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# **Governing China**

## **with the News**

*Television & National  
Development in China  
since 1958*

Thesis submitted for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of East Asian Studies  
University of Durham

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**Steven Guanpeng Dong**

*First submitted on 30 September 2007*

*Revised and Re-submitted on 31 March 2009*



09 JUN 2009

# 用新闻**执政**中国

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1958 年以来的中国电视  
与国家发展

董关鹏

英国杜伦大学东亚研究系

申请哲学博士学位论文

2007

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# Declaration

The material contained in this thesis has never been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. It is based on the author's individual research and has not been published before.

Steven Guanpeng Dong  
30 September 2007

# Abstract

## **Governing China with the News: Television and National Development in China since 1958**

*Steven Guanpeng Dong*

This thesis is an historical study of the interplay between television news and politics in China since 1958. It examines the evolution of television news and political development in China, as well as the continuing innovations to the CCP's ideological system.

Television in China has become the major source of social and political information and knowledge to facilitate development, at a time when China is experiencing its fastest development in the national economy. The Chinese television institutions now are far from a monolithic and unified propaganda machine, and have begun to play the role of a multifaceted creature undergoing a process of rapid transformation, with different parts of the body straining in different directions. Meanwhile, however, CCTV (China Central Television), which serves as the central hub of official information and social and political knowledge provision in the process of Chinese national development, is still mainly running according to the aims and agenda of the Chinese Communist Party and central government. Among China's journalists, the debate on the democratisation of journalism arises once again at a time when the social market economic system has been well established throughout the country.

This thesis has involved the examination of a diverse range of sources, dispersed in several archives and libraries in the UK, US and China. Bibliographical research has been combined with fieldwork carried out among Chinese television journalists and senior managers in television stations.

This work aims to contribute to a better understanding of the media and politics of modern China, adding a new perspective to the study of televised democracy and mediated politics in China.

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# Abbreviations

CCP=Chinese Communist Party

CCPCC=Chinese Communist Party Central Committee

CDP=Central Department of Publicity (Propaganda), CCPCC

CDO=-Central Department of Organisation, CCPCC

SCIO=State Council Information Office

*This is also the CCPCC's Central Department of International Communications (CDIC). CDIC and SCIO are sharing exactly the same responsibilities, directors, personnel and offices. In daily operations, the Party and central government prefer to have the State Council name "SCIO" rather than CDIC.*

SARFT=State Administration of Radio, Film and Television

*The SARFT was formerly named differently as:*

MRFT=Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (1986-1998)

MRT=Ministry of Radio and Television (1982-1986)

SAB=State Administration of Broadcasting (1949-1982)

SAPP=State Administration of Press and Publishing

FM=Foreign Ministry

MII=Ministry of Information Industry

MOC=Ministry of Culture

MPS=Ministry of Public Security

MNS=Ministry of National Security

EPB=Environmental Protection Bureau

PLA=People's Liberation Army

BOCOG=Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games  
2008

CNR=China National People's Radio

CRI=China Radio International

CETV=China Education Television

PD=*People's Daily* and The *People's Daily* Group

CD=*China Daily* and The *China Daily* Group

Xinhua=Xinhua News Agency

CNS=China News Service

CCTV=China Central Television  
CCTV-1 (Comprehensive)  
CCTV-2 (Business and finance)  
CCTV-3 (Entertainment)  
CCTV-4 (International in Chinese)  
CCTV-5 (Sports)  
CCTV-6 (Movie)  
CCTV-7 (Agriculture and military)  
CCTV-8 (TV drama)  
CCTV-9 (International in English)  
CCTV-10 (Science and education)  
CCTV-11 (Classical opera)  
CCTV-12 (Society and law)  
CCTV-News (24 Hour news services)  
CCTV-Kids (Kids and youth)  
CCTV-Music (Traditional and classical music)  
CCTV-E&F (International in Spanish and French)

XWLB=*Xin Wen Lian Bo*

*Gathering of News around China at 7:00 pm on CCTV1*

FR=*Focus Report*

*Daily Investigative News of Hot Issues, 7:37 pm on CCTV1*

NP=*News Probe*

*Weekly Investigative News Magazine, sharpest and critical*

TTT=*Tell the Truth*

*Talk Show of People's Everyday Life, Sunday mornings CCTV1*

OH=*Oriental Horizon*

*Breakfast News and Current Affairs Magazine, CCTV1*

BTB=Beijing Television

STV=Shanghai Television

SMG=Shanghai Media Group

SOT=Shanghai Oriental Television

DTV= (Shanghai) Dragon Television

HNTV=Hunan Satellite Television Channel

CAS=Chinese Academy of Sciences

CASS=Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

CPS=Central Party School

NSA=National School of Administration

CSS=Central School of Socialism

TSJC=Tsinghua School of Journalism and Communication

CASS-IOJC=Institute of Journalism and Communication Studies,  
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

CUC=Communications University of China  
*Formerly the 'BBI'=Beijing Broadcasting Institute*

CNN=Cable News Network  
BBC=British Broadcasting Corporation  
VOA=Voice of America  
CBS=Columbia Broadcasting System  
C4=Channel 4, UK  
AJ=Al Jazeera

IT=Information Technology  
PSB=Public Service Broadcasting  
VCR=Video Cassette Recorder  
VOD=Video on Demand

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Steven Guanpeng Dong  
Durham, September 2007 and then March 2009

## *Introduction*

### **Governing with the news:**

### **Television and national development in China since 1958**

*The significant revolution of the modern times is not industrial or economic or political, but the revolution taking place in the art of creating consent among the governed... Within the life of the new generation now in control of affairs, persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. None of us begins to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political premise.*

Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* [1922: 1]

The importance of the media in politics lies in their potential to reach large audiences. Television is especially important in today's politics as it provides a greater sense of reality. Television in China has become a major source of social and political awareness and provides information in support of development at a time when China's national economy is developing at its fastest rate ever. Chinese television institutions are no longer a monolithic and unified propaganda machine, but a multifaceted creature undergoing a process of rapid transformation, with different parts of the body straining in different directions. However, China Central Television (CCTV), which serves as the central hub of official information and contributes social and political knowledge to the process of Chinese national development, is still mainly being run according to the aims and agenda of the Party and central

government. Within the journalistic community of China, the arguments on democratisation of journalism arise once again at a time when the social market economic system is well established throughout the country. People want answers to certain questions, such as:

- What is the contribution of Chinese television to the current and future political and economic development of China?
- How important is the fact that CCTV serves as the only central medium in the Chinese "four-level" television system, and how long will it dominate the audience market?
- Does the public expect CCTV to change in some way?
- What is CCTV's current political communications strategy as directed by the Chinese Communist Party's Central Department of Publicity?
- To what extent has the market economy provided a democratising alternative future path for Chinese television within the rapidly developing political environment under CCP control?



- What challenge does Chinese on-line journalism present to television journalism? Will the pattern of television propaganda policies be changed?

This thesis aims to answer these questions.

### **Television news and Communist China**

We have experienced an age of powerful news from all over the world.

What major functions do the mass media perform in society? Political scientist Harold Lasswell [1969: 103], a pioneer in media studies, mentions:

- surveillance of the world to report ongoing events
- interpretation of the meaning of events
- socialisation of individuals into their cultural settings

Political communications scholar Doris Graber [2002: 6] argues that a fourth function should be added, which would be the deliberate manipulation of politics.

It is believed that the media have a major impact on the conduct of politics and on public thinking. Politicians throughout the world act and behave on the basis of this assumption.

Larzarsfeld [1944: 2] led research over 60 years ago reporting on how people made their voting choices in Erie County, Pennsylvania, USA in the 1940 presidential election. His research is among the early studies in the West indicating that a well-publicised campaign appeared to change votes. His research was criticised for many years, as social scientists started proving that media influence was limited in determining people's votes. The full technology of mathematics, statistics and even physics was introduced into the studies until a more persuasive learning theory was applied in researching media influence on politics [Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, Newbold, 1998: 82].

Mass media effects are always hard to measure, both at individual and societal levels because they are highly complicated and elusive. Social scientists often underestimate media impact because they falsely equate statistical significance with political significance. Media impact on a statistically insignificant number of individuals could still have enormous political consequences. During an electoral campaign, for example, only one or two per cent of the voters may change their votes because of media stories.

That is a statistically negligible effect. From a political standpoint, however, the impact may be major, because there have been so many elections in history and in recent years which have ultimately been decided by a very narrow margin of voters. An “insignificant” one per cent of the total would still represent more than one million people [Graber, 2002: 15-18].

Studying media effects in China can be tough, as its billions of citizens are mobilised in various ways through the mass media every day, and researching Chinese audiences is too ambitious a project to be viable. What is surprising, however, is that the viewers in their billions are always directed by the media according to the Party’s ideology. It is impossible to believe that governing China with ideology can be based on a very scientific research of media effects and audiences, using statistics and mathematical calculations. This cannot be how the Chinese Communist Party governs [Bishop, 1989: 5].

There are political élites in China who are playing an important part in social and political development. The main problem with social science research on China’s mass media is that it has concentrated so much on measuring the effects on ordinary individuals, rather than on political élites. Average individuals in Chinese politics are generally unimportant in the political process, because the political élites in China talk in a relatively different

language on television, and this makes programmes boring for ordinary people to watch.

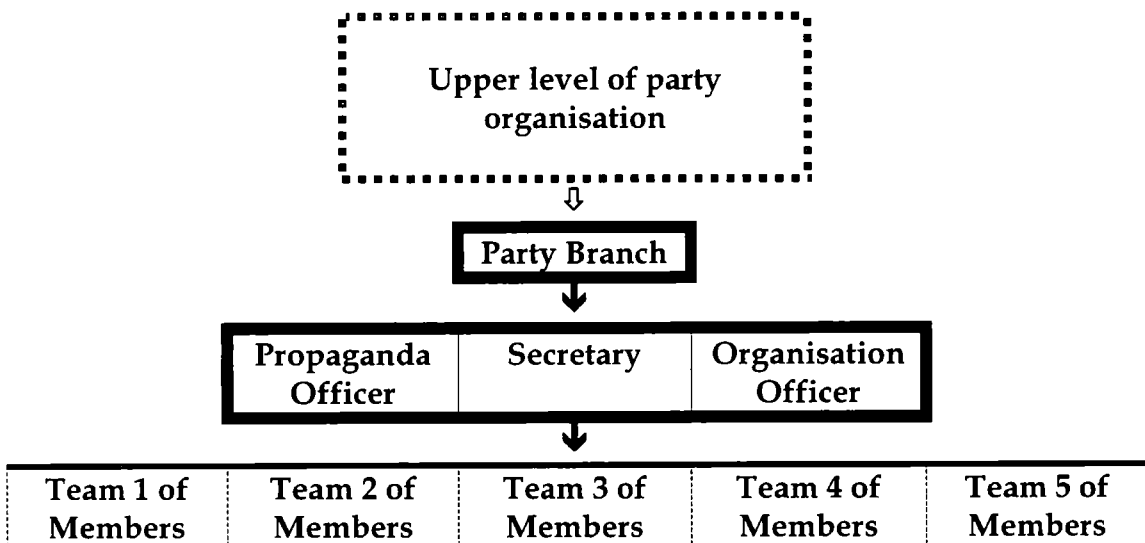
CCTV is still maintaining old-fashioned programmes like *Xin Wen Lian Bo* (*The United News at 7:00*). It was the television version of the front page of the *People's Daily (PD)*, but became far more powerful than the *PD*. Presenters on the programme are older than the average and unnecessarily serious, with no smile and no appeal. News items are ranked in order of people's official position in the Party and government. Political élites have the power to make changes and, as decision makers, their immediate concern is likely to be the content, genre, narrative and format of news because of the profound impact these aspects have. Despite a sharp decline in the audiences of *Xin Wen Lian Bo* in China since the 1990s, the programme is still the most politically important media production in China. No newspapers, radio reports, Internet pages or text-messaging services could ever replace its unquestionable authority. Reuters journalists in China once commented that watching *Xin Wen Lian Bo* was extremely helpful in predicting climate change in Chinese society, economy and politics [Interviews, 2005].

Government attempts to control and manipulate the media are universal, because public officials everywhere believe that the media are an important political force. This belief is based on the assumption that the institutions

which control public information can shape public knowledge and behaviour and thereby determine the support or opposition of citizens and officials to the government and its policies [Berkowitz, 1997: 101]. It is obvious that the CCP highly valued the significance of the media and the formation of public knowledge as early as the Yan'an Period, when it was fighting against the Japanese invader and then the KMT [Zhao, 1998:14]. The CCP comprises thousands of party branches, normally with three officers leading a standard branch, one of whom is always responsible for publicity and propaganda.

This can be seen from Table 0.1 below:

**Table 0.1 A typical party branch**



**Source:** Compiled by author according to the CCP Constitution

### Development theory and television studies

As this thesis concerns television in China and its role in the governance and development of China, it has been written with the help of the arguments and

conclusions advanced by development theorists. The thesis has not restricted itself to a particular set of development theories, but has cherry-picked from different sources those judged to be most relevant to the discussion here.

Development has over the years been described and defined in all sorts of ways and based on various factors. Different organisations and theorists have come up with a score of methods for measuring the development of people at individual and family level, at country and continental level and even breaking the measurement down to look at development with regard to society's use of technology and communication. Theories of development [Peet/Hartwick, 1999:1] define development as the use of the productive resources of society to improve the living conditions of its poorest people. This, however, is not normally the case, as the advancement of development frequently results in the accumulation of more by a few, while the process masquerades as the accumulation of more for more.

China's emergence as one of the countries that has seen the most rapid development over the past three decades is mostly described in terms economic growth, such as the rate of growth of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP per capita) since its economic reforms started. In this thesis, however, China's development is considered and discussed in terms of how economic development has affected people's lifestyles, communication processes and the relationship between citizens, politics and government.

This is based on the understanding that describing a country as developed, from economic growth alone, is inadequate while there are still problems with its environment, cultural and social wellbeing and the media's restricted freedom of expression. In addition, economic growth inevitably results in victims; these are the people, or that part of the population, who suffer because of the economic advances that are taking place and enjoyed by other parts of the population. There are people who lose their homes in the name of infrastructure development, others who are exploited as cheap labour and others, such as women, who are marginalized as being unsuitable for various activities.

Most of the definitions of development by which countries are measured are those developed by the World Bank, which uses GNP per capita, and the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), which uses the Human Development Index (HDI), and takes into account factors other than economic growth. China is measured against the scales of these two organisations. However, there are discrepancies in the methods used by these two organisations to measure development, which is because they are based on Western ideas of development. National and international agencies report only what can be measured using conventional accounting procedures. Whose "convention" is "conventional"? [Peet / Hartwick, 1999: 7].

In recent years, contributors to development studies and theories have been coming to a growing consensus that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for development. To say that a country has truly developed, the development must be accompanied by enhanced human rights, free media to facilitate free flow of information, and other liberties that allow a nation's people to participate fully in further development and to enjoy the resulting benefits. Wilbur Schramm (1956) is a pioneering scholar in his research on mass media and national development. He supports the idea that the mass media will provide the necessary knowledge for development to the people and government. Schramm's approach differs from traditional development studies, as this particular area has been dominated by economic theories from classical economists and neo-classical scholars through to the Keynesian growth theory supporters. Development has always involved growth. The sociology theory of modernization has provided alternative approaches through naturalism, rationalism and structural functionalism. Modernization and development are beginning to be examined not only economically, but psycho-culturally, historically and sociologically. Other scholars have contributed to the idea of considering the media in the context of national development research. Vandana Desai and Robert Potter who edited the 2002 book entitled, *The Companion to Development*, says most theories have missed the power of the mass media. Peter Burnell and Vicky Randall (2008) argue in *Politics in the Developing World* that democratization's



meaning, like democracy *itself*, is contested, because of social integration by people's mass perception of democracy, influenced by the media.

Marxist and neo-Marxist theories applied the terminology of imperialism, idealism, materialism, production theory and dependency theory. New theories analyzing development are also now included, being post-structuralism, post-colonialism, post-developmentalism and feminist theories. The mass media, however, are usually omitted when discussing new political and social changes in the developing world. Schramm's early work seems to have no sequel. This thesis fills in that gap, consisting of interdisciplinary research between political science and communications.

### **The Study of Media and Politics**

As if to justify its position as the fourth estate or the fourth branch of government, the media everywhere have been playing an influential part in political systems and governance. Prompted by this increasing rise in the media's importance, scholars have over the years written books that aimed to examine the media and their role in politics and governance. In coming up with *Governing China with the News: Television and National Development in China since 1958*, the author took inspiration from his study of media and politics through the works of several leading Chinese, American and British

scholars, including Timothy Cook, W Lance Bennett, Brian McNair and Yuezhi Zhao, among others.

In the book *Governing with News: The News Media as a Political Institution*, Timothy Cook presents an in-depth analysis of how the media work with politics in the United States of America. Published in 1998, the book looks at the idea of neutrality and objectivity of the media in the US. Cook examines how the media strive to be objective and neutral in their role as an indispensable part of government. In his introduction to the book, he states, "This book seeks to show how the news media are recognisable as a political institution: because of their historical development, because of shared processes and predictable products across news organisations, and because of the way in which the work of newsmen is so intertwined with the work of official Washington that the news itself performs government tasks".

Another insight into the relationship between the media and governance is provided by W Lance Bennett in the book, *News: The Politics of Illusion*. Here, Bennett presents a thematic focus on the relationship between news and governance. He goes beyond the conventional debate about freedom of the press by introducing discussion of news reforms and the age of citizen journalism.

Michael Schudson wrote a chapter in a book edited by Timothy Cook, called *Freeing the Press: 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment in Action*. The chapter entitled, 'Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press' argues that it is important for media to be aggressive and attacking in order to make democracy work. Schudson applauds the media for their tendency to focus attention on things that sometimes make it unpopular, such as the media's love of conflict and how they like to expose politicians and other people of power and influence. In essence, Schudson delivers the message that the media should not be a lap-dog.

Schudson also explores the role of the media in democracy in his 1995 book entitled, *The Power of News*. Here he discusses the importance of news with a historical perspective by looking back over the 300 years of US newspapers. He concludes that the news media can contribute to a more democratic society. More informed citizenship will create a better and fuller democracy.

A number of authors have looked at how people in the US depend on the media to hear about political developments, most especially during elections. Darrel West (2005), in his book, *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaign 1952-2004*, discusses the way that people learn about presidential candidates through television commercials. Larry Sabato (1992) examines how the news media cover and influence presidential campaigns, when attack

and investigative journalism becomes commonplace. Joseph Hayden (2002) details how Bill Clinton won the 1993 US elections with the media's help. His book entitled, *Covering Clinton: The President and the Press in the 1990s*, looks at Clinton's two-term presidency and how he related with the media.

Other writers considered in this thesis have examined the way in which the media have changed politics with regard to how politicians present their message to the people, and also how people access political messages. In their book entitled, *Media and the Re-styling of Politics*, John Corner and Dick Pels (2003) argue that politics has been re-styled by the media, an idea confirmed by other scholars such as Margaret Scammell (2003), who observes that a new marketing of politics is invented as citizens become political consumers.

Scammell contributes a chapter to the book, *Media and Re-styling of Politics*.

Pippa Norris (2000), in her book, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communication in Post-Industrial Societies*, observes that many accounts have mentioned the decline of traditional forms of party campaigning and the rise of new developments, such as the growth of spin-doctors and political consultants.

Paolo Mancini (1999) argues that political professionalism has been revisited by the media-driven political marketing. Writing in the 'Journal of Political Communication', Issue 16, 1999, Mancini said, "...The original meaning of political professionalism is confined entirely in the field of politics; however,

the media have changed everything, a politician with no media experience cannot survive at all”.

•

The rising power of the media and increasing influence on politics and governance gave rise to media conglomerates, whose existence has taken the relationship between media and politics to a new level. In his book, *Rich Media and Poor Democracy*, Robert McChesney (1999) examines the rise of private media in the West. He observes that our era rests upon a massive paradox, “On one hand it is an age of dazzling breakthrough in communication and information technology. Communication is so intertwined with the economy and culture that our times have been dubbed the information age. On the other hand our era is increasingly depoliticised, traditional notions of civic and political involvement have shrivelled. Elementary understanding of social and political affairs has declined. The clear trajectory of our world turns towards ever greater concentration, media conglomeration and hyper commercialisation”. John Street (2001) in *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* notes the poisonous conglomerate control by media moguls. Writing about packaging politics, after seriously criticising state control and state propaganda in previous times, Street points out that in the face of globalisation and new technologies both politics and the mass media are changing, with major implications for the distribution of power and the operation of democracy.

W. Russell Newman (2001) brings in a new perspective when he talks about the impact of new media and politics. Contributing a chapter to the book *Mediated Politics* by W Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, he says, “The political activities in the web community have just completed a successful promotion of civic awareness and web use under the rubric of web, white and blue. There may be significant social re-alignment and social movements that will bring news issues to the fore and reorganise traditional allegiances”. John Thompson (2000) adds another perspective as he explores why political scandals have become more prevalent today. In his book, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*, he states that the more political scandal occurs the more likely it is that new scandals will arise and will be amplified by increasing media attention. The dynamic of scandal, media attention and the politics of trust, produce ratcheting effect, which constantly increases the political stakes.

Although many of the American authors were studied in the writing of this thesis, were writing about different topics, they all seemed to agree that the media in the US have a watchdog role. This is the conclusion reached by W. Lance Bennett and William Serrin (2005) in the book edited by Geneva Overholser, entitled *The Institutions of American Democracy - The Press*.

British scholars have also made an extensive contribution to the exploration of how the media and government relate with each other. Brian McNair (1995, 2000) provides an in-depth analysis of media and politics in the United Kingdom. McNair studies British politics in an age of mediation. The media have not only become a political editor; they are also a provider of people's everyday understanding of politics. He appears to be concerned about performance politics in the UK, which would not benefit the process of democracy.

### **The Study of Chinese Media and Politics**

C. C. Lee is one of the first scholars in the West to have examined the infrastructure of Chinese politics and media. Works by CC Lee that influenced this book include *China's Media, Media's China*, published in 1994, and *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism*, published in 1990.

Yuezhi Zhao is another scholar among the first to study the history of radio, television and newspapers in China and analysed the relationship between media development and important historical moments. In her book, *Media, Market and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line*, Zhao studies the corruption of journalism in China, with a focus on newspaper reforms. In 2008 she published another book entitled, *Communications in China:*

*Political Economy, Power and Conflict*, where she describes how market reforms and digital communication technology have reconfigured the party/state power and media control. Perhaps most importantly, she argues that Chinese politics have entered an international age; China is invited to compete with its media system and the effective governance of a billion people.

On the other hand, Daniel Lynch (1999) contends that a combination of property rights reform, administrative fragmentation and technological advance has caused the post-Mao Chinese state to lose a significant degree of control over “Thought Work”, the management of propagandistic communication flow into and through Chinese society. Lynch’s book, *After the Propaganda State - Media, Politics and Thought Work in Reformed China*, is the first Western scholar’s book about contemporary media and politics in China.

Another unique writer about China is Susan Shirk, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the US. She is unlike other academic authors, because she observes China through diplomatic and political eyes, having been a senior diplomat in the US government, responsible for American policy on China. She has an unbeatable and unique understanding of China and its mass communications system. Her book is entitled, *China: Fragile Super Power: How China’s internal politics could derail its peaceful rise*, and includes many of the



case studies she on how the media area managed over natural disasters and social crises in China.

All the authors who have written about China and its media, such as Lynch, Zhao and Shirk, have done well in identifying issues at the core of the media and politics in China. My thesis has greatly benefited from their scholarly observations on China. These authors, however, have not provided a thorough history of the interplay between television and politics in China. None of these scholars were real players in Chinese media and politics. Social science research methods, such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews and personal observations do not always guarantee unchallengeable results in analysing media and politics in China. I hope that this thesis will go some way towards fulfilling this task.

### **Television studies: from sociology to anthropology**

Writing about television has been popular in sociology. Issues covered are normally about television institutions, social representation on television, audience research and social effects. Richard Collins (2004) wrote a chapter in a book entitled, *Television Studies Reader*, edited by Robert Allen and Ennette Hill. Collins discusses public service broadcasting in Europe and argues that this has been the dominating theme for people studying television. Early

works that may have influenced Collins' book include a Lucy Kung-Shankleman's book, entitled, *Inside the BBC and CNN-Managing Media Organization*", published in 2000. She was the first scholar to have personally spent time in the BBC and CNN as a dedicated observer. Her book successfully compares the two broadcasters' methods in achieving their commercial and public service goals.

Looking at China, Junhao Hong (1998) wrote a book entitled, *The Internationalisation of Television in China: The Evolution of Ideology, Society and Media Since the Reform*. Junhao successfully reviewed the history of Chinese television from Deng Xiaoping's reform until 1998. The focus of the book is on China's television preparation for its global challenges, and how conventional politics gave way to the enforced reform of the media. The book unfortunately did not give cover history before 1978.

It has always been argued that television represents society, but Julie D'Acci (2004) states that any discussion of the ways in which television represents society might start by asking what is meant by the term "representation".

Soft power theory had been invented and was extensively applied by the CCP from Chairman Mao's period of leadership onwards. Mao and his peers in the early foundation of the Party established an authoritarian control system

based on a totalitarian ideology. The system was designed to have tight control of the media in order to support the Party's ideological goals and prevent it from interfering with the Party's conduct of government.

Traditionally, the CCP has four methods of controlling the press: laws and regulations, standards and values, structural management and economic tools. This thesis will examine how this control is carefully managed and how it is contributing to the social, political and economic development of the nation.

### **Theoretical foundations and structure of this thesis**

Studying television news in China is complex and requires diverse, eclectic methods. Chapters 1 to 4 begin by interpreting the historical record of Chinese television and its news production. The thesis follows the gradual development of Chinese politics, whereby political scientists use historical data to trace the origin of contemporary institutional organisations and to specify the political, social and economic conditions under which they emerged. It was thought important that the thesis should first provide a history of the relationship between politics and the media in China and clearly show how the two sides have been influencing each other to produce a kind of state-controlled yet semi-independent media. The first four chapters

explore how television emerged in the Chinese media and the position it took in society, particularly in politics.

It is through understanding the social and political background of how the Chinese media, especially television, were established and operated that readers will appreciate the current conditions in the Chinese media as discussed in later chapters. The history chapters have attempted to identify the major events that forced changes in the Chinese media, and the people and authorities behind them. These include people and events that were hardly noticed at the time, but proved to be significant.

In **Chapter 1** the thesis describes how the CCP established its control of the Chinese media by setting up guidelines by which the media were to operate. It further shows how the Party established a position in its ranks to control the media. The chapter also talks about the beginning of television in China, marked by the opening of Beijing Television (BTV), and later Shanghai Television, and the assistance given for this project by the USSR. The Cultural Revolution played an important role in the history of the Chinese media and **Chapter 2** outlines the motives that necessitated it. This chapter discusses why Chairman Mao went ahead with the Cultural Revolution despite the obvious scars it would leave on Chinese history. Media involvement is articulated, especially the role that television was expected to play, and how

the Cultural Revolution eventually led to the closure of BTV in 1967. The chapter further looks at the cruelties perpetrated by the Gang of Four and how they used television to advance their interests in the Cultural Revolution. Former American president Richard Nixon visited China in the 1970s and the chapter describes the lasting impression that the American television journalists accompanying Nixon left on the Chinese media.

There is no media institution in China that can ever challenge CCTV in all aspects at the same time, because CCTV remains the protected monopoly of the Party and Central Government; it is secured and supported politically, economically and even socially by the state. Empirical research studies were conducted from the perspectives of news production, gate-keeping practices and the political economy of running a giant media organisation. When conducting research on television institutions in China, it is always recommended to start from CCTV. As discussed in varied chapters of this thesis, the CCP's management of television news is through a "pyramid" of "four level television" and CCTV is on the top as the central hub of CCP official information and CCP guaranteed monopoly of news. The CCPCC's Central Department of Propaganda (CDP) has always carefully managed political policies and discussions, important and sensitive information, to be gathered and conveyed to the public through CCTV. Directly under the CDP are the *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV. A narrative history of

CCTV is certainly the history of the CCP's manipulation of power and the people's mind in China.

**Chapter 3** outlines the birth of CCTV, which marked the end of BTV, and talks about television news since the Cultural Revolution. The influence and power that the Gang of Four had in the Party were diminishing after the change of leadership in the CCP, and this development gave rise to a certain amount of freedom in Chinese television journalism. Banned programmes resumed, personnel could make decisions about news, presenters returned to the screen and Western programmes were once again allowed. Through television coverage of visits by Deng Xiaoping to other countries, Chinese people noticed the development gap that existed between China and the outside world in terms of infrastructure and standards of living, and they demanded modernity. The chapter also introduces a discussion on how advertising found its way into Chinese television, and the enthusiasm with which it was received.

The rise of television and the decline of radio is the discussion that marks **Chapter 4**, which aims to demonstrate how television was undermined in its early days, when radio was still regarded as the best thing that ever happened in the media. The narrow freedom allowed to television following the leadership changes in the Party gave an opportunity for the medium to show

the public how powerful it could be when its news coverage started to influence the Party's decisions. CCTV no longer looked only for positive news stories, but also reported on negatives, and it started producing programmes with the same approach. The chapter relates how, from 1980, the Party started paying more attention to television than to radio and newspapers. The existence of television became a factor in party decisions, and journalists started running the television stations.

**Chapters 5 and 6** consist of a narrative history and a lively discussion, complemented by recent developments and important case studies. These chapters are the bridge to a further in-depth discussion on important aspects of the interplay of politics and television news in the developing China.

Chapter 5, *The golden age of television*, describes the continued development of Chinese television with the 1993 establishment of Shanghai Oriental Television (SOT), a purely commercial station without party or government funding. SOT was a news-oriented station and this presented competition to CCTV, jerking it into action to change its news policy. The chapter observes how in its efforts to improve its news coverage CCTV was supported by President Zemin, who watched the news every day and participated in interactive programmes. As efforts to change continued, CCTV news became increasingly less to do with Party and government and more audience oriented. To withstand competition CCTV needed to keep up with

commercial pressure, and this forced it to scrap unpopular programmes. The chapter concludes by discussing the erosion of professionalism through the influence of money and resulted in the commercialisation of news. **Chapter 6**, *CCTV and the international playground*, is set out as a research proposal, with a presentation of its findings. It looks at the notion of globalisation in relation to the global media, and then the focus is narrowed to China.

Social science research methods are employed in later chapters. **Chapter 7** is based on personal studio observation, when the author was presenting news on the busiest CCTV 24 hour news channel. This chapter aims to provide a detailed description of the news production process, while examining the relationship between the Party/government and the media after several years of reform. Throughout the chapter it is clear that the Party/government have increasingly been forced to take the media, particularly television, into account when making decisions. **Chapter 8** is a comprehensive report on a series of surveys and interviews with CCTV producers, reporters and editors, as well as the CDP and SCIO's senior officials. In this chapter, entitled *Television journalists - seeking strategies for survival and success*, the thesis sets out the trade-off that occurred between media independence and freedom and the benefits that accompanied state control. A picture is drawn of the changes that took place in the lives of journalists as less government control meant that they had to forego benefits such as free housing, retirement



pensions and other attractive benefits. Figures are provided which highlight the everyday lives and professional careers of Chinese television journalists.

**Chapter 9** is a combination of empirical research and a cultural approach.

This chapter describes the introduction of a 24-hour news channel and discusses what led up to the decision to establish it. Although it appeared to be a good move, the channel's news still lacked quality and it appeared to be little more than a response to Phoenix Television in Hong Kong. Its weaknesses included a lack of original international coverage, and its news was not comparable with Western standards. The chapter also explores the problems associated with state-owned television channels. In **Chapter 10**, *Televised democracy and mediated realities*, the thesis introduces the term "televised democracy", which the author coined to describe how the Chinese Party and government officials used television to give an impression of democracy and being democratic, by taking advantage of the medium's wide reach. The chapter looks at all the major party journalistic organisations in China and compares them with CCTV's early efforts for a televised democracy. It presents an argument about whether televised democracy was intended to bring real democracy to China or whether it was simply a party tool to bring mediated reality to the public, in order to brainwash and mislead.

**Chapter 11** is a discussion of the Internet in China and the challenges it has presented to the CCP's control of information flow. The chapter also explores

the opportunities that the Internet has offered to Chinese citizens at almost every level and how the Internet has compete with the traditional media including television. As a final chapter it offers a forecast of where China is going with regard to the exchange and availability of information among its citizens.

This thesis concludes at the time when Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao were completing their first term in administration and held the 17th National CCP Congress. According to the most cited Hu-Wen notion “Improving the Party’s Governing Capability”, the conclusion chapter does not intend to simply repeat the conclusions of each previous chapter. However, the conclusion highlights advantages and disadvantages of the Party’s 87 years of strategy having the media as “mouthpiece”. The Internet has never been the same as television, which can be firmly regulated by the Party and Central Government in China.

### **Research methodology**

This thesis has been compiled through a combination of empirical research and conventional social science research methods.

Peter Burnham (2004), in his book, *Research Methods in Politics*, observes that, "...Politics is about power. Studying the distribution and exercise of power is, however, far from straightforward". Don Stacks (1999) book, *Communications Research*, is formulated from both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including questionnaires, surveys, focus group interviews, content analysis and anthropological observations.

A narrative history forms the first part of the thesis. It is the first comprehensive history of Chinese television since 1958 and much of the information was found in the Chinese government's archive, which has recently been made available. When writing the history in these early chapters, the author compares the mainstream elements in the history of modern China and provides primary discussions on its media, politics and development.

This part of the study involved extensive examination of party and government documents, public reports, and trade and professional journals in China's national and Beijing municipal libraries, and in the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television Archive. Yearbooks of CCTV and SARFT (formerly the MRFT) were consulted for facts, figures and the official version of trends. Academic journals published by journalism and communications schools at CUC, Renmin University, Fudan University,

CASS and Wuhan University, and the research archives with all published newspapers and telegraphs at the *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency and the *Beijing Daily*. These are all rich resources for analysing the Party's gate-keeping practices and ideological control.

