



MEDIA@LSE Electronic Working Papers

Editors: Professor Robin Mansell, Dr. Bart Cammaerts

No. 1

Hong Zhang (zhangh2009@zju.edu.cn) is a lecturer at the College of Media and International Culture of Zhejiang University, China. She was awarded a PhD in Media and

The Globalization of Chinese Television:

1. INTRODUCTION

This research project aimed to understand how Chinese television has dealt with the influences of foreign, in particular, Western television cultural forms since 1978 when the country adopted the so-called 'reform and opening-up' policy (Zhang 2009). During the process of working on the project, I have been frequently challenged by the view that China's television development, owing to the Communist party state's control of the Chinese television system, has been primar

the interplay of party state policies with power factors both above and below the national boundaries.

In this paper the key characteristics of Chinese television globalization are compared at different historical stages, namely, internationalization (1978-1991), transnationalization (1992-1996) and renationalization (1997 up to now) in accordance with the changing role of the Chinese party state. It also presents the contribution of

Table 1: Criteria for Assessing the Historical Forms of Television Globalization

Chinese Party State Television Governance	Policy objectives Policy institutions Policy instruments
Key Transformation in Chinese Television (policy outcomes)	Ownership Market structure Management Production

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.

The analysis is limited by the fact that the research is highly dependent on documentation from governmental sources. This is because in China, since the party/state controls television, both television regulators such as the State Administration of Radio, Film and

3. KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In the following section, I present the major empirical findings of this project in accordance with the key analytical criteria, focusing on the similarities and differences between the transformation of Chinese television under each criterion and across different stages.

3.1. *The Transformation of Party State Television Governance*

As discussed, this study prioritizes the role of the Chinese party state in China's television globalization and starts from the transformation of party state television governance since the beginning of the reform era. I approached state television governance as a sub-branch of public policy and examined it in terms of policy objectives, policy institutions and policy instruments.

3.1.1. Policy Objectives

In China as elsewhere, studying policy objectives is important for the analysis of public policy making because, once policy objectives are identified, policy makers may modify policy institutions and choose policy instruments favourable to their policy objectives (e.g. Thatcher, 1999: 314; Keane, 2001: 793-6). During the past three stages of television globalization, the ultimate goal of television policies in China has been to promote the growth of Chinese television as a means of reinforcing the party state's ideological dominance.

However, the justifications and specific policy objectives have kept changing. During the 1980s, the party state made it explicit that China's television reform was to promote the country's economic reform and thus the party state's power. When the party state recognized after the pro-democracy student demonstrations in 1989 how fragile official mainstream ideology could become when reduced to a matter of economic growth, it called in the early 1990s on Chinese television to promote 'spiritual civilization', which emphasized the importance of traditional Confucian values and socialist ethics in China's economic reform, while seeking to discredit the cultural aspects of Westernization (e.g. freedom and democracy). Since the late 1990s, the party state has advocated, as a response to the overwhelming presence of television as entertainment, the 'public interest' function of Chinese television modelled on that in Western democracies. Although the new ideology no

longer overtly demonizes Western cultures, its emphasis remains on evoking Chinese traditional and socialist values in order to construct an harmonious socialist society, rather than enlightening the public in a manner free from political intervention. One could argue that, as the party state strives to find a better justification f

However, top policy makers within the party state have continually modified policy institutions so as to achieve the policy objective of accelerating the growth of Chinese television within the party state's ideological control. From the early 1980s, the party state has decentralized the main responsibility for managing sub-national level television stations to sub-national broadcasting bureaus. While this decentralization activated sub-national governments to invest in Chinese television, for example, by importing technologies to establish television stations, it also increased the regulatory power of the sub-national broadcasting bureaus, in particular, after 1992 with the party state's recognition of the commercial nature of Chinese television.

During the early and mid-1990s, many sub-national bureaus, reliant heavily on

117) argues, policy instruments are seldom ideology-free. They depend in large measure on the party-controlled institutional framework in China.

However, despite the lack of a Broadcasting Act, television policy instruments

managed by broadcasting bureaus and re-allocated to Chinese television stations as state subsidies.

