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Formatted entertainment in China: change in television production practices

Li, H.

Formatted Entertainment in China: Change in Television Production Practices

Hong Li

School of Media, Arts and Design

University of Westminster

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Abstract

Since the format *Got Talent* achieved great success in China, we can see the prevalence of format adoption and the television industry's reliance on western expertise. Television formats have provided Chinese television professionals not only with new creative inputs into indigenous production practices but also with license to experiment with ideas that may not fit in with the legacy of the national culture or the brand of the channel or network.

This study explores the growing trend toward television format adoption and localization as an industry development strategy in China, and provides rich data through qualitative methods such as field observation and semi-structured interviews. The results of the various analyses in the thesis demonstrate, in different ways, how Chinese professionals perceive the development of their practices and that of the whole television industry following the adoption and localization of formats.

Furthermore, the analyses also indicate how China's political and economic contexts impact on the ways in which television formats are localized.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The broadcast industry of the People's Republic of China has, in recent decades, transmitted international television formats to an ever greater extent. The popularity of formats in China may suggest not only its burgeoning interconnectivity with global television networks but also the standardization of content and technology. At the same time, political, cultural, commercial exigencies are reflected in the localization process, that is, the local television environment impacts upon the ways in which formats are localized.

The subject of this research is the growing trend toward television format adoption and localization as an industry development strategy in China. The research aims to (a) examine the influences of television formats on TV production practices and (b) examine the consequences of local political and economic contexts upon format localization.

This chapter is an introduction to the issues of the thesis, the context

of the study and the relevance of the research. It also draws an outline of this research.

The Local Context of the Study

With China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 and its sponsorship of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, China has been facing both a great number of unprecedented opportunities and challenges. As Lee (2003) stated, 'China and its media have been caught in the crosscurrents of nationalism and globalism' (p1). On one hand, an order by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) was issued in October 2011 and came into effect on 1 January 2012 to reduce entertainment broadcasts by two-thirds during prime time, which Lee (2003) interprets as the government trying to retain its 'monopoly over tremendous coercive power and resources' (p2). However, because of the changing nature of audience consumption towards online and mobile media, it is interesting to note that the curb on 'excessive entertainment' has driven some among the audience to turn to streaming-video sites with entertainment content (Chao and Tejada, 2012).

Meanwhile, it has long been the dream of Chinese broadcasters to be global players in the worldwide market. The launching of the 'Going Out' policy has also offered Chinese broadcasters a promising prospect of stepping out of the Chinese market to export more of their own creative content.

In this greater context, Chinese media have to take challenges from competitors from abroad as well as those inland. According to Zhao (1998), 'although the media are still owned by the state, their economic basis has been shifted from complete reliance on state subsidies to increasing dependence on commercial revenue from advertising, sponsorships, and business operations in other areas' (p67). In addition, with the development of multi-channeling (increasing number of channels), we can see the appearance of audience fragmentation, namely, lower average audiences per channel (Economic Analysis, 2004), which means that audiences have more choices and that competition among media conglomerates has also intensified (Chen, 2008). Therefore, Chinese television stations increasingly began to search for the formula which is already well established as popular entertainment and proven successful in

other markets. As Chen (2008) argued, 'those who can generate more resources and create more popular programmes will be the winners in the market' (p16). But as to why Chinese broadcasters tend to simply buy formats rather than create their own, Lei revealed that the 'media business is a risky business as the taste of audience is unpredictable. The most important part in content production is the idea, which is equivalent to R & D in corporate function. Buying some successful formats can surely reduce the risk comparatively and to some extent have cost efficiency' (Chen, 2008, p24).

In this context, the deployment of formats from foreign countries has become prevalent in the Chinese television industry and has also been seen by Chinese broadcasters as a means of increasing audience share.

Research overview

The overarching argument is that production practices are being affected by the adoption of television formats as an industry development strategy, and on the other hand, the local political and economic contexts have vital explanatory power in impacting upon the ways in which formats are localized. Keane (2002) points out that

'formats are the cost effective key, and it is the format that will even increasingly offer a reliable map to the highways and byways of the new production landscape' (p1). This research updates the discussion by (a) illustrating the changes in production practices consequential upon the format adoption and (b) explaining the critical and often overlooked interplay of local broadcasting rights, regulation and competition and how these determine the ways in which television formats are localized.

The key research questions are:

1. How do Chinese professionals perceive the development of their practices and that of the whole TV industry consequential upon the adoption and localization of formats?

2. What are the constraints and benefits of the political and economic contexts upon format localization, according to television professionals?

Research structure

The research is set out in four parts.

Part one: Background

Ch 1 Introduction

Ch 2 Television media and transnational television format in China

Ch 3 Literature review and theory

Part two: Research design

Ch 4 Methodology and research design

Part three: Findings

Ch 5 Findings deriving from the research question one

Ch 6 Findings deriving from the research question two

Part four: Conclusions

Ch 7 Summary and general conclusions

Part one of the thesis comprises three chapters, which provide contextual and theoretical frameworks and build on reviews of the academic literature relating to the issues most relevant for the aim of the research. **Chapter 1** provides an introduction to the research.

Chapter 2 provides background information and essential

knowledge in relation to the subject of this research. It explains what a television format is and its cultural, business and legal dimensions, explores the global and local extent of the television format trade, and accounts for the advantages of format adoption and localization. This chapter also introduces the historical, political, social and economic contexts of the contemporary Chinese television industry and offers an overview of the development of transnational television formats in China in the past decade. This background knowledge is crucial for the understanding of the complex production context that Chinese TV professionals deal with in the adoption and localization of television formats.

Chapter 3 discusses relevant theories to enhance the understanding of the researcher's theoretical approach in this study. This chapter combines the literature review with a discussion of the theoretical context, presents relevant theoretical perspectives and establishes theoretical frameworks for the core discussions and arguments. Both western established conceptual frameworks of media globalization and Chinese scholarly studies on global television flow are reviewed in this chapter.

Part two provides methodological framework for the analysis. **Chapter 4** articulates the researcher's consideration of methodological choices and constructs the specific research design of the two methodological approaches- participant observation and interviews with industry professionals. This chapter also discusses possible methodological problems, obstacles and limitations of the research design, addresses some relevant issues that emerged during the fieldwork, and explains the precautions taken to ensure the largest possible validity and reliability of the results.

Part three provides the findings and analysis of this research. It draws together the findings from the qualitative research including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with local producers, flying producers, broadcasters, policy makers and regulators. **Chapter 5** aims to answer the first key research question of how Chinese professionals perceive the development of their practices and that of the whole TV industry consequential upon the adoption and localization of formats. In doing so, it also describes how the format shows are produced in the local context, how the international formats influence the local production procedures, and how the import of formats is changing production approaches in

China. In addition, it explains how Chinese professionals perceive the knowledge about the production they learned from the international formats, and what transnational television formats mean for Chinese TV.

Television is a heavily regulated industry; government intervention inevitably impacts upon the television production market. An example is found in the rules that SAPPRFT introduced in October 2013 to reduce the number of television formats Chinese broadcasters can acquire and further limit reality shows and other entertainment shows on satellite television stations. Consequently, **Chapter 6** aims to answer the second key research questions to explore the constraints and benefits of the political and economic contexts upon format localization. It will cover the corresponding regulatory, economic and ideological environment in China, and will also examine how national regulatory regimes and policy actors impact on the ways in which television formats are localized.

Lastly, **Chapter 7** summarizes the overarching argument and draws conclusions on both the analytical results and methodology of the research. It also briefly provides an overview of the very recent

developments in format production and consequently sheds light on the future localization of television formats in China from a transnational perspective. At the time of writing, the researcher can only make some assumptions about probable conclusions, which are included in the next sub-chapter for initial findings.

The Final Part is the bibliography. This thesis applies the Harvard referencing system.

Television media and transnational television format in China

2.0 Introduction

The television industry in China has gone through significant changes since 1958, and has also experienced rapid development over the past six decades with a rate comparable to the nation's economic growth and structural transformation. With the development of China's television media, the gap between Chinese television industry and its western counterparts has started to narrow down. In order to elaborate the uniqueness and complication of the current television production environment in China, this chapter provides background information and knowledge essential to the subject of this research. It explains what a television format is and its cultural, business and legal dimensions, explores the global and local extent of the television format trade, and accounts for the advantages of format adoption and localization. This chapter also introduces the historical, political, social and economic contexts of the contemporary Chinese

television industry and offers an overview of the development of transnational television formats in China in the past decade. This background knowledge is crucial for the understanding of the complex production context that Chinese television professionals deal with in the adoption and localization of television formats.

2.1   The historical context of the Chinese television industry

The development of China's television industry has been divided into various historical periods. Even though the divisions of different phases that are defined by scholars are not the same, the approaches and criteria that they adopt are similar. Considering the unique socio-political context of China, politics and policies rather than markets or profits guide the process of China's television industry development to a large degree. In other words, the periodization symbolizes key policy events over time, since the development of China's television industry is mainly led by the China's socialist system and the state ownership of television broadcasting institutions in China.

'In the pre-commercialization days, the functions of media were limited to those of a state apparatus, providing guidance,

propaganda, and education' (Chan and Chan, 1998, p650). Television broadcasting institutions in China, as an outcome of the planned economy, were parts of fully state-owned public service institutions that symbolize 'a one-to-many model of broadcasting and its programming served the interests of propagandists' (Keane, 2003, p95). With the in-depth economic reform in China and the rapid growth of the national economy, markets and profits have started to play an increasingly significant role in the development and industrialization of China's television industry. Regardless of the fact that the various overlapping institutions of the Party and the government have determinative influence, the Chinese government, especially China's television industry has taken into account the factors of markets and the potentials of profits when setting out policies. As Weber (2002) states, 'the party's decision to introduce a competitive, self-funding structure into the domestic television system since 1995 centered around implementing western management practices and thinking, advertising revenue building, foreign programming, technology transfer, foreign investment, and improved consumer choice' (p57).

Therefore, when exploring and examining the development process of China's television industry over the past sixty years, the candidate needs to first take into account the policies that are either stated or behavior-related and then market-related factors. The development process can be divided into two primary periods that are shown below: the period of 'naissance and cautious advance under the socialist command economy system' (1958-1978) and the period of 'industrialization under the socialist market economy system' (1979 to the present) (Huang *et al.*, 2004; Lu, 2002; Wu, 2003).

Table 2.1 The development of China's television industry

Periods	Phases	Stages	
			1958
Commencement and cautious advance under the socialist command economy system (1958-1978)			
			1978
Industrialization under the socialist market economy system (1979 to the present)	Marketization (1979-1996)	Initial stage (1979-1983)	
		Accelerated stage (1983-1992)	
		High-speed stage (1992-1996)	
			1996
	Marketization adjustment and conglomeration practice (1997-2004)		
	Post-conglomeration (2005 to the present)		
			Present

Source: Huang, *et al.* (2004); Lu (2002); Wu (2003)

2.1.1 The period of 'commencement and cautious advance under the socialist command economy system' (1958 to 1978)

The foundation of the China's first television station, Beijing Television Station (China Central Television nowadays), on 1 May 1958 signals the beginning of this period. Regarded as political or ideological institution under a socialist command economy system, television in China during this time did not comprise profit-driven institutional units until the reform and opening up policy of China in 1978. It was considered as a news media to disseminate political propaganda and treated as the mouthpiece of the Party and the government to educate and tame the general public and the people all over the nation.