The subsequent chapters of the thesis are supported by social science research. Qualitative and descriptive methods were employed and these included participant observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews. Information was also obtained through a survey in which 2,000 questionnaires were distributed to CCP members and television journalists at all levels to collect basic data. 1,717 were returned for analysis in this thesis.

As a vital supplementary method, the in-company research that underpins the analysis of CCTV was conducted between January and July 1999, March and December 2000, May and October 2001 and March and June 2003. During this period, 49 senior members of staff and 151 journalists and producers were interviewed at the CCTV Beijing Head Office and in London during their coverage of the Chinese President's official visit to Britain in 1999. Further interviews were conducted with members of staff in the CDP and some academic institutions, including the BBI, CASS-IOJCS and RMU. Most of the interviewees were met twice, first for the initial data collecting and then for the feedback.

Full details of the research methodology and the early findings are available to the examiners on request. Because of the politically sensitive nature of the topic of this thesis, the interview data have been used either as background material or cited anonymously to respect the wish for confidentiality of most informants.

## Chapter 1

# The rise of the People's Republic and the birth of Beijing Television

[1958-1966]

### Chapter Summary

*The Chinese Communist Party had first established complete control of the media at its founding congress in 1921, using the "party principle" policy to enforce its ideological guidelines. The CCP's five-year development agenda for ideology and education of 1955 included a proposal to establish Beijing Television (BTV), which was finally born in 1958 with assistance from the USSR. The initial scramble for television dominance during the Great Leap Forward (1958-66), with numerous networks set up throughout China, led to problems when a series of natural disasters depleted the nation's finances and government cuts forced all but 25% of the stations to close.*

*BTV's early development is outlined, noting the launch of television news and the "News Documentary Era". The Chinese leadership's growing awareness of television's potential is noted, particularly shown in Zhou Enlai's support of BTV. Premier Zhou also saw BTV as a means of improving China's image in the West, and used his televised interview with the BBC for maximum impact abroad. BTV also set up a network of foreign correspondents, in line with the CCP's long-standing global television strategy. BTV's experiments in programming are examined, live sports coverage being particularly well received, along with televised lectures, known as "moving the blackboard" which were also used by the Party to identify and promote future leaders.*

"Party principle" has been a widely understood term in the Chinese media ever since the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party. Explaining it in Chinese is easy, although it would involve a lengthy explanation in English, but Tong Bing and Cheng Mei [1993: 148] have provided one of the clearest

interpretations of the term. They concluded in *Theorizing Journalism Studies* [1993] that “party principle” consists of the following components:

- News media must adopt the Party’s guiding ideology as their own
- News media must propagate the Party’s programmes, policies, and directives
- News media must accept the Party’s leadership and adhere to the Party’s organisational principles and media policies

This is exactly describes the true nature of the Communist Party’s control of the media in the former Soviet Union and in today’s China. The Party has exercised unconditional control over all publications since the Yan’an era of history. The Party established its media policy during its founding congress in 1921, and stated that “Party journals, daily publications, books and booklets must be administered by the Party’s central executive committee, and no central or local publication should carry any article that opposes the Party’s principles, policies and decisions” [Tong and Cheng, 1993: 147].

**Table 1.1**  
**Top leadership of the CCP since 1949**

*Chairman of the CCP*

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| Mao Zedong  | 1949-1976 |
| Hua Guofeng | 1976-1981 |
| Hu Yaobang  | 1981-1982 |

*General Secretary of the CCP*

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| Deng Xiaoping | 1954-1966 |
| Hu Yaobang    | 1978-1987 |
| Zhao Ziyang   | 1987-1989 |
| Jiang Zemin   | 1989-2002 |
| Hu Jintao     | 2002-     |

**Source:** Compiled by author from the Chinese Communist Party Archive

Mao Zedong and the first generation of CCP leaders issued many directives to their senior members on the importance of maintaining complete control of the press [Zheng, 2004: 191]. Public opinion was a great support during the anti-Japanese war, directed by carefully conducted communications with people at grassroots level. Even today, the majority of Chinese people would say that the CCP had defeated the Japanese invaders, while the KMT had retreated from the war. This was the main reason why the people supported the CCP in winning the later Civil War and the KMT was finally forced to Taiwan Island [Lieberthal, 1995:199].

In every tiny branch of the CCP, there are normally three senior officers who direct activities and one of them is always the Propaganda and Communications Officer. The CCP's practice and theoretic understanding of "soft power" is as good as that of any party in the West. Before television



became powerful in China, the newspapers and radio were already under the Party's tight control, and television fell into line as soon as it began to play an important role in Chinese society [Hong, 1998: 102].

### **The birth of national television in China**

Chinese television was born during the "Da Yue Jin" (Great Leap Forward) period. Da Yue Jin is the continuation of the Chinese Communist Revolution under Mao. Economically, China was still a very weak country. With only very limited financial and technological support, the first television service started on 1 May 1958. Since it was regarded as a "laboratory experiment" and restricted to the Beijing region, the service was named "Beijing Television" (BTV). As with television services elsewhere in the world at the time, all programmes were broadcast live and in black and white [Crisell, 1997:165].

Five months later, on 1 October 1958, a second television service became available in Shanghai and was accordingly named Shanghai Television [SAB 1978: 22]. A third service was introduced in Harbin, the northern provincial capital city on 20 December of the same year [Guo 1991: 32].

Beijing and Shanghai are major centres of political and economic development, while Harbin is the capital of the China-USSR border province of Heilongjiang, and for this reason early Chinese television was under tremendous and direct influence by the Soviet Union.

Television at the time was principally regarded as a technological affair by the Party and government. Most staff in the new services were engineers who had studied overseas, mostly in the USSR or the former Eastern European socialist countries [Lee, 1990: 177]. The first TV sets, branded as “Beijing”, were produced under the supervision of Moscow experts [SAB 1978: 62]. These experts had also helped Shanghai to establish its own “Shanghai” brand of TV sets, made in a newly established factory in the city. The socialist family of the USSR and Eastern Europe helpfully supplied the programmes.

According to Guo [1991: 42] and the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) Archive, the newly born television service opened its broadcast at 7.00 pm on 1 May 1958 with the words “Beijing Television” in Chinese traditional calligraphy set against a background picture of the USSR-supported Central Broadcasting Plaza Building, and accompanied by revolutionary music.

The first programme was a live broadcast of an International Labour Day round-table discussion, led by National People's Radio reporter Li Yi. Invited guests included Tong Chunrong, a labour worker from the Beijing Mechanical Factory, Liu Wanyuan, Head of Shift, Beijing Shijingshan Steel Factory and Hao Decai, Director of the Beijing Sijiqing Agricultural Production and Co-operative Bank. Topics under discussion ranged over production figures, Da Yue Jin proposals and Maoist thoughts. The programme was smoothly presented, and illustrated with charts and photos. Historical documents indicate that several rehearsals took place before the live show.

The second programme was a documentary, *Go to the countryside*, which portrayed the way that cadres were sent by the Party to the socialist countryside to correct "mistaken thoughts". This documentary was made by the Central News and Documentary Studios (CNDS). Before television was introduced, the only news in audio-visual format was produced by this organisation and in later years it merged with the BTV (now CCTV).

According to the SARFT Archive and interviews with journalists, entertainment programmes were also provided, which included the following:

- A recitation by the National Broadcasting Opera of poems: *Three girls from the factory* and *Call for the Great Leap Forward*
- A ballet performance by the Beijing School of Dancing Arts of the *The four little swans*, *The romance of shepherd boy and country girl* and a Chinese traditional dance of *A beautiful night on the Spring River*

The first day of broadcasting finally closed with a USSR-made documentary entitled *The television*.

On the same day, Xinhua, the official news agency of the CCP and the Republic, released news of the birth of Beijing's first television station.

Guo [1991: 42] argues that BTV had very limited resources for producing programmes. It relied on the support of other organisations in the Chinese performing arts and film industry. At this early stage, BTV was purely a broadcaster showcasing other people's work and it is surprising that the first days of broadcasting were all live rather than recorded.

Although there was no obvious connection between politics and television in China during the inception period and audience numbers were limited, USSR

experiences in television from as early as 1939 attracted the attention of Chairman Mao and other leaders of the CCP. Very generous financial and technical support was guaranteed by Premier Zhou Enlai. The proposal to establish BTV was already included in the State Council's five-year development agenda for ideology and education in 1955. By 1958, 57 countries around the world were introducing television networks in their territories and the US and USSR had started to compete over television development. As a loyal brother of the USSR and the Eastern European countries, China could not be left out of the campaign. Hong Kong had established black and white television broadcasting in 1957 and Taiwan had conducted some early experiments in the same year [Xu, 2003: 113]. The People's Republic just had to succeed ahead of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

BTV was included in the Party's propaganda system as soon as it was launched. Though technically it could only reach audiences within a 25 kilometre radius, its national television status was confirmed and Chairman Mao was one of BTV's most enthusiastic supporters. Occasionally he would ask BTV to re-broadcast some programmes that he had missed. Mao sent his calligraphy of the BTV title in Chinese as a gift in December 1964. The privilege of asking for a re-broadcast of a programme was also available to the other top leadership in Zhongnanhai. Vice Premier Deng Zihui had asked for a documentary on the electric plough to be shown twice. The Chairman of

the State Liu Shaoqi, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Chair of the National People's Congress Zhu De both visited BTV more than once [Roderick, 1993: 46].

On behalf of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (CCPCC), Premier Zhou Enlai paid an official visit to the station on 12 September 1959. During his visit, additional financial support was provided and he even paid attention to the fake flowers on the piano. He told staff at BTV that if they could not afford to buy fresh flowers every day, they could always go to Zhongnanhai and collect all they needed from the leaderships' family gardens. In 1961, Premier Zhou and his wife Deng Yingchao went to see the opera *Lady Du's legacy*, and the premier was said to have instructed the cameraman to film the orchestra while the actors were changing scenes. In 1963, Premier Zhou is said to have intervened again, when he asked BTV supporting staff to put soft pads under the teacups in order to minimise noise. In 1972, Premier Zhou held a meeting for national media reporters at Zhongnanhai, where he introduced the rule of "pool reporting", under which all national media reporters were to collaborate with each other [Guo, 1991: 74]. Previously they had competed for stories about the top leadership, but this collaboration meant that Premier Zhou actually promoted BTV to a leading position and began to give priority to audio-visual facilities.

Two weeks after its establishment, BTV started producing its own news programmes. On 15 May 1958, a four-minute news clip about the Dongfeng brand of car was produced and broadcast. On 1 June 1958, BTV covered the launch by the CCPCC of the Party's theoretical journal *Hong Qi (Red flag)*. During the same period BTV produced a documentary on fighting floods in Henan Province. This period in Chinese television history is referred to as the "News Documentary Era".

Poor technological support and facilities did not prevent the newly-born BTV from playing a crucial role in major national events. On 1 October 1958, BTV covered live the parade on Tiananmen Square to commemorate the 9<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the People's Republic of China. The Party and the Government were so pleased with it that a fully functioning Broadcasting Centre was established on the Square to enable BTV to cover the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. After that, live coverage became the compulsory usual practice for such celebrations, and demonstrated that the Chinese political leaders had equipped themselves with the fundamental skills and tactics of television politics [Interviews, 2004].

The first presenter of television news was introduced rather informally, because both the head of BTV and the CDP leaderships did not attach any importance to this aspect of television. Shen Li, a beautiful lady with an

authentic Beijing government-approved accent, was chosen to be the first announcer and presenter. Her role was basically just to fill in the gaps between documentaries [Interviews 2004]. In a BTV television crew, the cameraman was the commander and centre of decision-making. Most people regarded television technology as complicated and therefore regarded the cameraman as a great engineer equipped with hi-tech knowledge – and the cameramen thought the same! Despite being held in such high regard, they paid little attention to news values such as reality, objectivity and impartiality in their shooting. The two main priorities were to get good quality pictures and ensure political correctness. This tradition is still evident in CCTV, as the technical department does not provide the necessary support for other departments to fulfil their functions well. It does not surprise viewers when a news item is cancelled by the technical support department before going on air because of poor quality pictures and sound. Many leading presenters and journalists in CCTV have frequently complained about this, but the only time that the complaints were given attention and some minor improvements made after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Hong Kong based Phoenix Television covered the event, despite poor quality pictures and sound provided by amateurs, and it won an audience of nearly half a billion in China. CCTV, however, was waiting for the best quality pictures and sound, as well as approval from the top for political correctness. It offered less than two minutes' coverage during the first 48 hours after the attack, and



meanwhile vast numbers of loyal audiences, as well as advertising investors, were lost [Interviews, 2004].

It is difficult to criticise the pioneers, as the leaders at the time were largely to blame; they just did not understand the need to adapt to change.

News production soon turned to the “Great Leap Forward” mood of the 1960s. Many provincial television stations were established and were all required to submit their news programmes to BTV. This exercise was not only for central approval purposes, but also to collect the best pieces for BTV as the national television to re-broadcast. At the same time, BTV sent pictures and voices from Zhongnanhai and the capital to provincial television stations around China.

A problem arose at the time as television stations were “photocopying” from each other. Viewers could easily predict the conclusion of each programme and presenters would even be wearing the same clothes in different programmes. Creativity was seriously neglected, while consensus was greatly encouraged.

## **Politicians on television**

Felix Green, an English television journalist and producer, was visiting China for the second time in 1960 when he was suddenly informed of an invitation from Premier Zhou Enlai in Beijing [MRT, 1984: 144]. The invitation was for Green to interview Premier Zhou for television audiences beyond the Chinese borders for the first time.

Professional support for the interview was provided by a team from Beijing Television, who set up the best possible facilities in the Jiangsu Hall of the Great People's Hall on Tiananmen Square. The interview took place on 5 September 1960. Green later commented that Premier Zhou was slightly different during the interview compared with when there was no camera. He was very serious and concise and the context of his answers was never beyond the pre-prepared scripts. The scripts were well written by diplomats and carefully aimed at the international audiences.

The BBC aired the interview on 3 November 1960 and it was also reported by most of the leading international news agencies and newspapers around the world. This was the first time that China and a Chinese politician had been seen and directly heard by Western audiences on a formal television broadcast. Before this, the image of China was always demonised and misleading [Li and Liu, 1998:15].

The *People's Daily* published the full dialogue between the premier and Green two days later. According to this newspaper, the interview covered issues of Sino-American relations, Taiwan, Sino-Indian relations and the ongoing ambassador-level negotiation in Warsaw between China and the US. When Green questioned why talks with China always took so long, Premier Zhou said:

Why should we be in a hurry? It is important that we are continuing the talks. It took us two years to complete the peace talks in Korea. You are younger than me and I am older, so I should be the person to worry. I am sure I can see the result of the talks before I get too old. It won't take so long to complete as you think. Britain is a country with a long and glorious history, so from the historical point of view, we always take our time for the good of the people.

[Guo, 1991: 69]

Green was the pioneer in televising China to the West to improve communication between those on both sides. On the basis of this, when an American journalist, Edgar Snow, visited China ten years later he was invited

to the Tiananmen (Peaceful Heaven Gate) with Chairman Mao for celebrations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the People's Republic in 1970.

The Green interview, made the top leadership in China realise the importance of television and it impressed upon them the principle, "*Be prepared collectively, and then get interviewed.*"

### **The failure of the "Great Leap Forward" in the development of television**

At the same time that China started the Great Leap Forward, the country had to face three years of unremitting natural disasters nationwide. The slogan for the Great Leap Forward was, "How brave you are will determine how productive your land will be" and "Never dare to achieve; when you think about it, you can make it" [Dreyer, 1993: 66]. Many of the gradualist development proposals, including the development of television in China, were immediately abolished and replaced by extremely ambitious ones.

When the 7<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Broadcasting was held in Beijing on 1 March 1960, it was announced that 40 new television stations would be built and the total number of television stations in China would reach 50 within three years. However, as a result of the natural disasters, China's economy was in crisis and some of the newly established television stations started to collapse as soon as they were established.

BTV was in a dilemma. At least 20% of its staff were sent home following funding cuts by the central government. Broadcasting time was cut to around 2 to 2.5 hours a day, an hour less than previously. After the cut, BTV was asked to concentrate on producing weekend programmes for Saturday and Sunday. At the same time, China stopped importing TV sets, and this was another disaster for the development of Chinese television. By February 1963, only 25 per cent of the television stations were still alive and broadcasting, and these only on limited time schedules, in eight cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Shenyang, Harbin, Changchun and Xian. Radio services were not spared either, and nearly 50% of the 146 radio stations were closed in 1962.

China was so poor in the 1960s that seemed inappropriate for a billion people to watch television when others were hungry for food. There was no money for making TV sets and none for producing more programmes. These were some of the barriers to the further development of Chinese television.

Certainly, the 'Great Leap Forward' was not the right solution; it created great waste, as it encouraged the setting up of too many television stations, only to close them after a short time.

## **The limited success of BTV**

Ping-Pong, otherwise known as table tennis, is the Chinese national sport. It was famous because it served as a bridge in Sino-American relations in the 1970s. BTV was, in fact, the only lively television station supported by the Party and central government, and was rescued through televising the table tennis competition in 1962 when the 26<sup>th</sup> World Championships were held in Beijing.

Working together with newspapers and radio, television started showing people the power of moving pictures. Through television, the audiences in Beijing did not miss a single match during the 11 days of the games. BTV broadcast the 14 matches for 35 hours. There were only 10,000 television sets in Beijing at the time, but each set was watched by several hundred people. They cheered in front of their TV sets just like the spectators in the stadium. The power of television had now been realised, not only by the people but the top leadership as well. For a while news reports were filled with ping-pong stories, and BTV received over 3,000 letters, telegraphs and telephone calls from people around Beijing.

BTV senior management held an internal meeting immediately after the competition and agreed that programmes should include sports and entertainment in order to attract a large audience.

Following its successful experience in broadcasting the table tennis competition, BTV started considering more entertainment on television, despite the hard time it was going through in China. On 30 August 1961, a Variety Show, *Laugh*, debuted. It brought plenty of laughs to the sad audiences in the midst of disasters and received a warm welcome from the people and senior leaders. However, when the second and third episodes of *Laugh* were broadcast, the programme received serious criticism from the top leadership. Even Chairman Mao commented angrily and wrote the following lines to the authorities on 27 June 1964:

In the last 15 years, almost all of the arts organisations have badly led the audiences except for a small number of loyal Communist ones. These arts organisations are full of feudalist and capitalist people and they have never researched the people at grassroots, including the workers, farmers and soldiers. They have never presented the great achievements of the socialist revolution and construction. We must urge them to change!

[Mao, Vol. 3, 1982: 196]

The early BTV attempt to entertain failed, and so management started to look for alternative ways of serving the Party and people. From April 1961, BTV

began to send staff reporters to cover Communist brothers in Laos, Vietnam and North Korea. Through these efforts, BTV journalists produced documentaries on Laos and accompanied Chinese delegations headed by Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi to 14 Asian and African countries.

In 1963, Mei Yi, Minister of State, Administration of Broadcasting, announced that national television should be, “Rooted in Beijing, facing the world”, and this became one of the earliest government statements on Chinese television global strategy. A series of conferences about producing programmes for the international market was held to realise Minister Mei’s goals [SAB, 1979:203].

The wars in the Korean Peninsula and in Vietnam provided a great opportunity for BTV to boom. Both Korean and Vietnamese leaders selected BTV journalists as their only chosen medium to express their (the leaders’) opinions to world audiences. Young as it was, BTV established its first overseas bureau in Hanoi and this was long before the already long-established Xinhua News Agency and the *People’s Daily*.

### **Television as an ideological classroom**

Producing news was still a luxury for BTV in the very hard 1960s. Directly learning from the Open University in the UK and Houston KHHT in the USA,



BTV introduced educational programmes in 1960. On 8 March of that year, the Beijing Television University was formally established and 8,600 students registered in the three departments of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. A Department of Chinese and Literature and a Department of English were established later on. Vice Premier Lu Dingyi highly valued this effort, saying:

This is the best way to take full advantage of television. Television should not televise the capitalist life style, but teach people knowledge of socialist constructions.

[Zheng, 2004: 329]

Television universities were set up in other cities after the Beijing success. Producing teaching programmes on television was relatively cheap. It was called “moving the blackboard”, illustrating the fact that television staff were just broadcasting real classes to a bigger audiences.

The classroom format brought inspiration to producers at BTV and soon a new format of television forum being introduced on television. The programme created many celebrities, the first being “Steel Man” Wang Jinxi, an oil field worker from Daqing. Wang was a great speaker on television. On 17 February 1966, he lectured on BTV and it was broadcast live [SAB, 1980: 101]. His lecture was published in the *People's Daily* the next day, but people

preferred to watch “the real” Wang on television. The lecture was 80 minutes long and acclaimed as a great success according to the audiences’ positive feedback. During the live broadcast, many viewers called in and some even asked for the Steel Man to be given a cup of water and to take a break. More television stations invited Wang for lectures and he was undoubtedly regarded as a celebrity from then on.

Directly promoted by the CCP, Daqing Oil Field Base, Dazhai Country Farms and the People’s Liberation Army were this period’s three flagship models for China. Guests for television lecture programmes came from these model places. Lecturers included Zhang Baifa and Li Ruihuan. [SAB, 1980: 44].

Zhang was then a construction worker for the National People’s Great Hall and from the 1980s the Deputy Mayor of Beijing. Li was a carpenter and then the Mayor and Party Secretary of Tianjin, as well as Chairman of the NPPCC and a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee in the 1990s. The television screen provided a platform for ideological propaganda and the promotion of future leaders. Li Ruihuan is still one of the best speakers among the Chinese top leadership. It would be hard to deny that his lecture on BTV was an important milestone in the success of his subsequent political career.

## Chapter 2

# Party journalism and the governing system under Mao during the Cultural Revolution [1966-1976]

### Chapter Summary

*The inseparable connection between the Cultural Revolution and the history of the Chinese media is discussed. As Mao saw the media as integral to the success of the Cultural Revolution, BTV was obliged to play a key role as his mouthpiece, and the effect of this policy on BTV programming is shown. BTV's failure to re-broadcast a national ceremony in 1966 forced it to close, but the CCP used this opportunity to strengthen its control of television, taking over the State Administration of Broadcasting, and vetting all programmes when BTV reopened. The Gang of Four's attempt to use Shanghai Television to forward its ideological aims is examined, with particular emphasis on the brutal televised Class Struggle conferences.*

*Television was directly affected by the CCP's foreign policy from 1970, when the CCP revised its global strategies and Mao renewed his diplomatic talks. The most dramatic example of this came through US President Nixon's state visit to China in 1972, when Chinese television journalists covering the event were shocked to see how badly their technology compared with that of their American counterparts who had the most advanced technology in the world.*

*The Gang of Four brought an additional influence: paying renewed attention to China's image in international relations, they decided to convert television broadcasting throughout China to colour, and thus played a major role in the next advance of Chinese television.*

Mao is still regarded as one of the greatest of China's leaders and one with extraordinary daring, although most people in China would regard the Cultural Revolution as a huge mistake. According to Lieberthal [1995: 167], Mao had four broad goals for the Cultural Revolution. First, he sought to

change his nominated successor from President of China Liu Shaoqi to Defence Minister Lin Biao and demanded major efforts to blacken Liu's name. Second, Mao wanted to discipline the huge bureaucracy governing the country and urge party officials to stop corruption. Third, Mao wanted to have Chinese youth armed with the necessary amount of what he called "revolutionary experiences". Finally, Mao wanted to make substantial changes in various policy areas, including reducing income inequalities and introducing material incentives.

The national response to Mao's call to launch the Cultural Revolution amounted to the wild adulation of a leader who had caused enormous suffering. As the mouthpiece of the Party, BTV was necessarily included in the Cultural Revolution régime. In May 1966, BTV was forced to make the following adjustments to its programmes:

First, to add information about the Cultural Revolution in news bulletins; second, from 15 May 1966 to establish feature programmes criticising "black lines" within the Party against Chairman Mao; third, to televise the Cultural Revolution in all news programmes as much as possible; fourth, in children's programmes, to organise young people to criticise and fight against Deng Tuo and Wu Han's anti-revolutionary activities and

behaviours; fifth, to promote people and activities supporting Mao and the Cultural Revolution.

[Xu, 2003: 410]

### **Television and the Cultural Revolution**

BTV was small in size and influence, but very close to the centre of power. There were only a few TV sets in Beijing, and a great many of these were owned by the political élites. The CDP of CCPCC had included BTV in the priority list of propaganda along with the *People's Daily* and the Xinhua News Agency.

BTV soon released a memorandum to “ban bad programmes”. The “bad” programmes were unconditionally banned and programmes could be “bad” in the following eight ways:

- 1: Misleading writing of history and promoting the already  
mistaken routes;
  
- 2: Discovering a Communist hero's mistakes and blackening the  
hero's image;

- 3: Encouraging the fear of war and supporting peaceful settlements with the capitalist West;
- 4: Demonising images of workers, farmers and PLA soldiers;
- 5: Denying class struggle and class enemies;
- 6: Promoting people-centred capitalist values;
- 7: Promoting feudalist and capitalist romances;
- 8: Broadcasting classical opera about emperors, beauties and ghosts, regardless of domestic or international Productionstional.

[SAB, 1980: 272]

In response to this, BTV eliminated names of reporters in news bulletins, and the names of producers, authors, editors and reporters of programmes were no longer shown on the screens. This “innovation” was highly praised by the CDP on 22 July 1966.

During the Cultural Revolution, important organisations such as the *People's Daily* and Xinhua were asked to come up with innovative ways of showing loyalty to the Chairman and the Party. BTV broadcast Chairman Mao's portrait continuously during the day and the portrait was always surrounded by sunshine and sunflower with the background music "The East is Red".

On 18 August 1966, Chairman Mao received the Red Guards at Tiananmen Square and BTV was required by the Central Department of Propaganda (CDP) to broadcast this massive event. Following previous practice, this kind of programme would be edited for re-broadcasting as a documentary on national and local television. For unspecified reasons, however, the repeat was not shown for a few days and serious complaints arrived at BTV and its bosses, including the State Administration of Broadcasting and the CDP.

Among these complaints was a letter from the Red Guards at Beijing University of Science and Technology, who asked, "If BTV doesn't want to broadcast this glorious event, then what does it want to broadcast?"

An anonymous member of the audience wrote:

I so much want to see the Chairman again and again, many times,  
but why can't BTV understand this? I think BTV does not love

Chairman Mao; BTV does not trust and adore Chairman Mao!

BTV does not understand the heart of people.

[SAB, 1980: 279]

Girls from Beijing No 13 High School wrote a joint letter in combative mood:

“Down with your black-hearted president of BTV! We want a new BTV president from the farmers, workers or the PLA soldiers.” [Guo, 1991: 108].

Letters and telephone complaints kept pouring in and some even started to challenge presenters and reporters on other aspects, such as their dress, make-up and speed of presenting.

Internal meetings were held to find a strategy for surviving the situation and

a decision was made to close down BTV for its own protection. On 31

December 1966, the State Administration of Broadcasting approved the BTV's application to close down for three reasons:

- 1: The audiences are all busy with the Cultural Revolution and have no time to watch television



2: Professional artists and performing organisations are all devoted to the Cultural Revolution and have no time for television programmes

3: Staff at BTV are eager to take part in the Cultural Revolution

[Zheng, 2004: 272]

From 1 January 1967, BTV programmes always started with a shining portrait of Chairman Mao and *his selected words (Mao Zhuxi Yu Lu)* of the period.

Ordinary programmes were stopped and replaced with Cultural Revolution propaganda. On 6 January 1967, BTV was formally closed down by the CCPCC [SAB, 1980 Appendix 2].

One after another, television stations around the country were closed, except for Shanghai Television.

### **Shanghai Television: The televised Class Struggle conferences**

Shanghai was the centre of the Cultural Revolution because Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, and her three followers were all based there [Dreyer, 1993: 45]. Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan of the Gang of Four urged Shanghai Television

to play an active role in the fight against class enemies of the Cultural Revolution through its powerful audio-visual effects. The Gang of Four even invented the “televised class struggle conference” in Shanghai [SAB, 1980: 412-415].

In the televised conference, the former party chiefs of Shanghai, Chen Pixian and Cao Diqu were forced to get down on their knees on a platform and were rudely beaten by the Red Guards. The format of the conferences, including which of Chairman Mao’s words should be announced, the slogans to be promoted, and even the allocation of desks and chairs and how to beat the class enemies, were all quickly learned by neighbouring cities and provinces. This is how the Gang of Four relied on the power of audio-visual communications to achieve their political goals.

The Gang of Four never got tired of the televised conferences. More than 100 conferences were held over a few months. However, some conferences got out of control. On 13 March 1968 the Dean of the Shanghai Academy of Music, Professor He Luting, was brought to the conference. In front of the camera, he loudly denied all the charges levelled against him by the Red Guards. He even compared the Red Guards to the Japanese invaders and KMT dictators, saying he could not condone torture by the Guards. The Gang of Four were so annoyed and anxious that they ordered the police to arrest

Professor He for betraying his country and the adored leader [SAB, 1980: 412-415]. All this was broadcast live to a great number of people around Shanghai.

A second televised conference against Professor He was held on 25 April. All his family were arrested and brought to the conference. Professor He still maintained his stance, angering the Red Guards, who brutally beat him and his family in front of the camera. This shocked the audience, and Zhang Chunqiao of the Gang of Four ordered the television station to stop broadcasting the programme immediately [SAB, 1980: 412-415].

Failure of the televised class struggle conference against Professor He Luting brought a serious threat to the Gang of Four and they decided to abandon this newly invented, powerful method. Television is a platform for manipulating people's minds, but it is also difficult to bury the truth on television. The State Administration of Broadcasting ordered the existing television stations to stop live broadcasts of class struggle conferences, and all conferences had to be carefully edited for the Cultural Revolution. The CDP also asked the local party officials to approve programmes before they went on air.

### **A time of madness for television**

On 4 February 1967 the government re-opened BTV, but all previous programmes were cancelled and the new ones were about the Cultural Revolution. News programmes were full of Chairman Mao's selected words and the Red Guards' achievements in destroying the historical heritage of Beijing. The programmes always started with the Dance of Royalty, Singing the Songs of Chairman Mao's selected words, and presenting the compulsory morning commands and evening conclusions [Guo, 1991: 110].

On 12 December 1967, the CCPCC sent PLA representatives to take control of the State Administration of Broadcasting, including the national radio and television services. The Gang took tight control of BTV, with Jiang Qing among the senior leaders approving the programmes each day before they went on air. Apart from news programmes, the majority of BTV's airtime was given to the newly invented "Yang Ban Xi" (model opera). The Gang were very pleased to gain full control of television. They even began to consider technology upgrades. Colour television facilities were purchased from overseas, which started off a second round of television development. This time, however, it was carefully managed by the Gang with clear political goals to avoid huge waste like the Great Leap Forward.

### **Solid exchanges with the West (1970s)**

From 1970 onwards, Mao's shining portrait was removed from BTV's opening scenes and in 1971, at Mao's instigation; his selected words were removed from television, too. Nobody really knows the reason even now.

This was also the time when the US Secretary of State, Dr Henry Kissinger, and the 37<sup>th</sup> American President, Richard Nixon, visited China.

The CCP revised China's global strategies, following its misplaced trust in the USSR, who had offered sanctuary to the traitor Marshall Lin Biao, originally Mao's nominated heir, after his failed coup d'état. Chairman Mao had further talks on international relations and diplomatic activities. BTV revised its programming strategy accordingly and started learning from the most advanced television industry, that of the United States [Interviews, 1999].

On 21 February 1972, a week after BTV televised the funeral of American journalist Edgar Snow, President Nixon arrived in Beijing, accompanied by a delegation of American television journalists armed with the most advanced television technology. This embarrassed the Chinese television journalists who were covering the visit alongside the Americans.

Carefully edited as always, BTV programmes during the visit showed President Nixon offering his hand first, to which Premier Zhou would respond and the two would shake hands. This pleased the Chinese audience, because to some extent it created the impression that the US wished to apologise for its previous mistakes. Though the BTV journalists were praised by the top leadership for work well done, the journalists could not forget the yawning gap between their technology and that of the US journalists.

Nixon's visit also gave the Chinese leadership a chance to experience the power of television in telling the American audiences about the real China. Three networks were covering Nixon in China: ABC, NBC and CBS. The total coverage of China for the period was 52 hours, with over 30 themes. The networks had nine live sessions covering Nixon's visit, reaching an audience of 60 million to 1 billion. It was the first time that the US population had seen the real China. On television Chinese people appeared gentle, polite, diligent and peaceful [SAB, 1973: 155]. Something similar happened when the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei visited China in 1972.

The top leadership in China had made a decision to convert Chinese television from black and white to colour. Money was no longer a problem. On 14 April 1973, colour television signals were sent out as a test and on 1 October 1974, BTV formally started broadcasting in colour [SAB, 1973: 12].

Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou and the Gang of Four all contributed to this development. The main reason for their support was based on international considerations, because at this time none of them could have predicted the radical influence of television news during the coming decades.

## Chapter 3

# From BTV to CCTV: Television News since the Cultural Revolution

[1976-1982]

### Chapter Summary

*Under new leadership and after the Gang of Four's arrest, Chinese television had greater freedom and began to flourish. BTV's broadcasts reached a wider audience and were entirely in colour. Banned programmes were reinstated and new ones introduced. It began local and regional programme exchanges, which led to its renaming as China Central Television (CCTV), and in 1976 to the launch of Xin Wen Lian Bo (XWLB), a composite programme of breaking news from networks around China.*

*Deng Xiaoping's international travels brought Chinese journalists into contact with advanced Western technology, and a realisation to the Chinese public of the vast development gap between Western lifestyles and their own. Through popular demand Chinese television was updated, owners of television sets rapidly increased, and CCTV was soon the most watched channel worldwide, and a massive influence on the China's development.*

*Advertising was first pioneered in China by Shanghai and Guangdong Television, followed by CCTV. This commercial revenue eased television's financial burdens and CCTV gave programme innovation its top priority. All Chinese television stations regarded news as central and increased their news production staff. GTV began to import and export programmes, establishing the first commercial production company. It also launched the first Cantonese channel, and dramatically revamped its news format.*



## **Televising the end of the Gang of Four**

The Cultural Revolution was a huge disaster in modern Chinese history. The Cultural Revolution was Mao's idea of getting rid of people in the Chinese Communist Party and in Chinese society who were deemed to be emerging as a privileged class in China. Mao's strategy in bringing about the Cultural Revolution was to mobilise students and young workers as his Red Guards to attack members of the Communist Party who were alleged to be liberal bourgeoisie elements. The Cultural Revolution plunged China into social and political chaos, leading to economic problems that lingered until 1976, when the Cultural Revolution finally ended. The Gang of Four were the most important actors of the Cultural Revolution and they were working so hard to use the power against any political competitors.