However, since the early 1990s, the party state has compelled Chinese television stations to be self-financing because it could no longer fund the increasingly expanding television system. As a result, private or foreign capital started to penetrate Chinese television because sub-national broadcasting bureaus which had similar economic interests to sub-national television stations such as ZJTV, WZTV and the newly emerged cable services, welcomed the inflows of non-state capital for the development of the

Besides these similarities, there are remarkable differences in the transformation in micro-management in the three stages. Although the party state approved commercial advertising in Chinese television stations and arranged state-

3.2.5. Content

Ever since the party state launched its 'opening up' policy, it has approved program inflows from foreign countries. Consequently, in the past three stages, Chinese television stations have broadcast programs from a number of countries, with a focus on developed Western countries such as the US and the UK and culturally or geographically proximate areas such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and Korea. Moreover, Chinese television stations have modelled their domestic programming on

3.3. *The Interplay between Party State Policies with Other Power Factors*

The global transformation theories argue that any satisfactory account of globalization must trace historically the causal dynamics of the globalization process (e.g. Thompson, 1995: 173; Held et al., 1999: 19; Price, 2002: 234). In this project, the causal dynamics are derived from four sources of power: technologies, economics, politics and culture. This section will identify the role each of these power factors through the comparison of their influences across the three stages.

3.3.1. Technologies

Since the advent of the reform, the party state has encouraged the import of advanced technologies as a mechanism for modernizing the Chinese television system. So far, the inflows of these technologies have largely improved the efficiency and quality of Chinese program production and transmission, and greatly expanded its coverage to over 96% of the Chinese population (CRTYEC, 2007: 545).

However, technologies are always double-edged swords. They also create conditions for inflows of foreign programs that may challenge the interests of the party state. For instance, from the early to the mid-1990s, the party state encouraged the development of domestic satellite television channels and cable television stations as a strategy for expanding the coverage of domestic television. But both technologies also accelerated the reception and recasting of transnational channels. Interestingly, while the same transmission technologies, such as satellite communications, already existed during the 1980s, they had not played a role in transnational flows. The potential of technologies was only opened up in the 1990s when satellite dishes were affordable for ordinary audiences and transnational channels targeting the Chinese market emerged because of the growth of China's economy.

Since the late 1990s, the party state has initiated the transformation from analogue to digital television production, transmission and reception. This is because digital technologies are not only able to create a central portal for the party state to control information flows, but also have the potential to generate huge revenues from value-added services for both domestic and foreign operators. Thus, domestic and transnational broadcasters have turned to cooperating with the party state to develop this technology and produce programs more adaptable to the party state's official ideology. As Straubhaar (2007: 113) finds in the case of

cooperated with the party state to promote Chinese perspectives in their programs. However, domestic television stations determine the renationalization process because they shoulder most responsibilities of program broadcasting in China.

Nevertheless, market forces cannot replace the regulatory role of the party state in Chinese television, even if they challenged Chinese party state policies in the mid-1990s. Above all, market forces are in the business of making money, not founding alternative political organizations or identity. Accordingly, without regulation, market forces can easily produce negative externalities, such as a structure of repetition in small stations and ignorance of the interests of the poor and the periphery in society. Since the late 1990s, the party s

During the 1990s, the influence of these Western states and international organizations faded away. On the one hand, Western countries such as the US had cut back their expenditure on international television cooperation after the fall of the major Communist regimes in the early 1990s. On the other hand, after 1992 Chinese television producers' exposure to the outside world was tremendously increased by training courses and seminars

With advertising revenues becoming the major funding for Chinese television stations in the 1990s, producers, in particular those at sub-national television stations, started to relay Western entertainments or copy Western formats under severe competition for audiences. But even audience preferences were constrained by the economic power. Driven by short-term economic interests, few television stations or companies were willing to cultivate programs reflecting Chinese culture. Thus, high quality domestic programs were largely unavailable in the early and mid-1990s. Since the late 1990s, the party state has strengthened its control of imported television programs. It also created economic incentives for producers to churn out programs in tandem with its official ideology. As the quality of mainstream ideology programs improves, audiences have switched back to these domestic programs, which in turn has enhanced producers' enthusiasm for such programming.

However, cultural factors are neither determined by political economy nor always reinforce the dominant political economy, because producers and audiences do enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. For instance, during the 1980s, while Chinese producers were required by the party state to promote the Chinese economic reform, inspired by the Western ideal of objective reporting, they went beyond their role as propagandists to disclose official corruption and social stratification as a result of the economic reform. Since the late 1990s, the phenomenon of 'cultural proximity' (Straubhaar, 1991: 51), or audience preference for programs depicting environments similar to their own culture, has occurred in China. This is largely because the party state has successfully motivated producers to improve their skills in programming relevant with official mainstream ideologies, which, through redefinitions, have absorbed many cultural elements such as Confucianism deeply rooted in Chinese audiences. As Straubhaar (2001: 153) argues, when the state works intelligently within the boundaries of national culture, it can better achieve its policy objectives such as ideological dominance. Thus, culture should be regarded as a source of power that also bounds and enables

Similarly, all aspects of Soviet television experienced transformation simultaneously because of the collapse of Communist party control in the early 1990s (Rantanen, 2002).