2.1.2 The Period of 'industrialization under the socialist market economy system' (1979 to the present)

It was not until the Chinese government adopted the reform and opening up policy and initiated economic reform towards the end of the 1970s that China's television industry began to develop along a path of industrialization with Chinese characteristics and experience a number of internal changes. The 'open door' policy brought rapid growth in economy but also considerable change to cultural, political

and social domains in China. Television can no long be considered as a simple tool with political or ideological attribute to disseminate political propaganda under the socialist command economy system. With the gradual development, it has started to have both ideological (political) and industrial (economic) attributes. The approximately fourty years of development consist of three phases as shown in Table 2.1: marketization, marketization adjustment and conglomeration practice, and post-conglomeration.

2.1.2.1 Marketization (1979-1996)

As shown in Table 2.1, the candidate divides this phase into three stages to provide an overview of policies and historical events during the process of marketization: initial stage, accelerated stage, and high-speed stage.

(1)   Initial stage

The first television commercial about 'Ginseng Longan Wine' was broadcasted on Shanghai Television Station (Dragon TV nowadays) on the day of Chinese New Year in 1979, which symbolized a new

way of income generation rather than total reliance on government subsidies. The China's first television advertisement can be considered as a symbolization of the start of television industrialization in China under a socialist market economy system. However, television broadcasting institutions in China were still state-owned and most of them had no profit demands. Even though the television stations that featured advertising generated some revenue, their operations still relied on meager subsidies from the government because the income generated from advertising was quite small.

(2)   Accelerated stage

In 1983, a policy named 'Television Stations Established on Four Administrative levels' was introduced at the working conference organized by the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television of the PRC (The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the PRC nowadays), which signals the beginning of this stage. The primary objective of this policy was that television stations should be established on four administrative levels, i.e. the nation level, the province level, the city level and the county level, in order to

enhance the cover of television broadcasting in China. The number of television stations has increased dramatically year by year and the television industry has progressed rapidly, since the policy was implemented. According to Lu (2002), the number of terrestrial television station in China was increased to 586 in 1992 from 52 in 1983, which indicates the policy was effective in achieving the popularization of television broadcasting at the four Chinese administrative levels. And the government ceased to provide subsidies to television stations because the revenue television stations obtained from advertising rose significantly.

However, the underlying problems of the policy cannot be overlooked even though it to some degree signals China's television industry improved greatly and entered a new era of self-dependence. First of all, when the policy was implemented at the beginning of China's reform and opening up, the financial capability of each government from the national to the county level was inadequate and limited. In this situation, the policy makers of broadcasting system should have focused on building up and improving the central and provincial television stations rather than excessively extending the popularization and cover of television broadcasting all over the

nation. The second problem is that the policy failed to be in control of the number and scale of television stations, which gave rise to hidden problems for 'the further development of the television industry in China, e.g. untrammeled proliferation of quantity and repetitious building of television stations' (Diao, 2009, p157).

(3)   High speed stage

This stage began with the 'Decision Regarding Accelerating the Development of the Third Industry', which was issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council of the PRC in 1992. The decision significantly changed and focused on the development and escalation of the third industry in China, directly bringing about the rapid progress of the marketization of China's television industry. The core of the decision was that 'it required the state-owned institutional units and enterprises appertaining to the third industry to gradually transform their business (or operation) patterns from institutional to commercial (or 'enterprisation') and to embrace the self-management as well as assume the sole responsibility for profit and/or loss' (Wu, 2003, p15).

However, the decision indicated that the intrinsic quality of television stations in China were still the state-owned institutional units, even though the government officially recognized the economic attribute of the television industry that is categorized into the third industry. That means it only required the television stations to transform their business pattern and management form but did not change the state-owned ownership of China's television stations.

As discussed above, the phase of marketization has positive aspects such as establishing economic (market) and political (policy) environments for the further development of industrialization in China's television industry. Viewing from the political aspect, the government allows television stations to produce diverse content and also gradually deregulates the television production and management. And in the sphere of market, the income of television stations transferred from the government subsidies to the revenue generated from rapidly increasing television commercials. However, the phase of marketization has two negative aspects as well. First, the government always emphasizes on the ideological attribute of television by extensively regulating the market behaviors of

television stations. The essential problem is the state-owned ownership of all of China's television stations. The second negative aspect is that the blind development and repetitious construction are caused by the early stage marketization of television industry that fails to formulate comprehensive plans for the sustainable development. All of the problems above contribute to the unsuccessful progression of the conglomeration practice in the next phase.

2.1.2.2 Marketization adjustment and conglomeration practice (1997-2004)

'Notices on Enhancing Regulations of Press, Publication, Radio and Television' (Document No. 37) was issued by the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council of the PRC in 1996. This document stipulated China's television industry to face the existing problems such as low quality television production, serious waste of human, financial and other social resources due to repetitious building and blind development. Lu (2002) suggested 'emphasis on China's television industrialization should move to the control and the decrease of the number of television stations and structural reform of

the television industry' (p106). The emergence of Document No. 37 signals going into a phase of marketization adjustment and conglomeration practice, which is made up of two stages: (1) marketization adjustment to restrict the quantity of television stations and (2) conglomeration to continue reducing the number of television stations and to carry out television conglomeration reform.

In 1999, The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the PRC promulgated its 'Views on Enhancing Regulations of Constructing Cable Networks of Radio and Television' (Document No. 82). Because there were still more than 3,000 television stations by the end of 1999 even though the number had declined since Document No. 37 was introduced. The core of the Document No. 82 was stated as follows: 'the separation of television stations and broadcasting networks; the consolidation of radio and television as well as cable television and terrestrial television; implementing the 'Television Stations Established on Three Administrative Levels' policy in place of the previous 'Television Stations Established on Four Administrative Levels' policy, i.e. closing all county television stations and abrogating the qualification of county governments to establish television stations, permitting

establishment at three levels only (central, provincial and prefecture/city)' (Diao, 2009, p161). In other words, the governments on those three levels only would be qualified to establish broadcasting institutions such as media groups and broadcasting corporations. As Diao (2009) stated, 'China's television industrialization now entered a new stage of reduced numbers of television stations and the contemporaneous practice of television conglomeration reform' (p162).

The first media group at the sub-provincial city level – Wuxi Broadcasting Group was established in 1999, which signals the beginning of China's television conglomeration trial at the city level. And the establishment of the first broadcasting corporation at the provincial level – Hunan Media Group heralded the formal and comprehensive commencement of the television conglomeration reform in China (Office of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, 2004). However, in 2004 it was announced at the working conference of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television that 'further establishment of state-owned institutional media groups, broadcasting corporations or broadcasting groups with political or ideological leanings would be

forbidden' (Diao, 2009, p164). In other words, the establishment of only state-owned television stations or radio stations with institutional attribute was allowed. Therefore, the authority offered two options to more than twenty existing state-owned institutional broadcasting corporations or media groups that were functioning at that time. The first choice was to separate the operation of the institutional/administrative sections from that of commercial/industrial sections and substitute the original name for 'General Station of Radio and Television' in order to make more distinguished the state-owned institutional attribute of these state-owned general stations of radio and television. The second option was to keep the original title with the state-owned institutional attribute of broadcasting groups, and also to separate the commercial/industrial sections from the broadcasting groups and then establish a separate commercial/industrial corporation or groups.

However, the television conglomeration was terminated after five years. The main reason was that there existed problems in the process of implementing television conglomeration in China. First, re-allocation of human and industrial resources is intervened by the

government and organizational restructuring is led by administrative instructions. That is, the television conglomeration in China did not proceed via market behaviors like in many western countries, whereas it was totally guided by bureaucracy. The second problem is the regulation approach. In western countries, the regulation of structure has been transferred to the regulation of behavior during the process of media reform. Hence, as Lu (2002) noted, the term 'deregulation' indicates 'the customary conglomeration regulation approach of television and other media industries in most western developed countries' (p87). However, the media reform in China remains in the 'regulation of structure' stage, that is, there exist many problems in the structure of China's television industry to be dealt with. The third problem lies in the only pathway to television conglomeration that leads to merger or consolidation. However, in other western countries, media conglomeration is normally achieved through diverse pathways such as acquisition, merger and strategic alliance. As discussed above, the combination of China's unique political and economic structure and system, bureaucratic regulation and organizational arrangement has led to the failure of the television conglomeration reform in China.

2.1.2.3 Post-conglomeration (2005 to the present)

Though having gone through the failure of conglomeration, television industrialization in China has progressed into the post-conglomeration stage. The first feature of this phase is that the government emphasizes on its regulation on radio frequencies and television channels and also strictly restricts foreign capital to enter into the television industry in China. As Yin *et al.* (2006) noted, 'in 2005, on many formal or informal occasions, the SARFT of the PRC consistently emphasized that since radio frequencies and television channels are monopolistic resources exclusively owned by the nation or the government, they cannot be traded, rented to, or contracted with any enterprises, firms or individuals' (p64). The second feature is that private capital is gradually deregulated and allowed to enter into China's television industry. Yu (2011) describes the Chinese case as a 'hybrid political-economic structure that is non-liberal, anti-liberal and neoliberal, all in one' (p32), and he also points out that neoliberal strategies conflict with 'socialist legacies, traditional values, post-socialist dilemmas, and presumer desires' (p33) and have influences on media industries in China. As he stated,

'This is the paradox of neoliberalism, or rather 'disingenuous neoliberalism', in China: a passion for intervention in the name of non-intervention, all in the name of 'serving the people' under the rubric of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. The market is not all free. It dances with the magic wands of both global capitalism and the Chinese authoritarian state.' (Yu, 2011, p33).

Television has become one of the most influential and important media in China since it started to develop in 1958. According to the statistics provided by 'The General Situation of Development of China's Radio, Film and Television in 2014' (Office of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, 2015) and 'Innovation and Transition – 2014 Chinese Media Industry Development Final Report' (Cui, 2015), the television viewing population had reached to 96.34 per cent of the overall population by the end of 2014. The gross income generated from television advertising in 2014 was 1500 billion Chinese Yuan (approximately 250 billion US Dollars) with a consistent annual rise of 18 per cent. These statistics allowed television commercials to maintain the primary source of revenue in television industry in China.

2.2 The economic context of the contemporary Chinese television industry - Entertainment television: Chinese television's response to media commercialization

Following the implementation of the reform and opening policy in 1978, the television industry, like most of other economy sectors, began to develop rapidly and to be liberalized gradually. In the meantime, advertising was introduced in the late 1970s, which signaled that the commercialization started to change Chinese television.