The term Gang of Four refers to a faction that was formed during the Cultural Revolution led by Jiang Qing, Mao's third and last wife. Other members of the Gang of Four included Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen. The four had their own political ambitions and they used Mao's name to implement their plans by victimising other party members who disagreed with them or were viewed as a threat during the Cultural Revolution. The Gang of Four committed many atrocities in the 10 years that the Cultural Revolution was in effect. After Mao's death in October 1976, the

group was arrested and put on trial, leading to life and death sentences for them.

When Premier Zhou died in January 1976, television again became the Gang of Four's platform for minimising the Premier's influence. After a two-minute story about the Premier's death on 8 January, BTV never carried follow-up reports and yet model operas continued every day at prime time. These actions greatly angered the Beijing audience.

Model Opera was promoted by Chairman Mao and his wife Jiang Qing through the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong had on several occasions, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, expressed disapproval of the operas that were being staged. He complained that though there had been reforms most operas were still dominated by Western ideologies and lifestyles. Mao wanted opera that would depict proletariat heroes from workers, peasants or soldiers. Jiang Qing found an opportunity to revise the content of several Beijing Operas into Model Operas, whose format and style would be followed as standard. She made sure that the model operas were broadcast all the time on television and radio, made into movies and advertised with everywhere with posters. Performances were given all over China and each performance had to be identical and adhere to the model.

Even during the memorial week after Premier Zhou's death, BTV had to broadcast Model Opera during most of the time and cut nearly all the pictures of people crying at the sight of Premier Zhou's body. On the day of Premier's funeral, there were people parading on the streets for a distance of at least 10 kilometres, but it was absent from BTV.

The Gang of Four had actually gone too far. Yao Wenyuan was seen with a serious face on the television, but no tears. He shook hands at length with the widow, Deng Yingchao, on television, implying that he was the chosen successor to Premier Zhou. People were extremely angry when Jiang Qing appeared on television wearing a cap on her head. Many workers and farmers watching television in factories and farms angrily shouted, "Take off your cap!" [Interviews, 2000].

When Chairman Mao died in September 1976, the Gang had no way of preventing BTV from reporting thoroughly on this sad news and the associated events.

Soon it was time to celebrate, when the Gang of Four were arrested by the new CCPCC led by Chairman Hua Guofeng. The trial was publicly broadcast by BTV, and at the same time many of the previously cut and edited programmes in memory of Premier Zhou were shown on television.

The new CCPCC ordered BTV to broadcast the national celebration of Chairman Hua's accession to power and the sentencing of the Gang of Four on charges of serious crimes. A time of madness was over and the BTV was entering a new era of development [Interviews, 2000].

### **Tribute to Premier Zhou on television**

Programmes in tribute to Premier Zhou dominated the airtime for weeks. People who had been imprisoned by the Gang of Four were released by Deng Xiaoping. Most of them were powerful people, as they had held important positions in the Party and the government at the time they were imprisoned. They had every reason to celebrate and promote the new political values and ideas pursued by Deng Xiaoping. Poems that were deemed illegal were read out loudly on television and even converted into new songs that were sung on BTV's variety shows. Television journalists were part of the celebrations and they planned a special evening memorial show for Premier Zhou on 21 December 1976.

Lady Guo Lanying sang with tears a new song in tribute to Premier Zhou. Everyone cried with her, and the song was being sung by billions from the second day. Lady Guo Lanying became the most famous singer after that. For

BTV, the political implication of the evening was not only the tribute to the Premier, but also being free from the dictatorship of the Gang of Four.

The Beijing News Documentary Studios were still the only official production base for BTV. Being different from the Cultural Revolution days, red was no longer the only colour on television to describe the Party and governance. BTV documentary films started to be based on true stories and drew on real people's experiences. Through these interactions with the public, television became more important in Chinese politics [Interviews, 1999 and 2000].

### **BTV tests the political climate in China**

“Class Struggle” in China had formed a key element of CCP policy ever since 1960, and it was still deeply engraved in the people's consciousness even when the Gang of Four's power had officially ended.

While carefully meeting the requirements of the Gang of Four to promote the Cultural Revolution, BTV was also presenting some carefully selected politically correct foreign programmes. In 1971, with approval by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, BTV showed a ballet by Japanese dancers, which she loved, called *White-haired daughter (Bai Mao Nu)*. The content was regarded one hundred per cent politically correct and approved, as it supported the Class Struggle,

but a blunder was made at the end of the show, when the ruthless landlord, who had tortured the “white-haired daughter”, held hands with her in apparent harmony. As the landlord represented the Class Struggle leaders and the daughter the oppressed, this holding of hands clearly sent out the message that such oppressors should not be tolerated by the oppressed. It was badly received by the Gang of Four, being in direct contradiction of their policies, and BTV senior management were obliged to issue them with an apology.

A similar blunder was committed in 1974. BTV aired a Beijing Opera Academy show called *Sunflower store (Xiang Yang Shang Dian)*, which viewers loved. But during the show, while a lady was singing the words, “Never show your mercy to the class enemies”, a shining portrait of Chairman Mao suddenly appeared on the screen. The implication was that Chairman Mao was the enemy referred to in the song and it once again perturbed the Gang of Four.

People at BTV became extremely cautious and careful after that, and all attempts at improving the news services were cancelled by the management. The safest way for them was to show a succession of “model operas” (Yang Ban Xi) [Interviews, 1999, 2000, 2002].

After the arrest of the Gang of Four, BTV management started thinking about the news. Before making any improvements, however, the management resumed programmes from foreign countries, as well as previously banned programmes such as traditional opera and those about love and romance. Two Yugoslav movies were shown and a series of Yugoslav television dramas also became popular among Beijing audiences.

On 6 February 1978, BTV broadcast a newly organised Spring Festival Variety Show, comprising Chinese traditional *cross-talks* (*Xiang Sheng*), songs, dances, operas and acrobatics. This soon became a traditional part of the Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve celebrations. After carefully testing the political climate with the Yugoslav television drama series, BTV broadcast eight drama series made by its own production teams. When Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping visited Japan, BTV produced and broadcast a number of educational programmes, including *Science and technology today* and the translated Japanese movies *Hometown* and *Chasing the criminal*. *Hometown* was the first movie in China to depict women in prostitution since the foundation of the People's Republic. Although it was a story entirely based in Japan, the BTV still took extra precautions by holding audience round-table discussions and organising newspaper and radio commentaries to minimise the political risk [Interviews, 2000].

Every action taken by BTV indicates that the institution was testing the climate for changes to keep up with the social, economic and political developments in China.

### **Completed hardware for the news to change: The birth of Xin Wen Lian Bo and CCTV**

Initially, in order to broadcast the shining images of Chairman Mao during the 1971 May 1 Labour Day Celebrations on Tiananmen Square, the State Administration of Broadcasting (SAB) held a meeting with established national television networks to cover this event. In the name of the Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao, both the SAB and BTV received much assistance from the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. By the end of 1975, except for Xinjiang, Xizang (Tibet), Inner Mongolia and Taiwan, all provinces and cities in China could receive BTV signals while the local television stations could also transfer their programmes to BTV electronically.

When the hardware was available and ready, the SAB's 1976 National Working Conference for Television Development decided to introduce a news programme on BTV, which would gather together all the breaking news for audiences around China. A change of contents started immediately and on 1 July 1976 an early 10-15 minute draft of the news went out on air. According



to the SAB annual statistics, the programme signal could by 1976 theoretically reach an audience of over 300 million. However, there were only around 463,000 TV sets in China, so the real figures were hard to establish.

With the Gang of Four in prison, Chinese television began to flourish and progress [Guo, 1991: 144]. From July 1977, all programmes on BTV were in colour, and at the same time it was servicing more people outside the borders of the Beijing municipality. Special task teams were sent to regional centres to negotiate programme exchanges, with particular emphasis on the prompt provision of news programmes.

On 1 January 1978, daily news programmes resumed after the break of over 10 years and people saw an attractive young lady presenting the news, replacing the red flags that viewers had become accustomed to over the previous ten years. From that day, the daily news programme at 7.00 pm was called *Gathered bulletin of news around China* (XWLB or *Xin Wen Lian Bo*, also translated as *The united prime time news*). This programme would later take over the political importance of the front page of the *People's Daily* and the *Evening Prime News* at 7.30 pm on the National People's Radio [Sun, 2003: 67].

Once the *XWLB* was formally on air, news production at regional and local television stations were organised by BTV. The Party and central government, seeing the growing importance of television, considered that BTV was ready to be “national” and “central”. On 1 May 1978, the central government re-named BTV as China Central Television (CCTV), and the Chairman of the CCPCC, Hua Guofeng, provided his calligraphy of the Chinese name of CCTV. This was a great honor for CCTV to have its name written by the state leader. From then on, CCTV was not only administratively under the supervision of SAB, but also directly under the CCPCC’s CDP [SAB, 1978: 112].

Only a limited number of media organisations came under the direct supervision of the CDP, and these included national newspapers and national radio. This was a paradox for CCTV, because while direct supervision meant being given first place and having greater access to top-level political activities, it also meant more regulation by the Party and less freedom.

### **Open to the West and learning from the internationals**

From the late 1970s Chinese people started seeing real news on national television. When Deng Xiaoping visited the United States in 1979, people watched the latest news of the visit every evening. At the same time,

supported by American colleagues, CCTV showed a series of new science and technology programmes, including the American-made documentaries, *Wildlife*, *Dynamics of the river* and *Apollo's moon landing*. The news of Apollo's moon landing in 1969 was ignored by the Gang of Four, because they were afraid to inform the public that "Public Enemy No.1", the United States of America, could be so successful. When Chinese audiences saw the moon landing by US astronauts ten years later, Chinese people for the first time realised the huge development gap between China and the West. It was arguably at this time that CCTV as the national television played the most crucial role in national development since the establishment of the first television stations 21 years earlier [Guo, 1991: 145].

When Deng Xiaoping returned, he also brought back gifts for television development. The US started providing China with the latest technology for satellite television and related facilities. As a reformer, Deng enjoyed being accompanied by journalists from CCTV. The young and energetic television journalists showed exactly what they had witnessed during the Vice Premier's visit to Thailand, Japan and the US. Chinese people were deeply impressed by what they saw on the news - the skyscrapers, highways jammed with modern cars, modern facilities at every private home-and that every family in the West had a TV set - and as a direct result they demanded more TV sets for themselves. In their everyday life after the Cultural Revolution,

Chinese people wanted a variety of choice in clothing, lifestyle and knowledge of contemporary trends. Knowing more about the modernised Western countries was another reason why people chose television as their window on the world [Xu, 2003: 301].

Nine years later, China had become the largest producer of black and white TV sets and the third largest producer of colour TV sets. By 1987, there were 600 million people in China watching television every day, and, theoretically, CCTV became the most watched television channel around the world. It was impossible for the CCP to ignore the importance of television, as the audio-visual effects had become an extremely powerful influence on social, economic and political development in China [Zheng, 2004: 178].

### **Early days of advertising: Could money speak louder?**

China was famous for having no advertising because it was seen as a symbol of capitalism, and in a centrally controlled and planned economy, there was no need to advertise anything to attract more buyers.

Shanghai and Guangdong television stations were the pioneers in advertising. On 28 January 1979, Shanghai Television showed the first advert for a herbal drink, followed by one for the Swiss-made Rado watch. Hong Kong

businessmen soon realised that this was a great profit-making opportunity and they seized it, becoming agents for Shanghai and Guangdong Television Stations. Both of them took plenty of advertising revenue in the first year. Although television stations were at first shocked to at earning money in this way, they soon accepted it [SAB, 1980: 136].

Advertising was officially approved by CDP, and CCTV started to have a five-minute commercial slot each day.

Japanese companies paid for most of the commercials and as a result they sponsored many Japanese cartoons and TV dramas to be shown on CCTV, earning CCTV the criticism of being “Japanese Television”. Japan is China’s closest neighbour, but criticism over CCTV was soon overtaken by more important issues raised in the media, as China was so eager to develop and modernise the four sectors proposed by Deng Xiaoping: industry, agriculture, science and technology, and defence.

Nevertheless, advertising on Chinese television in the 1980s was always carefully managed and kept to a minimum to avoid unnecessary criticism from the government and the public. The television sector was as greedy for profits as it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Money played only a negligible role in

influencing the television agenda. Advertising was strictly for promoting products to the public.

### **Stronger voices in process**

When the financial burdens disappeared and undue political pressure eased off, CCTV made innovation of content their top priority.

To secure a regular audience, CCTV introduced new programmes for various needs. Among the many new initiatives was *Servicing you* (*Wei Nin Fu Wu*), which became one of the most popular programmes, and was particularly enjoyed by housewives for the daily running of a family. Following its success and popularity, *Servicing you* was “photocopied” by other television channels in China. The programme reached another milestone when Mrs Shen Li, who in 1958 had been the first news presenter on Chinese television, was chosen to host it. Shen became the first television celebrity with loyalty right across the country, and it was then that people realised the power of personality-led programmes on television.

Shanghai Television introduced *Market report* (*Shi Chang Lue Ying*), which became the first business and financial news bulletin. Guangdong Television had a similar programme called *Market this week* (*Shi Chang Man Bu*). All

television stations in China started to recruit more news production staff and news

was evaluated as the core strategy by most television directors [MRT, 1984: 144].

Guangdong was among the television stations with the most “imported” programmes. It became the first provincial television station to establish a commercial company for audio-visual productions when it opened the Pacific Audio-Visual Company. This company became the official platform for making programmes for external markets, as well as importing programmes into China from elsewhere.

No sooner had this development taken place than a challenge arose.

Guangdong residents in the Pearl River Delta could easily receive Hong Kong television programmes, and by comparison the Hong Kong television was more entertaining and had many different programmes. Because viewers opted to watch it rather than the Guangdong Television (GTV), the GTV network was motivated to make improvements.

Three major improvements were made during 1981 to 1983. In 1981, GTV introduced a new channel with more localised and entertainment programmes. In 1982, it began lunch-time news as well as a more interactive

programme, which offered a popular request service with a hotline available to the audiences. In 1983, a Cantonese channel was opened and facilities were improved to reach over 80% of residents in the province. This was a record that even radio never matched [MRT, 1983: 204].

GTV was directly under the supervision of the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee's Department of Propaganda, and so it was regarded as a political duty to attract audiences to watch the network rather than Hong Kong television. Audience surveys were frequently conducted and immediately analysed and adjustments were made to programmes accordingly.

A comprehensive proposal to improve news programmes on GTV was approved by the Party's provincial authority. News programmes were produced in various formats, which included news briefs, commentary, reporters on the scene, live coverage, television debate and newspaper comment.

The SAB was replaced by a new cabinet ministry, the Ministry of Radio and Television. The name itself shows that television was accorded an equal position with radio. It was an indication that television in China was well recognised by the Party and central government as a new way of governing



popularly. The Guangdong experiences were cherished by the newly appointed ministry.

## Chapter 4

### The rise of television and the decline of radio

[1983-1992]

#### Chapter Summary

*This chapter relates how from around 1980 the Party started to pay more attention to television than to radio and newspapers. The existence of television became a major factor in party decisions, and journalists took over the management of television stations from party officials.*

*Reform of television news was central to media reform, encouraged by the Party after the fall of the Gang of Four. CCTV's negative news reports and investigative journalism were well received and attracted the best journalists. CCTV offered lunchtime and evening news, and ordinary people were heard voicing their opinions. The drive to improve journalistic standards included an emphasis on prompt, accurate and comprehensive news reporting. The CCP retained control, but television's powerful influence on the public became obvious when its programmes began to affect political decisions.*

*Television journalists were more creative and go-ahead than their radio and print counterparts, with innovative programmes and celebrity role models, and all met with the CCP's approval. As radio audiences declined, television rose in popularity, and so the Party gave television a much higher priority for its announcements and party news than to other media. A major advance came when the CCTV broadcast round-the-clock coverage of the National People's Congress, with televised interviews of member and top leadership, and phone-in sessions by the public.*

The rise of television was a little surprising at the beginning for the entire "Thought Work" régime. It was even opposed by the traditional newspaper and radio leaders within the CDP and "Thought Work" system. "Thought Work" (TW) is a direct translation from the Chinese words, "Si Xiang Gong

Zuo". Narrowly, it means ideological control and operations, and was always regarded by the Party as a vital part of the governing mechanism.

### **News reforms**

News programme reform was a greatly sensitive topic for any official in the TW system. Senior people from the newspapers felt uneasy with the rise of anti-corruption reports. Besides, some quarters argued that television would not make any difference, because radio was already doing everything; its journalists were able to report issues promptly and could efficiently collect public opinion on current affairs.

Television had just entered centre stage. Journalists from CCTV at the time were entirely party selected, and they were loyal and kept to the Party's guidelines. The core of the *XWLB*'s mission was to propagate the Party's theory, guidelines and policy and staff reporters had never considered negative coverage of anything about the Party and government. However, positive news faced serious challenges. The Gang of Four had created a special way of telling "the good news", but viewers did not generally believe what they heard. Television journalists inherited the "special way" of reporting great achievements, which the *XWLB* viewers just found boring.

In November 1976, the SAB organised a conference in Hefei to discuss the quality of television news around China. Participants agreed that news programmes should get rid of four problems: programmes being faked, slow, too long or insubstantial. The problems were clear, but few television directors could propose any effective methods of making changes until the Third Plenary Meeting of the CCP's 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress, on 18 December 1978.

Deng Xiaoping called on the Party to "Seek truth from facts" (Shi Shi Qiu Shi) and this seems to have motivated TV journalists. From 1979, CCTV started to criticise inappropriate behaviour of residents in Beijing, such as throwing rubbish on the streets and violation of traffic laws. Whenever these programmes were shown, viewers called in and demanded remedial action. By the second day things would usually improve dramatically.

On 12 September 1979, CCTV broadcast a brave report about the wrongful use of government vehicles by senior officials and their relatives. Two young CCTV journalists, Zhang Changming and Wang Jiyan, bravely recorded the registration plates of all cars parked in front of the Wangfujing Department Store. The reporters suspected that the government cars were parking there for the officials' private purposes. The programme was edited for immediate showing on the evening of 1 May 1979, but it failed because it had to be edited

again and again by the CCTV Director and Deputy of News and later by the minister-level Director-General of the SAB, Zhang Xiangshan. Four months later, the story was finally on air, though not as “news” any more. This groundbreaking story received the highest praise from viewers. For the first time, over 1,000 people wrote to CCTV about just one news item. Both the SAB and CCTV were relieved when, as a result, the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting passed a new document regulating senior Party officials’ political and private lives.

The programme was also lauded as having influenced the passing of other new Party documents. The two young journalists enjoyed the experiments as a great success. Zhang Changming was later promoted to various positions in CCTV, leading the news departments, and he is currently the Vice President and Deputy Party Secretary of CCTV for Personnel and Political and International Programming. Wang Jiyan was promoted to be Vice President of the Beijing Broadcasting Institute and then President of the Hong Kong based Phoenix Television [SAB, 1989 and Interviews 1999, 2000].

After this initial test, CCTV decided to establish a new programme to cover negative news on a regular basis. It took a long time for the SAB to pass it because most of its officials had been promoted from the National People’s Radio which, since 1959, had never broadcast commentary or negative news.

The SAB officials had a deep fear of challenging the set boundaries. After careful consideration, CCTV was given the chance to experiment first, and for this purpose CCTV opened a new department, the CCTV Features Department. This department would later attract the best journalistic staff for the development of CCTV over the coming 20 years. CCTV took a pioneering role in opinion programmes.

The Features Department contributed a series of high quality watchdog programmes. On 12 July 1980, the department's official weekly programme, *Observing and thinking*, broadcast a masterpiece on the shortage of vegetable supply to the capital. The reporter did a stand-up report and interviewed people on the streets. Interviewees were not told what to say or recite from a prepared reply as before, and everybody was speaking the everyday language of ordinary people. The pictures, the sound and the topics were all real. This programme certainly became very popular [Sun, 2003 and Guo, 1991].

After a few years *Observing and thinking* faded away, partly because of a lack of creativity and passion in the production team. Other similar programmes also ended, following the direct supervision introduced shortly after *Observing and thinking* was launched. All CCTV popular news programmes were required to be under the direct supervision of CDP of the CCPCC. Key



members of the programme were invited to the weekly internal briefings of the CDP and themes and topics had to be pre-approved by the CDP before reporters covered the news. These practices from the beginning until now have greatly limited the power and potential of the programmes.

### **News, not entertainment: Television News as the government's core strategy**

After the approval of advertising, television became more diversified and the airtime allotted to share news broadcasting decreased sharply. More TV drama, imported cartoons, variety shows and televised traditional operas were competing for airtime. Director-General Zhang Xiangshan of the SAB published several serious criticisms of the SAB's official newspaper, *Television weekly (Dian Shi Zhou Bo)*, saying that he would prefer more news on television rather than programmes purely for entertainment [SAB, 1981: 122]. Zhang pointed out that national television was the mouthpiece and propaganda organ of the Party and should never become a "mini-cinema", only for movies. He demanded a "healthy" balance of news, education and entertainment.

Debates on Zhang's proposal were quite lively until he left the SAB, when it was elevated to become the Ministry of Radio and Television. News

programmes were, however, expanded without further debate. Learning from the Guangdong Television experiences, CCTV introduced lunchtime news and evening news bulletins. Even for the traditional *XWLB*, producers conducted various experiments, which included a challenge to the preferred order of news stories. Previously, news items were not ranked according to the timeliness or importance. News stories were simply ranked according to the officials' seniority, and domestic news was always positioned before international news. News producers wanted to adapt the international media's way of ranking news according to news values.

Journalists started to take over senior positions in CCTV and MRT from the party cadres. Journalistic standards gradually became the new philosophy in the newsrooms. Journalists in television competed with each other for prompt and accurate coverage of news. They also competed with radio reporters. This competition broadened the scope of potential news, including many of the forbidden topics and issues such as natural disasters and a badly managed response to accidents.

In May 1987, CCTV covered the big fire in the Da Xing An Ling Natural Forest for a month, and this formally marked the start of television defeating radio in the news. Scholars had even written and argued that television news would eventually replace conventional newspapers, magazines and radio,



and that TV sets would become available to every single household in China, while the number of radio receivers would decline sharply.

### **The “Four-Level Television” system**

The new MRT set up the 11<sup>th</sup> All China Radio and Television Working Conference in Beijing on 31 March 1983. It was also the first time that the word “television” was inserted into the Conference’s official title. The CDP head addressed the conference and stressed that, “Propaganda is the core of all radio and television development”. MRT Minister Wu Lengxi proposed the “Four-Level Television” (FLT), and this attracted most people’s attention [MRT, 1983: 12].

For a long time the development of television in China was limited by financial constraints and political considerations. CCTV was better off as it was supported by the CCPCC and central government. However, local television stations were vulnerable, having to depend on local officials, who had insufficient understanding of television and its significance. The new FLT proposal permitted municipal and country level Party committees to supervise the establishment of television stations at their level of government. It had now been some time since the Cultural Revolution and local governments were no longer lacking in financial independence. All local

governments were required to promote their own policies for running the television stations. Soon municipal and country governments came up with budgets for establishing their own television stations.

As local television stations were being established, cable television was beginning to develop in the coastal regions.

The FLT proposal led to great success considering the fact that in 1982 China had no more than 20 television stations, and that by the end of 1987, there were 336 television stations throughout the nation.

However, the CDP required that the MRT take proper control of the television stations. CDP wanted to have all television stations centralised by the MRT and CCTV. As the local stations were financially supported by the local governments, it was not thought practical to expect all the local stations to comply with all the CCTV and MRT guidelines. Politically, it could work, but economically it could be very difficult.

When illness forced Minister Wu to retire in 1985, the new MRT Minister, Ai Zhisheng, slowed down the approval of new television stations. Among the existing stations, some were really successful, while others were at the edge of

bankruptcy. The CDP and MRT soon learned that television management would no longer be based on political correctness, but on financial stability.

### **Formation of the loyal and mature audience**

Television journalists were certainly more creative and competitive compared with the monopolistic traditional Party newspaper and national radio journalists. Television nearly considered using all creative audio-visual formats to replace the limited traditional media formats. In July 1985, CCTV invited middle school teacher and education expert Qu Xiao to give a televised lecture and it was broadcast to a billion viewers. Qu had originally been discovered by National Radio and became famous for his powerful lectures, but now television brought the real person to its audience. The televised lecture was a powerful format, frequently used during the Cultural Revolution, and even before that. For example, the “Steel Man” Wang Jinxi became a national, popular and adored hero, promoted by television. Supervised by the CDP, CCTV in competition with the National Radio now decided to present teacher Qu Xiao and a disabled girl Zhang Haidi, followed by the Vietnamese War hero Xu Liang. Traditional coverage of heroes in newspapers and on the radio had lost its appeal, and the CDP was happy to see television realising the goals of the CCPCC in promoting such role models.

With the downward trend in radio audiences from the mid 1980s, the CDP naturally gave higher priority to CCTV than to NPR or even the *People's Daily* for covering the most important news, especially news about senior political leaders' international visits and the initial announcements of important policies. This was entirely the result of the decline in radio audiences and the rise of television audiences, and their awareness of the powerful potential of television [Zheng, 2004: 331].

Since mid-1980s, CCTV presented its coverage of the National People's Congress and CPPCC's annual gathering in every March in an interesting way. Unlike the traditional reports of such meetings, CCTV invited members to answer questions in front of the cameras. People watching the programmes were encouraged to call and raise further questions with members of the congress. From this point on, CCTV became an alternative central government "reception desk" for gathering public views, opinions, concerns and problems. [Lynch, 1998: 56]. As CCTV was not an independent media organisation, information provided by the viewers was never ignored or thrown into the dustbin. Public opinions were carefully collected and analysed for the CCPCC's decision-making process, and this practice continued throughout Deng Xiaoping's administration.

The Party's Congress Meetings were always a mystery to the Chinese people and the international community. CCTV helped to change this image during the 13<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress, when it provided around-the-clock exclusive coverage of the gathering. Top leaders were persuaded to collaborate with CCTV and, from this congress onwards, Chinese leaders became accustomed to the cameras. The five elected members of the Politburo Standing Committee would be seen standing in line to meet the press and answer questions by both Chinese and foreign journalists. Television journalists applied to cover almost every event and the Party would give its approval. As a senior CCTV journalist later commented, CCTV was growing alongside the Party and the nation's top leadership. It was CCTV journalists who gave lessons to the most senior Chinese officials in media literacy, and thus television journalists gradually brought about transparency in Chinese politics. Television no longer merely served as the mouthpiece of the party but also as a bridge, or at least a dual carriageway of information.

At the same time, television news was also preparing a more mobilised audience group. Audience loyalty was essential for CCTV, and maturity in political understanding among the audiences would be a bonus for CCTV's efforts and would contribute to the social, economic and political development of China.

## Chapter 5

# The golden age of television: Commercialisation, journalistic corruption and political correctness [1993-2003]

### Chapter Summary

*The history of Chinese television and its interaction with the state continues here. Shanghai's cable television now had several million viewers, and Shanghai Oriental Television (SOT) was launched, a commercial channel without state support, and with news central to its programming. CCTV also made news its core strategy in its aim to be an authoritative and influential global network, and like other networks experimented with creative new ways of presenting the news. Further developments included the success of provincial television, and the formation of two Chinese media conglomerates.*

*Television reform, particularly of the news, was reflected throughout the Chinese media. The rise of television commercialisation and media conglomerates in China were the results of the severance of financial ties with the state, and this is currently justified as a necessary condition for meeting foreign challenges since China's accession to the World Trade Organisation.*

*An examination of how commercially supported television was run in practice is made, followed by discussion of the benefits and disadvantages of commercial television. The dilemma between television's wish for greater freedom from state control and political correctness is set against the corruption arising from the commercialisation of the media.*

The year 1993 was a very special one for Chinese television: Shanghai Television established a commercial channel, Shanghai Oriental Television (SOT), soon after cable television became available to several million viewers in the Shanghai municipality. Being commercial meant that this channel was

no longer financially supported by the government and party authorities: the television station had to make profits from commercial advertising to pay the bills. Very bravely, Shanghai Oriental Television positioned news programmes as the core strategy of competence. While the official Shanghai Television channels still presented Party conferences in a boring way, SOT was exploring ways to present the news in a format closer to viewers' tastes [MRFT, 1993: 145].

A year after Deng Xiaoping's famous speech in Guangdong, when he called for more openness in Chinese politics, CCTV was ready for further changes in its news programmes.

### **News as the core strategy**

The official yearbooks of MRFT indicate that promoting CCTV as a worldwide influential television network was integral to national strategy. The yearbook recorded Minister Sun Jiazheng's directives that, "CCTV will never be a powerful and influential medium in the world if the news programmes are not authoritative and professional by international standards." Since former Minister Zhang Xiangshan's commentaries were covered up, few people remembered how he too, ten years earlier, had eagerly promoted the importance of news provision for national television.

News, undoubtedly, was agreed to be the core component of national television by CDP, MRFT and the senior management of CCTV.

**Table 5.1**  
**Leaders of SBA-MRT-MRFT-SARFT**

| <i>Period of Time</i> | <i>Title of Administration</i>       | <i>Name of Director</i>                                | <i>Report to...</i>              |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| 1949.6-1949.11        | Department of Broadcasting           | Liao Chengzhi (Director-General)                       | CDP, CCPCC                       |
| 1949.11-1951.12       | Administration of Broadcasting       | Li Qiang (Minister)                                    | State Council                    |
| 1952.1-1962.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Mei Yi (Minister)                                      | State Council and the CCP, CCPCC |
| 1962.1-1966.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Ding Laifu (Party Secretary), Mei Yi (Minister)        | State Council and the CCP, CCPCC |
| 1967.1-1967.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Liu Luming (Military Commander)                        | CCPCC                            |
| 1968.1-1968.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Zhang Wu (Military Commander)                          | CCPCC                            |
| 1969.1-1972.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Liu Jiangong (Military Commander)                      | CCPCC                            |
| 1973.1-1973.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Liu Jiangong (Minister)                                | CCPCC                            |
| 1974.1-1976.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Deng Gang (Minister)                                   | CCPCC                            |
| 1977.1-1977.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Zhang Xiangshan  | State Council and the CDP, CCPCC |
| 1978.1-1978.12        | State Administration of Broadcasting | Zhang Ce (Party Secretary), Zhang Xiangshan (Minister) | State Council and the CDP, CCPCC |
| 1979.1-1982.4         | State Administration of Broadcasting | Zhang Xiangshan (Minister)                             | State Council and the CDP, CCPCC |
| 1982.5-1985.4         | Ministry of Radio and                | Wu Lengxi  | CDP and State                    |



|                |  |                          |                       |
|----------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|
|                | Television   | (Minister)               | Council               |
| 1985.4-1985.12 | Ministry of Radio and Television                   | Ai Zhisheng (Minister)   | CDP and State Council |
| 1986.1-1994.4  | Ministry of Radio, Film and Television             | Ai Zhisheng (Minister)   | CDP and State Council |
| 1994.4-1998.3  | Ministry of Radio, Film and Television             | Sun Jiazheng (Minister)  | CDP and State Council |
| 1998.3-2000.6  | State Administration of Radio, Film and Television | Tian Congming (Minister) | CDP and State Council |
| 2000.6-2005.12 | State Administration of Radio, Film and Television | Xu Guangchun (Minister)  | CDP and State Council |
| 2005.12-       | State Administration of Radio, Film and Television | Wang Taihua (Minister)   | CDP and State Council |

**Source:** Compiled by author according to SAB, MRT, MRFT and SARFT Yearbooks

CCTV senior management first established breakfast time as a “special zone” for news reforms and other associated experiments [CCTV, 1993: 202]. At the onset they could not think of an appropriate name for the new department, but later the entire breakfast news programme was officially named by CCTV and the MRFT as *Oriental horizon*. Its official name was *Department of news and commentary* and this was the first time that commentary had been introduced to television news in China. Investigative journalist Sun Yusheng was appointed as Director of the new department, and wrote a book about his experimental experiences in running it. By the time it was published, he had already been promoted to become the youngest Vice President in CCTV’s history and was also responsible for the 2008 Olympic operations.

The introduction of news departments and commentary was only one part of a series of new changes within CCTV news productions supported by the MRFT. There had only been four news bulletin slots: morning, lunchtime, prime time at 7.00 pm and the late night news. From 1 March 1993, CCTV Channel 1 broadcast news bulletins twelve times a day and most of the news programmes were broadcast live [Sun, 2003: 181].

More than ever before, television producers could now no longer be satisfied with simply relating the Party's policy word by word to the public during the news. They started seeking the best ways of communicating and interacting with the public. The all-positive *XWLB* was also reformed and started to include negative news stories in its bulletins almost every day.

In December 1992, *XWLB* broadcast investigative reports of serious crimes in certain cities and how the police were struggling to combat the problem. The reports presented crime scenes, not previously allowed on television, and the programme was not only welcomed by the general public, but also praised by President Jiang Zemin. As with Mao and Zhou in the early days, President Jiang Zemin watched *XWLB* every evening and effectively interacted with the news departments. He supported CCTV in becoming the alternative channel for assessing public opinion on the current policies of the Party and

government. President Jiang and Premier Zhu Rongji had both publicly stressed the importance of CCTV's watchdog function. Premier Zhu once even commented that, "If CCTV *Focus report* stops investigating and reporting misconduct, I will stop watching CCTV immediately" [Jing, 1997: 98]. In December 1996, *XWLB* covered the story of an underground base for pork production and illegal butchers in the North East. President Jiang immediately called the Minister of Trade and Commerce for verification and urged action against the misconduct.