Secondly, these findings support the revisionist view that culture is not always a tool for reinforcing commercial and political imperialist control, but may function as an independent power because of the active choices of local agents (Fiske, 1987; Hoskin and Mirus, 1988; Straubhaar, 1991). For instance, the influx of foreign television cultural forms neither reflect

4.3. *Global Transformation Theories*

Above all, the global transformation theories point out the importance of developing trans-historical criteria for capturing changes in the key features of globalization, and more importantly, of investigating the dynamics of change (e.g. Held et al., 1999; Sassen, 2006). Comparing the key transformation of Chinese television on the basis of several trans-historical criteria, this study demonstrates not only that the penetrations and reinventions of foreign television forms in Chinese television have varied at different stages, but also that the dominant power factors differ, largely because of the policy strategies that the party state has sought to impose. Thus, the results of this study

However, global transformation theories have so far been illustrated by few empirical studies, in particular of cases from non-Western countries. Indeed, scholars within this paradigm often generalize their arguments with little evidence. For instance, Held et al. (1999: 371-2), on the basis of their studies of a few developed countries, argue that states

Figure 1: The Relationship of (Party) State and Television under Globalization

reform, but also foreign companies targeting China have started to make programs fitting Chinese ideology.

China is one of the few countries that have borrowed the techniques of Western television governance without democratizing its regulatory system, for instance by granting media freedom through legislation. Indeed, the party state has nowadays proposed Confucian values, such as that of a 'harmonious society', as an alternative ideology to that of Western democracy, as manifested in the opening ceremony of the 29th Olympic Games. The globalization of Chinese television, like its economic reform, seems to suggest that there are different paths to achieving development.

What will the next stage be? Will China be able to provide significant contra-flows to the West, as many have aspired to see? (e.g. Fung, 2006: 85; Curtin, 2007: 289) Could the Chinese party state maintain its current television system while expanding its television culture to foreign markets? So far, what we have seen is that, while the party state has increased its power in the domestic television space, its influence on the overseas market is limited. CCTV, China's biggest television station, has a small number of overseas audiences compared with truly global channels such as CNN and the BBC. China's program export industry lags far behind that of the US, and also behind those of East Asian countries such as Japan or Korea. It is important for future research to understand why Chinese television has limited impact outside its borders as the globalization process unfolds.

REFERENCES:

- Boyd-Barrett, O. (1977) 'Media Imperialism: Towards an International Framework for the Analysis of Media Systems', pp. 116-35 in J. Curran, M. Gurevitch and J. Woollacott (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Arnold.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (1998) 'Media Imperialism Reformulated', pp. 157-76 in D. K. Thussu (ed.) *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance*. London: Arnold.
- Char J. M. (2005) 'The Global-Local Communication (Dis) Synchronization: Interplay Among Media, Individuals, State, and Global Institutions During the SARS Outbreak in China'. Paper Presented at the Conference Media and Society, 2-3 June 2008, Fudan University, Shanghai, China.
- Char J. M. and Qiu, J. L. (2002) 'China: Media Liberalization under Authoritarianism', pp. 27-46 in M.E. Price et al. (eds.) *Media Reform: Democratizing the Media, Democratizing the State*. London: Routledge.
- Chapman, G. P. (1981) 'International Television Flow in West Europe'. Paper presented at the International Institute of Communication Annual Conference, 7-10 September 1981, Strasbourg, France.

- Keane, M. (2001) 'Broadcasting Policy, Creative Compliance and the Myth of Civil Society in China', *Media, Culture and Society* 23(6): 783-98.
- Keane, M. (2002) 'As a Hundred Format Bloom, a Thousand Television Stations Contend', *Journal of Contemporary China* 11(30): 5-16.
- Kranenburg, H. & Hogenbirk, A. (2006) 'Issues in Market Structure', pp. 325

Thatcher, M. (1999)

Electronic Working Papers

Media@lse Electronic Working Papers will:

- Present high quality research and writing (including research in-progress) to a wide audience of academics, policy-makers and commercial/media organisations.
- Set the agenda in the broad field of media and communication studies.
- Stimulate and inform debate and policy. All papers will be published electronically as pdf files, subject to review and approval by the Editors and will be given an ISSN.

An advantage of the series is a quick turnaround between submission and publication. Authors retain

Editorial Board Members:

Chrisanthi Avgerou

David Brake

Patrick Dunleavy

Clare Hemmings

Robin Mansell

Diane Perrons

Danny Quah

Andrew Scott

Leslie Sklair

Robert Wade

Anne Barron

Bart Cammaerts

Rosalind Gill

Sonia Livingstone

Andrew Murray

Andy Pratt

Margaret Scammell

Raka Shome

Shenja Vandergraaf

Edgar Whitley

ISSN: 1474-1938/1946