It was not until the late 1980s that entertainment became an increasingly important means to attract audiences. As to what the television entertainment refers to, especially in the Chinese context, Gray (2008) gives its definition as 'programmes, segments, or channels that enjoy, amuse, delight, and perhaps even enlighten. Or, to be precise, it is to refer to television that tries to achieve such goals. Given the vast differences in in individual notions of what actually is entertaining and what is not, by television entertainment, I mean programming designed with entertainment as the primary goal' (p3). During the period from 1984 to 1989 a total of

approximately 6,000 episodes of television dramas were produced domestically (Zeng, 2009). In some sense, this period of time can be regarded as inaugurating the age of Chinese entertainment television. Since then, the idea to experiment with the soap opera approach to drama production started to dawn upon a group of Chinese media workers.

In 1990, China's first domestically produced soap opera *Yearnings* (渴望) seized the whole nation's imagination and caused a sensation across the country. It was not the first serial drama that was aired in China, but it was the first drama focusing on relationships between friends and families and dreams of ordinary Chinese people, making it what people called China's first real 'soap opera' (Latham, 2007). In the next three years, many other soap operas such as *Stories in the Editor's Office* (编辑部的故事), *I Love you Absolutely* (爱你没商量), and *Beijinger in New York* (北京人在纽约) were broadcasted after *Yearnings* formed the beginning of Chinese television drama. These dramas, in a thematic sense, turned to deal with various sensitive issues and concerns that ordinary Chinese commonly related to, rather than somber themes about the nation or history. Since then, television dramas have burgeoned a lot of scholarly attention and

come to constitute a major part of the cultural landscape in contemporary China.

Commercialization has been going on throughout the post-Mao era since advertisements were introduced in the late 1970s. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping made his speech about the move to take bolder steps in economic development and reform, which marked that market economy in China was formally established. Not only were the media regarded as the Chinese Communist Party (CPC)'s mouthpiece and ideological instrument, but also media workers saw it as a medium of aesthetic and intellectual engagement, which had commodity values. The year of 1992 has been widely recognized as transforming the face of Chinese television in a higher degree of media commercialization. Advertising revenues were soared for several consecutive years, which resulted in television as the leading advertising medium by replacing newspaper. As market-oriented institutional improvisations proliferated and provincial stations launched their satellite channels to seek for a wider audience, the competition for advertising revenues intensified. It was recognized that television drama became essentially a medium for advertisement and hence turned to be financially important to

television stations. Even state-funded and 'propaganda-themed dramas aimed to emulate commercial entertainment' (Bai and Song, 2014, p3).

In contrast to television drama that were, and still are, an unrivalled form of television entertainment in terms of output it generates, the supply of entertainment programmes such as variety shows, game shows and dating shows became steady and voluminous in the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, entertainment programmes took up an increasing share of the total hours of television programming, from approximately 26% in 1992 to 44% in 2000 (Zhang, 2002, p24).

CCTV took the lead by launching two entertainment programmes in 1990- *Zhengda Variety Show* (正大综艺) and *Variety Panorama* (综艺大观). While it was sponsored and co-produced by a Thai-Chinese agricultural fertiliser company (Zhengda Consortium) based in Thailand, the *Zhengda Variety* can be considered as China's first authentic variety show format and remains the most influential variety show in China. However, by 1997 it began to suffer the fate that most successful programmes would face in China. When the *Zhengda Variety* was widely circulated and heavily imitated

throughout China, its market value generally diminished. Like other economy sectors in China, television industry is evidence of what the Chinese call 'duplicate construction', that is, 'everyone rushes in and produces the same kinds of products and targets the same markets within a particular locality' (Keane, 2002, p4).

However, Hunan Satellite Television (HSTV) made its way to rise as a leading force in Chinese television entertainment by liberally borrowing from successful television shows. For example, HSTV launched *The Citadel of Happiness* (快乐大本营) in 1997, a game show targeted at the youth audience, and *A Date with Roses* (玫瑰之约) in 1998, a dating show. Within a short space of airing time *The Citadel of Happiness* became the most popular entertainment show in China, which demonstrated that the shortcut for provincial television stations to compete in the domestic market was to concentrate on entertainment.

2.3 The political context of the contemporary Chinese television industry

Considering that the domestic television industry is still in its adolescent stage, the authorities sought rigidly to restrict the flow of foreign programmes into the local market, strictly regulate the domestic industry by keeping programme content under tight state control. Until now the mass media are still to some extent regarded as the 'throat' of the Communist Party of China, and are target to disseminate the propaganda on behalf of the authorities. Therefore, the roles that regulators play are very ambiguous in both supporting broadcasting institutions to foster growth and banning profitable programmes if they are considered to be 'harmful' to 'socialist values' of the Chinese society. As Zhao (2003) describes these conflicting policy goals,

'The restructuring and rationalization of China's national media system under market logic has predominantly taken the form of bureaucratic monopoly capitalism. Under this system, media organizations under the control of the party state, which had previously single-mindedly pursued ideological and cultural objectives, are now more or less in line with the capitalist system, assuming the twin objectives of capital accumulation and ideological legitimization.' (p63).

Given the rapid growth of the domestic television market, Yu (2011) regards the process of media reforms in China as an experiment with a two-track system in the industry of media and communication. While exerting control over the news production sector, the entertainment production has gradually become market-oriented.

'While the market power and imperative are unleashed and harnessed to stimulate domestic media and communication industries, the party logic dominates how media are managed and who controls the backbone of China's media and communication infrastructure.' (Yu, 2011, p39).

2.3.1 the conflict between market growth and content control

The Chinese television industry started to strive for profits when moving from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy, and its production and distribution had become more profit-driven and less public service-oriented. Television stations and independent production companies at the national, provincial, and municipal levels went through a transition from depending on government

subsidies to generating revenue on their own. Television stations even developed business models by selling advertising slots to generate revenues. Since the value of advertising slots is directly connected to the audience ratings of the respective programmes, the revenue generation can only be achieved by making programme to a high standard and catering to the tastes of audiences.

However, when the programmes that are popular among audiences contradict with the preferences of the authorities, the conflict between interests may happen. Even though both western countries and China consider such content (for example, excessive violence, sex, gambling, etc.) as being harmful to society, there exists more subjects that are censored by regulators, such as 'those that threaten the political stability of the on-party-state by questioning the legitimacy of party rule, even if obliquely' (Niedenfuhr, 2013, p97). While the content is being gradually liberalized in the marketization process of television broadcasting institutions, the Chinese authorities strives for maintaining political stability in China by devoting considerable and substantial resources.

The commercialization of television production has brought about 'a focus on entertainment, which has become a target for criticism from many of China's conservative intellectuals' (Keane, 2002, p80). The dominating ideologies (i.e. the values of collectivism and socialism) are often considered being threatened and promoting western capitalistic value (i.e. the values of individualism and consumerism), if applying the logic of market-oriented economy to the television production. This phenomenon indicates a widespread concern about the latent impact that western culture or ideologies have on Chinese media. However, it is inevitable to see that cultural forces, regulatory policies and economic development in contemporary China are shuffling to search for a new balance.

In China, there are two ways of understanding the television commercialization. While some consider that 'commercial interests will liberalize television and minimize party propaganda', others believe that 'the process of commercialization can also enhance party propaganda' (Zhong, 2001, p169). Even though greater autonomy in programme making and fund raising had been stimulated by the reduction of government subsidies and the increase of revenue from television advertising, the new mindset that media executives

obtained in the process of commercialization were still under the tight control of the government on China's television industry. While western advanced management approaches and production practices were introduced to enhance the commercial attribute of television broadcasting institutions, television in China has served a role as 'state apparatus, providing guidance, propaganda, and education' (Chan and Chan, 1998, p650).

2.3.2 Television regulation and state intervention

A three-tier system of political power is dedicated to regulate the content of television programmes, and the guidelines are given from the three pillars of party, state and military and operated at central, provincial and local levels. Television professionals have to obtain the approval from the dedicated regulatory departments of the provincial level by submitting their programmes for examination before broadcasting on screen. After the initial approval, the programme will be undergone further examinations by the dedicated committees led by the State Administration for Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (abbreviated as SAPPRFT), which plays an

important and principal role in regulating and censoring the content of television programmes.

New genres such as science fiction in 2008 and mythical themes in 2010 were introduced onto television screens by SAPPRFT, because these categories were very popular with audiences. However, the TV dramas about supernatural powers were then identified by the authorities as being 'ideologically incorrect', because these kinds of drama shows were formulated with 'superstitions, fatalism and reincarnation' (SAPPRFT, 2011).

2.4 The Deployment and Development of Television Formats in China

In recent decades, transnational franchising and local adaptation of international formats has come to play an increasing important part in the global television market. Television formats such as *Big Brother, Survivor, Idol* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* can be found with diverse local versions in different areas and countries. This part is aimed to explain what a television format is and its cultural, business and legal dimensions, explore the global and local extent of

the television format trade, and account for the advantages of format adoption and localization

2.4.1 what is a television format

The international television industry gives a definition of a television format as a programming idea that is developed in the local country and then sold for adaptation elsewhere (Schmitt *et al.*, 2005). This definition describes television formats as programming concepts and systematic television production practices that have been exported to other countries outside its country of origin for making localized versions. However, if looking at television formats beyond this pragmatic perspective rather than in a theoretical manner, a television format can be 'the set of programme invariables from which the variables of a concrete programme episode are produced' (Jensen, 2007, p14). As illustrated below, formats organize a comprehensive variation ranging from programme graphics to set designs of the studio in order to regulate the content of different versions of localized format shows.

'Fundamentally, formats constitute process of systematization of difference within repetition, tying together the television as a whole, national television industries, programme ideas, particular adaptations, and individual episodes of specific adaptations.' (Moran and Keane, 2004, p200).

By quoting the 'incomplete equivalence', a term coined by Lotman (1990), Moran and Keane (2004) described the connections among different levels involved in the format as below.

'Indeed, in stressing the multiple levels contained in an element such as genre (or, for that matter, format), Lotman has coined the useful term 'incomplete equivalence' as a means of designating the necessary relationship between particular instances of the phenomenon or that obtaining between the level of the instance and the general level of the phenomenon. No adaptation can ever constitute the only possible or correct rendering of a particular format and neither can any single adaptation ever constitute the range of possible renderings of any format.' (Moran and Keane, 2004, p201).