The top leadership seemed highly satisfied with CCTV's reform of news programmes. In February 1995, the Standing Committee of Politburo officially invited Minister Sun Jiazheng to a special meeting on the development of radio and television in China. Minister Sun was encouraged by the Politburo to highlight all the dilemmas and problems he faced. This was unusual in Chinese politics. The Politburo sorted out all his concerns, and a great deal of special assistance was given to him by the Party and central government.

### **Commercial changes in news productions**

*Oriental horizon* was not only a brand-new CCTV programme, but also an ambitious experiment for news production operations. As they placed such a crucial role in CCTV, news programmes and their financial arrangements

were always centrally managed by the editorial board. News programmes are allowed to operate their own commercial advertising. *Oriental Horizon* introduced new operating procedures, which amongst other things gave the executive producers full political and financial control over the programme. The executive producers were also required to be responsible for the programme's revenue from advertising. This policy motivated television journalists to produce more quality and critical programmes. Producers competed with each other by using innovative ways of presenting news to attract more viewers for both positive and negative news but, as with any society in the world, negative news always attracted the most public attention. The news department was continually expanding and *Beijing Youth Daily* in 2000 reported that there were over 6,000 staff reporters working for CCTV news departments. Journalists interviewed by the author expressed pride in being television journalists in China and only a few of them complained about press freedom issues. They covered everything from government corruption to crime in the dark corners of society. They kept an eye on government behaviour on behalf of the public and provided a platform for the voices of the poor and those at grassroots. A news documentary programme called *Life space* became popular. Reporters were sent to ordinary homes around China to cover ordinary people's everyday life for the news.

Cutting-edge programmes like *News probe* and *Focus report* were very successful. They set the agenda for the national newspapers and commentary of most domestic media. Hu Zhengrong argued in 2000 at the China Communication Forum that the public regarded programmes as the "alternative government reception desk", where they could take their complaints, rather than to the bureaucratic party and government system.

### **Commercialisation vs. party journalism**

Television was not the only medium celebrating reform; the entire Chinese media had undergone significant changes in the period between 1993 and 2003, as a result of media commercialisation supported by the Party and government. The print media had gone even further and had formed press organisations like those in the West. The birth of media conglomerates in China was initially a response to the state's severance of financial subsidies to the press but now, however, it is being justified as a necessary condition for meeting potential foreign challenges following China's accession to the WTO.

However, commercialisation is a double-edged sword and inevitably it was the negative side that attracted the Party's attention. First, as Lee [2003: 3] argues, the Chinese party-state system is moving closer to a system resembling what Latin American scholars call a "bureaucratic authoritarian

(capitalist) régime,” whereby the system capitalises on emerging opportunities in the global market. The global market was clearly dominated by a few Western media giants promoting Western values and democracy. The CCP has never forgotten this potential threat to its ideology.

Second, China has tried to shelter the media sector from the rules and norms of international trade arrangements, as the media remain the party-state’s means of profit and ideological impact. Essentially, the Chinese media are owned and controlled by the party-state. The party-state takes a corporatist approach, whereby significant élite clients are incorporated into the power orbit of the party-state, with the party-state offering political and economic benefits in exchange for the media elite’s loyalty. However, the Ministry of Commerce and Trade had had no experience whatsoever in dealing with the media industry. Very few of its media managers were professionally trained, unlike those from commercial companies. Most media directors were ideological cadres and former practitioners of Party journalism. It would take a great deal of time to get the ideological mind and the economic world smoothly bridged.

Third, press conglomerates in China evolved in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the dire financial and bureaucratic imperatives of the party-state. Media officials seemed to believe that “bigger” implied “better” and that in

order to compete with foreign media providers in China large media conglomerates were necessary. But media conglomerates were actually a weak response to global forces and they were merely a facade for domestic political control and economic growth.

In 2001 a grouping of all broadcasting institutions was formed to make the China Corporation of Radio, Film and Television, but again the establishment of giant national-level bodies was not the answer. "The bigger the better" was never part of the strategy for the development of broadcasting in China.

Petitions are currently being made to the government for passing a money bill that will enable the formation of another media giant, to be called China International Communications Group. It will comprise CCTV 4 and CCTV 9, CRI, *China Daily* and [www.China.com](http://www.China.com).

Meanwhile television stations were still successfully operating on their own at a business level. Hunan TV achieved the first economic miracle among provincial television stations. Reform at this television network went beyond mere innovation in news programmes. Chinese versions of *American idol*, *Survivor*, *Big brother* and *Blind date* were all popular on the network. Their success was also supported by aggressive advertisers in the industry. China's number one dairy company, Meng Niu, became Hunan TV's primary partner.

The corporate world poured money in its billions into television stations every year to sponsor programmes, and before long questions started being raised about objectivity and impartiality when television stations took money from the commercial world [SARFT, 2003, 2004].

CCTV-2 introduced the “Low Ranking Denying” exercise, through which programmes with low audience ratings would automatically be dropped (or “denied”) after three months, including the personnel working on those programmes. Many local television channels followed. “Money speaks louder” became true of many Chinese television stations [Interviews, 2004].

Surprisingly, the LRD was supported by the CDP and SARFT. The Party believed that it was impossible for a programme without mass popularity to propagate the Party’s guidelines effectively.

### **Corrupted journalism and political correctness**

Journalism is corruptible in many ways and government power is one of them. China’s case is different because journalists are not corrupted through political power, but by the commercial interests of television stations.



Journalists are supposed to be independent of commercial influences.

However, in the current Chinese media organisations, especially the severely competitive television industry, the ultimate goal is to make profit rather than to uphold professional values. Scholars in many countries are worried about this trend. In the West, media power is already in the hands of a few people and giant corporations. In China commercial interests have seriously corrupted the national and local television networks [Zhao, 1998: 83]. At the same time, political correctness has become the new benchmark in news departments. There are certain bottom lines of political reporting in the news departments. In severe commercial competitions, television programmes should never risk to go beyond the political correctness bottom lines. This is also to guarantee the government will not stop protecting CCTV's monopoly position in Chinese television industry.

It is some years since television ceased to be subverted by government interference, which had turned the relationship between the two into a government-protected monopoly. This means that television stations under the name of the party and government can now make money from entertainment programmes and commercial advertising, as well as from news programmes. The Party and government care less about how television stations make money, as long as they are able to make enough to operate. It is

occasionally heard that even reporters charge companies for a positive portrayal in news stories.

Corruption in journalism was developing and spreading fast. The Party and government had not realised that the corrupted media conglomerates would soon start demanding freedom and a guarantee of higher profits.

Since the Party still have the right to appoint senior media personnel for media groups, Li Xiguang [2003: 1] suggests that immediate action should be taken to establish new regulations and laws to curb the misconduct of the media and journalists.

In the highly developed coastal regions, including Zhejiang and Jiangsu, private companies are allowed to invest in newspapers, magazines and television productions. Unfortunately, the investors are given the right to take part in deciding editorial policies and occasionally, though at a junior level, these media organisations attack government officials and party leaders. With private business developing in the national economy, it will not be long before private business investors enter other territories of the media industry. It remains to be seen whether the legitimacy of the party-state will be challenged by the media.

This chapter only intended to highlight the problems. Methods of solving these problems are discussed in later chapters. It is obvious that the CCP needed to adjust the current television policy following the painful experiences endured by local government. Different departments within the CCP have already taken steps to prevent further damage, as the ability to govern through the news has been officially included in the Hu and Wen requirement, the "governing capability of the Party".

## Chapter 6

# CCTV and the international playground [2003-2007]

### Chapter Summary

*Can China's media industry, especially television, compete with the media giants from the more advanced capitalist countries, given the ever-widening gap between the two? The debate includes an overview of the global media industry, and a discussion of the Chinese television industry's current status.*

*Key strategies for the media industry of advanced countries in a global market are then highlighted, followed by a discussion on whether Chinese television can work out appropriate ways to raise its standards adequately to compete internationally, with particular regard to news programmes.*

*The factors holding back the development of China's media industry are discussed in turn: powerful competition from Western media giants, China's negative international image, poor brand management, state indifference to audience research, corruption of broadcasting integrity by commercialisation, and the global dominance of the English language and of Western culture.*

*The media policy of the Chinese government is examined, whereby it retains strong media control, allowing only a very limited freedom. The advantages to journalists of this are shown, along with the obstacles it causes. The conclusion suggests that defending the domestic media market is not a priority for China, but the successful maximisation of profit from the domestic market is the way forward if the Chinese television industry is to compete successfully with the Western media giants.*

CCTV has become the most profitable media organisation in China since the late 1990s. For a long time there has been no organisation in the Chinese media powerful enough to challenge this government-protected monopoly.

However, now that China is a member of WTO, can this monopoly be protected any longer? In the national interest and for cultural security, China is also requires a powerful media brand. Can CCTV step up to the challenge and be a representative of the Chinese media? Can China, as a developing country, compete with the Western media giants?

This chapter debates whether the Chinese media industry, especially television, can compete with the media giants based in more advanced capitalist countries. The key hypothesis is that the gap between the media industry of developing countries and developed countries is becoming increasingly wider, more so than ever before. To support this point, an introduction to the global media industry will be given after a sociological description of the “globalised” world. An overview of how the Chinese television industry developed will also be provided.

The discussion will then highlight key strategies for the media industry of advanced countries in a global market, followed by a discussion on whether Chinese television can work out appropriate ways to deal with raising its standards enough to enter the global media market. It will also examine the media industry in China from the aspects of domestic market, language preference, Research and Development, contemporary global cultural dominance and China’s negative image internationally.

The author will further examine government media policy in China, which has set out the social and political conditions for further development, conditions which are useful, but also form obstacles. The thesis will finally suggest that defending the domestic media market is not a priority for China, but that the successful maximisation of profit from the domestic market is the way forward if the Chinese television industry is to compete with Western giants in the international playground.

### **The competition: Giants of the globalised media industry**

As the Chinese television industry aspires to enter the international stage and become part of the global media industry, it will need to withstand huge competition. What is currently referred to as the global television industry is in reality just a monopoly of a few television giants whose grip on the industry is so strong that it will require a great deal from ambitious and up-and-coming television networks like those in China even to begin to compete. Television organisations that dominate the world stage in competition with Chinese television include American and European corporations that have been developing in the industry at a very fast rate. To illustrate this dominance, we can examine those corporations who practically control more

than half the American television industry and a world television market of almost the same size. .

Walt Disney owns several television networks that dominate both the American and world markets. It owns the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), one of the oldest American television channels, which by 2008 was the most watched television network in the US. It is also available in several other countries, including Canada, Mexico, Israel, Iraq, Japan, Russia and the Caribbean. In addition, Walt Disney owns one of the world's leading sports channels, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN). Time Warner is another American corporation whose global share of the television industry is staggering. The company is a conglomerate that owns Cable News Network (CNN) and its reach is practically worldwide. Another giant worth noting is Viacom. This corporation owns such worldwide television networks as Music Television (MTV), Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Nickelodeon.

As mentioned earlier, any discussion of the global television market and industry is essentially about these American corporations and others like them, such as News Corporation which owns Fox News. These are the players currently in the field with whom the Chinese media industry will

have to compete if it hopes to emerge as an internationally accepted and respected television brand.

### **“New Propaganda” television news and its challenges**

The current status of Chinese television is that of a follower, because ever since the emergence of the Chinese television industry its programming has been more or less a copy and paste of Western television programmes. The programmes that have been most popular and have recorded the highest viewer ratings on CCTV have all been Chinese versions of American television programmes. A CCTV programme called *Focus report*, which takes a critical look at society and questions inappropriate behaviour on behalf of the public, is actually just a Chinese version of *Sixty minutes* on CBS, the American television network. Other Chinese television networks also have their own versions of Western programmes - for instance, the now suspended *Super girl*, which was a replica of *American idol*.

One of the reasons for the lack of improvement in the content of Chinese television is a lack of research and development. Those responsible for content do not carry out audience research to find out what kind of programmes would interest viewers. Instead, they seem to act on their own ideas of what viewers want and this is why Chinese television programmes



are still entrenched in the old ways while the rest of the world has moved on. With the opening up of China, many Chinese people are becoming exposed to the fast-growing outside world and their lifestyles are changing accordingly. If the television stations were to carry out research to measure the popularity of their current programming, they would be amazed. Another challenge to the improvement of programmes is that the people responsible for them have hardly travelled anywhere outside China, and have no of the type of programme content used by leading television stations elsewhere, and the fact that foreign television broadcasting is barred in China does not help.

Local television stations were previously required to produce their own programmes, but around 1993 CCTV changed the system to what was called “the separation of production and broadcasting”, through which stations could buy content from private production firms. This was essentially a good idea because programme content would be improved with competition between the private firms to produce programmes that viewers would want to watch. Unfortunately the system failed to work, because CCTV never really consumed very much from private production firms and the local television stations found it expensive, and these factors both discouraged the private production of programmes.

Without being creative and initiating programmes about the Chinese lifestyle, the Chinese television industry cannot hope to compete successfully with well-established corporations. If programmes with a greater pull of viewers are those copied from other television networks such as America, Chinese television will remain a follower on the global stage.

News programmes are items that lend credence to Chinese television networks, but there is currently a problem because networks such as CCTV from which a large proportion of the Chinese population get their news, depend heavily on foreign news agencies. About 30 per cent of the thirty-minute News Bulletin at 7.00 pm on CCTV consists of international news, but of this 90 per cent is from Western sources including AP, Reuters and AFP. Some original material is now offered by the Xinhua News Agency, but that only began in 2001. Before then, Xinhua could not provide audio-visual material from its own bureaux around the world.

News provision is not the only handicap to pose a challenge to the Chinese television industry's desire to break into the global arena. CCTV's reporting of major international events has left much to be desired. Chapter 1 mentioned the failure to report on the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, but another example is CCTV's failure to give adequate cover to the bombing of Baghdad in 2003, when US military forces invaded Iraq. The CCTV crew in

the city when the bombing started were ordered to leave for a safer place, while its major competitor, Phoenix Television, kept its foreign correspondent Lu Qiu Luwei there. He covered the offensive and returned to Hong Kong and broadcast pictures that attracted a huge audience to the network, beating CCTV by a vast margin. If CCTV fails to compete with a fellow Chinese television network like Phoenix, how will it compete with the global giants?

The television networks mentioned above have become major world players, because they export many of their programmes through the flexible regulations that govern the export of television content in the West. The import of foreign television programmes into China is regulated by the SARFT and it is currently very difficult to meet the requirements set by the authority. Exporting content from China is met with the same strict requirements, and so it has been possible to export only a handful of programmes, which will be a barrier if Chinese television is to go global.

Looking at the distribution of television programmes, it is clear that there are some local “tollbooths” within the information super-highway. The fact is that television has remained a local business, and only cable and satellite can reach the national level, because relatively pervasive national ownership restrictions still exist. These restrictions are very likely to impede on most of the cross-ownership investment. Now that China is part of the WTO it will be even tougher for Chinese television to be a player on the international stage,

because if other countries find it hard to sell their programmes in China they will in turn make it difficult for China to sell its programmes to them.

Digitalisation of television in China has not made any difference, because only a few cities provide digital boxes and only Chinese programmes are provided through the service. CCTV does not seem to pay any attention to being a vibrant online television service provider. Its current online service is basically the same as that found on television, without any added value in terms of features or contents. CCTV currently makes a lot of money from its mainstream television services, and so it sees no need to dominate the digital platform. This mentality appears to be encouraged by the strict conditions set out by SARFT for those wanting to venture into the digital market.

Chinese television forms an indispensable part of the Communist Party because, from Chairman Mao to the current President, Hu Jintao, all leaders have agreed that television is the mouthpiece of the Party and government, and therefore measures such as censorship are necessary. This is what has slowed down the development strategy of Chinese television for so long. Too much control has meant that television in China has been very slow to adapt to global changes, and this will continue for as long as the status quo remains. As already argued, while barring foreign players from the domestic television scene has protected Chinese television from competition, it has at the same

time not allowed Chinese television the opportunity to learn how to improve programme content and competitive station management.

### **Staying in control: TV organisation in China**

Almost every media market has ownership laws that restrict foreign ownership to far less than a controlling interest (usually 20-25%). In most countries, other than the US and the UK, these laws have been extended to cable systems as well. The reasoning behind this is that the media market and its products are very different from other market products. Following the social, cultural and political attribute of either news or other even entertainment programmes, the audiences can be mobilized for uncertain activities. At least in China, political leaders and the governing party had never ignored this potential risk. Sociologically and psychologically, social science scholars described that "seeing might be believing and even deceiving..." [Crisell, 1997: 212]. This is exactly how the politburo of CCPCC consider the imports of news programmes from the West.

As a developing country, the West is quite disappointing to see the slow process of media reform towards a West dominated "globalised media perspective". However, even for the good of Chinese people, the current situation raises the question of whether the government has noticed that the

country is entering an information age and that the media will play an important role in the future world.

The adage, "He who pays the piper calls the tune" [Hopkins, 1983:281], which a Marxist-Leninist would interpret as, "He who owns the means of production decides the manufacture," accurately describes the economic arrangements of the mass media in the former Soviet Union style systems, including China and many African and Indo-China countries.

Communist Party bureaucracy controls the media content, because the Party operates the levers of economic machinery. The government is clearly aware of the media's enormous significance, but unfortunately with an outdated view. Putting it another way, because the economic marketplace of a centrally planned economic society is highly regulated, its mass media primarily respond to other than the financial forces of advertising revenue, subscription rates, distribution costs, payrolls and capital expenditures, the litany that drives the world of publishing and broadcasting in most Western societies. Today almost everything in China is state-owned, and the media sector is specifically controlled by the government.

Commercialisation in China is under the careful supervision of the government. Market theory can only apply to the entertainment sectors, although the investment relies almost entirely on non-governmental business

organisations. The only time that the government considers investing is when there are adequate political interests and considerations involved. Another fact is that in China the totally state-owned industrial system has just been commercialised and big investors willing to risk investment into the media market have not yet emerged.

However, the changes and development of the media are never entirely dependent on Party or government discretion. With technological advances and more outside influence, the media in China, no matter how strictly controlled, will push for reform in order to join the globalised world media system. The developments that have been taking place in the Chinese television industry are a good example of this. The industry has the potential to achieve this kind of reform, but currently there is much that first needs to be addressed.

### **The Chinese case: From Socialist market economy to media reform**

Traditionally in China, the word "media" is a very political term and was never considered in an economic or commercial way until the late 1980s [Zhao, 1998: 96]. The Chinese government seldom rated its achievements in the media as economic success, but only as part of the Party's political agenda,

even with the growth of television audiences through rapidly improved technology. As Kim Gordon said:

Collectivism and egalitarianism have given way to tacit encouragement of individualism and consumerism: the Chinese are being encouraged- in a carefully controlled manner - to speak their minds.

[Gordon, 1999: 36]

The changes that occurred in the following years undoubtedly provided some necessary preparation for individualism and consumerism within the Chinese television audience group. These were also the factors basic to a media-market system.

Having had television in their homes for many years now, the Chinese people have started to demand better quality programmes and information. Only a competitive media market can provide the best and the most satisfying programmes for such an audience. Since the term "Socialist market economy" was used to define the current reformed Chinese political and economic system, the Chinese media world has also been thoroughly influenced by the "market" notion. However, the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee, which is in charge of the media, has only permitted



commercialisation and liberal reforms to take place in the entertainment sector (films, TV entertainment shows, music and partly in publishing).

Figures from a CCTV annual report suggest that in 1996 CCTV bought 377 hours of entertainment programmes from commercial television production companies, compared with only 78 hours in 1992 [CCTV, 1998:24].

At the same time, there is a series of data which indicates that the CCTV owned International Cultural Communication Company sells programmes to more than 62 countries worldwide. The profit, however, is not as high as imagined (only US\$2,200 million a year) and most of the programmes produced were sold to markets with a sizeable population of expatriate Chinese. The data demonstrate that these regions include Hong Kong (32%), Taiwan (36%), South East Asia (12%), North America (9%), Europe (6%) and others (5%). Within the context of the annual report [CCTV, 1998:75], CCTV's future target was to become an influential international television station (company) with a strong ability to compete in the global media (the term "market" was not mentioned in this context). Huayong Zhao defined his "Zhaoism" as building one of the biggest and most influential television networks in the world [CCTV Newsletter, issue 29, 1999].

Looking at CCTV as an independent business company, both its size and financial state would undoubtedly make it a powerful competitor in the

world of television distribution and regional television production. CCTV is currently running a nine-channel network for more than a billion viewers, the biggest audience group in the world. Advertising provides CCTV's key source of income, and the government is unconditionally committed to financial support of CCTV's development. Can we therefore hope that CCTV is able to compete globally as it tries to concentrate on taking an international market share?

### **Too expensive and costly to learn: The difficulties faced by China as latecomers in the global media market**

The reality of business history has been very different from the textbook. Instead of an occasional deviation from the textbook image, the normal path of capitalist development has been characterised by oligopoly, barriers to entry and imperfect competition. It is unfortunate that the media industry in China is still part of the political governmental machinery and politicians have not considered developing it into an aggressive profit-maker. However, even if the Chinese media, television in particular, were supported in joining the competition on the international playing field, they would as latecomers face severe difficulties in competing with large companies from advanced economies.

There are several factors that will make it difficult for the Chinese television industry to succeed globally, and unless they are addressed, the Chinese television industry will remain trapped in its own snare.

First, the media giants in the West have formed a huge and effective business system with their brands recognised worldwide. Disney, News Corporation and Reuters have become global brands recognised, respected and accepted in almost every country. Over the years these media corporations have built up a reputation that helps them to break into new markets and strengthen old ones.

At the same time, as part of the attempt to insulate their market and keep competition out, these brands have also managed to denigrate newly introduced brands enough to make the world market refuse to accommodate them. CCTV and Xinhua, though not as famous and popular as the others, are known brands, but CCTV has unfortunately been portrayed and misunderstood as a “police camera” elsewhere in the world, while Xinhua is considered too official to be trusted. Internationally, people have somehow been conditioned to feel that consumption of services from the two Chinese media brands is “unacceptable”.

It was believed that merging all Chinese broadcasting media into one major group would help to develop a Chinese media brand able to compete with the Western conglomerates, but as already argued in earlier chapters, this was a bad move because ultimately it did not change anything.

The second factor that is stalling the progress of the Chinese television industry is poor brand management. Chinese television does not pay attention to marketing programmes in ways that would make them permanent brands, first for Chinese audiences and eventually global. Managers of television stations do not have the business expertise to manage brands. For example, programmes like *Focus report* and *Xin Wen Lian Bo* are continually changing their logos and presenters and the music (signature tunes) that introduces the programmes is not consistent. It is sad that such aspects, which identify a television programme, are always changed when the programmes are at their peak. Any suggestions to make Chinese television brands better managed and competitive are always viewed as a threat to established norms and practices and are therefore often brushed aside as capitalist ideas.

Language and culture comprise the third factor that the Chinese television industry must review in order to enter world competition. The English language has always dominated and governed mainstream world culture

since the British built their world empire, and this makes it impossible for programmes broadcast in Chinese or Korean or even Japanese to succeed outside their national boundaries. Many Asian television networks such as those in Hong Kong, Singapore and China have been producing English programmes and sending them by satellite to world viewers. However, cultural differences have been a major barrier and have hindered the success of these networks. It has been difficult for viewers from other countries to learn about current affairs, for example, through Chinese television's English programmes, yet when they watch BBC, CNN or CBS they can understand the current international situation, no matter where they are in the world. BBC, CNN and CBS have been seen as the reliable news programme brands in the global media market. CCTV operates English, French and Spanish channels, but the problem has been that all these channels are merely direct translations of the Chinese domestic channels. Politics and culture are always the most difficult to translate without losing the original meaning, and this makes translated programmes boring and unreliable. The vast political, cultural and linguistic differences within the media markets have been a significant barrier to global diversification by the global media giants. Only Star TV, the Asian satellite television system owned by News Corporation, successfully formed a pan-regional network with the support of local and national governments.

The fourth factor concerns the domestic obstacles, especially the Chinese television industry's failure to separate the commercial element of networks from the news departments. Provision of news, to be successful, must be separated from advertising, because once the money-making obligations of a television network are confused with its news services, the public interest obligation is contradicted. Chinese television treats advertising and news as one and paid news is an acceptable practice, but this practice has resulted in corruption which has undermined the reputation of Chinese television networks as dignified and trusted sources of news. To compete on a global scale, the Chinese television industry must learn to operate advertising and news as completely separate and different components.

The rising cost of research and development forms the fifth factor to be considered if Chinese television is to realise its dream of succeeding globally. It is a commonly agreed principle that to establish a television network, serious audience research must be carried out, but so far China has failed to do this. In order to serve an international audience, Chinese television networks need to know the needs of viewers at a worldwide level and reach the technical standards required to provide the same quality of programmes as those provided by the already established networks. But such research and development are expensive, Chinese television is government funded, and it is not a government priority to fund non-domestic endeavours. Given the

ferocity of global competition, the cost will keep increasing, and so the government would rather spend the money on other priorities, such as improving people's living conditions.

Finally, the world still clings on to negative images of China as portrayed during the Cold War, although the Cold War ended more than a decade ago. China's image in the world has been demonised, so for networks like CCTV to venture out and compete they face a prejudiced audience with preconceived conclusions that prevent it being accepted as a television network with as much potential as the already established networks. It is even difficult for Chinese television to compete regionally with media from Hong Kong or Singapore because of this demonised image.

### **Conclusion: Defend the boundaries or expand?**

Television companies from developed countries have had a head start of several years in the industry and the technological gap that exists between them and Chinese television makes it almost impossible for China to compete and hope to claim any fertile ground for expansion. As discussed earlier, networks from the West have been successful globally partly because they have not had to meet prohibitive conditions for plying their trade outside their countries of origin. The Chinese television industry is currently so

greatly over-defended, protected and controlled that it is a luxury to expect it to develop to international standards.

There are strict restrictions against foreign television networks entering the Chinese market, and this prevents the Chinese industry having the chance to learn from global players about running a television business. So far, the only foreign television channels that have been allowed into China are restricted to five-star hotels and if their content contradicts the official government and party-established policy and ideology, they are immediately cut off. This kind of protectionism hinders the development of Chinese television, because when China tries to trade its television networks in other countries it receives the same treatment. Because of this over-control, Chinese television has always been myopic in its programming, and its lack of global orientation does not allow it to begin to compete with other networks.



## Chapter 7

# The Party and television news: Managing the News through “Thought Work” in modern China

### Chapter Summary

*Based on the author’s personal observations as television news presenter on CCTV’s 24-hour news service, this chapter examines how the relationship between the CCP and the media has changed after twenty-five years of reform, and whether Chinese television is still seen as the Party’s mouthpiece.*

*The topic is introduced by an overview of CCP structure, showing the hierarchy and lines of command, and television’s place in it. “Thought Work”, its definition, origin and current status are explored, followed by a discussion on how far the CCP still controls the media. The relationship between Party and television appears to be mutually beneficial. China is thus uniquely successful in its media reform, loosening government control and encouraging the media to be commercially run and semi-free.*

*A series of case studies illustrates this, showing how the need to address a single national problem has brought Party and television together, ultimately benefiting both. Forced to give television more freedom, the Party has also benefited, with television acting as its cost-effective watchdog and whistleblower, a means of assessing public opinion, and of educating and mobilising the public. Greater media freedom is thus based on the Party’s ability to govern and achieve far more through television in league with active citizenship than by increasing bureaucracy.*

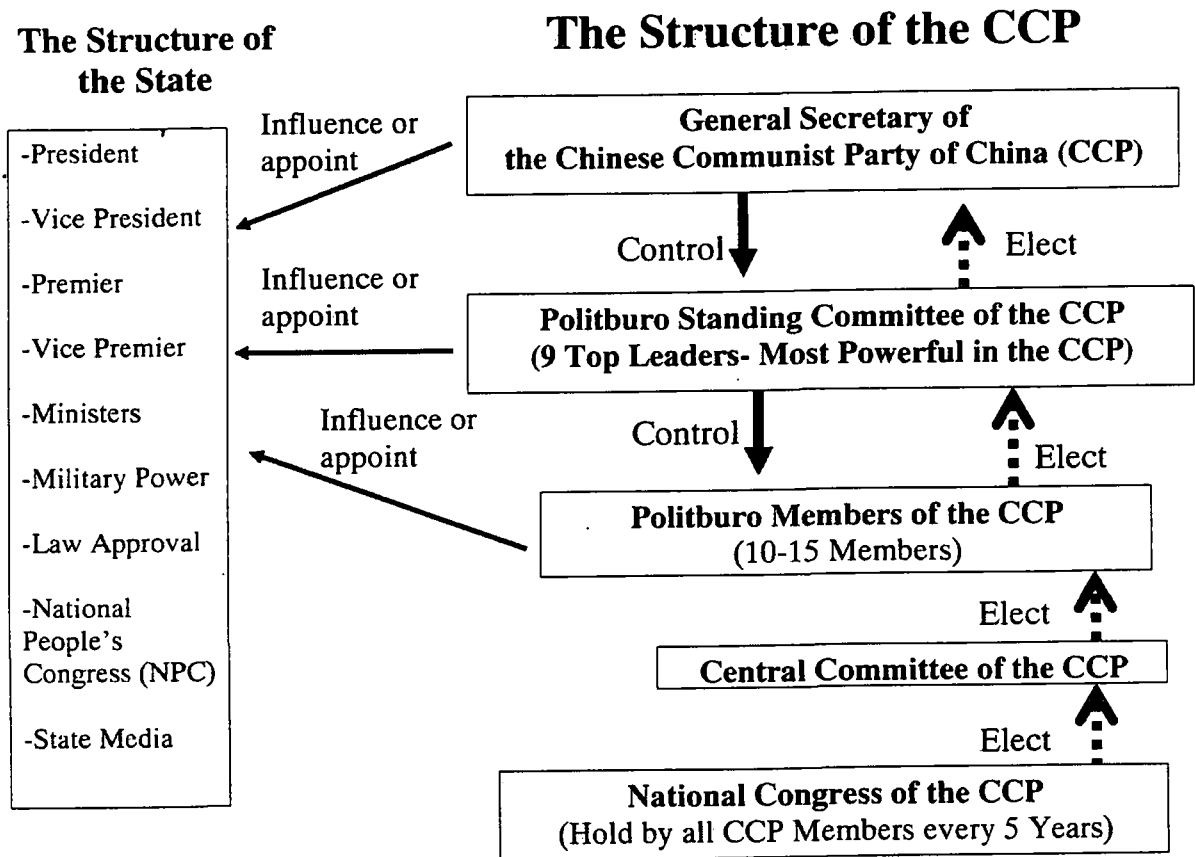
This chapter explores the changed relationship between the Chinese party-state and the mass media, television in particular, after a quarter century of reform. The chapter tries to answer such questions as: To what extent is television still the mouthpiece of the party-state? What has happened to the Thought Work regime, and is it still useful for the Party in managing news on

television? Is the Party pulling back from total control of television? Some case studies have been presented in the chapter to illustrate the discussion.

### **The contemporary Chinese political system and Thought Work**

As this chapter tries to examine the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and television, and how the former controls the latter as its undeviating mouthpiece, it is important to include a description of the CCP's structure. The structure will help in understanding where the controlling power originates, which parts of the Party are more influential and which ones have power to elect. It will show which arm of the CCP controls the media. The chapter will also provide the state structure, since it is influenced and appointed by the Party, and will then discuss the meaning of Thought Work.

**Chart 7.1**  
**How the CCP governs Chinese politics?**



**Source:** compiled by the author

At the top of the CCP is the General Secretary of the Party, a position currently held by President Hu Jintao. The position is an elected one by the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP, which comes directly under the General Secretary. The Politburo Standing Committee comprises the nine most powerful people in the Party: the General Secretary, Chairperson of the National People's Congress, Premier of the State Council, Chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Chief of Propaganda, Vice President, Vice Premier of the State Council, Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and Minister and Party Secretary of the

Ministry of Public Security. Directly under these nine positions are the Politburo Members of the CCP, who elect the Politburo Standing Committee. There are usually 10-15 Politburo Members, and they are elected by the fourth level of the structure, the Central Committee of the CCP. At the bottom of the party structure is the National Congress of the CCP, which is held every five years for all members of the CCP to elect the Central Committee of the CCP.

The state structure has the President at the top, followed by the Vice President and then the Premier and Vice Premier. The Cabinet, or Ministers, come directly under the first four positions and under the Cabinet is the Military Power. Following immediately is the Judiciary (Law Approval), followed by the National People's Congress, and at the bottom are the State Media.

The state structure usually reflects the operations of the party structure because its appointments are directly influenced by the three top levels of the party structure, namely the current General Secretary of the CCP, the Politburo Standing Committee of the CCP and the Politburo Members of the CCP.

The Chinese political system is intertwined with numerous party and state organs influencing and controlling each other, but most of these operate

under the influence of the top levels of the state structure. For example, the Discipline Commission is a party organ, which together with another group called Party Elders controls the Politburo Standing Committee and the Politburo Members of the CCP. These two in turn control the Military Commission, which is another party organ, as well as the National People's Congress and State Council, which are both state organs. Together the three elect three other state organs, namely Military Affairs, Courts and Prosecutors and Local Government.

CCP control of the media starts from the very top in the Politburo Standing Committee, where the Chief of Propaganda resides. This committee exerts its authority through four channels including the State Council, Publicity Department of the CCP (propaganda department), People's Liberation Army and the *People's Daily* newspaper. The State Council controls the Xinhua News Agency, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and the General Administration of Press and Publishing of the PRC. SARFT looks after China National Radio, China Radio International and China Central Television. The People's Liberation Army has its own publication, the *PLA Daily*.

To give an adequate explanation of "Thought Work", this thesis borrows the excellent outline offered by Lynch [1999: 2]. Thought Work refers to a system

of controlling and manipulating information by the state, so that citizens only have access to information and can only communicate in ways that the state deems right and appropriate. The state thus constructs its citizens' symbolic environment, making them likely to accept the state's political order as legitimate. This kind of communication control encourages citizens to identify affirmatively and enthusiastically with state goals. In other words, the state interprets reality for the citizen.

