists.

## Conclusion

After thirty years of isolation, the Chinese party-state relaxed its anti-foreign policies in the late 1970s. As a result, Western television cultural forms flowed to China. First, there emerged second channels within CCTV and a few provincial television stations, whose financial management was influenced by Western commercial television. Second, the reform introduced inflows not only of Western production technologies, but also of production values such as "objective report-

ing.” Third, there was an increase in imported programs and a diversification of domestic programs modelled on Western program genres and themes.

The influence of foreign television on Chinese television during the internationalisation process reinforces the argument of media imperialism on the asymmetrical television flows between the Western centers and the peripheries of the East (Boyd-Barrett 1977, 1998). However, it did not suggest the concept of Westernisation proposed by media imperialism (e.g. Hamelink 1983; Kivikuru 1988), for the foreign cultural forms have been “glocalised” by important internal power factors, in particular the power of the party-state. For instance, Western management practices were applied to the party-state owned television stations that still received state subsidies. Western production techniques and genres were also adopted in domestic programming, especially those engaged with the economic reform. The national service CCTV played a key role in the internationalisation process while most local television stations remained relay stations.

Moreover, the party-state resorted to strict program censorship, prevented direct investment from private and foreign capital and ban competition both within and between administrative levels in Chinese television to hold its ideological control.

Nevertheless, the party-state was no longer the monopoly power as it was before the 1980s. It decentralised its power in television regulation and operation to local broadcasting bureaus and television stations. It also introduced legal provisions to legitimise and regulate international television flows. Unlike the Soviet Union, the reforms of the party-state’s television governance aimed to reinforce the Communist party’s legitimacy, but they had made room for a variety of power factors too. For instance, imported technologies contributed to the expansion of television networks. Commercial funding had inspired television stations to improve their revenues. It also became an important way of finance in domestic programming and programs imports.

In contrast to popular assumptions, market factors were not the primary forces for the television globalisation process at this initial stage. Television ownership remains in the hand of the party-state. Imported programs were selected not to contain anti-government messages. Domestic programs were politically oriented, often depicting the economic reform.

Meanwhile, a number of Western television organisations and international organisations, rather than transnational corporations, were the main vehicles for Chinese television’s contact with the outside world. They speeded up Chinese television modernisation through various technological and cultural exchange activities. They also played an important role in diffusing Western values such as freedom and democracy to television producers who in the late 1980s demanded more media autonomy and produced programs critical of the economic reform. However, this powerful influence of Western and international organisations does not support the argument of media imperialism that external forces have the say in the process of media globalisation in developing countries (Schiller 1976, 9). The unique democratising performance of Chinese producers in the late 1980s was conditional on a lack of unified internal ideology within the party leaders. As Chan (2001, 113) noted, the roles of the media in a society varies with its power structure. Once the party hardliners defeated the reformists, Chinese television swung back to glorifying the Communist party-state.

To conclude, television internationalisation during the 1980s had largely modernised Chinese television and was determined by the interplays between the party-state, the Western states and international organisations. But this process had also challenged the party-state's tight ideological control, for the internationalised Chinese television had evolved from the mere party propaganda machine to a multi-faceted social institution, the forum for debating the country's reforms included. Kelly (1998, 58) and Young (1998, 118) argue that reducing socialism to economic goals rendered the mainstream ideology of the party-state irrelevant to political leadership. After the suppression of the 1989 movement, the party-state started to rebuild its ideological dominance with the concept of "spiritual civilisation,"<sup>28</sup> which emphasised the importance of traditional Confucian values and socialist ethics in China's economic reform. This, combined with the party-state's media commercialisation policy as part of its accelerated economic reform in 1992, resulted in the rise of market forces as the major competing forces of party-state power, and different patterns of television globalisation in China after 1992.

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#### Notes:

1. In China's political system, the party leads the work of the government/state via its authority to promote government officials, generating general policy lines and conducting ideological education and evaluation. This paper thus uses the term party-state to represent the Chinese version of nation-state.
2. CCTV is the only national television service in China. One could be critical of my choices of ZJTV from over 30 provincial television stations and WZTV from around 300 municipal television stations, since they are located in one of the richest provinces and cities in China. However, largely because of their strong economic capabilities, they are also at the forefront of the transformation of Chinese television under globalisation. Many state television policies have started with these television stations as pilots. In a sense, ZJTV and WZTV are highly representative of the trend of development of Chinese television stations at their respective administrative levels. Wenzhou is a municipality located within Zhejiang Province.
3. The Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRFT) replaced MRT in 1986.
4. Interview with a Scholar. 2005. Chinese University of Communication, Beijing, April, 1.
5. Ibid.
6. Interview with a Senior Manager. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, May, 31.
7. Archive of Zhejiang Broadcasting Bureau, accessed in Hangzhou, August 2005; Archive of WZTV, accessed in Wenzhou, March 2006.
8. Monopoly market refers to the situation that a single media firm has absolute control over a relevant market (Kranenburg and Hogenbirk 2006, 333). However, in the 1980s in China, the situation was not determined by the market economy, but dominantly by politics. It was called as "the administrative monopoly television structure" within the Chinese media circle (Qian 2002, 155).
9. Interview with the Research Director. 2007. WZTV, Wenzhou, May, 18.
10. Interview with a Senior Researcher. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, May, 31.
11. Archive of Zhejiang Broadcasting Bureau, accessed in Hangzhou, August 2005.
12. Interview with a Senior Manager. 2005. ZJTV, Hangzhou, September, 12.

13. Interview with a Scholar. 2005. Qinghua University, Beijing, April, 8.
14. China Sociology and Anthropology. 2006. New Weekly's Interview with Chen Duo. <<http://www.sachina.edu.cn/Htmldata/news/2006/09/2375.html>>
15. Interview with a Former Producer. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, May, 18.
16. Interviews with a Scholar. 2005. Qinghua University, Beijing, March, 8.
17. Interviews with a Scholar. 2005. Qinghua University, Beijing, March, 17.
18. Archive of CCTV, accessed in Beijing, May 2005; Archive of ZJTV, accessed in Hangzhou, August 2005.
19. Archive of WZTV, accessed in Wenzhou, March 2006.
20. Interview with a Senior Manager on Equipments. 2007. WZTV, Wenzhou, May, 18.
21. Interview with a Scholar. 2005. Renmin University, US, October, 30.
22. Interviews with Producers. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, March, 19; May, 18; June, 15.
- Interviews with Producers. 2005. ZJTV, Hangzhou, August, 24.
- Interviews with Producers. 2007. ZJTV, Hangzhou, April, 28.
23. Interviews with Producers. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, April, 14; May, 18; June, 10. Interviews with Producers. 2005. ZJTV, Hangzhou, August, 24.
- Interviews with Producers. 2007. WZTV, Wenzhou, May, 10.
24. Interview with a Scholar. 2005. Qinghua University, Beijing, March, 14.
25. Interview with a Producer. 2005. CCTV, Beijing, May, 18.
26. Interview with a Scholar. 2005. Qinghua University, Beijing, March, 17.
27. Interview with an Official. 2005. SARFT, Beijing, May, 27.
28. "Spiritual civilisation" was first put forward in 1979 to improve the nation's educational, cultural and moral standards, but had evolved in the 1990s to promote the national character of the Chinese market economy.

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