2.4.2 Global and local context of the television format market

2.4.2.1 The global format market

In recent years, the transnational television format exchange has experienced an exponential increase. According to the study undertaken by Keane (2015), 367 formats were localized and broadcast in the 18 countries and the UK had the largest number of different formats. Approximately 26 per cent of all different formats circulated in the 18 countries have originated from Britain. By analyzing the three-year survey from 2011 to 2013, we can see there is a 22 per cent increase in the number of formats that have been designed and circulated in the targeted 18 countries and a 24 per cent increase in the number of broadcast hours of format shows. The total production value that formats have created in the 18 markets has also increased from 3.6 billion euros to 4.2 billion euros. The statistics indicates that the UK is the most important player as format originator in the global television format market, whereas the United States has spent the largest amount of financial resources on format production. Also, the Netherlands, as the second most significant player as format originator, occupies 18 per cent of the total format

hours, which is mainly because the existence of the format production company Endemol is in the Netherlands. And the USA is the third important format originator with 16 per cent of the format hours. By observing the recent situation of the format markets in both the UK and the USA, there is some evidence showing that their shares in the format market have decreased slightly; however, the percentage of the format hours that the Netherlands have produced has grown faster and stronger than the other players in the whole format market.

The genre of the quiz and game show is considered as the most important one genre with the largest number of broadcasting hours and 50 percent of all format hours broadcast in the 18 markets. However, the quiz and game show has grown by only 10 per cent, which is increased slowly than other genres. Reality show format comes in a close second most important genre with 26 per cent of the format hours and grows at a rate of 24 per cent that is equivalent to that of the overall market. Besides, the lifestyle genre has grown more strongly than the other genres with the highest growth rate of 224 per cent.

2.4.2.2 The structure and mechanisms of the international format market

This part will briefly illustrate the mechanisms and players that are involved in the international format market and roughly describe the structure of the format market. Figure 2.1 below shows the relationship among various players on the television format market and the process of the format trade among countries.

Figure 2.1 The structure of the international format market
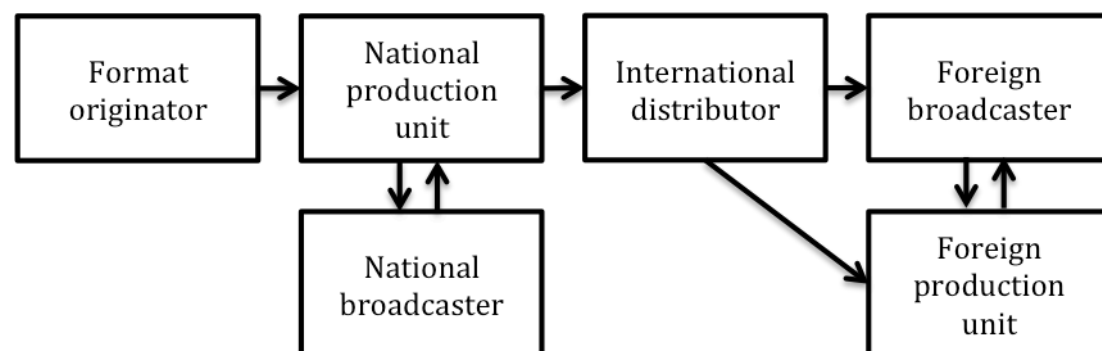
The figure illustrates how a format that originates as an idea in a television professional is developed into a proposal and sold to a local television station. If the original version that the local broadcaster produces is successful with local audiences, the show will be designed as a standard format and then be able to enter the international market for format packages. As Jensen (2007)

described, format packages mean 'the format concepts sold for local adaptation - in which the format originator sells the format rights via an international distributor to one or more foreign broadcasters and production units' (p19). A format package typically involves the programme bible and previous versions of local adaptation in other markets that include original version, localized versions, audience ratings, production procedures, etc. By viewing the mechanism of the format trade, it is necessary to note that the television station, which commissions the format from television professionals and makes it into a format show in the first place, plays as a significant gateway to the international format market. The national broadcasters make decisions about which ideas to commission and therefore which formats to get through to the global format market. Besides, it is important to note that the word 'format' used throughout this research refers to what is defined as 'format package' above by Jensen.

In addition, it is also worth noting that the trans-national media corporations such as Fremantle Media and Endemol often gain a lot of benefits and profits from integrating in the format exploitation chain on both the national level and the trans-national level. On one

hand, these large media conglomerates, on a national level, typically take full control of the production and distribution of the television formats. On the other hand, they closely cooperate with or corporately own various local production companies, various local originators and various local distribution companies, due to international mergers and joint ventures among media companies. For example, the production companies such as Australian Grundy are part of Fremantle Media.

A number of annual trade shows for television formats across the world have been organized, such as MIPCOM in Cannes and the Monte Carlo Television Festival, on which format packages are displayed and sold. The cultural power of these international content market has been traced in a case study undertaken by Moran and Keane (2006) in terms of 'the operation of a lingua franca – in this case the English language – that helps both to serve and drive the international format business' (p84).

The increasing importance of formats and the exponential use of adaptations in international television can be explained by the explosion in the number of television channels and programme

suppliers. This multi-channel television landscape is brought about by the changes that broadcasting institutions in the global scale have experienced in the recent two decades. The changes include, for example, media convergence, new production techniques and distribution technologies. The international television has transformed from 'being an oligarchy of traditional broadcasters to being a fragmented and differentiated multi-channel landscape consisting of the traditional broadcasters as well as new and primarily commercial players' (Jensen, 2007, p21). Various television forms such as cable television, satellite television, and television on demand have been created and adopted in a larger scale, and a great number of new content providers from the IT industry for instance have been part of the multi-channel television landscape. The situation discussed above has lead to the more fragmented market and more specialized channels that are tailed to meeting the needs of different audience groups. And the programmes are no longer broadcast on television screen alone but are displayed on social media sites, websites and podcasts.

Furthermore, these changes can also result in lower audience ratings for all kinds and genres of programmes, no matter how popular a

programme is with the audience. This is exactly what occurred to Chinese television. It was usual to see a decade ago ratings over a billion audiences in a nation of over 1.4 billion citizens. However, only the hit entertainment shows and premium drama productions nowadays can reach those numbers. Therefore this leads to an increase in the demand for popular genres that are broadcast on primetime and format production are gaining access to primetime. Because a number of financial, technological and political advantages can be found in the format adoption and adaptation.

2.4.2.3 The advantages of format adoption and adaptation

Compared with developing television programmes on their own, introducing a format from other television markets and adapting it into the local context represents a number of advantages as follows.

First of all, format adaptation has the financial advantage of saving the costs for the research and development of television programmes. Second, formats that are circulated and traded in the international television market have been proved to be successful in one or more television markets. They come with 'a track record and

therefore a built-in guarantee of success seeing' (Moran, 2004, p13), because they have been first examined by the originators and then approved by audiences in at least one country. Third, compared to a programme acquired from other countries, a format show has the advantage of being tailored to the local culture and produced in the local language. This means that the programme production participants share the same cultural values with the local viewers and hence the local format production potentially represents the identification with local audiences to a larger extent. Therefore, it leads to larger audience ratings and hence generates more advertising revenues. It is evident to see in China that a greater number of format shows have been produced in recent decade, which generates the highest viewer ratings and thus largest advertising revenues. Last, a good deal of political advantage is found in adapting formats into local contexts, as opposed to broadcasting original foreign programmes. As many countries including china regulate television content by demanding a certain amount of local content, localized format shows are consider as locally produced content.

As the format has a number of advantages, it is regarded as a 'vital element in the industry's attempts to regulate the increasingly trans-

national recycling and exchange of content' (Jensen, 2007, p22).

There are three reasons explaining why the television format represents an approach by the television industry to commercialize, circulate and protect a programme idea. The first reason is that plagiarism as a result of the multi-channel television landscape has grown exponentially in recent years, as the demand for content are increased in a larger extent than ever before. Second, the recycling and plagiarism of television content has generated a greater need to take control of which television market players can benefit from a specific content. Therefore the television format 'gains as much financial mileage for the developer as possible' (Moran, 2004, p14). Third, format originators and developers are often part of transnational media conglomerates, and the Format Recognition and Protection Association, abbreviated as FRAPA was founded in 2000 to protect television content against plagiarism and ensure profits and revenues for format originators and developers. Because format developers had no ways to know of any plagiarized content in other countries before the multi-channel television landscape, and they rarely could take legal actions against the foreign plagiarists. But nowadays this is not the case any more.

2.4.2.4 The local format market of China

The *Zhengda Variety Show* (正大综艺), which was an entertainment show broadcast on weekends and sponsored by a Thai-Chinese agricultural fertilizer company, was launched by CCTV in 1990. This show represents the beginning of format programme production in China, and it holds the record for being broadcast continuously for over twenty-five years, while going through several changes. Till now it is still considered to be the most influential and significant variety show in China. Before the production of *Zhengda Variety Show* was launched in China, the Zhengda Company[1] authorized the format production to Taiwan, where the Taiwanese version of the format, *Run around the Earth* (绕着地球跑), was produced and broadcast. The Taiwanese show had two features as opposed to the original format. First, there is a specific segment of each episode in which a female host travelled around the world and introduced cultural rituals in different territories, and this segment was named as *the world is amazing* (世界真奇妙). And the second feature was the guests were invited to answer questions about some videos. In the localized version of the format show that CCTV produced, the

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[1] Zhengda Company, also named as Chia Tai Group, is a Thai agricultural fertilizer company based in Bangkokl

Taiwanese host was invited to be part of the first segment mentioned above, and the interaction between guests and audiences in the Beijing studio remained the same with the Taiwanese version. This format show was considered as the first format adoption in China, which was purchased properly through the process from acquisition to adaptation. Table 2.2 below shows a number of formats introduced into China from 1990 to 2014.

Table 2.2 Format shows in China (1990-2014) (not completed list)

Original format	Origin	Chinese version	Broadcaster	Licensed or not
Run around the Earth	Taiwan	Zhengda Variety Show (正大综艺)	CCTV	Yes
Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	UK/ Celador	The Dictionary of	CCTV2	No

		Happiness (开心辞典)		
Go Bingo	UK/ ECM	Lucky 52 (幸运 52)	CCTV2	Yes
The Biggest Loser	US/ NBC	The Biggest Loser (超级减肥王)	CCTV2	Yes
The Apprentice	US	Win in China (赢在中国)	CCTV2	No
The Voice	Netherlands/ Talpar	The Song of China (中国好歌曲)	CCTV	No
Special Man and Woman	Taiwan	Romantic Meeting/ Rose Date (玫瑰之约)	Hunan Satellite	No
I Am a Singer	Korea/ MBC	I Am a Singer (我	Hunan Satellite	Yes

		是歌手)		
Where Are We Going, Dad?	Korea/ MBC	Where Are We Going, Dad? (爸爸去哪儿)	Hunan Satellite	Yes
Ugly Betty	Columbia	Ugly Betty (丑女无敌)	Hunan Satellite	Yes
The X Factor	UK/ SycoTV	The X Factor China (中国最强音)	Hunan Satellite	Yes
Pop Idol	UK/ Fremantle Media	Super girls (超级女声)	Hunan Satellite	No
Granddads	Korea/ CJ E&M	Granddads (花样爷爷)	Dragon TV	Yes
Shall We Dance	Philippines/ Australia (ABC)	Let's Shake It (舞林大会)	Dragon TV	No
So You	US/ Fox	Super Diva	Dragon TV	Yes