China learnt the Thought Work system from the then Soviet Union and has since then been one of the countries which successfully implemented Thought Work, right up to the early 1980s, when under Deng Xiaoping the country adopted a policy of "reform and opening up" to the outside world. Since reforms have begun to take root and China has allowed access to outside information, administering Thought Work has become increasingly difficult for the state.

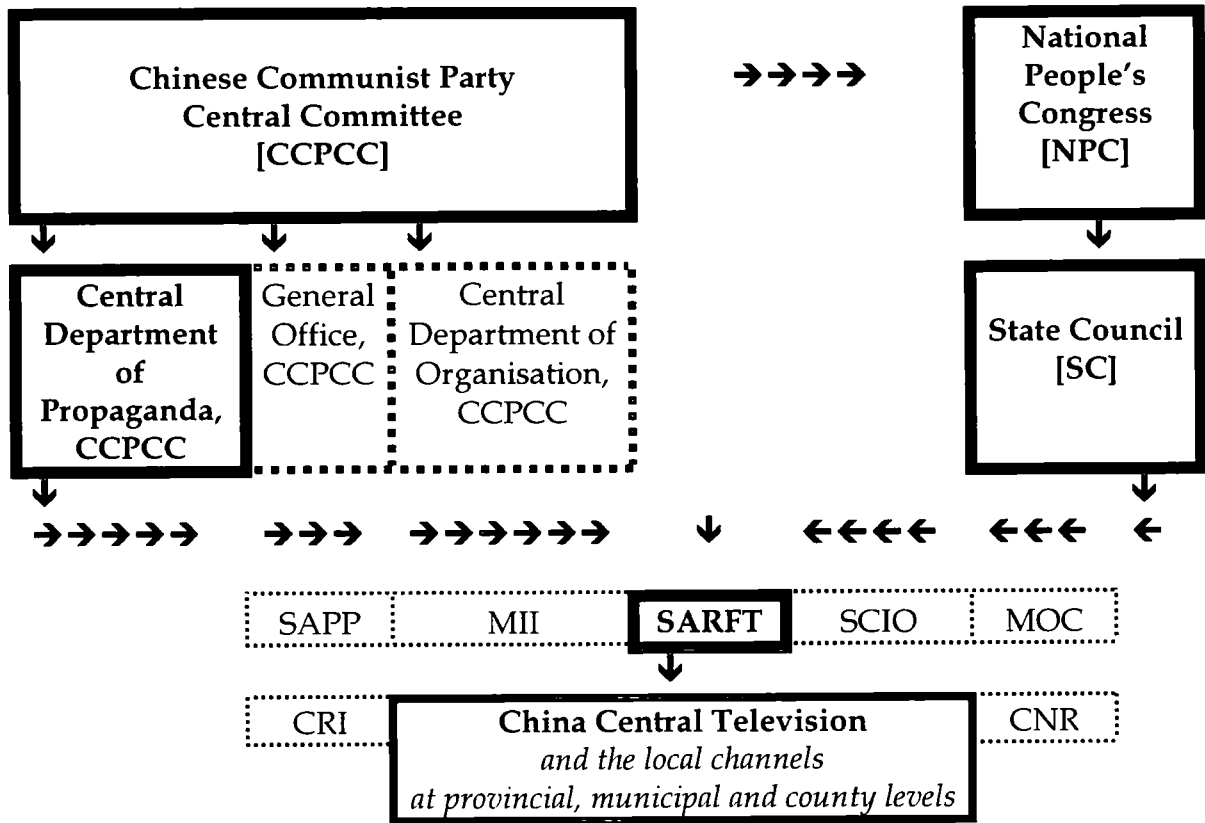
Over the past thirty years, with the decline of Thought Work as China has gradually opened up, the state has made every effort not to lose its grip on the media, especially television, being the most influential. In recent year, however, the relationship between television and state has been taking an interesting turn as the two sides seem to have involuntarily changed positions. The relationship is no longer that of party and government officials

telling television what to report and what to keep out of their business; television is now able to expose issues, forcing authorities to make changes. The relationship is becoming symbiotic, where both sides make some gains, rather than the slave and master scenario justified by Thought Work.

### **CCP and the media: A fragile yet beneficial relationship**

To date, China has proved to be unique in its ability to boast success in reforming a previously command-and-control style media and economy, to a highly efficient economy and a semi-free media. While similar liberalisations around the world have led to revolutions, the most famous of which was the result of *perestroika* and the fall of the Soviet Union, China has been able to balance its liberalising reforms and the desires of the Communist Party. While this balancing act may still be a bit like walking a tightrope, a beneficial relationship has developed between television and the CCP.

Chart 7.2  
How the Party governs the television networks?



Source: Compiled by the author

The chart illustrates how power and control is distributed from the Chinese Communist Party and National People's Congress through the Central Office of Propaganda and State Council to the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), which ultimately supervises CCTV and the two radio stations. At least this is how it is in theory; in practice the order is slightly different, as some parts of this power distribution chart are relegated to being merely symbolic, not really playing the role as indicated.



In practice the right hand side of the chart is not as functional as indicated. SARFT and the other bodies on the same level are supposed to report to the State Council, which would then report to the National People's Congress. In reality SARFT answers to the Central Department of Propaganda and the CCPCC. It is the CDP that directly controls all policy and strategies of CCTV, without the involvement and consultancy of SARFT. The General Office, which belongs to CCPCC through CDP, lays out the Party's programme for CCTV each day. For example, the General Office tells CCTV the party leaders' agenda for the day, such as what meetings they will have, whom they are visiting and if there is anything the Party wants to communicate to the public. CCTV takes all this as part of its news for the day.

The Central Department of Organisation also belongs to CCPCC through CDP. It nominates or appoints people to head CCTV and China National Radio, not SARFT as charted out. The real control of CCTV and the radio stations flows through the left side of the chart with SARFT in the middle, just like a door-keeper, not allowed to be concerned with what is happening inside CCTV.

Among the major topics discussed at the 10th plenary of the National People's Congress this year, were the "three rural issues" which dealt with corruption

in rural areas. Because party leaders are not elected, and are therefore not accountable to their citizens, there is little incentive for not indulging in corruption, as there is in the Western democratic sense (i.e. being impeached from office or not being re-elected). In addition, the Chinese rural areas are still in the process of transition from "rule by man" to "rule by law." The consequence of this is that local and national laws are often in contradiction and vague, and also usually ignored in favour of personal benefits, or simply for economic gain in the local economy.

### **Case studies**

Using this as springboard, the chapter introduces a case study, which is one of many that have pulled television and the Party together and forced each of them to take action to benefit the other, while addressing a single national problem, in this case environmental degradation and corruption.

China is home to 16 of the 20 most polluted cities in the world. It has a desert expanding at 385,700 km<sup>2</sup> a year [Economy, 2004: 233]. The country has destroyed many of its river systems, many of which do not even achieve a Level 5 water quality test (industrial uses) and has a serious water shortage problem in the North East. China, which has recently become the largest producer and exporter of pesticides in the world, consumes 14 per cent of all pesticide used in the world [Liu and Diamond, 2005: 1180]. Every year,

300,000 people die prematurely in China from environmental causes [Ma and Ortolano, 2002: 2]. The World Bank states that environmental degradation costs China between 54 billion and 110 billion US dollars a year. That is between 3.8 and 8 per cent of China's annual GDP [Ma and Ortolano, 2002: 2]. It is hard to believe that with a record this bad China's environmental protection apparatus is almost non-functional.

The Chinese environmental protection machinery is ill equipped to deal with the environmental problems and challenges the country faces. The State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) implements policies through Environmental Protection Bureaux (EPBs) spread across the country in branches at local government level. The challenge that EPBs have is that they depend on the local government for budgetary as well as personnel issues, including promotions, salaries, office space and even transportation [Ma and Ortolano, 2002: 154]. Local government officials are often more concerned with lining their pockets or growing the local economy, which puts the EPB at a disadvantage. Unless the EPB manages to gain the support of the mayor, it can never hope to enforce policies that would affect important sources of revenue for the area [Ma and Ortolano, 2002: 154]. Any action against local government only further hampers the EPB's powers by leading to reductions in its budget. The EPBs are often ignored by business and local officials who

favour increased production over environmental degradation. This renders the EPBs ineffective.

Television, the most revered among the broadcasting media in China, on the other hand is not subject to the same constraints as the EPBs. Realising its powerful watchdog and whistle blower role, which exposes careless and corrupt officials and businesspersons, Chinese television has taken up responsibility for environmental protection.

*News probe* was among the most powerful programmes on CCTV to start covering environmental issues and to set the agenda for changes. This time CCTV took an approach that was uncharacteristic, but would prove to be effective in influencing government policies. It collaborated with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A CCTV producer, having researched battery recycling, broadcast a programme on how improperly discarded batteries were a danger to the environment. Viewers were shocked at how much their health and land was being endangered by battery acid leaking into the soil. This one show alone made China rise into action as battery recycling efforts sprouted up all over the nation. Previously SEPA did not even have any guidelines in place for such an exercise [Economy and Day, 2005: 115]. In Dalian, a physician independently persuaded department stores to act as collecting points for used batteries. CCTV broadcast the story and a

few months later SEPA put battery-recycling guidelines in place [Economy and Day, 2005: 115]. Battery collection has had tremendous success at the Beijing EPB, where batteries were being collected; an official once joked that she gets so many phone calls on the subject that she suffered from "battery phobia." [Economy, 2004: 165].

Another television programme, *Focus report*, has gained popularity because of its investigations into issues of corruption and environmental degradation, and its ability to influence reparations. Only fifteen minutes long, *Focus report* draws an audience of 200-250 million and has spawned all sorts of investigative efforts into environmental degradation. The show has become so popular that people wait in long lines outside the studio to ask producers to investigate their local environmental situation. Its reputation earned it the expression by bureaucrats to "avoid fires, avoid theft, and avoid *Focus report*."

Television programmes, along with support from NGOs and the general public, have proved to be a relationship strong enough to force authorities into action against environmental degradation. In their efforts to halt environmental degradation, television in China is also serving the purpose of civic education. As more airtime is devoted to environmental issues, more viewers are educated about environmental issues and become more active citizens. "The more educated the populace becomes, the more they are likely

to lodge a complaint" [Economy and Day, 2005: 116], and greater television involvement caused the number of complaint letters received by environmental officials to quadruple over a two-year period, from 67,000 in 1996 to 241,321 in 1998 [Economy and Day, 2005: 116]. In turn, the more people write letters on environmental issues, the more the television authorities and NGOs are motivated to follow them up. The relationship is self-enforcing and simply by continuing the process the apparatus strengthens itself.

In another case, a nature photographer along with television journalists from Beijing, informed SEPA about the endangered snub-nosed monkey of Yunnan province. They suspected that deforestation was leading to an ever-declining number of monkeys. The environmental NGO Friends of Nature and the Chinese media quickly picked up the story and, with grassroots student movements, combined to bring the news to national CCP officials. Through an organised effort, a settlement between the State Council and the logging industry in 1995 spared the forests. Three years later, however, it was again reported that illegal logging continued. Action was again taken and the Yunnan Forestry Department's vice president held a meeting at which the head of Deqin County, where the logging was being done, was made to "confess his mistakes." Others at fault were also fired [Economy, 2004: 151].

This relatively new phenomenon, whereby Chinese television is effective in playing a watchdog and whistle blower role in society and forcing local officials to comply with laws such as national environmental legislation - but why would the CCP, always so careful about reining in control, allow television and NGOs this freedom?

Its willingness to allow this level of freedom is due to the sheer severity of environmental degradation in China, coupled with the World Bank's assessment that China has yet to complete its transition to the rule of law [Economy, 2004: 164]. Estimates indicate that environmental degradation in China already accounts for between 7 and 20 per cent of China's annual GDP. Implementation of environmental policy is impossible because corruption at local level is a big problem. In such circumstances, the CCP has very little choice but to allow the media this freedom. It is too costly for the CCP not to do so.

Television is an efficient and cheap way to protect the environment. Instead of having to monitor and shadow every movement and every deal that local officials make, checking that they are honest and law abiding, television in league with an active citizenship, is able to do a better job, with no need for an increased bureaucracy. Qu Geping said, "Using the media to expose violators and to praise enforcers of environmental regulations was the main

tool the NPC could use to enforce local government compliance with national environmental protection regulations" [Ma and Ortolano, 2002: 155] at almost no cost.

Television is an excellent tool for educating the Chinese on environmental issues. In a 2001 poll, 79 per cent of the Chinese population indicated that they learned about environmental related issues from television and radio, compared with only 42 per cent who said that government publicity was their main source of information [Economy, 2004: 163].

It has been CCP's goal to make television more independent of government subsidies. By allowing television to pursue topics which interest viewers, such as environmental issues, viewership increases and the necessity for government involvement in terms of funding local television is reduced [Economy, 2004: 3]. Liberating television at a local level is like killing two birds with one stone; avoiding the costly bureaucracy of implementing environmental legislation, and increasing the independent profitability of television.

Too liberal a television media and active citizenship is a potential threat to the CCP, but it is evident the Party has decided that the threat posed by a society



that is too closed, in which no one is permitted any degree of freedom of expression, is greater than one left open. Tony Saich argues this point:

The experiences of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution has shown China's leaders the kind of problems that can arise if the flow of ideas and information from society is cut off or unduly distorted. Thus, the post-Mao leadership has realised that a higher degree of participation by sanctioned groups is both desirable to promote modernisation and is inevitable, given the proposed rapid changes that they hope to bring about [Saich, 2001:167].

In other words the government could not create an expansion of the economy as fast as it has done without allowing some degree of freedom to the media. The absence of any legal form of participation would only result in the rise of illegal organisations, with aims in opposition to the government and groups which work outside the law, who believe that the laws of the state are inadequate or unjust, would obviously oppose that régime.

For this reason and "to prevent a plurality in society", rather than allowing grassroots organisations to arise and then just recognising them, all of these organisations are "created" by the Party and state [Saich, 2001:167]. All media in China are considered to be a "mouthpiece of the Party" and all are partly

owned by the CCP [Lanhan, 2000: 637]. In addition, the media are all censored by the state censorship bureau, SARFT. While holding on to the reins, and reserving the right to clamp down, the CCP is able to allow a certain degree of media freedom and NGO activity without forfeiting control. By allowing freedom to the NGOs and the media, the CCP can create a certain "revolution from above" [Saich, 2001:167], rather than permit one to occur from below.

NGOs are currently prohibited from having branches, but often one centre trains people who then go on to set up NGOs in different parts of the country, thus creating a strong network based on personal exchange [Elizabeth, 2004: 155]. As this continues to develop, along with support for environmental clean-up and organised pressure from the NGOs, the CCP will be forced to allow television more freedom of reporting on sensitive issues of public interest. CCTV is currently greatly hampered by SARFT and the CCP, but as it gains experience and support from the NGOs and the general public, its members can only get better at exposing scandals and braver in exposing more senior and even central government officials.

While the author is not as confident as Tang Xiyang about the inevitability of a democratic China within twenty years, one thing is certain: the increased role of television as watchdog and whistle blower will continue to serve and

benefit the environment and the public, and in so doing help the CCP to root out corruption at a local level.

Thought Work is designed to have control over communication flow and in so doing structure the symbolic environment, but this will only work in a society shut off from any other influences, as China was before its policies of reform and opening-up. In modern China, it is a misplacement of resources and energy to continue trying to control what society thinks and the flow of its communications. The sooner the Party and the state realise that a more liberal television and media will strengthen and enhance the policies of reform and opening-up the better.

## Chapter 8

# Television journalists: Seeking strategies for survival and success

### Chapter Summary

*China's gradual development into a market economy has resulted in the reform of its media, but journalists have lost substantial personal benefits in exchange for greater media freedom. Using questionnaires, surveys and interviews conducted by the author since 1999, with particular emphasis on CCTV, the current position of journalists at CCTV is examined.*

*China's journalists were traditionally chosen for their loyalty to the party line, rather than for professional and ethical journalistic standards. The author describes the difficulties of being appointed by CCTV, as well as managing to survive in post and be successful. Case studies illustrate the discussion.*

*The political nature of CCTV as a party mouthpiece and reception desk is demonstrated, and the author coins the term "triangle model" to describe the interdependent three-way communication between CCTV, public and state, which enables the Chinese political system to work. The work of a CCTV journalist also depends on "stakeholders" and these are described under separate sections. The author concludes that, despite all obstacles, journalists are still managing to improve their professional position and standards.*

The orientation toward a market economy in China has resulted in many changes to the Chinese media. In early 2004, the Chinese government shut down 677 government and party newspapers. In addition, 325 state-owned newspapers were transferred to commercial newspaper groups, while 310 newspapers were separated from government departments and 94 official

journals were converted into “free” publications. These changes have increased the degree of freedom of the press in China [Li, 2003: 3-12].

However, Chinese journalists have had to deal with a trade-off between a freer press and state benefits. In the past, under a planned economy and a tightly controlled propaganda system, the primary concern of most journalists was to follow the party and government line. Journalists complained about the lack of a free press, but as long as they followed the party line, they enjoyed free housing, free medical care, job promotion, and a satisfactory retirement package. With greater press freedom from political constraints, an increasing number of new journalists have lost their rights to labour contracts and medical and social insurance. In fact, a recent survey shows that 43 per cent of journalists working in the media do not have labour contracts.

This chapter is based on various questionnaires, surveys and interviews conducted since 1999 for this study. It discusses how, despite some level of liberalisation of the media, journalists choose to remain under party and state control by working for institutions that are still entirely party-state controlled. The discussion focuses on television journalists at CCTV, by looking at how they enter the institution, how they survive and how they work their way up the position ladder. The chapter concludes that CCTV is practically a branch

of the CCP and that CCTV journalists would not trade working at the party-state controlled institution for employment in another institution that has more freedom.

Every chapter has so far indicated the superiority of CCTV among the media in China and how much control the Party and the state exert on the institution to ensure that it operates only as the two powers desire. This control differentiates CCTV journalists from journalists of other Chinese media and even of other countries. This discussion will explain the difference and what success and survival mean at CCTV.

### **The difference**

Traditional media in China, such as the Xinhua News Agency and the *People's Daily*, followed employment criteria which ruled that a journalist should be a good and critical writer and a logical thinker, and for this reason people employed were usually literature graduates. When television was introduced, as BTV was back then, there was a clear difference in the type of people they were interested in employing. Instead of logical thinkers with impeccable writing skills, television was only interested in their looks. People who were judged to be good-looking, confident or just generally appealing were offered television jobs. Their only task at the television station was to read text

already prepared by the Xinhua News Agency. Once the news agency had supplied the text, camera teams would go out and look for pictures to match, and so a typical television newsroom then was basically for presenters and camera teams, not for journalists. Currently, of course, criteria for employment at CCTV do admit graduates in journalism, but compared with those in the other media, they are younger, and it is obvious that their looks have played a key role in getting them employed.

Television journalists, and indeed those from all other Western media, are people who have gained their reputation as respectable professionals through impartiality and their adherence to the ethics of journalism. In China it is a different story. CCTV journalists gain their respect from how far up they are in the party membership. How good they are professionally and how ethical is of secondary importance.

### **Getting into CCTV**

The word “cadre” is defined by some dictionaries as a controlling or representative group at the centre of an organisation, but in China the word has a completely different meaning. “Cadre” in China is a word associated with political correctness and respect. If you are a cadre in China it means you are a member of the CCP and under permanent government welfare –

the state looks after you for as long as you live. If one is directly employed by the government, the title changes to civil servant, but an employee of a government-owned enterprise is officially known as a cadre. Everyone in China wants this status, because once one is a cadre, appointment and promotion within the government system is automatic.

After this explanation of what it means to be a cadre in China, it will not come as a surprise to learn that being a cadre is the first qualification that allows employment by CCTV. One must be a member of the CCP to be employed by CCTV, because every job required will have something to do with the Party in one way or another. Having passed the party membership criterion, other qualifications are considered, for example how skilled a person is in other ways, such as voice, camera, graphics and related skills.

About 10,000 people each year apply for work at CCTV, but after scrutiny into their political background the institution is usually satisfied with only around 20 people, who are then employed. CCTV previously relied on other companies to identify and supply it with people who would be employed on contract, but after 1993 CCTV started to employ permanent staff itself. Once employed by CCTV, the professional tasks are not a challenge; the real challenge is to survive in the establishment.



## Surviving in CCTV

Like every media institution, CCTV has its dos and don'ts, the only difference being that at CCTV almost all the rules are about preventing staff from interfering with the mandatory political behaviour. Once again, party considerations are the priority, and every employee must accept, respect and support the one-party system. It cannot be challenged and nothing should be done that can be deemed to challenge the one-party system. One should never betray the People's Republic of China and employees are prohibited from discussing sensitive issues such as Tibet. Everyone is required and expected to follow the guidance of the CCP.

The 7.00 pm News Bulletin on CCTV is a good illustration of what the establishment expects of its employees. Presenters of the programme are carefully selected; they must be employees who are politically correct in every sense of the word and their commitment to the CCP must be unquestionable. While CCTV is regarded as the ultimate mouthpiece of the Party, the 7.00 pm News Bulletin is considered to be the voice of the Party. Being presented live, the party leadership makes sure that presenters should be employees who can never be suspected of saying anything unacceptable.

Professional conduct and adherence to ethics are the last things to worry about in keeping a job at CCTV, for it is easy to get away with a breach of both. This is why employees are also expected to respect the structural arrangements of the institution. At CCTV the newsroom and the advertisement department are not separated, as should be the case in a media institution. Having companies paying for coverage is normal and expected: in fact, this is the whole reason why CCTV has Channel 2, which is strictly for business and company news programmes, run by the establishment's advertising department. This channel has good business programmes, including news presented by attractive personalities, but companies that find themselves in the programmes are those who have paid. Those who do not pay occasionally appear, but their stories are usually negative. So far only one business programme, *Dialogue*, has publicly stated that it does not receive money from any company, but the rest charge for coverage. Channel 2 is commercially successful since it is run by business people, but for journalists who work there, ethics and professionalism have long been discarded. CCTV 1 is basically for political issues and it appears that its journalists are spared from having to be "corrupt", but a closer look reveals that it is the same. In CCTV 2 journalists offer positive reporting in exchange for money, while at CCTV 1 they offer trust in return for political considerations such as future promotions.

## Succeeding in CCTV

Making it into CCTV is an achievement and surviving the establishment is an effort journalists working there are proud of, but gaining respect from peers in the media and the country is what CCTV journalists describe as success.

Once this status is attained one is on the way to better things, such as promotion. Jing Yidan gives a good illustration of how to achieve success through respect in the media and the public.

She was born when Mao's Great Leap Forward movement began in the late 1950s. She became a Red Guard and worked as a newsreader in a rural farm broadcasting station. She then was sent to study Broadcasting Journalism at the Beijing Institute of Broadcasting (BIB) and joined Harbin TV station after her graduation at the beginning of the 1980s. She was promoted to Heilongjiang TV Station one year later. In the middle of the 1980s, she went back to the Beijing Institute of Broadcasting to study for a Master's degree and then became a lecturer in the Department of Television Journalism. Eight of her first students were recruited to CCTV news as presenters in 1988. Two years later, she was invited to be a presenter on a newly established economic news programme, *Economics 30 minutes*. In 1992, another new programme, called *Oriental horizon* was launched to provide the first investigative news series on CCTV, and she was asked to join the programme as anchorwoman

and reporter. The programme brought her a lot of fame. Five years later, another programme, *Focus report*, on which she worked as presenter and producer, obtained the top viewership award of all CCTV programmes. As an individual she has received the Golden Microphone Award for best presenter three times, earning her the permanent Golden Microphone Lifetime Award. She was appointed assistant director of the Central Bureau of Journalism of the CCP Central Department of Propaganda, and she now has an equivalent executive position as the vice-mayor of Beijing.

If one cannot be impressive enough professionally to achieve success like Jing, there is another means of advancement in CCTV and that is being politically important. Someone who does things that the political leaders find exceptional, are regarded as successful, because every time the leaders want to consider someone for a political position they do not look further. The career of Li Dongsheng illustrates well this kind of success

Dongsheng graduated from Fudan University in Shanghai and was employed at CCTV. After ten years he was appointed deputy editor-in-chief. In 1993 he introduced *Oriental horizon*, a one-hour news programme which was broadcast every morning. The programme changed people's habits; Chinese people started looking forward to *Oriental horizon* each morning. Previously Chinese people would listen to the radio news in the morning, and television

news in the evening. Dongshen then introduced an in-depth news report programme, which came every evening after the normal 7.00 pm News Bulletin. The programme, entitled *Tell the truth* became popular among viewers. Dongshen was appointed deputy minister of SARFT and then promoted to be deputy director of the CDP.

Other examples include Bai Keming and Zhang Baoshun. Bai was Editor-in-Chief of the *People's Daily* and was appointed Party Secretary and Governor of the Hubei and Hainan Provinces. Zhang was appointed Vice President of Xinhua News Agency and is now Party Chief of Shanxi Province.

Another barometer for success at CCTV is being able to achieve celebrity status, because it sets one on the path to wealth. Presenters who frequently appear on television soon become household names in China, and companies start hiring them to promote different brands and advertise products. Li Yong, whose wealth is currently estimated in billions, was a news presenter in CCTV. Realising that news presenting was not as lucrative as he expected, he switched to presenting commercial programmes which were being produced by his wife Ha Wen. He also anchored the Chinese version of *Who wants to be a millionaire?* and *The weakest link*.

## The Triangle Model

From the political nature of CCTV, as demonstrated in this chapter and in previous chapters, it is clear that this institution is not only the mouthpiece for the CCP and the government, but also some form of “reception desk” for the two authorities. Later the chapter will explore this role further, but it is important to realise that these two roles give CCTV the status of an important arm in Chinese politics. CCTV, together with CCP, form two parts of a triangle of which one is the Chinese political structure and the other is the public. The triangle formed by these three sides necessitates a flow of activity that enables the Chinese political system to work.

There is interdependence between CCTV and the CCP, between CCTV and the audience and also between the CCP and the public. CCTV is almost like another branch of the Party, because nearly 70 per cent of the CCTV journalists are CCP members and the institution is now home to 26 branches of the Party. CCTV is thus a very strategic part of the triangle for disseminating party information. CCP sets the political agenda and CCTV will turn everything into realities to “educate, inform, entertain and serve” the Chinese people. The public on the other hand plays the role of informing the Party about what is happening in the larger society. Once again CCTV becomes essential, when wearing its “reception desk” hat, because when the public has complaints or comments that need to be brought to the attention of

the Party they go to CCTV. Through its party structures and programmes, CCTV takes the message to the Party. This is probably part of the reason that CDP supported CCTV's creation and promotion of programmes such as *Oriental horizon*, *Focus report* and *News probe*, because through information culled from these programmes the Party is able to punish corrupt officials at a local level, which satisfies the public and encourages them to report more to CCTV. Through these programmes the CCP also formulates appropriate policies, and its feedback to the public is through CCTV's news, features and commentaries.

**Table 8.1**  
**The Triangle Model**



Source: Compiled by the author

### CCTV's reception desk function

The Communist Party and government both have in place a feedback system, and have established offices where people can go if they have anything to communicate. Typical things to communicate would be complaints about mismanagement and corruption by local officials, alerting authorities to the need for some social development or making suggestions about how certain

things should be done. Picking out relevant information from these, the CCP and government then make appropriate decisions in response to the public's communications.

Because of the bureaucracy involved, however, these information offices are not found effective by the public. Either the authorities take too long to respond or they do not respond at all. The difference is that when people communicate with CCTV they get a faster and more satisfactory response, and so people would rather by-pass the established information offices and go to CCTV. Seeing this, the two authorities decided to elevate CCTV to the same status, and so CCTV became recognised as another means through which the public could channel its communications to the Party and government, and the opposite is true too.

It is obvious that the Party and government find this arrangement useful and important, because to some extent it facilitates and makes governing possible, but this should not be the sole reason for encouraging and supporting CCTV's reception desk function. Rather, this function should be encouraged because it reminds CCTV of one of its main roles, which is to represent the interests of the people. The political nature of CCTV does not encourage journalists to aggressively go out into the public to investigate issues that are affecting people's lives and publicise them in news and other programmes.



When people go to CCTV with complaints and other issues, journalists are compelled to take up the issues without being paid as they would for other news sources. This reception desk function is helping CCTV to retain its value as a servant of ordinary people.

### CCTV stakeholders

There are several stakeholders that CCTV journalists must always have in mind as they work. These are people and institutions which directly or indirectly influence the everyday production of news and programmes. These stakeholders are an important part of CCTV and their existence results in threats, challenges and opportunities for CCTV journalists. The chart below shows who the stakeholders are and the few following paragraphs will describe each of them.

**Table 8.2: Stakeholders of a typical CCTV journalist in a news department**

|                             |  |                         |                         |                                       |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Public Opinion              | CCTV Editorial and Bosses  | Party Branches          | Journalistic Colleagues | Community                             |
| State Council Ministries    | <h1 style="margin: 0;">Stakeholders</h1> <p style="margin: 0;"><i>of a typical Chinese television journalist</i></p> |                         |                         | NGOs                                  |
| International Organisations |  |                         |                         | Trade Unions                          |
| Competitors                 |  |                         |                         | Commentators and Academic Researchers |
| Relatives and Friends       | Victims and the Grass-roots  | Related Corporate Firms | Advertisers             | PR Agencies                           |

**Source:** Compiled by the author according to the CCTV News Producer's Handbook

### *Public opinion*

Due to the political nature of CCTV, its journalists' coverage of news is usually reactive. Often CCTV journalists watch public opinion on various issues to decide how they would cover them in their own bulletins. Public opinion is usually observed through other media, especially print, and once the newspapers bring up an issue and it is in public debate, CCTV reports on it or adds the issue as one topic in a programme. In this way the journalists are able to protect themselves, because they cannot be accused of instigation.

### *CCTV editorial and bosses*

Elsewhere editorial meetings at the beginning of every working day are meant to discuss news production issues and assigning of duties, for instance who covers or follows up what event or story. But at CCTV editorial meetings are held to brief journalists on the guidelines and rules as stipulated by the CPD. The CPD normally organises the meetings for national media editors and bosses, when they are told what the Party expects and what are their responsibilities, and to pass on this information to journalists.

### *Party branches*

It is essential for CCTV journalists to belong to CCTV party branches, because decisions other than those made by the usual decision-making channels of CCTV are made by these party branches. Issues to do with staff promotions

and other personnel matters are usually decided by the branches, and so journalists at CCTV who do not belong to the Party stand at a disadvantage.

### *Journalistic colleagues*

Although CCTV journalists work together towards the same goal, they also compete to be the best at attaining those goals. They do not only compete as journalists over promotion or popularity with the viewers, but also to gain political favours and positions.

### *Community*

CCTV's community includes several government ministries: the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Railways, and constitutional bodies such as SARFT. Journalists need to remember this, because, for instance, the Ministry of Railways has long provided office space for CCTV and they assist with certain programmes. The Ministries of Defence and Science and Technology also provide programmes, so they have to be well treated.

### *NGOs*

The NGO concept is new to China but CCTV journalists have realised that these organisations offer an alternative to political news and programming, and they have a vast knowledge of issues. The journalists also need to tread

carefully, however, because they have to establish a healthy balance between NGO coverage and the Party, and this can put them into a dilemma.

### *Trade Unions*

CCTV journalists are members of the All China Association of Journalists, a trade union that looks after the interests of all the journalists in China. CCTV journalists need this union, though currently it is not serving them as desired. CCTV is one media institution in China that is not looking after the welfare of its journalists well in terms of salaries. Some journalists are being paid less than they are worth and others are receiving more than they are worth. Though the trade union is failing to help in this situation, CCTV journalists are compelled to remain members because the leadership of the union is dictated by the CDP, which automatically turns membership into a requirement.

### *Commentators and academic researchers*

CCTV must always find space to accommodate academic researchers and commentators, and journalists must tolerate them every time in order to maintain the relationship. There is a certain lack of trust between the two sides, however, because the political status of CCTV means that its journalists must always ensure that they do not get implicated with opinions held by the researchers and commentators. When these commentators are invited to offer

an opinion on television, they may say something which is not in the best interests of CCTV policy, but this would not worry them, because while they could lose the chance of being invited again, they still have employment elsewhere. The journalists, however, would be in trouble.

#### *Public Relations agencies*

Naturally public relations work in opposition to journalistic goals, because where journalists want to establish truth, public relations try to hide and present a different picture. At CCTV journalists must particularly watch out for these agencies, since most of them work with advertisers of different programmes on CCTV's numerous channels, and with the existence of CCTV 2 it is difficult for journalists to deal with public relations agencies.

#### *Related corporate firms*

CCTV owns about 50 top-rated public relations agencies, including Golden Bridge and Tomorrow, sometimes called Future Advertising, and all these are licensed to the CCTV's different channels. There are also companies that have had a lengthy relationship with CCTV, such as the dairy companies Meng Niu and Yi Li, and the alcohol making company Wulian Ye. It has long been rumoured that CCTV actually has a list of corporations that must be treated with kid gloves by journalists.

### *Victims and grassroots*

People in the lower classes of society depend on CCTV to voice their issues because the established system of communicating information from victims and grassroots is unreliable. CCTV journalists must understand how to handle these people and help them, which means that they have to be versed in the law and policies.

### *Relatives*

It is an honour for people to have relatives working as journalists at CCTV, one of China's most prestigious television stations, but they often abuse this privilege. If these relatives have problems with certain service providers, they can threaten to tell their CCTV journalist brother, daughter, husband or uncle and expose them, and sometimes relatives try to use the journalists to fulfil favours they owe certain people.

### *Competitors*

CCTV journalists must constantly be aware of what competing television stations are doing. One of the stations that gives CCTV journalists a good run for their money is Shanghai Dragon Television, which has 20 channels.

### *International Organisations*

CCTV journalists are eager to become members of international media organisations and participate in international media activities, but the limiting factor is the difference in ideologies. Interests pursued by these organisations are usually contrary to those of CCTV. The best that CCTV can do at present is to help with the production of documentaries and other such programmes.

### *State Council ministries*

These include among others SARFT, the Ministry of Culture and the State Council Information Office. These institutions always have information that journalists always need, and they cannot be ignored.