Think You Can Dance		(舞林争霸)		
Britain's Got Talent	UK/ SycoTV	China's Got Talent （中国达人秀)	Dragon TV	Yes
Pop Idol	UK/ Fremantle Media	Chinese Idol （中国梦之声)	Dragon TV	Yes
The Cube	UK/ ITV	The Cube (梦立方)	Dragon TV	Yes
The Voice	Netherlands/ Talpa	The Voice of China (中国好声音)	Zhejiang Satellite TV	Yes
Celebrity Splash	Dutch/ Eyeworks	Celebrity Splash China (中国星跳跃)	Zhejiang Satellite TV	Yes
Survivor	US/ CBS	Into Shangri-La (走入香格	Sichuan TV	No

		里拉)		
Survivor	US/ CBS	The Great Survival Challenge (生存大挑战)	Guangdong TV	No
Happy Family Plan	Japan/ TBS	Dreams Come True (梦想成功)	Beijing TV	Yes
The Weakest Link	UK/ ECM	The Wise Rule (智者为王)	Nanjing TV	Yes
Taken Out/ Take Me Out	Australia/ UK	If You Are the One (非诚勿扰)	Jiangsu Satellite	No

By observing the audiences' response to the format shows listed above, we need to ask why some programme ideas are transferred successfully while others fail. The cultural proximity may answer this question. For example, the audiences particularly in USA or European

are drawn to individualism and survival of the fittest that are not prevalent in China. Satellite channels in China had produced thirteen different music talent shows mostly adapted from imported formats by 2013. These format shows included Hubei Satellite TV's *Superstar China (我的中国星)*, Anhui Satellite TV's *Mad for Music (我为歌狂)*, Jiangxi Satellite TV's *China Red Song (中国红歌会)*, Tianjin Satellite TV's *Copycat Singers (天下无双)*, Shandong Satellite TV's *Pop Star of China (中国星力量)*, Hunan Satellite TV's *The X Factor China and Happy Boys (快乐男声)*, Dragon TV's *Chinese Idol (中国梦之声)* and Zhejiang Satellite TV's *The Voice of China (中国好声音)*. In the year of 2013 alone, a total number of twenty-one formats about music and dance competitions were imported from Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, USA and Korea by the top four satellite channels in China including Hunan Satellite TV, Zhejiang Satellite TV, Dragon Satellite TV and Jiangsu Satellite TV. Among those shows *The Voice of China* was the most successful with the audience ratings of 6.1 at its finale, which has still been the highest view ratings in the history records of entertainment shows in China.

Since the multi-channel television landscape started to take shape in China, the need for broadcasters to search for compelling content

contributes to the flowering and popularity of format shows in China, which is essentially an incentive for satellite channels striving to become competitive players in the national television market. It was common to see previously that Chinese broadcasters did not consider whether a specific television format was fitted into the local context or suitable for their audiences but would compete to secure the copyrights of the format. However, the Chinese television market has been maturing. Chinese television professionals are now aware and apprehensive of what formats are circulated in the international marketplace and what kinds of formats are suitable for their viewers.

In recent years, a number of Korean formats have been introduced into the Chinese market. For example, two significant licensed programmes, *I Am Singer (我是歌手)* and *Where Are We Going, Dad? (爸爸去哪儿)* were developed and distributed by the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) to Hunan Satellite TV respectively in January 2013 and October 2013. The format of *I Am Singer* is a music competition show that is fairly standard in eliminating contestants with live audience voting. And the format of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* Represents the genre of 'life-intervention television programmes' (Keane, 2015), and it spins around the stories of how

five pairs of celebrity fathers and their child interact with each other and cope with a series of different tough tasks. A name has been coined for this genre in China as 'the celebrity offspring travel survival experience reality show' (Keane, 2015). In the process of adapting formats to cater to the tastes of local audiences, it is inevitable to be aware of cultural adaptation that is defined as 'the reorganization and rearrangement of popular culture, entertainment, consumption, creative design and the like on a large, even global scale to fit the needs of particular situations, peoples, places and times' (Keane, 2015).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, the candidate has first discussed the historical context of the Chinese television industry by dividing it into various historical periods, which shows the development and actual situation of the Chinese television industry. And then the candidate has introduced its political and economic contexts, demonstrating how it is commercializing, professionalizing and adopting a number of advanced practices learned from other media markets, most significantly emphasis on entertainment television. In addition, the

increasing importance of television formats and the exponential use of local adaptations in the television market of China has been explored in this chapter, which provides background information and knowledge essential to the subject of this research. In the Chapter 3 therefore the candidate will present relevant theoretical perspectives and establishes theoretical frameworks to enhance the understanding of the theoretical approach in this study.

Chapter 3

Literature and theory

3.0 Introduction

With the launch of *China's Got Talent* in 2010, an increasingly great number of television format shows made their way into the mainstream of Chinese television. Although the Chinese television industry is tightly regulated by the state, the emergence and rapid development of television format adoption in China has not lagged behind the worldwide trend toward global television format. This can partly be attributed to the reform of the Chinese broadcasting system, the globalization of television in China and the significant influences of global culture on the domestic audiences. **Chapter 3** focuses on discussing relevant theories to enhance the understanding of the researcher's theoretical approach in this study. This chapter combines the literature review with a discussion of the theoretical context, presents relevant theoretical perspectives and establishes theoretical frameworks for the core discussions and arguments. Both the western established conceptual frameworks of media

globalization and Chinese scholarly studies on global television flow
are reviewed in this chapter.

3.1 Media Globalization

'Globalization' emerged as one of the most persistent buzzwords in
the 1990s, just as 'interdependence' did in the 1970s (Jan, 2009). Up
to now, there have been a great number of arguments about and
explanations of this term. Moran (2004) believed that 'the idea of
globalization is the claim that a worldwide system of economic,
cultural and political interdependence has come into being or is in
the process of forming' (p2). Similarly, as Featherstone (1996) noted,
'the globalization process should be regarded as opening up the
sense that now the world is a single place with increased, even
unavoidable, contact. We necessarily have greater dialogue between
various nation-states, blocs, and civilizations, as well as a dialogical
space in which we can expect not only cooperation and consensus
but a good deal of disagreement, conflict, and clashing perspectives'
(p47). This process is often described as a positive force 'which is
unifying widely different societies, integrating them into a 'global
village', and enriching all in the process' (Jan, 2009, p66). However,

as Jan (2009) argued, globalization is not necessarily a natural progression as if it were an organic process governed by the laws of nature, which emerges out of the ordinary communication and interaction of people and cultures around the world. Instead, 'it results from elaborate human choice by a powerful group of nations, transnational corporations and international organizations which have stakes in the process' (Jan, 2009, p66).

In spite of the fact that there exist vigorous disagreements over the term 'globalization', it is possible to reach an interdisciplinary consensus on the interrelations between media and globalization to a certain extent among scholars. This serves as a basis for reaching a better understanding of how to conceptualize media globalization. A vitally important starting point is to recognize how scholars reach an agreement on how the development of communication infrastructures in the scope of global media has contributed to the distribution of media content and information across territories to an ever greater extent. As Thussu (1998) points out, 'the coming of satellites for communications and broadcasting and the development of global information (and control) systems opened up infinite scope for the delivery of electronic goods, transcending physical and

political constraints' (p2). Similarly, Katz (2005) underlines how media globalization is closely related to the increased possibilities for the distribution of media content and information across continents and national borders: 'The concept of globalization refers to the transmission of television signals across cultures and continents, involving commercial and transnational proliferation of information, entertainment, and advertising' (p9). Kraidy (2007) also argues about the possible lack of symmetry in this development:

'In the last two decades, information technologies have overcome many restraints on terrestrial broadcasting. The advent of geo-stationary satellites, whose orbit is calculated to follow Earth's movements in order to keep the coverage area, or footprint, constant has decreased the technical laboriousness and financial cost of television coverage. Global information networks have mitigated time and space restrictions, albeit selectively and symmetrically.' (p98).

In addition, scholars who are outside the discipline of media and communications put emphases on the central role and great importance of communications in the globalization process (Mjos,

2010; Held and McGrew, 2007; Ohmae, 2005). The developments of communication infrastructures are closely tied to the increased possibilities for the global communications. Rantanen (2005) points to the central role of the media and communication in the globalization process by drawing attention to the definition of globalization: 'globalization is a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural, and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space' (p8).

By understanding television formats from the perspective of globalization, Bruin and Zwaan (2012) points out the ambiguity of this issue. On one hand, the rise in the global television format industry is a result of the technological, cultural and financial globalization, which has been the subject of scholarly interest and much media research over the past decades (Biltereyst, 2013). It seems that the global business of television formats contributes to a certain homogenization of television content in different countries and territories. On the other hand, formats entail a great deal of heterogeneity in the content, as they need to be adapted locally by a local production crew to meet national market conditions. Hence, television formats amalgamate the localizing and globalizing forces

and the homogenizing and heterogenizing processes, and also serve as a prime example to illustrate the duality of glocalization (Bruin and Zwaan, 2012). And in this way it is necessary to draw attention to the globalizing televisual culture, which is defined by Caldwell (1995) as the shift in look, style and the aesthetics in American television in the 1980s. In particular, this was 'an important historical moment in television's presentational manner, one defined by excessive stylization and visual exhibitionism' (p352). Similarly, Mjos (2010) gives a definition of televisual culture as:

'The practices and rituals in the production and distribution of television programming and media content, including the marketing and branding activities by television channels and other media outlets, and the outcome of these complex activities on the form and content of programming and media content.' (p6).

Although the aesthetics of television production constitutes the televisual culture, it represents the Caldwell's key idea of his study on 'deep texts'. These include 'visual icons, social and professional rituals, demotapes, recurrent trade and union narrativizations, and

machine designs, that audiences and viewers net see as they precede and prefigure the kinds of film/ television screen forms that scholars typically analyze' (Caldwell, 2004, p185).

Globalization of television in China

Before the adoption of the reform and opening-up policy engineered by Deng Xiaoping after 1978, television importation in China was 'quantitatively limited and politically and ideologically oriented' (Hong, 2007, p28). Chinese TV served for political propaganda before the reform era, and the decisions about selecting television programmes to be imported were dominated by political factors. Right after the ban on importing western programmes was lifted in 1978, the transnational media flows started coming into the country, which aggressively attracted western investment and promoted international engagement.

The competition of the television market in China intensified as a result of the further economic reform in the late 1990s, during that time global television formats started to be adopted in the domestic market. When Keane (2001) returned to China in early 2001 after his

first visit in 1989, he was 'amazed' to see the rapid development of Chinese television programming. As he points out,

> 'The Chinese television industry is currently in a state of unprecedented flux. With the largest television audience in the world, serviced by the most number of television stations, the industry has to adjust to the logic of supply and demand within an environment of market fragmentation. Television schedules are now more systematically attuned to audience demands. Prime time is dedicated to high-rating programmes, and most significantly, there are plenty of channels, although the content across channels lacks real diversity.' (Keane, 2001, p223).

Keane put forward the claim that the development of Chinese television programming benefitted from the cloning, joint production and adaptation of foreign television programme formats (2001 and 2006). And he described this process as 'cultural technology transfer', which becomes 'the means of the viability of a Chinese television industry bereft of imagination' (Keane, 2001, p234).

3.2 Television formats

3.2.1 Television formats

Before mapping out the field of format trading, the term 'format' has to be defined. Moran (2004) defines a television format as 'set of invariable elements in a programme out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced' (p5). Equally, it can be seen as 'a cooking recipe, the Guide identifies both the ingredients and the sequence and manner of their combination' (Moran, 1998, p14). Similarly, Keane (2004) defined it as 'a recipe, a package, or even a combination of technologies', which can 'impact upon television environments in terms of how they are produced, distributed, and bundled together with other services' (p103). Chalaby (2011) proposed another viewpoint towards the definition of format, that is, 'a show that can generate a distinctive narrative and is licensed outside its country of origin in order to be adapted to local audiences' (p296). It shows that the formats being traded should have met two key requirements, namely, that a format has to be tested and proved to be successful in advance, which we can tell from its track record showing whether it is a ratings winner, and at the same time it should be 'a licensed adaptation based on the

intangible property rights attached to a show that a broadcaster acquires and produces' (Chalaby, 2012, p37). When it comes to the importance of formats, as Keane (2002) points out:

'Formats are the cost effective key. It is the format that will even increasingly offer a reliable map to the highways and byways of the new production landscape.' (p1).

Thus, television formats systematize television's intrinsic difference within repetition and 'regulate the content of a programme by organizing the variation that every episode represents' (Jensen, 2007, p14), as illustrated below.

'Fundamentally, formats constitute processes of systematization of difference within repetition, tying together the television as a whole, national television industries, programme ideas, particular adaptations, and individual episodes of specific adaptations.' (Moran and Keane, 2004, p200).

In addition, Moran and Keane (2004) describe the relationship between the multiple levels contained in the television format as 'incomplete equivalence'.

> 'Indeed, in stressing the multiple levels contained in an entity such as genre (or, for that matter, format), Lotman (1990) has coined the useful term 'incomplete equivalence' as a means of designating the necessary relationship between particular instances of the phenomenon or that obtaining between the level of the instance and the general level of the phenomenon. No adaptation can ever constitute the only possible or correct rendering of a particular format and neither can any single adaptation ever constitute the range of possible renderings of any format.' (Moran and Malbon, 2006, p146).

3.2.2 Trade in TV format at a global scale

Since format franchising always leaves much room for revision, it is easier for television producers to localize television formats than to produce finished programmes. Television formats enable local producers to merge the exogenous culture inherent in the format and

the local dynamic input by local producers (Zhang, 2014). Like elsewhere in the world, the use in TV formats has been increasing for recent years in China.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a worldwide television system has increasingly matured with possession of a central dynamic that localizes the end product. And China, with a domestic television market comprising the world's largest audience, is a key player in this newly formed system. While Chinese television remained as a relatively late starter compared with other advanced national television systems until the early 2000s, times have changed with 'a significant moment of rapprochement between an already globalizing (Western) television system and a globally emergent Chinese structure of broadcasting' (McCabe, 2013, p127).
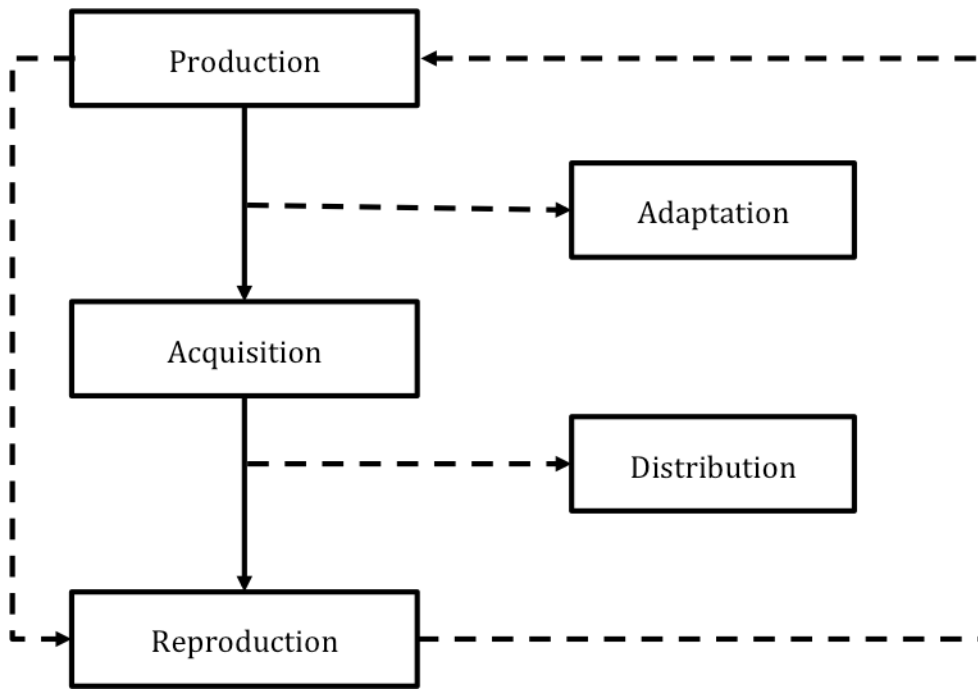
Figure 3.1 The three stages of the core format trade process

Figure 3.1 shows the three stages of the core format trade process: the production stage - the acquisition stage - the reproduction stage. The first one is the development and production stage in the country of origin; the second one is the takeover of a (successful) format; the third one is the adaptation stage where the format is reproduced to meet the local requirements. A television format goes through a number of stages, ranging from creating and developing to reproducing and broadcasting on the national level, followed by 'the international stages of acquisition' through the 'interlinking network of know-how transfer' (Moran, 2009, p92). With the increasing

collaboration with global networks, Chinese TV industry has been gradually involved in the circle of formatted TV, entering the global (re)production community, and grabbing the systematic process for the programme production.

Noted in Chalaby (2010), Britain has risen to become one of the dominant powers in the global television industry and the leading exporter of TV formats in the world. Many of audiences' favorite shows that have travelled around the world originated in Britain. These include four formats that were identified as the first 'super-formats': '*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and *Pop Idol*. Millionaire, in particular, has been a commercial success and the most widely distributed format with 109 licenses sold in the world up to 2008 (Television Research Partnership, 2008). The emergence of these four exceptional formats played a prominent role in the 'format revolution', which not only alerted broadcasters to the astonishing potential of the TV format (Bazalgette, 2005) but also radically changed the nature of the flows of the international TV trade.

Apart from the UK, other European countries have also played important roles in the format industry. On the global scale, only the UK, the Netherlands and the USA have a positive balance of trade (Bisson *et al.*, 2005, p17).

Table 3.1 Total formats exports, 2003-2007 (in percentages of programming hours)

Country of origin	UK		Netherlands		France	
Year	2003	2007	2003	2007	2003	2007
% of exported hours	51.0	53.0	15.0	18.0	5.0	4.0

Sourced from Television Research Partnership (2008, p29)

Compared with the sale of finished programmes, Steemers (2004) noted that entertainment format trading boots TV stations to a far more competitive position in an age of fierce competition. It enables broadcasters to manage risk and drive down costs by offering local programming. As Steemers (2004) points out, 'for channels trying to stand out in a crowded marketplace, locally produced formats have greater appeal to audiences than cheaper imports. Tried and tested

in other markets, risk is reduced, there are savings on development costs, and seriality provides opportunities to build audiences' (p74).

Speaking of the copyright and intellectual property of the TV format, it seems that it has attracted much attention in recent years. In many parts of Asia, there often exists 'the ignorance, naivety, or even the blatant disrespect for intellectual property that surrounds format 'borrowing'' (Keane, 2003, p9). Therefore, when talking about television production intellectual property issues have always been a major concern of western broadcasters.

3.2.3 The business logic of the global television format trade

The global television format business not only acts as a form of McTV, but also facilitates the further development of McTV. The prefix 'Mc' in this context is the shorthand for the term 'McDonaldization' which was coined by George Ritzer in 1993. It was originally referred to 'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the World' (Ritzer, 1993, p1). The fast-food chain McDonald is characterized by efficiency, calculability, predictability

and control, where 'quantity and standardization replace quality and variety as the indicators of value, serves as a highly suggestive metaphor for the general mania for efficiency' (Franklin *et al.*, 2005, p142). As Ritzer claimed that the principles of the fast-food industry were increasingly pervading all aspects of society, Mcdonaldization is also applied to the television industry. Mcdonaldization of Television, shorthanded as 'McTV', is 'the selling of programming ideas with a track record that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate local cultures to maximize profitability' (Waisbord, 2004, p378). Since the global television industry possessed the characteristics of globalized economics and localized cultures, television formats have been seen as an effective means and convenient instrument to cross cultural boundaries and meanwhile to take economic advantage of the global television networks' interconnectivity. Hence, television format, as a form of McTV, represents 'the global commercialization of an efficient and predictable programme that can be tweaked according to local tastes' (Waisbord, 2004, p378).

In addition, the global television format business has also facilitated the further development of McTV, which can be illustrated in the following two aspects.

➢ First, on the level of end product, the principles of McDonaldization can be better epitomized by television formats than finished programmes. A television format is like a formula presented in an elaborate package, which contains storylines, character descriptions, talent selections, script treatments, game rules, production guidelines, settings, music, graphics, etc. All these components constitute the blueprint for production. However, the value of a format lies in not the particular chosen elements but a core concept that underlies the series and is reflected in each episode, which enables the local production of formats to be efficient and predictable.

➢ Second, from the perspectives of production and distribution companies, format franchising reflects media conglomerates' expansion strategies to further extend their global production operation. For example, Endemol followed a path of expanding its activities on a global scale, since realizing the financial benefits of owning formats come from not only the license fees but also the fees involved in their local production.

However, even through McTV explains the global circulation of television formats and speeds up the local increase in format franchising, television formats inevitably have to be recreated to cater to the local audiences' taste as well as to respond to the local imperatives such as political, cultural, economic power factors in the localization process.

3.2.4 Television format as transnational production ecology

Miller, *et al.* (2005) point out that post-fordist modes of television production contribute to the state of Hollywood as one of the top global television production centre with flexible specialization as its driving force. And as noted by the authors, the formation of 'a new international division of cultural labor' is explained by 'high capital velocity and capitalist expansion' (p45). On one hand, media professionals and cultural agents have been provided with more flexibility in the global capitalist market of constant changes and long-lasting instabilities since the differentiated television landscape was formed. On the other hand, foreign location shooting, often referred as 'peripheral Taylorism', is completed in the locations around the world (often in under developed countries or less

developed regions), where competitive tax schemes are offered.