Going through the different stakeholders that CCTV journalists have to deal with everyday, one can appreciate how different it is from the way that other journalists work, not only in China but around the world, and it is challenging. Despite this, CCTV journalists are still striving to provide viewers with programmes that enable them to stay informed, to debate and to contribute ideas on how China is operating. Stability and consensus is one policy that both the Communist Party and the Chinese government work hard to achieve and maintain. Although they are faced with fulfilling the

desires of all these stakeholders, CCTV journalists are still managing to strengthen stability and consensus among themselves and the larger Chinese public.



## Chapter 9

# The 24-hour news channel: Propaganda or telling the truth?

### Chapter Summary

*An account is given of the decade of events leading up to CCTV's launch of CCTV-News, China's first 24-hour news channel, in 2003, with an analysis of the reasons behind this innovation.*

*It was in direct response to CCTV's closest and more advanced competitor, Phoenix Television, as well as to the public's dissatisfaction with the quality of the news. This motivated CCTV to improve the scope and standard of its reporting, and a change in Party leadership had given CCTV a greater control over its own future. Prompt and comprehensive reporting of breaking news was made possible by the creation of a 24-hour news channel, exclusively for news, and CCTV was encouraged by the long success of XWLB, a recognised leader of news-reporting in China, with a trusted brand image. Other factors included China's recent WTO membership and drive for economic growth, together with CCTV's own strategy to become a world-class broadcaster.*

*Early achievements of CCTV-News are described, including its immediate availability to all Chinese provinces and its prompt and balanced reporting of events. The threats to its success and survival are also discussed, including its inexperience, the lack of variety in its rolling news bulletins, its lack of critical commentary, and its lack of balance party journalism and commercialisation, as well as competition from other networks and the growth of the Internet.*

*The problems of state-owned television are explored and a discussion of the tension between public and civic journalism completes this chapter.*

After a ten-year consolidation period within the decision-making circles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China's first 24-hour News Channel (CCTV-News) finally entered the media scene on 1 May 2003.

However, this new development was not necessarily accompanied by a better quality of news. The move was regarded as a direct reaction to the Hong Kong based Phoenix TV's progress, not just in news but in all other aspects of television programming. This chapter discusses the factors that led to the emergence of the new channel and assesses the problems associated with state-owned television networks in China. The discussion begins with a brief overview of the driving forces that underpinned the creation of the news channel, and among other factors the demand for satisfactory coverage of news events, change in the leadership of the CCP's "Thought Work" régime, economic changes and CCTV's long-term strategic goals. The discussion will also look at the aggressive and massive success of reality shows pioneered by Hunan TV.

A quick glance at the changes that took place at CCTV revealed weaknesses, including a lack of original international coverage of news and a failure to provide up-to-date news comparable to Western standards. Several challenges and limitations threaten CCTV's long-standing monopoly. Competition with other media providers, such as Rupert Murdoch's joint venture with Phoenix Television, the growing number of imported Korean television dramas, and the increasing impact of the Internet, are some examples. The prevailing attitude within Chinese media circles is that this intense competition will probably lead to the re-

mapping of the Chinese television industry and to a larger extent delineates a new topography of its media territories.

### **The need for a 24-hour news channel in China**

CCTV-13, more commonly known as CCTV-News, aims to provide television coverage of events as they unfold. The channel provides hourly news updates, interspersed by in-depth coverage of news in four categories: Business and Financial, Cultural, Sport and International news. The slogan of the channel promises, "To keep pace with the world, to walk together with the times". Impressively, almost every province in China was able to receive the channel after it had been on air for just one month.

Given the obvious benefits and the necessity of 24-hour news provision in China, it is surprising that CCTV-News has emerged so recently.

Suggestions to create a 24-hour news channel were made in the 1990s, but it remained only an idea until 2003 because of the lengthy consideration period within the Party's Central Propaganda Department. Satisfactory reporting of events, especially breaking news, had not been achieved by the previous news system and it was recognised that a channel,

exclusively for news, was needed: CCTV-News filled a gap within China's television industry.

Several factors contributed to the birth of the news channel, but perhaps the most important one was the increasing criticism that CCTV received regarding its failure to respond to important news events in a timely and comprehensive manner. In particular, when big news stories (such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks) unfolded, CCTV did not report them quickly and updates as the events kept unfolding were inadequate. This lack of responsiveness caused widespread dissatisfaction throughout China, especially among the growing middle class, comprising white-collar professionals, leaders of government agencies and social institutions, and intellectuals who were believed to be the emergent opinion leaders in Chinese society. This growing middle class has been the new market, demanding up-to-date news. Prior to the launch of CCTV-News, the only satisfactory news programme available was the daily *Xin Wen Lian Bo* (*News Bulletin*) on CCTV1 at 7.00 pm, but many professionals were dissatisfied with this limited service. In addition, an increasing number of young intellectuals, some with overseas education, entered the civil service including CCTV and influenced the culture of their workplaces.

Additional demand for a 24-hour news channel also came following increased public dissatisfaction with propaganda stories and concerns about a lack of transparency in the news. These issues centred on the tendency of the Chinese media to prioritise positive news, while turning a blind eye to criticism of the government or the Party, as well as the lack of public representation in news stories. With the current availability of foreign television channels in China, viewers are sometimes confused by the different versions of events broadcast by national and international channels, which makes people feel duped by state propaganda [Li, 2003: 25].

An outline of what influenced the establishment of CCTV-News would not be complete without mentioning the role played by the successes of another Chinese news programme, the 7.00 pm *XWLB* (*News Bulletin*), which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2008. It has become a recognised leader of news-reporting in China, developing its own brand image, and claims to have a viewership exceeding one billion.

In order to maintain and further develop into a trusted news provider, CCTV will need to be more brand motivated, and consider breaking away from propaganda reporting to exploit the fact that the public's trust in a news provider is based on brand reputation. The creation of CCTV-News was an opportunity to maintain, and enhance, the audience's brand

loyalty to CCTV by providing an opportunity to pursue more groundbreaking stories and styles. To emphasise this, CCTV-News took over a well-known controversial news programme called *Focus interview* (*Jiaodian Fangtan*). Following Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's earlier comment that, "If *Focus interview* is not going to report on any negative news, I will not watch it", the programme gained a reputation based on the reporting of critical news issues such as corruption. CCTV-News may, therefore, provide an avenue for CCTV to improve its general image.

Chinese authorities controlling the media warmed to the idea of introducing a 24-hour news channel following a shift of decision-making powers from the CCP, which allowed CCTV to exert greater control over its own future. The departure of President Jiang Zemin and the appointment of the new Standing Committee members of the CCP Politburo also had a direct influence. The previous leadership, most of who were promoted directly from provincial to state level, came to power following a period of chaos in the late 1980s, and consequently their main priority was to stabilise the socio-political arena. In contrast, the new leadership acquired power at a time when the country was more stable, and it was therefore possible to tackle politically sensitive issues, such as reforming the state-owned media. President Hu and his cabinet were generally more relaxed over supporting reforms.

Improvement in the economy also necessitated the decision to launch a 24-hour news channel. In contrast to the 1990s, the Chinese media were almost ready to face the challenges of opening up the market to international investment by the time that China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001 [Brahm, 2002: 49]. The opening up of the Chinese economy to foreign investors resulted in competition.

Competition from other stations motivated CCTV to improve the scope of its news provision. The Chinese television market is large and lucrative. By 1999 China had about 320 million more television sets than the USA, and many media giants endeavour enter China's vast market [Thussu, 2000: 135]. CCTV faces competition, but the single most important competitor threatening the future success of CCTV is the Hong Kong based Phoenix Television. Owned by News Corporation and launched in China in 1996, Ma [2001:121] believes that Phoenix TV is currently the only channel that can challenge CCTV. For example, Phoenix provided impressive news coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while CCTV failed to report the incident within the initial 48 hours. Phoenix has successfully balanced its provision of comprehensive news about China without criticising the central government. The company has also been successful in transforming the image of news presenters in China. Until very

recently, Chinese news presenters were simply considered as news presenters, but Phoenix Television has managed to transform this status into celebrity. In order to compete with stations such as Phoenix Television, it was evident that CCTV needed a channel devoted exclusively to 24-hour news.

The business environment in which CCTV now operates is completely different compared with a decade ago [Hong, 1998: 32]. The current environment has made the public demand better television programming. There is a proliferation of national, regional and local stations, including cable television, and an increase in leisure time - that means more viewing time - and a growing number of foreign television services. Many Chinese viewers are now able to receive foreign channels such as CNN, NHK, BBC and Star TV, using satellite dishes and the Internet. Residents in Fujian and Guangdong can receive broadcasts from Taiwan and Hong Kong without satellite dishes. Since the 1990s, as a result of the wide range of media by which news is communicated, Chinese television viewers have become more selective about the programmes they watch, making it harder for television channels to attract and retain viewers (Hong 1998).

The creation of CCTV-News is part of CCTV's overall strategy to expand its media territory and to achieve its desired reputation as a world-class



broadcaster. A channel that provides 24-hour news provision can be used as an indicator of success. Conversely, if CCTV cannot provide professional news coverage, then it could indicate that the organisation is not a key player in the media industry. CCTV aims to become the first choice brand for media, perhaps even a benchmark standard, against which competitors are compared. All of these facts were reflected in the creation of CCTV-News, but unfortunately the channel has not met its expectation of being lively and groundbreaking; its news provision, in terms of quality and scope, does not match the standards set by comparable news channels in the West.

### **The milestones of the 24-hour news channel**

Although it took a long time for the CCP to approve the establishment of CCTV-News, there were already long-standing endeavours within CCTV's management to create a blueprint of operations for launching the channel immediately, regardless of when the central government would make a decision. This blueprint, which reflected CCTV management's long-term aims, facilitated the quick and smooth development of the channel once its approval was announced.

The channel's first milestone was the timely reporting of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the impact that the reporting had on CCTV's capabilities. The commencement of the war was reported on CCTV-1 only five-minutes after it began and was announced on CCTV-4 a few minutes later. This was a notable event because prompt reporting was unusual for CCTV, and it contrasted sharply with its previous response to big stories. Efficient coverage of the Iraq War clearly demonstrated that CCTV was capable and ready to report news events immediately and accurately. When one of the decision-makers in CCTV was interviewed, he explained that CCTV wanted to show the government and the public that the station was ready to report news without delay. The interview also revealed that although CCTV had been previously criticised for delays in its reporting of important events, the situation was not representative of its capabilities. The interviewee said that most employees wanted to transform the way that CCTV reported news, but realised that the changes could not take place as quickly as wished.

CCTV boasts a workforce that is highly talented and well-qualified, but the station is still the mouthpiece of the government and its reporting necessarily reflects this fact. Coverage of the Iraq War, however, helped to change the negative perceptions that were associated with CCTV's news coverage. Doubts within the central government and viewers about

CCTV's ability to handle breaking news stories were eroded, because during the war CCTV's reporting was comparable to that of the rolling news channels. There was competition between CCTV-1 and CCTV-4. Both channels were claiming a large proportion of news programmes, and there was soon a public debate about which channel would report events first and which channel would attract most viewers. For the first time, the idea of timely and accurate news was put into the public arena, and in a positive and non-threatening way. Li [2003: 213] describes positive feedback from the BBC and Japanese news agencies about CCTV's reporting of the Iraq War. The BBC reported that, "the Chinese media's reporting on the Iraq War is very balanced", while a Japanese newspaper commented, "CCTV had an incredible coverage. It was really interesting reporting. We believe the Chinese media is on its way to change". Obviously, such positive comments about the Chinese media from renowned overseas news organisations were well received by CCTV and the Chinese government, and demonstrated that CCTV could successfully report international news around -the clock.

CCTV's other milestone was the change in the leadership's attitude towards the reporting of its activities. On 28 March 2003, the Standing Committee of the Politburo passed new regulations (entitled *On further developing and improving of Party Conference Reporting and Top leadership*

*activity report*) that allowed more reporting of the leadership's activities.

After passing these regulations, the "actual voice" of the leadership was heard on CCTV for the first time, instead of voice-over interpretations of the leadership's activities.

CCTV-News was established to achieve several goals, including being closer to the public, servicing the macro-environment, producing news with Chinese characteristics and achieving the highest professional standards. The channel follows the three "closer" principles set out by the CCP leadership, aimed at transforming the status quo of news and the media. The principles stipulate that news and the media should be closer to the practical, closer to the public and closer to everyday life. In other words, the principles direct news and the media to be closer to the mass audience than to the leadership. Li Ting also laid down what he expected of CCTV-News. He insisted that news must be accurate and timely, the background to the news should be detailed and all-encompassing, news programming should be directed towards the official mainstream ideology, and its format should be audience-friendly (CCTV 2003-2004).

### **The partisan vs. the commercial: limitations and challenges**

CCTV-News has several challenges that threaten its success and even survival. The channel was partly established to counter the increasing success of other media organisations such as Phoenix Television, but the existence of CCTV News has only made competition tougher and harder for CCTV.

Another threat is the Internet, as news is readily available online from both Chinese and foreign websites. It could be argued that the Internet threat is small because more Chinese people have access to a television than with the Internet. In fact China had 59.1 million Internet users in 2002, but there were only about 27.6 computers per 11,000 people in the country (World Bank, 2004), whereas CCTV broadcasts to a much wider audience. In addition, Internet users tend to be concentrated in only three Chinese regions (cities) - Beijing, Guangdong and Shanghai - which are home to nearly 44 per cent of all Internet users in China (Brahm, 2001). Again, compared with CCTV-News, the TV channel has a much wider reach.

Competition from the Internet should not be underestimated, however, as Internet usage is increasing exponentially every year through changing attitudes, reduction in telecom charges, increased spending power and

plans for a Chinese-language software industry [Lewis, 2001: 72; Yip, 2001: 99]. Zhao Qizheng stated in 2001 that "In terms of the time period from the introduction of one type of new electronic medium to the formation of 5,000 users, it takes 38 years for broadcasting, 13 years for wireless television and 10 years for cable. It takes only four years for the Internet" (quoted in CCTV, 2002). The Internet will undoubtedly revolutionise China, and its media, over the next few years.

Another problem that CCTV-News needs to address is the quality of its news, especially when compared to Western 24-hour news channels. Before its launch, the media industry had high expectations of CCTV-News hoping that it would provide a livelier and more professional approach, currently lacking within the state-owned media. These expectations have unfortunately not been met. Although CCTV-News is a 24-hour news channel, this is only in theory because in reality the same half-hour news slot is repeated continuously during the day. People want re-stocked news programmes so that they can watch the channel for longer periods.

Another quality problem is caused through the lack of integration between departments within CCTV. The CCTV organisation can be described as an "under-developed land with many people wanting to

cultivate." There is a lack of communication between the many decision-makers in different departments, and consequently many programmes overlap and are repetitive.

It is also important to consider that foreign organisations, such as the BBC and CNN, have different operational management philosophies. It is fair to say that issues such as investment strategy, financial management, human resource management, etc are more developed in Western organisations. For example, Kung-Shankleman [2000: 2-12] explained how the organisational culture (as well as the interrelationship between quality and performance) plays a major role in contributing to the success of the BBC and CNN. However, fine-tuning the relationship between organisational culture and performance is generally alien to Chinese organisations. In addition, unlike CCTV-News, the global media organisations are very experienced in a competitive market, thus giving them a competitive edge over CCTV. Phoenix Television very effectively competes with CCTV and its success is partly based on Rupert Murdoch's unmatched experience in media competition and his ability to overcome the potential barriers that any market in China presents. For example, the station localises Phoenix Television by ensuring that Chinese professionals facilitate top management and decision-making. Phoenix Television has been sensitive to issues in China and has actively worked

to smooth relations with the government; for example, the station removed the BBC from its service following criticism over human rights abuses, cancelled another potentially negative contract with HarperCollins, set up a joint venture with the *People's Daily* newspaper, and organised a concert following the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade (Thussu 2000).

Although Phoenix Television has successfully overcome the barriers of the Chinese media market, CCTV remains bogged down by a failure to balance party journalism and commercialisation. Ma [2001] compared the Chinese and international news broadcasting models. She described how the acceptance or rejection of news headlines is determined by political guidelines. Consequently, headlines commonly include state leaders receiving visitors or a hero/model worker being introduced to the nation. In contrast, Western stations report the top stories dominating the world news. According to Ma, the result of this major "Chinese characteristic" is that "a series of receptions and meetings are grandly pushed out into the news. Obviously this style of news broadcasting (of highlighting politics) is different from the international, generally accepted news-broadcasting model" (Ma, 2001).



Another characteristic of the Chinese media is "positive propaganda" that often results in the reporting of unnecessary news. For example, Li [2003: 179] described how the reporting of floods in China was used to promote the image of the army; news pictures of the army working hard to save the Chinese people enhanced their public image. Other positive propaganda stories have included praising workers such as bus attendants and primary school teachers from remote areas. Although these activities have some benefits, it is difficult to judge whether viewers actually want to watch these events, compared with breaking news stories available on other channels. The international model of news reporting adopted by competitors, particularly Phoenix TV, means that CCTV-News may be at a competitive disadvantage with regard to attracting audiences. Zhao [1998: 94] discussed the intertwined nature of the commercialisation of the media in China. Despite this commercialisation and some reforms, urgent change is needed; she believes that values from commercial media in the West and Hong Kong are more informative and less didactic.

Another point to consider is that foreign news channels often provide critical commentary of a government, whereas in the Chinese media there is a lack of critical evaluation about government policies and behaviour; this is exemplified by Schnell's [1999: 4] interesting discussion of the lack

of political cartoons in Chinese newspapers; although political cartoons are common in the West they are rare in China, presumably because the government (which owns the press) does not want to be criticised or lampooned. The government has also expressed concern over the negative impact of foreign television programmes, including the effects of movies on teenagers. For example, Lynch described how the leadership has previously set limits to the proportion of broadcasting time apportioned to foreign programmes (in 1993 the government limited 20 per cent of total air time to foreign broadcasting, and in 1996 foreign programmes were suspended from primetime television [Lynch, 1999: 209]).

### **A Chinese version of public / civic journalism?**

The discursive negotiation between partisanship and professionalism entirely reflects the fundamental tension in the set-up between the CCP-dominated press system and the ongoing media commercialisation in contemporary China. Remaining central to such tension is the "mouthpiece" theory, which CCP commissars have employed to legitimate their firm control of the press and media over the past five decades. Following in the same vein of Jiang Zemin's open-ended theory of "Three Represents", Chinese scholar Tong Bing has attempted to

redefine the role of the news media in the following three dimensions: (1) the right to know and the right to communicate are basic human rights which are constitutionally legitimate; (2) the news media can serve as the mouthpiece for both the Party and for the general public; (3) news media can be defined both as an Althusserian "State Ideological Apparatus" and as an integral part of the profit-oriented "service industry" [2003: 18-20].

Its empirical contradictions and theoretical ambiguities aside, Tong's redefinition can be read as another typical manifestation of the "post-politics" prevalent in the ideological domain of contemporary China. The term "post politics", coined by Chinese critic Chen Xiaoming, embodies a condition wherein "everything is political and nothing is political at one and the same time; politics is everywhere, and yet it subverts itself at any moment" [2000: 222-223]. Obviously, such post-politics reflects CCP's current agenda in cultural/ideological domains, that is, to shift decidedly away from Maoist revolutionary legacies and towards pragmatic objectives for maintaining order and stability, or the status quo [c.f. Liu, 2004:19-28].

For Chinese journalists and media professionals, Tong's redefinition of the news media's role lends legitimacy to their experimentation in negotiating the partisan/professional. Post-politics is characterised by

their eclectic motto, "Helping but not making troubles" (*Baman bu tianluan*), that is, to help the public voice their concerns without making trouble for the top Communist Party leadership. This approach has been central to the development of public/civic journalism. Since 1 April 1994, CCTV has aired *Focused interview*, a 15-minute in-depth news programme in the mould of CBS's 60-minute segments. At the core of the programming are interpretation of current affairs, investigative reporting and watchdog journalism. The programme has gained official endorsement from the topmost leadership, high ratings from the general public and considerable revenue from advertisers, which has led to a boom in public/civic journalism in the Chinese news media.

We need, however, to rethink what "public/civic journalism" means in a different global/local context. The notion surfaced primarily at a group of American mid-sized daily newspapers in the late 1980s. Davis "Buzz" Merritt, one of the advocates in this campaign and editor/vice president of *The Wichita Eagle*, has defined key aspects of civic journalism as follows:

It moves beyond the limited mission of "telling the new" to a broader mission of helping public life go well, and act out that imperative;

It moves from detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life;

It moves beyond only describing what is "going wrong" to also imagining what "going right" would be like;

It moves from seeing people as consumers - as readers or non-readers, as bystanders to be informed - to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems.

[1995: 113-114]

Obviously, Merritt's idealistic model of civic journalism finds fault with the norm of objectivity, which remains central to professionalism and prevails in contemporary American journalism. Moreover, he also attempts to resuscitate the participatory nature and the overriding concern with political/public issues, as manifested in the bygone tradition of partisan journalism. Interestingly enough, Sun Yu-Sheng, the founder and then producer of *Focused interview*, shares a similar approach in defining the guidelines for his news programming, which can be read as a tentative definition of a Chinese version of public/civic journalism:

To maintain a correct standpoint in our observation,  
interview, analysis and programming; do not "give vent to  
outrage and be killed";

Social conflicts and problems remain the core to our news  
programming while a positive standpoint must be adhered to,  
that is, to construct but not to destroy

The topical selection, interview skills, shooting, editing and  
programming must conform to the criteria of television  
newsworthiness.

[2003: 5-6]

To a non-Chinese observer, Sun's vision appears to be a far cry from  
Merritt's model of public/civic journalism. We should bear in mind,  
however, that Sun, as a senior editor with one of the topmost CCP's  
"mouthpieces" rather than a liberal intellectual, cannot but state his  
reformist ideas in line with official rhetoric. His euphemistic wording,  
such as "a correct or positive standpoint" and "criteria of television  
newsworthiness", points to a departure from the conventions of partisan  
journalism, and to the efforts of re-contextualising the global model of  
public/civic journalism in indigenous Chinese discursive practices.

According to the leading theorist of public/civic journalism, Jay Rosen, "The idea is to frame stories from the citizen's view, rather than inserting man-in-the-street quotes into a frame dominated by professionals" [Rosen and Merritt, 1995:15]. Both Merritt and Sun, despite their different ways of expressing it, converge in their ideas on news-framing from the public/civic perspective. In fact, CCTV's *Focused interview* contribution to the ongoing press/media reform lies precisely on its reliance on the public/civic sources as the basis of news-framing and production. It is estimated that the editorial department receives over 2,300 news sources every day from all around China via various channels of correspondence, including phone calls, e-mails, and mobile phone text messages [Chen, 2004:1]. The programme has received a new lease of life under the current Communist Party leadership: *Focused interview* was granted a quota of no less than 50 per cent of "muckraking" reportage in its annual programming; the ratio by April 2004 had already exceeded 50 per cent, perhaps a positive sign for media reform [Chen, 2004: 1].

The Chinese re-contextualisation of public/civic journalism has taken a notable new turn in recent years. A new concept of "plebeian journalism" (*minsheng xinwen* or "news about citizens' life") surfaced to encompass public participation in news production, which originated in *Zero distance*

from Nanjing (*Nanjing ling ju li*, hereafter *Zero*), a primetime live news show in provincial Jiangsu Television's Urban Channel. If CCTV's *Focused interview* attempts to negotiate partisanship with professionalism, *Zero* aims to replace official discourses with a more playful, intimate and interactive plebeian culture.

As well as getting the audiences to call in direct with news sources, *Zero* enlists more than 1,000 amateur on-site correspondents and cameramen into its newsroom and constantly updates news polls and sampling during the course of the telecast. The majority of *Zero's* news items comprise live reportage of various incidents and disasters, public policy-making, as well as urban residents' call-in complaints and investigative reportage, ranging from shortage of electricity supply to mistreatment by government officials. Obviously, *Zero's* discursive practice aims to construct "plebeian journalism", news about ordinary people's mode of living and psychological stances [Wang and Wu, 2003: 2].

The socio-political vicissitudes of *Focused interview* and *Zero* cannot but testify to the dialectics and contradictions in the course of China's media reform, which deserves a book-length project for a detailed account and in-depth analysis. What remains to be seen is how far such experimentation with public/civic journalism can go and to what extent



the goals of public/civic journalism can be achieved within the current framework of the paradoxical partisan-cum-marketing system. With the global media's further penetration into the Chinese media arena, it is no surprise that the news media are torn between the opposing forces of partisan control and market economy. Emergent cheque book and yellow journalism, for instance, have already drawn attention from conscientious media scholars and professionals. Negotiation between the partisan and the professional still constitutes the core of the agenda of post-WTO Chinese media reform. The Chinese experience, as the attempts at recontextualising public/civic journalism have suggested, points to the directions in which we may engage the problems of globalisation (read Americanisation) and the search for its own cultural and social alternatives.

The challenges and changes of television journalism in contemporary China discussed in this chapter point to the urgency and necessity of transferring the focus in the current studies of global communication and China, namely, from the central theme of "What can media/cultural globalisation do to China?" to that of "What can China do to media/cultural globalisation?" The practices and experiments by CCTV-News and Phoenix, as well as local television stations, are emblematic of the re-mapping of the Chinese media topography in response to

prevailing media/cultural globalisation. In the foreseeable future, negotiating between the partisan, the commercial and the professional remains the central tenet of this ongoing globalisation in the Chinese media sphere. Not surprisingly, the end of a propaganda state seems to be consequent upon its negation. What remains to be seen is whether the Chinese news media can successfully compete with the restricting dominance of their Western counterparts and bring forth a more constructive alternative to the prevailing commercial/professional model.

## Chapter 10

# Televised democracy and mediated realities: Discussions beyond the television news

### Chapter Summary

*The concept of “mediated realities” is introduced, a theory that the images people have of the world, and their interpretation of them, are media-created. Newspapers and radio had originally mediated realities to the public, but were eventually replaced by television-constructed realities.*

*Against this background, CCTV began to offer the public “televised democracy”, by broadcasting debates on everyday issues. The sense of democracy increased with interactive live broadcasts, when viewers could join in the debate by telephone, and influence political decisions. Allowing a free flow of ideas benefited the government, while public demand brought greater political transparency from the leadership.*

*Reform of the Chinese media runs parallel to the reform of business ethics. Less censorship means that television news can reveal corruption in Chinese business and politics. Businesses are thus forced to act more ethically, and this attracts foreign investors. The thesis gives a useful background study of state censorship and the Chinese media. Case studies illustrate the points made.*

*The Tiananmen protest brought a halt to media reform by the leadership who reiterated the former view of television as Party “mouthpiece”. Having seen the benefits of press freedom, the author concludes it is clearly essential if China is to become ethical, stable and economically sustainable, and to take its place among the major world powers.*

“Mediated realities” is a theory that argues that pictures or images of the world that people have in their minds are influenced by their contact with the mass media (Karen S/Johnson C-4/2004). People usually interpret

their surroundings according to what they absorb from the media. People normally look to the media for experiences they have never had, such as places they have never visited and people they have never met. For example, a lot of people in the world have never been to China, but they are able to talk about the country based on the “reality” of China as presented by the media. Their construction of what Chinese people are like is based on what they have read, seen on television or heard on the radio.

Before television was introduced in China, reality was what people read in the government newspapers and heard on state radio. Once television was able to combine audio and visual, people’s idea of reality changed, because what was now believable was what could be seen and heard. Television-constructed reality became accepted and trusted. As television became more entrenched in Chinese society and proved that it had more to offer than radio and newspapers, people’s expectations started growing and television was challenged to be more ambitious.

It is against this background that CCTV has for some time been giving Chinese people a taste of democracy, perhaps not in the same sense and magnitude as the West and elsewhere, but to some extent Chinese people have enjoyed more liberties through CCTV than they could ever have

hoped for otherwise. Increasingly, through CCTV programming, Chinese people were introduced to a diversity of ideas and they learned that in reality not everyone held the same opinions on issues that affect the wider public, as they had been made to believe before. CCTV started producing programmes which discussed issues that directly affected people's lives, such as policies and governance, especially at the local level where television news programmes revealed a lot of mismanagement and corruption.

When CCTV started broadcasting live programmes democratic values increased, because it became possible to allow viewers to debate issues. Through calling in or being part of the audience in the studio, ordinary citizens began to discuss issues in a democratic way. CCTV provided an opportunity for Chinese people to start influencing party and government decisions; having heard people's comments on television, the authorities took remedial action, even going so far as to change laws and policies. Live programming also meant increased transparency and a willingness on the part of the state to allow the free flow of ideas on television.

The programme, *Tell the truth*, is a good example of democracy on television. It tackles a single topical issue each week and during the programme panellists discuss the issue with a live studio audience who

are allowed to participate by asking questions, arguing or contributing in any constructive way to the issue. When the programme was first introduced in 1994 it was lauded as one of the most democratic programmes on CCTV.

Through these open programmes, CCTV introduced a culture of transparency in Chinese society and soon people started expecting the same from other sectors, such as politics and business. This gave rise to press conferences, briefings and open inquiries by business and politics as they tried to be transparent. Also resulting from this was the concept of spokespersons, who were introduced into government offices and state-owned enterprises.

In the early days of television, the medium was predominantly for the upper class. Poor people from villages and rural areas never hoped to have any chance of advancing their interests through television. Through CCTV's efforts at democratisation, however, such people now enjoy the benefits of television as much as everyone else. CCTV is able to highlight their problems and disseminate their views and contributions on national issues.

Although China is not a democratic country, television enables citizens to participate in a democratic way over any issues they might have and to influence how they are governed. This is necessary to bring about both the full democratisation of television and China in general, because as citizens enjoy this transparency they will be motivated and empowered to demand more. It is obvious that the media in general and television in particular cannot wait until there is total democracy in China to provide people with programmes that are based on the democratic principles of free speech and transparency. Even through the little it is doing, CCTV is helping to oil the transition wheels as they move China towards eventual democratisation.

### **The Free Press: A ticket to an ethical, sustainable and unified China**

Chinese media reform during the current economic boom goes hand in hand with the current drive for improved business ethics, encouraged by the decrease in press censorship. As a result, unethical and corrupt corporate and government practices are no longer readily accepted or tolerated. Mass media, particularly television news programmes, are finally revealing the corruption in China. Television news departments are making every effort to serve the people by truly acting as their eyes and ears in the corporate and government culture. Because of the media's

exposure of corrupt corporations, companies are beginning to act more ethically, and this is attracting foreign investors to the Chinese market. This not only helps to increase the trust of the people, but will also help to sustain and foster the growth of the economy. To properly understand this argument, the chapter is supported by an in-depth examination of the structure of the Chinese media, the recent reform movements, and a case study in business ethics. This is necessary as it will provide information about past situations and an understanding of the role of both current and future journalistic practices.

**Table 10.1**  
**Contrasting assumptions about Press mission**

| <i>Authoritarian régime assumptions<br/>(e.g. China)</i>                     | <i>Democratic régime assumptions<br/>(e.g. UK/USA)</i>                     |
|--|--|
| Government knows and respects people's best interests                        | Government are fallible and often corrupt                                  |
| Press should not attack the government and its major policies                | Press should attack the government when officials and policies seem flawed |
| News should engender support for major policies                              | News should stimulate critical thinking about major policies               |
| News and entertainment programmes should be selected for their social values | News and entertainment programmes should be selected for audience appeal   |

**Source:**  
 Graber, D. A. (1993) *Mass media and American politics*, Congressional Quarterly Press. Page 20.



Chinese newspapers can be classified into two types: party organs or non-party newspapers, such as mass appeal chapters and bureaucratic chapters (Lee, 161). Television stations, however, are all directly under the supervision of the CDP or the propaganda departments of CCP committees. The party organ is the formal voice of the Party, and has a political and ideological background to its editorial approach. The non-party newspapers, on the other hand, while still owned and controlled by the party-state, serve the general interests of the public. Both types of newspaper carry with them an administrative status, which is defined by the administrative level of their sponsoring units. In China, each newspaper is required to have a sponsoring unit (Zhu Ban Dan Wei) and a regulating unit (Zhu Guan Dan Wei) [Lee, 2003: 164]. These two units ensure that the newspapers are unit based and that no individuals can start up publications on their own. In addition, the sponsoring unit and the newspaper must agree on how they function in society and what are their geographical targets. The administrative status of the Chinese press is not merely a question of status; it carries with it important economic implications. These may affect its privileges, such as access to pulp and printing facilities, rates for distribution, frequency of technological updating, and tax rate [Lee, 2003: 164]. Most importantly, a paper of a given administrative status is not allowed to enter another market of equal or higher administrative status. This basically means that a

provincial party chapter will not be allowed to enter another provincial or the national market.

Certainly, these are strict boundaries but there is a reason for them. With the growing desire for profit and fame, prosperous newspapers often want to move into larger territories in order to profit, but this is seen as trespassing on to the Chinese administrative system. Currently, the provincial party organs are meant to serve the political aspirations of the provincial authorities and not to interfere with other province's business. Spreading to another province does necessarily guarantee better receiver's rate if the coverage are about the neighbour's crisis, scandals and disasters. Higher receiver's rate will normally guarantee better advertising revenue of the year and sharp economic growth. However it can almost certainly guarantee to disturb the neighbouring province's leaders as well.

With the administrative boundaries in place, China's newspaper market is divided along provincial and municipal lines. The newspaper market force is strongest in the provincial capitals, where the city newspaper competes head-on with provincial daily chapters. The provincial borders are, however, effective in limiting the expansion of the media market in China and are also changing the administrative borders between cities in

a given province. In the whole of China, only a few local newspapers have circulations large enough to count as national dailies. A non-party chapter is in general less bound by its administrative status than a party organ. This corroborates the observation that there has been a decline in party organs in the overall press structure and a rise of municipal party organs, mass appeal evening chapters, and metro chapters [Lee, 2003: 164].