Production ecologies are referred to in the analysis of O'Regan and Goldsmith (2003), which examines the diversity and scope of studio complexes in Australia within the national and international contexts of its television industry development. The international production ecology is characterized as 'mobile, fluid and slippery' by O'Regan and Goldsmith (2003), as it is closely related to 'the importance of global markets, the co-production as an industrial norm, the tendency to agglomeration and conglomeration of media firms and their affiliation with smaller companies through subsidiary arrangements, as well as resulting adjustments by national governments' (p19). In comparison, the term 'production ecology' is used by Cottle (2004) to describe the 'unique conditions and relational processes that constitute the development and production of natural history programmes on television' (p79). Specifically speaking, production ecologies are particularly characterized by the 'coexistence and cooperation, competition and rivalry that are enacted and played out in response to strategies of self-interest and the imbalances of scale and market opportunity' (Cottle, 2004, p82) in the domain of cultural production. Furthermore, production

ecologies are applied beyond the scope of traditional studies on media professional and their institutions (Tunstall, 2001), because they bring

> 'Into view the dynamic relationships between different media organizations that coexist and compete within particular arenas of cultural production and how they respond - both organizationally and professionally - to wider forces of change, and adapt and differentiate their particular cultural forms.' (p82-83).

These dynamic relationships between different media organizations are also examined in the study on creative labor that Deuze (2013) carried out in 2007:

> 'The project work in the media is ecological in that it combines elements of severe competition between investors, studios, service companies, and individuals with aspects of cooperation and dependencies through formal and informal production networks, reputation mechanisms and access restriction policies. In order to understand the complex work-style of television and

film professionals, one has to include elements of repetition as well as structural change, the development of interfirm and intrafirm networks and loyalties, and their appreciation of their ongoing negotiations to achieve a delicate balance between competing for jobs and collaborating on projects.' (p190).

Cottle (2004) points to the transnational nature of natural history television, when he indicates that the programming of this highly globalized television genre represents a field of media production and features extending beyond national television systems. In this aspect, the global television format industry shares some of the important characteristics with the natural history television, which is going to be demonstrated in the following paragraph.

Firstly, both of the two media production fields are characterized by a 'differentiated organizational field made up of the world's leading media conglomerates, national public service, commercial and private broadcasters, and lots of medium and small-sized production companies that all coexist and compete' (Cottle, 2004, p90). In addition, both have to be transparent in the content in order to be traded as a commodity internationally. Cottle introduces the term of

production ecology to describe the complex structure of a specific media form.

> 'Production ecology helps to signal the theoretical importance of attending to organizational relationships and dynamics that exist within a particular field of media production, as well as attending to individual media organizations or general marketplace dynamics. Studies of selected production domains and associated professional practices are invaluable for improved theoretical understanding of media output, but 'production ecologies' encompass and extend beyond the immediate sphere of production of any one organization within a particular cultural field.' (Cottle, 2004, p82).

Only by attending to the production ecology for improved understanding of media organization and production more generally, 'we can begin to better understand how the different organizations within it reproduce, adapt and differentiate their associated cultural forms through time' (Cottle, 2004, p82). As Cottle pointed out, the term of production ecology helps expound three analytical dimensions when exploring particular fields of cultural production,

namely the organizational structuration, professional negotiation and general market dynamics.

'Critical economic theory is essential for understanding the general market dynamics of media organization and production, and it also needs to be deployed in respect of particular fields of cultural production. We also need to attend however, to the organizational structuration of a particular field as well as the professional negotiation within it of wider forces if we want to understand the production and evolution of cultural forms. The concept of 'production ecology' helps here and brings into view the dynamic relationships between different media organizations that coexist and compete within particular arenas of cultural production and how they respond- both organizationally and professionally- to wider forces of change, and adapt and differentiate their particular cultural form.' (Cottle, 2004, p82).

By noting the transnational systems, Cottle points out that production ecologies transcend and develop beyond the scopes of traditional national media systems. It is likely for the production

ecologies to have logic that is not necessarily explained in the context of tradition and normative national media systems, or to have logic of their own. Therefore, Cottle provides an important point of view to the theories of normative media systems, which is of great use in dealing with transnational media industries such as the international television format industry. Secondly, Cottle (2004) makes clear the great significance of genres or media forms as he named in the professional collaboration or mediation on the organizational level. According to him, 'questions of media form are intimately bound up with questions of mediation, of how media representations are constructed, conditioned and conveyed' (p81). By understanding television formats as media forms within a particular production ecology, Cottle argues that the cultural imperialist way of thinking is to conceptualize 'the local adaptations as a powered play of discourses, in which the non-local and the foreign are somehow 'combating' the local' (cited in Jensen, 2007, p63). Instead, it aims to explore 'the organizational relationships and dynamics' embedded in the television format industry to better understand how the localization of format is 'constructed, conditioned and conveyed' (Jensen, 2007, p64).

3.2.5 Television genre theories

'Genre being the locus par excellence of repetition and difference, it is necessary to disengage both the constant and the variable elements. This operation requires a prior diachronic investigation, as variation manifests itself in the course of a historical development. By the same token, it is impossible to give a definition of a genre. All one can do is remain on level of observation and note some facts.' (Neale, 1980, quoted in Nielsen, 1992, p57).

The quote above indicates the paradox lying in the nature of genres. Though its concept and categorization are constantly changing, researchers and scholars try to give a definition in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of television genres in the process of format localization.

3.2.5.1 why is the concept of television genre useful in this research?

The concept of television genre correlates with television formats for

a variety of reasons. Television formats being traded in the international television market seem to exist primarily within the genres of factual entertainment such as quiz or game shows and reality shows. But on the contrary, it is often seen that the original programmes are traded internationally when speaking of factual and fictional genres such as documentaries and drama series. Therefore, compared with fictional genres that travel in their original versions more easily, factual entertainment genres do not travel in their original versions in the international television market. The format shows chosen for analyses in this research are all found to be within the factual entertainment genres (specifically reality genres).

3.2.5.2 television genres playing as cultural categories

The concept of genre is approached in this research from the perspective of cultural studies, which combines production practices and media texts. According to the terminology given by Mittel (2004), genres are cultural categories, which are 'culturally operative within different spheres of media practices undertaken by industry professionals and audience' (Mittel, 2004, quoted in Jensen, 2007, p.68). Therefore, the process of cultural categories, which are not

intrinsic to media texts, takes place outside the sphere of media texts. As illustrated by Mittel (2004),

> 'Genres are not intrinsic to texts. They are constituted by the processes that some scholars have labeled 'external' elements, such as industrial and audience practices. We need to look beyond the text as the locus for genre, locating genres within the complex interrelations between texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts. Genres transect the boundaries between text and context, with production, distribution, promotion, exhibition, criticism, and reception practices all working together to categorize media texts into genres.' (p9).

3.2.6 Relevant academic positions within the research in the field of television formats

Despite the fact that the subject of format adaptation has not attracted a great deal of academic interest, a number of insightful media scholarly contributions do exist, all of which directly or indirectly points out the issues concerning to the phenomenon of television formats. This paragraph presents the existing central

positions within the research in the field of television formats, which is going to be set out in the order of the three elements of the transmission model of communication, the transmitter, the receiver and the message.

The transmitter

What are the consequences for local broadcasters and television industries consequential upon the explosive rise in the use of television formats?

Since television formats pertain to increasing internationalization in many aspects, the majority of media scholarly contributions do not surprisingly take their points of departure in the issues related to globalization but viewing formats on the global-local axis. Firstly, It is by now well documented that there exist national differences in the adaptions of the same formats in different territories, and the format industry is highly internationalized and even global but the local adaptations are exceedingly localized (Moran and Keane, 2004; Waisbord, 2004). Secondly, speaking of production processes, the use of television formats raises some interesting perspectives. On one hand, formats could undermine the creativity of local television

industries (Moran and Keane, 2004). Before the increasing use in television formats, local producers developed most of the programming content, which however now is increasingly developed by foreign television industries. With the 'invasion' of formats on local schedules, it may be assumed that television formats could eventually undermine the local research and development capacity of local television industries and represent an imminent danger of stagnation in the local innovative environments.

On the other hand, there appears to be evidence that the increasing use of television formats can help to support local TV production environment in both the quantitative and qualitative manner. For instance, in some Asian countries the explosive use of transnational formats has resulted in the revival of local programming content and the marginalization of western content, especially in primetime schedules (Moran and Keane, 2004). In China, the local television industry has gained two advantageous effects. The one is that 'it creates more work places and generally breathes new life into local television industries', and the other is that local producers and broadcasters 'benefit from the foreign know-how, which often comes with the formats and thus learn how to be innovative and eventually

create their own local programming content' (Jensen, 2007, p41).

The receiver

How do local audiences respond to the localization of television formats?

Moran (1998) deals with comparative audience studies of format adaptations and analyses local receptions of localized Australian drama formats including *Prisoner Cell Block H*, *Sons and Daughters* and *The Restless Years*. With particular reference to the ways in which the German and Dutch audiences identify with the format localization, he concludes that there are various ways of culturally identifying with the format adaptations and local audiences interpret format adaptations just as they would do to the local programming content to a large extent (Moran, 2008). Bruun (2004) examines how Danish women respond to the localized version of a format show and its original American version *Ricki Lake*, and the study shows how Danish women's reception of the Danish version is influenced by their genre expectations from watching the American equivalent version to a certain degree. This group of viewers becomes disappointed about the local version because it does not come up to

the high production level of *Ricki Lake* and thus does not meet their original expectation of the genre of talk shows.

And Agger (2005) examines the more general issues concerning national identity, although she does not carry out concrete audience researches. She points to the impact that format localization may have on the national identity of local audiences and doubts that a national television culture can be internationalized consequential upon the adoption of transnational formats without losing its original national identity.

The message

How do media scholars view the format adoption and localization?

If taking a closer look at the format localization, the substantial local differences among the various local adaptations are embedded in television formats. The most common answer to explain the local differences has been the national differences in areas such as social mores and national mentalities. Keane (2004) makes a reference to this in the following quote,

'We discover a consanguinity of production inputs that are linked to social mores and cultural values [which] does suggest that format adaptations [...] are influenced by specific structures of feeling.' (p14).

Cultural differences can also be traced in the specific preferences for formats that a national television environment has. For instance, the local producers in Japan do not regard the immediate appeal of ordinary people as the necessity for the talent shows (Iwabuchi, 2004), while Chinese broadcasters appear to cultivate ordinary people as potential television stars in the real sense (Keane, 2004).

Language is also an important factor in explaining the local differences from the perspective of the culture. And a considerable part of the explanation for the global popularity of television formats is found in 'the resilience of language as a constitutive element of national identities' (Waisbord, 2004, p374).

If looking into technology transfer theories and viewing television formats as a form of 'technology' which is transferred from one country to another, television formats are also influenced by a

number of equally important factors existing in a particular country or territory, such as legislation, regulatory policies, economy, etc.