Censorship represents one of the most burdensome infringements on freedom of expression. Censorship refers to "any system in which the government may deny a person the use of a forum for expression in advance of the actual expression". Chinese authorities employ different types of censorship to ensure that the Communist Party is able to silence critics and maintain direct editorial control over political information and news reporting. These types of censorship include: legislative censorship, political censorship, psychological censorship and technological censorship. Legislative censorship is upheld since people in China must ask the government's permission before they are allowed to publish. The state achieves political censorship in that the Communist Party has the right and the ability to screen works prior to publication, and stop publication of those works it finds objectionable. Psychological censorship is a result of Chinese authorities intimidating Chinese citizens into silence by using vague and over-broad laws to imprison people who publish

politically sensitive works without permission. Technological censorship occurs when Chinese authorities use computer software and hardware to prevent Chinese citizens from viewing and publishing opinions of which the government disapproves. This is the most recent form of censorship as the Internet has begun to make its mark on Chinese society and culture.

Chinese journalism has had its ups and downs ever since the 1980s. It started with gradual and uncertain liberalisation, leading to brief blossoming in the spring of 1989, and then the clampdown that followed was maintained until the early to mid 1990s.

In 1977, when Deng Xiaoping picked Hu Jiwei to be editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*, China was about to set out on a path of modernisation and opening up to the outside world after a decade of "Maoist insularity" (Jernow, 17). Hu Jiwei, a journalist and Communist Party member, was a good choice for this position to help fulfil the vision of a new China. The *People's Daily* is the one newspaper in China whose bureaucratic rank is equal to a ministry. Its editors enjoy the prestige and privileges of the Party. Hu Jiwei was not only a member of the Communist Party and an editor-in-chief of the Party's most influential newspaper, he was also an intellectual who sought positive long-term goals for China.

When Hu Jiwei became editor of the *People's Daily*, he was aware that the Party had made mistakes. His love for his country and loyalty to the Party were no longer one and the same, and he was forced to choose between the two. Hu Jiwei decided to take the newspaper in a bold direction, and bring it back to the people. The early 1980s were a time of sweeping economic and political change. Under Hu Jiwei's leadership, the *People's Daily* published some of the best investigative stories in China, among them an article about the sinking of the Bohai oil rig which led to the Minister of Petroleum's resignation, and an article exposing the Minister of Commerce's habit of dining out on public money [Jernow, 1993:18].

In 1982, at the pinnacle of his career, Hu Jiwei called on newspaper editors to publish the opinions and criticisms sent in by their readers. It was his belief that newspapers should speak for the people and should offer diverse thoughts and opinions. This call to action was seen as a conspiracy, and in 1983 during the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, Hu Jiwei was forced to resign.

The Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign died quickly because memories of the Cultural Revolution were still fresh in the minds of party leaders. They did not want to start the ideological hunting down of people, the purges and violence again. When the political "sloganeering" and public

denouncements began to threaten Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign lost its drive [Jernow, 1993: 23].

Journalistic reforms took a step backwards in October 1985 when Liu Binyan, a journalist and party member, wrote an article in which he supported the right to "espouse political opinions that differed from the party of Mao" [Jemow, 1993: 23]. The article was refused by the *People's Daily* but published in a magazine called *Kaituo*. A few months later, Liu Binyan was criticised and eventually expelled from the Party.

There was yet another upward swing in October 1987 when Zhao Ziyang told the 13th Party Congress that public opinion was needed in order to supervise public officials, and he specifically encouraged critical reporting. Zhao said that the public should know about more important events and debate important topics. Chinese journalists were united in an enthusiastic response. This unification was most significant, as it served as the backbone for the events that would take place in the spring and summer of 1989.

The timing of Zhao Ziyang's speech was perfect, because when the protest movement began in the spring of 1989 Chinese journalists had come too close to attaining independence not to put up a fight. During the spring

and summer demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, journalists needed to be passionate about their career and to stick together. They were put to test for the first time during this period.

In April, Chinese journalists marched under a *People's Daily* banner to oppose an editorial that appeared in the *People's Daily* for 26 April. The editorial, written by Deng Xiaoping, accused protesters of undermining stability and creating turmoil. It had been published despite staff objections. The *People's Daily* journalists had once again been forced to serve the Party, and they wanted people to know that they were not free to write as desired.

On the evening of 4 May, demonstrators received encouragement from a speech by General-Secretary Zhao Ziyang. He distanced himself from the hard-line 26 April editorial in the *People's Daily*. Zhao Ziyang said the students were not causing turmoil and that reforms would continue. Taking advantage of a political struggle at the top of the party hierarchy, journalists began openly reporting on the protests in Tiananmen Square.

This sentiment of open reporting continued up to the end of Tiananmen Incident. Many people recall reports published in the *People's Daily* of 4 June. The brief articles said that there had been a "counter-revolutionary

rebellion" [Jernow, 1993: 60]. It described the Army as having suddenly occupied Tiananmen Square, and suggested that they used force. The message was not lost either to the readers or to the leadership, and this article angered some top officials.

The defiance of the press, while not outright, persisted after the massacre in Beijing, which had strengthened the journalists' antagonism towards the government. However, the hardliners who had gained dominance struggled to regain control of the rebellious propaganda machine. Top officials sympathetic to the press, Hu Qili and Zhao Ziyang, were expelled from the Standing Committee of the Politburo [Jernow, 1993: 61].

With the crushing of the Tiananmen protest, the media reform movement also suffered a major setback that was apparent both in journalistic practice and in theoretical discussion. The Party attributed the movement to the influence of "bourgeois liberalisation," a Western strategy of "peaceful evolution," and the partial takeover of the media and the ideological front by liberal and democratic reformers [Zhao, 1998: 45]. Two speeches, one by Jiang Zemin and Li Ruihuan, who replaced Zhao Ziyang and Hu Qili respectively, effectively reimposed the Party's principle and closed any theoretical debate on reform.



Jiang reiterated the mouthpiece theory. He claimed that serving the Party and serving the people were invariably one and the same, and criticised those who advocated the people principle and press freedom, charging them with maliciously trying to overthrow the party leadership.

According to Li, the media were to fulfil all responsibilities by providing correct direction to the public and arousing people's confidence in and enthusiasm for the socialist system. Sadly, media reform, after a decade of intense debate and struggle, seemed to have returned to its starting point a decade before [Zhao, 1998: 46].

News reports in the major media in the mid 1990s have remained typical of party journalism; they are monolithic, positive and predictable. Many publications covered the same stories regarding policy directives from provincial and national leaders, visits of party and government leaders to various provinces, good agricultural harvests despite droughts, education in patriotism, and model party members [Zhao, 1998: 49]. Though these were clearly steps backwards, journalists were still united, and having once tasted freedom of expression, they were determined to get it back.

China's acceptance into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on 11 November 2001 was exactly what the mass media industry needed to fully bring back the 1980s freedom of the press mentality. Reformers have

argued against the Party's concern that greater freedom would cause instability. Their argument is that press freedom is not only a right, but also conducive to political and economic stability. Wang Roushui, known for his theory of Marxist humanism and alienation under socialism, claimed that "economic instability is caused by bureaucracy, corruption and degeneration, which can be checked by a free press" [Zhao, 1998: 36].

This point is further supported by Hu Jiwei. He said that "There will be no genuine stability without press freedom" [Zhao, 1998: 37]. According to Hu Jiwei, a free press can not only prevent and correct party and government wrongdoing and therefore eradicate destabilising factors, but also promote mutual understanding between the people and the government and among different segments of society. It provides a safety valve for people to vent their dissatisfactions. In an essay published in the *Worm Economic Herald*, Hu Jiwei said:

Without freedom of the press, the people are helpless in the face of policy mistakes and the phenomenon of increasing corruption. If what they say is moderate, it serves no purpose. If what they say is tough, it is not published in the press. As time goes on, many people will cherish an attitude of saying and thinking nothing, and even taking things as they come,

bending to fate. Such a phenomenon gives a false impression of stability and unity. But it actually has people's numbness, indifference and their repression as a price. Hidden therein is an even greater risk.

[Zhao, 1998: 37]

Both of these men made their statements before China entered the WTO in 2001, and they now appear to be prophetic. There are two major themes running through their ideas: corruption and economic instability. The hope for economic reform lies in the continuation of freedom for Chinese journalists [Jemow, 1993: 93]. Without freedom of the press, corruption flourishes unchecked, which further impoverishes the country, rendering people helpless and undermining Chinese economic growth in the new century.

China, once a planned economy, started to introduce the market mentality when it shifted from class struggle to economic development in the early 1980s. Marketisation was given a strong boost after Deng Xiaoping elaborated on the importance of economic liberalisation in the socialist system during his widely publicised tour to southern China in 1992. By the logic of marketisation, one should expect capital to be crossing administrative boundaries, such as provincial and urban borders, in its

pursuit of a larger market. Indeed, in the non-media sector, the Chinese authorities have well recognised the need for abolishing all forms of local protectionism in order to foster a national market. The state administration released rules in April 2001 that forbid the use of any means to interfere with the entry of goods and services to a local market. The intention is to establish and to perfect a unified national market that allows orderly and fair competition. [Lee, 2003: 159]

It is clear that these economic reforms have led up to China's 2001 entry into the WTO. As stated before from Jemow [1993: 93], the hope for economic reform lies in the continuation of freedom for Chinese journalists. In order to defeat corruption and economic instability, a free Chinese press must exist.

Some Chinese argue that if the economy is to continue to develop and prosper, the need for rule by law will likewise grow. A market economy can thrive only on the basis of viable contracts that can be fairly and impartially adjudicated, and it requires unhindered access to information. People are not going to invest money in China's stock exchanges unless they know where it is going and can be confident that their investments will be safe. The press must be free to provide them with this information. Western-educated intellectuals also place their faith in the creation of a

middle class, who demand greater political participation [Jernow, 1993: 133].

In the past, journalists in China have been assigned a difficult balancing act as intermediaries between the nation's political authorities and the public. They are instructed to serve as the eyes, ears and mouthpiece not only of the Party and government, but also of the people and this has put them in a Catch-22 situation. As a result of working for two bosses (the Party and the people of China), journalists in China often find it difficult to get a balance between the two. If they are biased towards the Party, people are upset, and if they disagree with the Party, the Party sees it as a conspiracy and punishes the newspaper and the author. As a result of this, the truth is often distorted or completely changed, and it is the people who are the victims.

If China intends to continue its economic growth, journalists need a strict commitment to serve the people. So far, journalists have made some steps towards serving the people better. These steps have had a positive influence by decreasing corruption and increasing economic stability [Lee, 2003: 33].

With the development of the global economy, Chinese companies face the challenge of competing in the world market, and this demands market morality. As Chinese companies recognise the importance of morality in the market, public demand for the same increases. The mass media, who are becoming increasingly articulate on abusive practices, will play a major role in developing an ethically responsible market. As a result there will be a decrease in corruption and an increase in economic stability, both essential for the Chinese economy to prosper.

One case illustrates well how the media helps to flush out corruption and corrupt business people.

In the summer of 1998, a disastrous flood hit China. Heavy rains beat down on the Yangtze River and caused floods in ten provinces. As a result of the storm, hundreds of millions of victims lost their homes. CCTV, in an effort to source immediate financial aid for the victims, organised a charity programme to raise relief funds. During the broadcast companies and joint ventures donated money to the flood victims, while others pledged to donate later. The donations were to be sent off to the Red Cross within one year. Unfortunately, however, an enormous amount of the promised funding never came. One day, Greeson Medicine Corporation, a Western company, received a list that showed that three of

its Chinese business partners who had pledged to donate money had broken their promises to provide relief. [Rothlin, 2004: C14]

Greeson Medicine Corporation was forced to drop these three Chinese business partners. Chinese people were appalled to learn of the deeply rooted corruption of these companies when a Chinese newspaper exposed their unethical behaviour. The companies certainly saved some money in the short term by not donating to the flood victims, but the long-term financial losses will be irreplaceable. Since the newspaper exposed these three companies, the trust that Chinese citizens had in them has been erased and they have undoubtedly incurred large financial losses.

As China becomes a bigger player in the global market, both Chinese people and Chinese corporations are no longer accepting corrupt practices and low quality products. These new sentiments are the result of the decreased censorship of newspapers. With decreased censorship, newspapers are free to expose corrupt practices both in business and political environments, and are truly serving the best interests of everyone in China. Now that corporations and the government are aware that newspaper can, and will, expose corrupt practices, they are making efforts to act ethically. As a result, citizens both in China and abroad have a greater sense of trust in the Chinese economy and market. This confirmed

sense of trust benefits everyone in China. Large corporations and the government will develop an ethical culture, as they can no longer easily get away with unethical and corrupt behaviour. This will encourage Chinese citizens to trust corporations and the government. For the country overall, the general awareness that Chinese corporations and government offices are acting ethically and actually being held accountable for their crimes will entice foreign investors to the potentially rewarding Chinese markets.

The corruption and the false sense of stability and unity, so typical of the large corporations and the government, will crumble under a free media. In their place will be an ethical, economically sustainable and unified China that will take its place among the major world powers.



## Chapter 11

# Governing China with the news in an Internet age

### Chapter Summary

*This final chapter examines the media policy of the Fourth Generation Chinese leadership, and its implications for economic and political reform. An analysis is made of the Chinese media, and the Internet in particular, in order to discover the role of the Internet in contemporary Chinese society and assess whether television is able to survive.*

*The CCP's media policies are discussed, showing how they contradict each other. While advocating more openness, the government's main priority is still to maintain strict control of the media and iron out dissent. The Internet, in particular, is seen by the Party as a dangerous and destabilising influence.*

*The Chinese media, and especially television, have brought social, political and economic reform to China: increased democracy, more political openness and economic growth so great that China is now the second largest economy in the world. The thesis concludes that this transformation is largely due to television-led reform, and that it is essential now for the Chinese leadership to release its media from state control. This will enable China to build on its economic growth and technological achievements and become recognised as a truly great world power.*

Media policy under President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao is emblematic of one of the major contradictions of the Fourth Generation leadership. On the one hand, the Hu-Wen team has committed its administration to the new ethos of transparency and responsibility, and the media has been touted as a prime vehicle to promote *glasnost* and popular supervision of the government. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party leadership's top priority is still to maintain socio-political stability and

snuff out dissent. All challenges to Beijing's stern one-party rule, including those emanating from the press and the Internet, are seen as dangerous, destabilising agents [Dong, 2004: 166].

Particularly during the first year after coming to power at the 16th CCP Congress of November 2002, Politburo stalwarts including Hu, Wen, and Li Changchun have issued tolerant and liberal instructions to the media, and since the SARS crisis, officials at all levels have been told not to hide the news, including potentially embarrassing facts and figures. The official media have been encouraged to bring corruption and allied administrative ills out into the daylight.

This concluding chapter examines the media policy of the Fourth Generation leadership, as well as the implications for the future of economic reform, and political reform in particular. Emphasis is placed on how the Hu-Wen team addresses the challenge of the globalisation of the media and the challenge of the Internet, as well as the commercialisation of electronic and media units. This chapter also looks at the overseas public relations aspect of Beijing's media policy, including the way that the CCP leadership responds to, and tries to influence, any China-related reporting in the Western as well as the Hong Kong media.

## **Untangling the net: The Internet's effect on China's consensus and stability**

An economy which had a large share of its output controlled by its country's government; a command economy wherein the state dictated the level of production goals, how prices were to be controlled, and how resources were to be allocated; a centrally planned economy which once pooled its households into large communities, and undertook large-scale investments both in human and physical resources, in order to support rapid industrialisation [Brahm, 2002: 197]: this was the China of yesterday. These steps were taken to instil independence in the Chinese economy, in the sense that it would only need to import goods that were beyond the range of its maximum production capacity. Government plans, however, did not work as well as they had expected [Chang, 2002: 35]. Policies implemented by the government kept the country's economy at stagnant and relatively inefficient levels, and competition was simply not present. Profit incentives were at their best meagre, whereas controls placed on production and prices caused distortions in the economy. A centrally planned economy, China had living standards that were substantially lower than those of most other countries.

Rising from the bottom of the economic ladder, China has now become the second largest economy in the world, with predictions that it will surpass the United States by 2020 [SAS, 2005:92]. As of the year 2000, China's contribution

to global GDP growth, in terms of purchasing power parity, has been bigger than that of the U.S. and more than half as big as the combined contributions of India, Brazil and Russia, which are the three next largest economies. With the decade of economic development has come the emergence of the Internet as a social force in China. It is a sure fact that economic openness and prosperity in China's reform era has led to the expansion of social organisations and social groups that provide a variety of purposes and functions in China's ever-changing society. Coinciding with this is the commercialisation of the media industry, which has generated a brand-new audience and substantially enlarged the public sphere that is essential to the growth of society.

In the advent of a vast array of speculation as well as criticism, this concluding chapter aims to further analyse the Chinese media, and the Internet in particular, in order to discover the role of the Internet in modern Chinese society and how television can survive. Will the Internet be included in the tightly controlled official media system? To what extent have the Internet and the digitalised media challenged the traditional understanding of consensus and stability?

In a society that has been under authoritarian rule and had limited information, the Internet has helped give social groups a voice and has helped

empower the individual Chinese person, giving the public not only the right to be heard but access to relevant information, and this has accelerated the change in Chinese society.

### **The Internet in China**

The Internet is defined as a computer network consisting of a worldwide network of computer networks that use the TCP/IP network protocols to facilitate data transmission and exchange [Answers.com]. It has revolutionised the world, taking communication to the next level. It started as a database support for the United States military, in order to break through conventional communication methods and regulatory frameworks and enable information to flow freely. Cyberspace on the other hand is defined as the electronic medium of computer networks in which online communication takes place [World Net Search]. Information that is uploaded in this network can easily be found in cyberspace by using complex and powerful search engines. This makes information literally at the finger tips of the user. It comes as no surprise that more and more people are becoming fascinated by this technological breakthrough, even in China.

One of the characteristics of this juggernaut is that it has transformed the traditional concept of space through combining and changing political and

geographic boundaries. It does not matter where someone is or what nationality one is; given the proper connectivity and sufficient technology, information has been more attainable than ever. Furthermore, it has helped empower individuals to bypass conventional regulatory mechanisms [Tai, 2006: 83]. What used to be a very expensive phone call or a very long wait for a letter has been totally revolutionised by the Internet. It is a brand new realm through which people can communicate with ease at the touch of a button. Because of this improved technology, governments of every nation have needed to make a much greater effort to regulate information.

### **Chinese official understanding of consensus and stability**

If a state can control society's communication processes, it can structure the symbolic environment in such a way that citizens will be more likely to accept that state's political order as legitimate. There will be fewer challenges to the state's rule and citizens might even be encouraged to identify affirmatively with state rule, and citizens might even be encouraged to identify affirmatively and enthusiastically with state goals.

[Lynch, 1999: 2]

This is the main justification China has used for centuries for trying to regulate the flow of information. Chinese leaders have tried to control the communication process in Chinese society, because they believe that controlling the way that their citizens think greatly assists in stabilising the nation. This concept, that the state has the right and the responsibility to manage the way its citizens think, was firmly established in China when the Communist Party was established. This is evident from one of the theoretical journals published in November 1960:

If the entire nation possesses a uniform ideology and if the nation is unified by the thought of Mao-Tse Tung, then it will enjoy unified actions. If a nation of 700 million people does not possess a uniform ideology, then it will be generally scattered sand. The ideologies of the entire populace can only be unified with the power of the thought work of Mao-Tse Tung.

[Lynch, 1999: 18]

Instilling a proper mindset in the minds of Chinese citizens has been achieved through the use of propaganda materials and by controlling the media. The media have to function under the Party's apparatus and are responsible for educating the masses and disseminating ideology [Tsui, 2001: 17]. Under Communism, the role of the media was very different from that of other

countries. In China, the function of the media is to ensure the loyalty and unity of the organisation's members, to enforce not only correct thinking but also correct behaviour.

### **Vertical communication in the age of television and newspapers**

The flow of messages during the early years of the People's Republic of China was distinctly top-down, meaning that the emphasis was placed on creating a mass media and telecommunications system that could relay orders hierarchically from the central governing station to the citizens [Lee, 2000: 122]. It indicated that information was highly centralised, as the public received the news already altered in a way that supported the decisions of the government [Lee, 2003: 165]. Information was edited and changed to match the "uniform ideology" of China [Lull, 1991: 98]. The hierarchy was arranged thus: State Council - Administrations - Provincial Governments - Bureaux - Township Governments [Lieberthal, 1995: 42].

However, with the rise of technological advances, such as the Internet, the control that Chinese leaders wish to retain is being undermined. "Thought Work", the struggle to control the communication flows [Lynch, 1999: 2], is still evident in China today. There is a struggle between the government and society as to who can impose order and content upon the circulation of information, and this struggle is causing the nation to change. The Party has



effectively established a powerful network for controlling the conventional media sectors, including national and local television and all printed publications. Neither Wang Dan, student leader on Tiananmen Square, nor Li Hongzhi, the Grand Master of the Falungong, could never own one of the media or even just appear on mainstream television. However, the Internet has changed this as it can bypass this vertical communication and all the Party-assigned gatekeepers that the government regards as the necessary elements for a stable nation.

### **China's stand on the Internet**

Methods of governing through newspapers and radio contributed greatly to the strategies for television news. Maoism is still part of the Party's philosophy which directs the *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV. However, Hu and Wen are alone in seeking the right strategy for the Internet.

Despite all the dangers that the Internet brings, China under Jiang Zemin's period embraced this technological breakthrough for two main reasons. First, the authorities believed that the Internet could serve as the new engine of economic acceleration and productivity [Tai, 2006: 82]. Both President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji were engineers in their early careers and, like many of their engineer colleagues in Chinese politics, they had used GDP

growth as the main yardstick for all their policies. As discussed earlier, China has been an economic juggernaut over the past decade and the Chinese authorities were confident that China could maintain its leading position among other nations in the pace of economic growth, right into the new millennium. They believed that this could be achieved with the help of technology, and this explains why information and communication technologies have been granted a central place in China's national development strategy. The Party believed in the use of technology to enhance the access to and delivery of government services to benefit citizens, business partners and employees.

Second, authorities believed that with proper filtering, the Internet could create a "cyber environment" that would contain all the public information thought suitable for the Chinese people to see. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese government believes in the power of propaganda. Though not ideal, the government wishes to be able to filter the Internet so that it will only contain the information that it wants citizens to see, but the government will soon find this to be too ambitious because amateur writers such as bloggers can be more productive than the officially approved party journalists. The Party is initially hoping that a well-developed and well-regulated Internet can work to its advantage in strengthening its grip on power and its capacity to win popular support. "The strategy is to produce our own content (Xinhua

News Agency, *People's Daily* and CCTV) and limit other news sources" [Tsui, 2001: 17]. As they did earlier with radio and television, the Chinese leaders hope to make the Internet work for them by transforming it into a new form of medium, through which an average Chinese citizen can get his daily dose of government-approved information.

It comes as no surprise that China has implemented numerous actions and several policies to regulate the use of the Internet. In order to achieve its two main goals, China has been trying to censor the information super-highway by means of regulation and filtering. "China's Internet-filtering régime is the most sophisticated effort of its kind in the world" [Internet Filtering in China in 2004-2005: A Country Study 2006]. It involves a large number of state agencies and thousands of personnel to censor content transmitted through different systems such as web pages, web-logs, on-line discussion forums, bulletin board systems and e-mail messages. On the macro level, China has started the "Great Firewall" movement, whereby all Internet communications coming in and going out of China are required to pass through a number of major Chinese networks, and this allows the government to limit, control and observe the information being sent over the Internet [Interviews with SCIO Officials]. This allows the People's Republic of China (PRC) to be largely successful in regulating Chinese computer networks into a controlled information environment, according to what they deem ideal. On the micro

level, there is a Chinese saying: "Kill the chicken to scare the monkey." The Government officials are notoriously selective in enforcing regulations spurned by the Chinese bureaucracy. The government does this by regulating individual users by requiring them to be registered with the Public Security Bureau, the republic police system, constantly reminding them that they are being watched and that violating these set laws would warrant them severe punishments.

### **The rise of the Internet and the decline of television**

China's interest in the Information Revolution has been clearly supported by a number of government and party officials, starting in the 1980s. It gained strong support because both conservatives and reformers agreed that this "class neutral technology" was needed to close the gap between its Asian neighbours and the Western world [Tsui, 2001: 15]. The rise of the Internet in China is parallel with that of the West, its growth is simultaneous with the technological advances of Western nations. The history of the Internet in China has three basic levels [Tai, 2006: 82]. The first is the use of the e-mail between 1987 and 1994. This was only available to a few scientific research institutes, and so the public still had no access to it. The next phase was the development of research and education networks, where it lasted for two years only, from 1994 to 1995. Here the Chinese Academy of Science and the

Chinese Committee of Education created the China Science and Technology Network (CSTNET) and the China Education and Research Network (CERNET) respectively. Both agencies aimed to provide communication services for their research institutes and universities. From this point, the Chinese Internet began its involvement with the international community. The final stage was commercial use, which began in 1995 and still continues. The government established its first public network, China Net, which allowed the public to access the Internet. After that, other networks were launched, all geared to give Chinese users access to websites and to provide faster and better services to the masses.

As of today China has the second largest number of Internet users after the United States [SAS 2005 and Official Data, [www.scio.gov.cn](http://www.scio.gov.cn)]. According to the China Internet Network Information Centre (CINIC)'s 18th Statistical Survey Report on Internet Development in China 2006, there were 123 million Internet users as of June 2006. The nation currently has 54.5 million computer hosts and 788,400 worldwide websites. The average bandwidth is 214,175 megabytes per second, which indicates that the government is trying to provide people with improved and faster Internet services. The top four most frequently used services are news, search engines, e-mails and BBS, community forum. The use of blogs is currently rising, and is now at 23.7%.

Figures in Table 11.1 can be easily understood in the way that the Internet, as preferred provider of information, is expanding while television is declining. On more than several occasions the whole nation has had to access the Internet for news while television was stating that nothing had happened. Among the serious cases, 9/11 and SARS were the most significant. CCTV gave no coverage of the breaking news in New York on 11 September 2001 for nearly 48 hours. People were so scared and eager to find out how the attacks had happened and what the consequences would be in relation to China. The Sina.com and Sohu.com websites provided news services access around the clock and they were dubbed "Chinese CNN on the web". During the first month of SARS, people in the northern part of the country heard the first piece of news about SARS, not from CCTV or the *People's Daily*, but from the Internet and mobile phone text messages associated with some of the portal websites [Dong, 2003c: 75].

**Table 11.1**  
**News consumption patterns in China 2001 and 2006, Beijing residents**

| <i>Medium</i>                                    | <i>Percentage(%) 2001</i> | <i>Percentage(%) 2006</i> |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Local newspapers ( <i>Beijing Evening News</i> ) | 29                        | 19                        |
| National newspapers                              | 9                         | 3                         |
| National television (CCTV)                       | 34                        | 22                        |
| Alternative news networks (Phoenix TV)           | 3                         | 7                         |
| Portal websites (news.sina.com.cn)               | 2                         | 21                        |
| News magazines ( <i>Chinese Newsweek</i> )       | 6                         | 7                         |
| Radio  | 12                        | 11                        |
| Text-message service                             | 0                         | 2                         |

**Source:**

2001 and 2006 *Annual surveys of audiences*, conducted by the Department of Propaganda, Beijing CCP Committee and *Qianlong News*

**Effect of the new media: Will the same methods of control work?**

It is not surprising that the Internet has broken down the norms and regulations of the traditional ways of thinking in China, as well as the way of managing news in the Party. Despite the numerous regulations implemented by the government in censoring the Internet, it cannot completely prevent the viewing on the Internet of information that contradicts its ideology.

Technology enables people to do what they like, which explains why thousands of Chinese users have found loopholes in the system to bypass the regulatory framework set by the PRC. Proxy servers, alternative hosts and peer-to-peer networking are among the methods used in China to cheat the system. In doing so, the average Chinese citizen is able to get hold of information never accessible before.

*Politics*

At one time in China, the only information to which the Chinese public were allowed access had first been modified by the government to suit the image it wished to project for its own purposes. This has changed with the coming of the Internet, which has made the circulation of information easier than ever before, and created the opportunity for Chinese users not only to obtain raw,

genuine information but, more importantly, help them express their opinions on important issues of interest. The Internet represents the vital channels of communication in a civilised society, through which individuals and groups can become informed about issues, discuss and debate them autonomously, and ultimately have an impact on policy agenda.

Through international websites and private pages, Chinese people can access an abundant supply of news. Unlike before, users are able to experience the liberty of finding out what is really happening in the world and in China. In turn, through bullet board services, blogs and chat rooms, users are able to comment and voice their opinions on these topics. These sites have in fact become a barometer for politicians and government officials, enabling them to gauge public opinion and make changes accordingly [Liu, 2004: 145].

An example of this change in Chinese politics can be seen in the story of Sun Zhigang. Sun was a 27 year old college student who was stopped by the local police on his way to an Internet café. When Sun could not show his temporary resident ID permit to the police, he was sent to a detention centre. While there, he became sick and was taken to a penitentiary hospital, where he was beaten to death by inmates and employees. The story was written up by a local newspaper reporter, though sadly not until a month later, but it was published locally and then hit the Internet globally. People who caught this



story voiced their anger through the Internet, and as more and more people caught the news and expressed their outrage, it put pressure on the Chinese officials to catch the criminals behind this atrocity. The author was presenting morning news from 6.00 to 8.00 am at this time on (CCTV?). Presenters were ordered not to televise any news on the Sun case by more than one senior editor, but they changed their stance and directed that the story be in the morning news bulletin. The author went into history as the first television journalist to have covered this sensitive story. As an insider of the national television, I could feel the pressure on us from the Internet and the Hong Kong based 24 hour news channel Phoenix Television. The dozen culprits were captured and immediately sentenced to death. Moreover, China's State Council terminated its administrative measures that had been in place for years on the custody and detention of vagrants in Chinese cities.

Though still insignificant, Chinese people now have a voice in society. If this story had hit the news a few years back, the government would have tried to hush it up, and the angry Chinese citizens would have had no medium through which to express their disapproval. The Chinese citizen now has the power to influence how government officials ought to behave and what policies they should implement or remove. Though it is still limited by various rules and regulations, the online public sphere has become an

important indicator of public opinion and sentiment. For an authoritarian régime that does not care about public opinion, the Internet has in many cases provided the only forum for checking the pulse of mass opinion.

### *Culture*

Brand new information is taking shape on the Internet. Apart from politics, the Internet has been able to circulate all kinds of information into and out of China, and this includes the globalisation of the media. An increasing number of media products from other cultures are penetrating the Chinese symbolic environment as the country becomes ever more tightly linked to the highly automated, worldwide communications web. The process is much easier than it had previously been through television and publications; it always takes a long time to get the SARFT or SAPP's final consent for importing a programme or a book. Western influence has been slowly creeping into the Chinese community and the worldwide web is one of the reasons behind this. Chinese students in urban areas now know far more about American movies, television shows and even international athletes. Gone are the days when people would only wear traditional blue suits, and bicycles were the only form of transport in the streets. These days, catching a young teenager wearing Jack Jones and seeing a Chinese businessman riding a Mercedes Benz would no longer surprise anyone. As the cultures of many nations slowly enter China, the globalised belief system could inch its way into the minds of

Chinese citizens and possibly influence them to veer away from the PRC's control and pursue a more liberated lifestyle for themselves and for the nation as a whole.

The Internet has also changed the traditional role of the conventional media in Chinese life. Marketization of the mass media in China has pushed the media ever closer to the edge of the market. Numerous portal sites in the country have teamed up with national and local media in sharing information sources, making it quicker and easier to spread the news. These stories are no longer limited by geographic location in reaching potential audience members. The reports that interest people, such as social events and human interest stories, are what more and more reporters publish now that readers have the power to choose what articles to read and which websites to browse. Careful tracking of the popular websites that Chinese users visit also indicates what sort of information interests them. From complete dependence on state subsidies to increasing dependence on commercial revenue from advertising, sponsorships and business operations in other areas [Zhao, 1998: 67], media institutions can now produce more stories that cater for the taste of their audiences and not what the government demands.

*Social*

The Internet has changed the arena of social interaction in a number of ways. The changes could easily be understood in political and ideological terms by the Party. First, the Internet has created a new platform whereby the public can express their opinions on just about anything. It is a gathering place where people share their respective views and debate. In doing so, it has paved the way for a number of Chinese Internet users to be exposed to the opinions of their fellow Internet users. This brings people together in a public agora, to voice their concerns and share their hopes. This is why the people's control of this public agora is perhaps the most fundamental political issue raised by the development of the Internet.

Similarly, the Internet has also made it possible for the users to find people who share their interests. It has been a new avenue where Chinese people can meet new friends and talk about issues of common interest. Technology has allowed users to share information in more ways than one. Sending pictures, songs and videos are some of the ways that the Chinese online users interact with one another. With these technological advances, users are better able to express themselves, and this encourages an ever-growing number to use the information highway. From serious political views to simple hobbies, the Internet has made it possible for the public to congregate and engage in discourse.

Mass public participation is another area revolutionised by the Internet.

Unlike other types of media, the worldwide web has attracted active participation from an increasing number of people. Television and radio can also broadcast information widely, but Internet users can easily respond and at the same time use the same medium to express their own ideas. Its user-friendliness and accessibility has encouraged the public to accept the Internet as a new channel through which they can contribute to society.

#### **Democratisation - Does the Internet promote more freedom than television?**

The Internet does indeed promote more freedom, because it helps to release the information that the public ought to see without the regulatory gatekeepers of television news. It has been said that information is meant to be free [Tsui, 2001: 67]. The Internet was invented as a project to defy information control by the state, and distribute the power of control to all [Tai, 2006: 180]. The vertical communication of the old Communism is being eroded in China today. Along with other media, the Internet has provided a means of vertical communication, allowing greater discussion among citizens. The anti-control nature of the Internet brings the hope of democratising production and dissemination of information to the Chinese people as more and more information gets spread to a growing user base in ways that were not possible before.

However, the Internet alone cannot solve many of the persisting problems in establishing democracy. The Internet will not democratise China, but rather the Internet is democratising communication in China. It is what the Chinese people do with the information they receive which will determine whether a political democracy will ever come about in China. While on this topic the question, "What do the Chinese people do with the new information they receive?" should be asked.

The eyes of the Chinese people are slowly being opened with the help of the Internet, rather than the conventional formats of television and newspaper. Mentioned earlier, the key characteristic of the Internet is its spacelessness, and it is thus able to bridge the former obstacles of geography and social structures. Each person is being empowered with this raw, unedited information. Blogs are being created in which personal sentiments are expressed for others to see, and they contain all kinds of ideas, pro-China or not. Through the help of the Internet more and more people are able to find others who have the same interests as their own, and form groups and societies that were impossible before. Bullet board services and community chat rooms are the more popular choices for this type of action. BBS allows users to offer opinions on various topics posed by someone. There, people can read different opinions, all based around a single topic and this highlights the

diversity of Chinese individuals. Chat rooms on the other hand are avenues of direct communication, person to person, and are based on real time, as one person waits for the other to respond.

Furthermore, the Internet promotes continuing debate and analysis on these various topics. Chinese people are now able to give their opinion on the current issue at hand. The stimulation of critical thinking is made possible through the use of the Internet. Blogs, chat rooms and BBS are used as places where Chinese citizens are not only able to read and absorb information, but also as a venue where they can set out their own thoughts and views. Gone are the days when the public would just accept news reports as presented. In this day and age, the Chinese individual's voice can be heard.

As discussed in this chapter, the Internet has changed Chinese society. It has been seen that the traditional understanding of Chinese stability and consensus has diminished as each Chinese citizen has been given the power to hear and be heard through the more diversified media. It has severely challenged the traditional understanding of consensus and stability by forcing the government to make changes in its roles in order to accommodate this new found "power" that the average Chinese citizen now possesses.

## **The People's e-Republic of China: The future of press and politics in China**

It took the CCP nearly a century to cope with the rapid development of television. Strategies for directing television news are a combination of the Maoist Party rules and those of Deng and Jiang to control the media, while developing the media at the same time. It will not give Hu and Wen the chance to have a nice, long break by entering the new media age. Challenges are not merely provided by the Internet. Mobilised by the Internet, television, newspapers, radio and magazines are all empowered with new looks and a fashionable presentation. Driven by the growing commercialisation, television will rely less and less on the government's financial support. If we think back to the government's four ways of controlling the media, we will see why it has been so hard to achieve.

First, regarding laws and regulations, it appears that the Party is still very nervous about introducing new laws and regulations into the media and communication sectors. Their primary concern is whether their unconditional control through the "Thought Work" régime will be challenged. The problem now is that no specific person has challenged the Party, while the Party is actually challenged by the newly-emerged media technologies.



Second, standards and values, formerly used to control the media, are more relaxed than ever before. Even the majority of journalists serving in the traditional media, including television and newspapers, are uncertain of the political ideology and it will be even harder to set publicly agreed standards and values for the providers of online information.

Third, structural management can only be achieved in the national media organisations directly supervised by the CDP. Senior personnel are still appointed by the CCPCC, CDP and the SARFT. It is, however, a different case for the fully- and semi-commercialised media sectors now. People on the board who invested greatly in the media would defend their rights to satisfy their interests. Even the SARFT is not capable of recognising whether all the on-air productions are produced by a SARFT registered person who has been approved by the Party and government.

Finally, economic tools are still useful, but have limited functions. These have changed more quickly than the CCP had expected and the majority of media institutions are now operated as businesses, and struggling to make better profits for their investors. Senior members of national and provincial television were sent to study at the prestigious business schools in Harvard and Oxford, as well as to the short executive courses for business and financial managers at the Peking and Tsinghua Universities. The market

economy has automatically driven the media firms to become more globalised, although it may not actually represent the majority of people's interests.

**Hu and Wen's governing capability is evaluated: Is the change for better or for worse?**

Although it is true that access to the Internet is not egalitarian, universal and unfettered, and rational debates have not become the norm on the Net, there is no denying that the Internet has already transformed the traditional communication landscape by making information already available to a variety of social groups that otherwise would be off limits without the Internet.

[Tai, 2006: 183]

Indeed the traditional Chinese understanding of consensus and stability is slowly diminishing. Through numerous kinds of technological breakthrough each individual is being empowered with the chance to be heard and to speak out their own opinions. This change is good for China. Giving each citizen a voice is healthy for a developing country. It is also necessary for the Party to

be aware of people's concerns and to sort out the problems at an early stage. The longer it is left, the harder it is to get issues sorted out in a huge country like China. The party controlled media should serve as a dual carriageway, facilitating two-way communication between the Party and the people. Party journalism could blind the Party if they are only to speak and never to listen. Different views allow Chinese officials to see the nation from numerous perspectives, equipping them with the proper knowledge to do what is necessary. Moreover, critical thinking helps a nation, by stimulating each person to react to a given situation. In doing so, a better solution can be reached because it is tested by countless debates and deliberations, instead of just one small group of people making decisions for the whole nation. Human beings are meant to be free, each one has their own free will and the new media policies in China offer an avenue through which human beings can present their own ideas to other people. Without achieving this mission, regardless of having the world's fastest GDP growth, China will never be fully developed for the wellbeing of the people. □

## Conclusion

Knowing what the situation was in the People's Republic of China when television was introduced in 1958 for the first time, one can appreciate the long way that television has come. Television emerged during a time when political power in China was strongest and it offered a new way of governing and ensuring that everybody spoke and thought in the same way. The Communist Party of China had found a new tool to achieve its political goals.

Since it was introduced as a new part of the media, television in China has been used as party mouthpiece, with CCTV as the centre from where the directives and decrees of the Party and government are echoed. With the heavy hand of political control and the burden of government regulations, CCTV has played its part in Chinese politics, playing its role as an indispensable part of the Communist Party.

Before China's reform and opening-up policy, CCTV could never have hoped to be anything other than a political branch of the Party, but with China's opening up CCTV could no longer resist television's natural urge to change in an environment which is open to the free flow of ideas. Even though the Party engaged in new tactics to cope with the strong winds of change, CCTV has

adopted a relatively relaxed position and has developed from being purely a party megaphone to a medium that also tries, despite challenges, to represent the public. In its own limited way CCTV has tried to force the Chinese authorities to achieve a certain level of accountability to citizens, it has tried to encourage the Chinese people to point out government wrongdoing, and has empowered ordinary Chinese people to contribute ideas on how they should be governed. Through CCTV's numerous channels, Chinese people at all levels have contributed in various ways to their country's economy and politics by offering opinions and voicing their aspirations.

It goes without saying that the Party is not ready to let go of CCTV and allow the forces of the market dictate whether it is good for the Chinese people or not. Having said that, the changes taking place in Chinese society since the opening up cannot be ignored. Little by little, if CCTV continues to be a platform for politics, it will lose the appeal that it currently enjoys, because the transformation of the market economy taking place in China will soon catch up with it. Viewers will eventually have alternative networks from where they will be able to access all they currently can from CCTV, but without the heavy dose of politics.

All over the world people always demand something more from television; they dare networks to break the boundaries of innovation and try exploring

uncharted waters to satisfy their hunger for entertainment and information. Chinese people are no different, and as China continues to reform and open up, the public's expectation of what CCTV should offer will grow and so will their demands. Failure to provide and satisfy these demands will send Chinese people to alternative media, including those offered by foreign countries.

The market economy that is increasingly taking root in China is transforming society into one that seeks quality in the goods and services being offered. In business, people want to see more honesty and healthy competition, and in governance they want the authorities to be more transparent and tolerant. The implications are that it will be impossible for CCTV to keep looking the other way and not reflect the quality and standards that the public want in their society. Already CCTV has to some extent demonstrated that it can produce news and programmes about what people want to see, but with the continued entrenchment of market economy values it will become increasingly difficult for the Party to control the television network without running the risk of making it unpalatable to viewers.

Many Chinese people are now accessing the news and other information online. Although the government is making every effort through censorship to "clean" the web of information that does not support its ideals, the

Internet is still proving to be the way forward as far as access to satisfactory information is concerned. If television continues to remain under party control and limits the information that the Chinese people want, it will not be long before the public will watch CCTV and other controlled networks more out of habit than to be informed and entertained. Currently, CCTV has only fractionally taken advantage of the Internet to reach a new audience, especially the young. The longer CCTV takes to invest into this market, the more its effectiveness will dwindle and CDP's control of information on behalf of the Party will only be theoretical since there will be hardly anyone watching television. CCP's failure to control the Internet as completely as it has done with the other media will prove to be its failure to control information in China in general, because the young generation for whom the control is obviously meant rely on the Internet for their information

The Thought Work system on which China depended to control the free flow of information is currently under serious threat. It has already been shown that with reform and opening up, systems of information control such as Thought Work, will have to be thrown out and only be remembered for what they managed to achieve when China was still too afraid to let new ideas in.

By reforming and opening up, China has taken the first step towards becoming a country in which citizens live freely and enjoy the liberty of

choosing what they want to hear, see and say. When the Party and the government finally set television and the rest of the media free, China will take another important step towards becoming a truly liberated citizen of the global village. All that China will need to do then is concentrate on adding to her established achievements in world technology and economic growth.



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# APPENDIX-I

## List of people interviewed for this thesis, 2000-2005

| No. | Name           | Media Organization/Department |
|-----|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1   | Zhao Qizheng   | SCIO                          |
| 2   | Cai Mingzhao   | SCIO                          |
| 3   | Wang Guoqing   | SCIO                          |
| 4   | Guo Weimin     | SCIO                          |
| 5   | Yang Yang      | SCIO                          |
| 6   | Hua Qing       | SCIO                          |
| 7   | Li Liyan       | SCIO                          |
| 8   | Wang Xingming  | SCIO                          |
| 9   | Liu Gengyin    | SCIO                          |
| 10  | Ma Hong        | SCIO                          |
| 11  | Liu Xuan       | SCIO                          |
| 12  | Liu Zhengrong  | SCIO                          |
| 13  | Wei Zhengxin   | SCIO                          |
| 14  | Shen Lu        | SCIO                          |
| 15  | Shou Xiaoli    | SCIO                          |
| 16  | Liu Jiang      | SCIO                          |
| 17  | Zhu Yinghuang  | China Daily                   |
| 18  | Zhou Xisheng   | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 19  | Li Jie         | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 20  | Yan Wenbin     | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 21  | Ju Mengjun     | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 22  | An Zhiping     | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 23  | Tian Wenquan   | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 24  | Chen Zengbin   | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 25  | Xiong Lei      | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 26  | Huang Yan      | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 27  | Shen Bohan     | Xinhua News Agency            |
| 28  | Jing Yidan     | CCTV News                     |
| 29  | Bai Yansong    | CCTV News                     |
| 30  | Liang Jianzeng | CCTV News                     |
| 31  | Zhang Jie      | CCTV News                     |
| 32  | Chai Jing      | CCTV News                     |
| 33  | Wen Jing       | CCTV News                     |
| 34  | Li Ruiying     | CCTV News                     |
| 35  | Kang Hui       | CCTV News                     |

|    |                |                       |
|----|----------------|-----------------------|
| 36 | Li Zimeng      | CCTV News             |
| 37 | Wang Zhiming   | CCTV News             |
| 38 | Pan Linhua     | CCTV News             |
| 39 | Chen Mang      | CCTV News             |
| 40 | Hu Jincao      | CCTV News             |
| 41 | Dong Qian      | CCTV News             |
| 42 | Wang Zhi       | CCTV News             |
| 43 | Liu Shunfa     | CCTV News             |
| 44 | Yuan Zhengming | CCTV Business Channel |
| 45 | Jiang Shiming  | CCTV Business Channel |
| 46 | Li Jiaming     | CCTV Business Channel |
| 47 | Wang Xiaoya    | CCTV Business Channel |
| 48 | Rui Chenggang  | CCTV Business Channel |
| 49 | Wang Lifen     | CCTV Business Channel |
| 50 | Chen Weihong   | CCTV Business Channel |
| 51 | Ru Chen        | CCTV Business Channel |
| 52 | Lei Jianjun    | CCTV Business Channel |
| 53 | Chen Dahui     | CCTV Business Channel |
| 54 | Wang Xiaolei   | CCTV Business Channel |
| 55 | Zhang Shuang   | CCTV Business Channel |
| 56 | Liu Meihong    | CCTV Business Channel |
| 57 | Sun Lili       | CCTV Business Channel |
| 58 | Ma Bin         | CCTV Business Channel |
| 59 | Xiang deli     | CCTV Business Channel |
| 60 | Meng Bo        | CCTV Business Channel |
| 61 | Luo Ming       | CCTV                  |
| 62 | Wang Gennian   | CCTV                  |
| 63 | Sheng Yilai    | CCTV International    |
| 64 | Fan Yun        | CCTV International    |
| 65 | Yang Rui       | CCTV International    |
| 66 | Yang Li        | CCTV International    |
| 67 | Liu Lianxi     | CCTV.com              |
| 68 | Yang Xiaoping  | CCTV.com              |
| 69 | Zhang Xinyu    | CCTV.com              |
| 70 | Anonymous1     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 71 | Anonymous2     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 72 | Anonymous3     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 73 | Anonymous4     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 74 | Anonymous5     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 75 | Anonymous6     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 76 | Anonymous7     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 77 | Anonymous8     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 78 | Anonymous9     | CCTV Human Resources  |
| 79 | Anonymous10    | CCTV Human Resources  |

|     |                   |                                |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 80  | Anonymous11       | CCTV Accounting Department     |
| 81  | Anonymous12       | CCTV Accounting Department     |
| 82  | Anonymous13       | CCTV Accounting Department     |
| 83  | Anonymous14       | SARFT                          |
| 84  | Anonymous15       | SARFT                          |
| 85  | Anonymous16       | SARFT                          |
| 86  | Anonymous17       | SARFT                          |
| 87  | Anonymous18       | SARFT                          |
| 88  | Anonymous19       | SARFT International Department |
| 89  | Anonymous20       | SARFT Research                 |
| 90  | Anonymous21       | SARFT Research                 |
| 91  | Zhang Liang       | BTV                            |
| 92  | Ma Hong           | BTV                            |
| 93  | Liu Qi            | BTV                            |
| 94  | Wang Hui          | BTV                            |
| 95  | Xu Tao            | BTV                            |
| 96  | Zhong<br>Bingsong | BTV                            |
| 97  | Liu Xun           | BTV                            |
| 98  | Lei Lei           | BTV                            |
| 99  | Tian Xiangping    | BTV                            |
| 100 | Pang Zi           | BTV                            |
| 101 | Shen Lei          | BTV                            |
| 102 | Ma Lili           | BTV                            |
| 103 | Wu Jiang          | BTV                            |
| 104 | Wu Jin            | BTV                            |
| 105 | Chen Da Hong      | BTV                            |
| 106 | Zhong Shan        | BTV                            |
| 107 | Sun Wenjun        | BTV                            |
| 108 | Li Xiaoping       | BTV                            |
| 109 | Sun Zhen          | BTV                            |
| 110 | Zhang Siwen       | BTV                            |
| 111 | Liu Dandan        | BTV                            |
| 112 | Ma Junqi          | BTV                            |
| 113 | Yu Liangzong      | BTV                            |
| 114 | Zhang Daqi        | BTV                            |
| 115 | Yu Hua            | Shanghai TV                    |
| 116 | Yin Fan           | Shanghai TV                    |
| 117 | Zhang Qing        | Shanghai TV                    |
| 118 | Zhang Jing        | Shanghai TV                    |
| 119 | Wang<br>Duanduan  | CCTV International             |
| 120 | Wang Zhou         | CCTV International             |
| 121 | Xu Li             | CCTV International             |
| 122 | Ouyang Qun        | CCTV Taiwan                    |

|     |               |                           |
|-----|---------------|---------------------------|
| 123 | Wang Shilin   | <b>CCTv International</b> |
| 124 | Zhao Shuqing  | <b>Yunnan TV</b>          |
| 125 | Zhang Qi      | <b>Yunnan TV</b>          |
| 126 | Wang Maoliang | <b>Shenzhen TV</b>        |
| 127 | Zhang Fan     | <b>Liaoning TV</b>        |
| 128 | Zhu Xuantong  | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 129 | Kang Ning     | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 130 | Jing Muyao    | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 131 | Chen Li       | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 132 | Huang Bailian | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 133 | Liu Shuliang  | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 134 | Chang Hong    | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 135 | Deng Bin      | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 136 | Lian Baojun   | <b>CETV</b>               |
| 137 | Caojing Xing  | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 138 | Chen Luyu     | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 139 | Hai Tian      | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 140 | Lv Qiu Lu Wei | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 141 | Shen Liang    | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 142 | Mei Yi        | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 143 | Wei Yonglin   | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 144 | Li Fa         | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 145 | Yang Jinlin   | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 146 | Ma Dingsheng  | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 147 | Dong Jiayao   | <b>Phoenix Television</b> |
| 148 | Chen Fangzhu  | <b>Zhejiang TV</b>        |
| 149 | Li Xiufen     | <b>Zhejiang TV</b>        |
| 150 | Wang Hong     | <b>Fujian TV</b>          |
| 151 | Kang Bo       | <b>Fujian TV</b>          |
| 152 | Wang Zijian   | <b>Fujian TV</b>          |
| 153 | Shu Zhan      | <b>Fujian TV</b>          |
| 154 | Anonymous22   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 155 | Anonymous23   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 156 | Anonymous24   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 157 | Anonymous25   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 158 | Anonymous26   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 159 | Anonymous27   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 160 | Anonymous28   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 161 | Anonymous29   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 162 | Anonymous30   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 163 | Anonymous31   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 164 | Anonymous32   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 165 | Anonymous33   | <b>CPD</b>                |
| 166 | Anonymous34   | <b>CPD</b>                |

|     |                   |                                      |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 167 | Anonymous35       | CPD                                  |
| 168 | Anonymous36       | SARFT                                |
| 169 | Anonymous37       | SAPP                                 |
| 170 | Anonymous38       | SAPP                                 |
| 171 | Anonymous39       | SAPP                                 |
| 172 | Yin Yungong       | CASS-IOJCS                           |
| 173 | Ming Anxiang      | CASS-IOJCS                           |
| 174 | Shi Tongyu        | CASS-IOJCS                           |
| 175 | Zhang Dan         | CASS-IOJCS                           |
| 176 | Fang Ning         | CASS-Institute of Political Sciences |
| 177 | Hu Zhengrong      | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 178 | Gao Xiaohong      | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 179 | Li Yu             | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 180 | Zhang<br>Shaogang | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 181 | Zhang Zhe         | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 182 | Liu Liqun         | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 183 | Cao Guofen        | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 184 | Zhu Yujun         | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 185 | Cai Wenmei        | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 186 | Deng Xinxin       | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 187 | Zhang Yuqiang     | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 188 | Xu Qinyuan        | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 189 | Liu Xiaoying      | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 190 | Qin Fang          | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 191 | Zhu Yongchuan     | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 192 | Liu He            | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 193 | Liu Jinan         | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 194 | Hu Suli           | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 195 | Ding Junjie       | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 196 | Huang Shenmin     | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 197 | Hu Zhifeng        | CUC (formerly the BBI)               |
| 198 | Guo Zhenzhi       | Tsinghua University                  |
| 199 | Yin Hong          | Tsinghua University                  |
| 200 | Zhang Xiaoqin     | Tsinghua University/CCTV             |



# APPENDIX-II

## Parallel Chronology : The evolution of television news and political development in China

*compiled according to this thesis*

| POLITICS  | TELEVISION  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1921</b><br/>CCP's founding congress.</p>   | <p><b>1921</b><br/>CCP establishes policy of total media control at its founding congress.</p>  |
| <p><b>1939 onwards</b><br/>From 1939, television attracts attention of Mao &amp; CCP leadership.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>1955</b><br/>CCP's five-year development agenda for ideology &amp; education is established.</p>  | <p><b>1955</b><br/>CCP's five-year development agenda includes proposal to set up Beijing Television (BTV).</p>   |
| <p><b>1958</b><br/>China joins USSR to compete with US over television development.</p>   | <p><b>1958</b><br/>Birth of Chinese television:<br/>1 May: Beijing Television (BTV)<br/>1 October: Shanghai Television<br/>20 December: Heilongjiang TV</p>   |
| <p><b>1958-61: Great Leap Forward era</b><br/>Politicians begin to realise the power of television as a means of control.</p> <p>Premier Zhou Enlai provides further financial support to BTV and takes detailed interest in its operations.</p> <p>Zhou Enlai introduces "pool reporting" and thus gives priority to television reporting, especially to BTV.</p> <p>Many provincial television stations are established in line with the Great Leap Forward mood of the time.</p> | <p><b>1958 onwards:</b><br/>Re BTV's birth and development:<br/>Reaches radius of 25 km max<br/>Revolutionary music &amp; calligraphy<br/>Live broadcast debate<br/>Documentary<br/>Entertainment</p> <p>"News documentary era" begins:<br/>BTV's own news programmes, documentaries and live broadcasts<br/>First TV news presenter</p> <p>Provincial television stations required to submit news programmes to BTV for approval and selection for re-broadcast.</p> |

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| <p><b>1960:</b><br/>Government approval given for educational programmes.</p>   | <p><b>March 1960:</b><br/>"Moving the blackboard": BTV introduces televised classes and Beijing Television University is founded, successfully followed by others.</p>   |
| <p><b>September 1960:</b><br/>Zhou Enlai invites BBC journalist Felix Green to conduct televised interview for external broadcast for the first time.</p>   | <p><b>November 1960:</b><br/>BBC broadcasts Zhou Enlai interview, the first time that Western audiences have formally heard and seen a Chinese leader; it hits world headlines.</p>  |
| <p><b>1961 onwards:</b><br/>Zhou Enlai further realises the influence of television, and maximises its use for government purposes.</p> <p>Early government statement is made on global television policy: "Rooted in Beijing, facing the world" (1963).</p>                  | <p><b>1961:</b><br/>BTV reporters accompany Zhou Enlai on diplomatic tours abroad.<br/>BTV reporters go to Laos, Vietnam and North Korea to make documentaries.<br/>BTV's first overseas bureau established in Hanoi.</p>  |
| <p><b>1962:</b><br/>Unremitting natural disasters and Widespread poverty force CCP to:<br/>Cut television investments<br/>Stop import of television sets</p> <p>Power of television is realised by CCP with success of televised Ping Pong. CCP continues to support BTV.</p> | <p><b>1962:</b><br/>Effects of cuts in CCP funding:<br/>Closed 40% of television stations<br/>Remaining ones on limited airtime<br/>BTV focus on weekend programmes</p> <p>BTV broadcasts live the 26<sup>th</sup> World Ping Pong Championships (1962) in Beijing.<br/>Its success results in BTV initiating sports and entertainment programmes.</p> |
| <p><b>1966-1976: Cultural Revolution</b><br/>Mao and political élite use television in policy drive for Cultural Revolution.</p> <p>Gang of Four, seeing television's power and with clear political aims, decide to import colour television facilities.</p>                 | <p><b>1966-1976: Cultural Revolution effects:</b><br/>BTV forced to "ban bad programmes" and support of CR with updates on CR news, criticism of anti-revolutionaries, and features promoting CR to children.</p>  |
| <p><b>July 1966:</b><br/>Government approval for BTV</p>  | <p><b>July 1966:</b><br/>BTV removes names of authors,</p>   |

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| removal of names (and therefore any celebrity status) of television staff  | editors, reporters, producers, etc from screen.  |
| <b>August 1966:</b><br>Mao receives Red Guards at Tiananmen Square, a ceremony which BTV is required to broadcast.   | <b>August 1966</b><br>BTV fails to re-broadcast Red Guards ceremony quickly. The public outcry forces it to close on 31 December 1966.   |
| <b>December 1966:</b><br>CCP sends PLA to seize control of State Administration of Broadcasting, and the Gang of Four take tight control.  | <b>Early 1967:</b><br>BTV re-opens: Ordinary programmes replaced with government propaganda.<br>Most airtime given to "model operas".  |
| <b>1968 onwards:</b><br>The Gang of Four urges Shanghai Television to play active role in fight against class enemies.<br>But Gang of Four worried by public's heavy criticism of a brutal Class Struggle conference televised in March. | <b>1968:</b><br>Shanghai Television introduces live televised Class Struggle conferences. Audience disapproval at injustice and brutality forces a conference to close. Conferences are no longer broadcast live and need prior official approval. |
| <b>1970s:</b><br>CCP influenced by West through Mao's renewal of diplomatic talks to further China's international relations.  | <b>1971:</b><br>BTV introduces foreign ballet and opera in line with Class Struggle ideology, until they offend the Gang of Four.  |
| <b>1972:</b><br>US President Nixon's state visit to China, with Dr Henry Kissinger.  | <b>1972:</b><br>Chinese journalists covering Nixon's visit notice huge gap between their technology and that of US journalists.  |
| <b>1973:</b><br>The Chinese leadership are now able to finance the project to convert television to colour throughout China.   | <b>October 1973:</b><br>BTV starts broadcasting in colour.   |
| <b>January 1976:</b><br>Death of Zhou Enlai: Gang of Four use minimum television coverage to belittle his influence. A public outcry ensues.   | <b>January 1976:</b><br>Gang of Four order BTV to broadcast ordinary programmes and model operas, nothing to honour Zhou Enlai.  |
| <b>1976:</b><br>Arrest, trial and imprisonment of Gang of Four, with huge public approval.   | <b>1976:</b><br>CCP orders BTV to broadcast trial of Gang of Four. BTV can show forbidden programmes on Zhou Enlai at last, and belatedly reflects the public mourning.  |

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|---|---|
| <p><b>1976 onwards:</b><br/>Under Chairman Hua Guafeng, the government takes a new direction, triggering many developments in Chinese television.</p>   | <p><b>1976 onwards:</b><br/>BTV tests mood for political change with many innovations: brings back foreign programmes and films, traditional Chinese opera, programmes about love and romance; produces documentaries with true stories and real people, educational programmes and eight drama series; initiates the Spring Festival Variety Show.</p> |
| <p><b>1976:</b><br/>State Administration of Broadcasting (SAB) builds on 1971 discussions under Mao to transfer television signals around China.</p> <p>SAB also discusses the quality of television news around China</p>  | <p><b>July 1976:</b><br/>Birth of XWLB (<i>Xin Wen Lian Bo</i>) or <i>The United Primetime News</i>. Using signal transfers, this programme gathered up all breaking news around China, then broadcast on XWLB throughout China. Presented by an attractive young woman. After this, BTV organised all regional and local news programmes.</p>          |
| <p><b>May 1978:</b><br/>Central government renames BTV as China Central Television (CCTV), having noted its national importance.</p>  | <p><b>May 1978:</b><br/>With its renaming, CCTV now comes under direct control of CCPCC as well as SAB, meaning less freedom.</p>   |
| <p><b>1979:</b><br/>Deng Xiaoping US visit is broadcast to Chinese public. He accepts the US offer to provide China with the latest satellite television technology.</p> <p>Television from now on shows its huge influence in social, economic and political reform and development.</p> | <p><b>1979:</b><br/>Simultaneously, CCTV broadcasts US science and technology documentaries. Chinese audiences see the 1969 Apollo moon landing for the first time. Deng Xiaoping's US visit broadcasts have huge influence on Chinese, introducing them to modern Western life, resulting in their demand for lifestyle choices.</p>                   |
| <p><b>1979:</b><br/>Commercial advertising on television approved by CDP.</p>   | <p><b>January 1979:</b><br/>Shanghai Television and Guangdong Television showed the first commercial advertisements, followed by CCTV.<br/>This financed innovation in programme making, and more staff were recruited.</p>   |
| <p><b>1980s:</b><br/>State Administration of Broadcasting replaced by State Administration of</p>   | <p><b>1981-83:</b><br/>Guangdong Television (GTV) sets up Pacific Audio Visual Company to</p>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Radio and Television, television sharing an equal place with radio and seen as a new way of popular governing.</p>   | <p>produce programmes for export.</p> <p>GTV's other major innovations were:<br/> A localised, entertainment channel<br/> Interactive, lunchtime news<br/> A wide-reaching Cantonese channel</p>  |
| <p><b>1983-1992:</b><br/> CCTV journalists still all CCP-selected and follow party line. Deng Xiaoping told the Party to "seek truth from facts"</p> <p>CCP appreciates the power and facility they indirectly have to govern by supporting CCTV's innovations and reforms.</p>       | <p><b>1983-92:</b><br/> Television is now centre stage. From 1979 onwards, CCTV initiated new types of programme, with which audience could interact:<br/> Tackling social problems<br/> Negative news<br/> Watchdog programmes<br/> Thus changed government policies. Also introduced televised lectures</p> |
| <p><b>1983:</b><br/> State Ministry of Radio and Television sets up Four Level Television as a means of governing. Local and municipal governments given budgets to run their own television stations.</p>  | <p><b>1983-1987:</b><br/> Four Level Television resulted in growth from 20 to 336 television stations throughout China.</p> <p>Television overtakes radio in importance and audience size.</p>  |
| <p><b>1985:</b><br/> National People's Congress given round-the-clock coverage by CCTV. CCP gives approval to CCTV for live, interactive television interviews, as maturity in political understanding will bring about the social, economic and political development of China.</p>  | <p><b>1985:</b><br/> CCTV televises live interviews with political leaders at National People's Congress. Offers hotline for audience to ring in with questions, forming a bridge between leaders and people. CCTV &amp; CCP learn together, and CCTV assists leadership in media literacy.</p>               |
| <p><b>1992:</b><br/> Ministry of Radio and Broadcasting Yearbooks 1949-2005 show that a worldwide television network was seen as integral to national strategy. In line with Deng Xiaoping's call for more openness in politics, this places greater emphasis on news broadcasts.</p> | <p><b>1993:</b><br/> Shanghai Television (SOT) establishes a commercial channel, without any state funding. News remains core strategy, but in new formats.</p>   |
| <p><b>1993:</b><br/> CCP approves CCTV reforms. In 1995 the Standing Committee of Politburo shows its approval by inviting media minister to discuss development of</p>   | <p><b>1993:</b><br/> CCTV seeks reform of its own news programmes, including introduction of <i>Oriental Horizon</i>, a breakfast news programme, for the first time</p>  |

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| radio and television, offering assistance and solving set-backs.   | including news commentary. Executive producers have full political and financial control over the programme.  |
| <b>Since 2000:</b><br>Party praises CCTV's <i>Focus Report</i> , describing it as the "alternative government reception desk".   | <b>March 1993:</b><br>CCTV starts 12 news bulletins a day. Introduces cutting-edge programmes <i>News Probe</i> and <i>Focus Report</i> .   |
| <b>1993-2003:</b><br>Party approval of commercialisation of the media results in widespread media reform and gradual change in social, economic and political attitudes. | <b>1993-2003:</b><br>Widespread changes throughout the Chinese media, as a result of media commercialisation.   |
| <b>2001:</b><br>China Corporation of Radio, Film and Television is formed by amalgamating all broadcasting institutions to compete on the international market.          | <b>2001:</b><br>CCTV and CCP have by now both realised that in order to compete with Western media giants its national television needs to offer good quality news with a reliable brand image. |

# APPENDIX-2

## Glossary

### Great Leap Forward

The term Great Leap Forward was given to an economic plan initiated by Mao Zedong between 1958 and 1963. This project aimed to take advantage of China's large population to rapidly transform the country from a predominantly agrarian economy into a modern agriculturalised and industrialised society. His vision was to modernise China's economy so that it would rival that of the US by 1988.

The Great Leap Forward failed and it caused widespread famine in China, which resulted in the deaths of millions of people. Failure of the plan also forced Mao to resign as head of state in 1959 and later in 1960 the plan was abandoned.

### Cultural Revolution

In 1966, about seven years after resigning because of the failed Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution was Mao's idea of getting rid of people in the Chinese Communist Party and in Chinese society who were deemed to be emerging as a privileged class in China.

Mao's strategy in bringing about the Cultural Revolution was to mobilise students and young workers as his Red Guards to attack members of the Communist Party who were alleged to be liberal bourgeoisie elements. The Cultural Revolution plunged China into social and political chaos, leading to economic problems that lingered until 1976, when the Cultural Revolution finally ended.

### Gang of Four

The term Gang of Four refers to a faction that was formed during the Cultural Revolution led by Jiang Qing, Mao's third and last wife. Other members of the Gang of Four included Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Hongwen.

The four had their own political ambitions and they used Mao's name to implement their plans by victimising other party members who disagreed with them or were viewed as a threat during the Cultural Revolution. The Gang of Four committed many atrocities in the 10 years that the Cultural Revolution was in effect. After Mao's death in October 1976, the group was arrested and put on trial, leading to life and death sentences for them.

### **Model Operas**

Mao Zedong had on several occasions, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, expressed disapproval of the operas that were being staged. He complained that though there had been reforms most operas were still dominated by Western ideologies and lifestyles. Mao wanted opera that would depict proletariat heroes from workers, peasants or soldiers.

During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing found an opportunity to revise the content of several Beijing Operas into Model Operas, whose format and style would be followed as standard. She made sure that the model operas were broadcast all the time on television and radio, made into movies and advertised with everywhere with posters. Performances were given all over China and each performance had to be identical and adhere to the model.

### **Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign**

This was a campaign championed by Deng Xiaoping and other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party between October 1983 and February 1984. Its aim was to keep China free of Western liberal ideas that followed the "open door policy".

### **Symbolic Environment**

Symbolic environment relates to China's long-term policy to bring about a harmonious society where everyone works towards the realisation of peace and stability. The current Chinese leadership believes that economic growth alone would not improve China better, but that inclusivity is needed to enable people to live in harmony and prosper together.

### **Class Struggle**

Class Struggle refers to Mao's continued efforts throughout his leadership to rid China of the development of ideas that might lead to people differentiating between each other and produce a class system in society. This was one of the causes of the Cultural Revolution.



### **Falungong**

It is an illegal cult in China. It was founded by Li Hongzhi, who was an unemployed worker in Jilin province in 1990s. At the beginning, he was training older people in parks and squares for Taiji and Martial Arts while studying traditional Buddhism theories. He then started to introduce his own theory and promote himself as the Master appointed by fate to lead. However, besides being involved in financial scandals, he had also mobilised a large demonstration in Beijing against the Government in the 1990s, and this was judged to be against the law of China. Since Li's escape from China, he has been supported by a number of US, Canadian and Japanese organisations in his activities around the world.