> 'Because a technological system is shaped by a particular national environment, consisting of various social, political and economic factors, the process of technological transfer to a new national setting [...] will involve adaptation to new political, legal, educational, cultural, social and economic institutions, as well as geography, and resource conditions.' (Moran and Keane, 2004, p202).

3.3 Reality television

This part clarifies the generic confusion around the concept of reality television and then reviews the mainstream studies on this subject. Reality television, sometimes called popular factual television, is a genre of television programming that features real people, documents unscripted situations, and crosses 'border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama' (Hill, 2005, p2). Over the last decade, television viewers worldwide have witnessed the dramatic proliferation of television formats

pertaining to the reality television genre. As Hill (2005) argued,

> 'What ties together all the various formats of the reality TV genre is their professed abilities to more fully provide viewers an unmediated, voyeuristic, and yet often playful look into what might be called the "entertaining real". This fixation with "authentic" personalities, situations, problems, and narratives is considered to be reality TV's primary distinction from fictional television and also its primary selling point.' (p5).

According to Jensen (2007), reality television, compared to lifestyle television, has a potential of being substantially to the intimate that 'constitutes both the starting point, the content, and the terminal point- as well as the theme, the mode of audience approach, and the emotional 'glue' keeping the programme together' (p11). As Jensen (2007) pointed out, reality television has three subgenres, namely, reality documentaries, studio-based reality shows and reality game shows. When it comes to the format adoption and localization, studio-based reality shows are by far the most important subgenre and also the focus of this study.

Over the last decade the subject of reality television has attracted a good deal of academic interest, and a closer look at reality television has forced media scholars to rethink 'the changing meanings of public service, democracy, and citizenship in the age of neoliberalism, deregulation, conglomeration, and technological convergence' (Murray and Ouellette, 2008, p9). It is evident to see that an increasing number of academic scholars and public commentators around the world have contributed academic studies on reality formats originated in the United States and Europe. By discussing the reality television phenomenon in different regional context, the public discourses of localization, globalization and neo-liberalization have been discussed. Kraidy (2007) addresses the interaction between political impact and the production of reality television in the Arab world and examined the controversy about the social and political influence of reality television on the democratic process in the local area. Murray and Ouellette (2008) identify the strong impact of local culture in the Latin America on the localization of imported formats by examining the transformation of local television.

3.4 Political Economy

'Capitalism is more global than ever, not only in North American and Europe, but expanding to other parts of the world, including China and other key locations' (Wasko *et al.*, 2011, p2). The Chinese television industry is becoming a more and more significant player in the global television market, as not only a crucial part of the global political economy but also a important member of the cultural industry in China. Wasko *et al.* (2011) claim that the significant way to understand and comprehend the globalization and development of capitalism appears to be the critical political economy. 'There is a universal belief that the cultural or 'creative' industries are no longer peripheral, but occupy a central role in the economy, but the analysis of this phenomenon is often problematic and inadequate' (Wasko *et al.*, 2011, p3). Since China has player a more and more significant role of the global political economy of capitalism, the critical political economy is often regarded as an appropriate way to understand how the Chinese media as a whole, and specifically the Chinese television industry in this context of research, relates to the development of global media and communication.

Mosco (2009) has introduced two definitions of political economy in

a narrow sense and a more general sense. 'In the narrow sense, political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources' (Mosco, 2009, p2). This definition brings attention to the whole production and consumption process in the media and communication industry. Mosco (2009) points out that 'the definition directs the political economist to understand the operation of power, a concept that addresses how people get what they want even when others do not want them to get it'; 'it also leads us to think about what it means to be a producer, distributor, or consumer, and to appreciate the growing ambiguity about what constitutes these categories' (p2). And the more general definition that Mosco provides is that 'political economy is the study of control and survival in social life' (p3). Control is 'a political process because it shapes the relationships within a community', which means how society organizes itself; and survival is 'mainly economic because it involves the process of production and reproduction', which means how people produce what they need to operate their society and reproduce themselves (Mosco, 2009, p3). This definition brings 'the breadth to encompass at least all of human activity' (Mosco, 2009,

p25) to political economy.

Wasko *et al.* (2011) give a different description on political economy. They argue that political economy is 'a more gradualist approach, in which the negative impacts of capitalist dynamics would be disciplined by strong public regulation and countered by substantial investment in public services' (p1), and also point out that Adam Smith and Karl Marx represent the first two different groups in the studies of political economy. 'For its early practitioners, like Adam Smith theoretical and empirical questions about how to organize economic life and balance markets against state intervention were inextricably bound up with questions about the constitution of the good society' (Wasko *et al.*, 2011, p1). However, Max, 'as a critique of political economy, shared this ethical concern, but argued forcefully that it could only be pursued by abolishing capitalism' (Wasko *et al.*, 2011, p1).

Mosco provides media and communication studies with a relatively comprehensive and conceptual theory. In contrast, theories from Wasko and Meehan mainly lie in television studies, which are more relevant to my research.

3.4.1 TV industry studies by Meehan

Meehan provides the point of view that the political economy of television studies mainly consists of three aspects. 'The research literature addresses the political construction of American television as an industry, the economic structures comprising that industry, and the programming delivered via television technologies' (Meehan, 2005, p239). From point of view of Meehan, there exist three markets that are closely interlinked in television industry: 'the markets for advertising', 'the market for viewers that advertisers want' and 'the market for programmes that attracts the viewers that advertisers want to reach' (Meehan, 2005, p240). In other words, the length of advertising time, the audience ratings and the audiences themselves are regarded as merchandises and products that are sold in these three markets. These markets in the United States are 'the market in which networks commission and select programmes; the market in which advertisers demand and buy audiences; and the market in which the A. C. Neilsen Company (ACN) sells ratings to advertisers and networks as proof that networks' programmes deliver the demanded audiences in acceptable numbers' (Meehan, 2005, p241).

Meehan (2011) discusses in her recent book about the incentives and motives of each players on the market, the 'advertisers' inflexible demands for consumers drive the market in which ad agencies compete for exclusive contracts and the market in which audience assemblers compete for advertising dollars' (p70). Meehan has further reminded us of the crucial factors to reach success in the market. 'For agencies and networks, the problem is how to demonstrate their effectiveness in reaching people with the disposable income, access to retail outlets, and desire to buy name brands whose prices are inflated by branding and advertising'; 'For advertisers, the problem is how to evaluate agencies' and networks' necessarily biased accounts of their success'; 'For advertisers and networks, this is complicated by their conflicting interest about how advertisers' access to audiences should be priced' (Meehan and Torre, 2011, p70).

Meehan (2005) identifies six factors to examine the ratings and inceptions in the market and also set the parameters for commercial programming that is distributed nationally. 'These six elements shape the market for ratings, audiences, and programmes, regardless of the technology delivering ads and programms' (Meehan, 2005,

p242). The analysis and examination of the market for its broadcast inception and its ratings by Meehan has been seen as a useful model for television studies. Meehan (2005) points out that 'radio's genres, character types, and formats became the bases for television's programming because television ratings depended on ACN's prewar radio sample' (p244). First of all, 'advertisers want bona fide consumers', who are target consumers with the desire and ability to consume the products that advertisers want to sell (Meehan, 2005, p243). Second, 'networks want to produce what advertisers want to buy', which also makes the networks' demands increasingly intense to know about who are supposed to be counted as bona fide consumers (Meehan, 2005, p243). Third, 'conflict over prices between networks and advertisers introduces discontinuity in demand, which opens space for companies to struggle over industrial definitions' (Meehan, 2005, p243). For instance, 'CBS is waging a campaign to redefine the premium audience as upscale consumers in their 40s and 50s who have access to the Internet' (Meehan, 2005, p243). Fourth, 'structural wiggle room allows the ratings producer to be more than a slave to demand; like its clients, the ratings producer can creatively manipulate discontinuities and rivalries for its own benefit' (Meehan, 2005, p243). Fifth, there is interlocked relationship

among the markets for programmes, ratings and audiences: 'neither the ratings producer nor the networks nor programmes producers have any economic interest in producing commodities that are unresponsive to advertisers' demand for bona fide consumers' (Meehan, 2005, p244). Sixth, 'the smooth and inexpensive operations of these three markets require a single source of ratings' (Meehan, 2005, p245).

3.4.2 TV industry studies by Wasko

Like what Meehan (2005) mentions that 'we may need to stop thinking about the study the television industry, with its networks, channel, ratings, and programs and start considering and researching the entertainment/ information sector, its hierarchy of trans-industrial media conglomerates, their array of revenue sources, and their brands and franchises that cross traditional lines between entertainment, news and advertising' (p122). Wasko (1994) also points out the significance of examining and studying the media and entertainment industry, which 'has grown considerably during the last few decades, and increasingly attracts the attention of financiers, investors and companies outside the traditional entertainment

world' (p3). Wasko brought up with two arguments in her book *Hollywood in the Information Age* (1994). The first statement is 'the myriad of technological changes that have prompted discussions of a new age of information has been introduced into societies which remain fundamentally the same'; and secondly, 'it might be noted that many of the new technologies associated with an information age have been introduced and employed for leisure-time activities or entertainment' (Wasko, 1994, p2). She noted that new technological developments have been brought about by the trends of globalization and deregulation.

It is worth to address Wasko's recent article (2011), in which she has pointed out five continuities in Hollywood and are relevant to my research. By noting that Hollywood is facing a lot of new challenges, Wasko brings up with her perspectives of the changes and continuities in Hollywood. First, it continues to 'dominate most film makers around the world'; second, it continues to 'dominate the US film business'; third, it continues to 'attract sizable revenues'; fourth, it continues to 'produce films as commodities'; finally, it continues to be a profit-driven industry (Wasko, 2011, p321). Apart from those continuities that have not been changed, Wasko makes a list of

changes that challenges the future and development of Hollywood. The first change occurs to 'the most important companies- finding new funding sources for the very pricey films that Hollywood tends to produce' (Wasko, 2011, p309). The second challenge comes from independent filmmakers thanks to the digital technologies' development (Wasko, 2011). As quoted in her notes about Erickson (2010)'s definition, 'the filmmaker have full creative and distribution control, investors have no involvement with the film outside of providing financing, and the filmmakers undergoes substantial risk to produce and distribute the film' (Wasko, 2011, p327). The third change is the challenge from the great development of digital technology, such as new forms of digital promotions ranging from social media to video websites (Wasko, 2011). Wasko (2011) argues that 'some Hollywood marketers even wonder whether the new forms of promotion are actually that effective", and "it seems clear that digital promotion definitely has not taken over from traditional Hollywood marketing strategies- at least, not yet' (p311).

By referring to Mosco, Meehan and Wasko's theories, we have examined how to apply the political economy approach to television studies, and demonstrated that they could be good models to apply to

Chinese television studies.

3.5 Professionalism

Up to now, there have been various approaches to understanding the key concepts of professions, professionalism and professionalization. According to Mayiga (2008), three basic perspectives have been mainly adopted to study the literature on the sociology of professions, which are structural-functionalism, phenomenology, and power relations. As to the phenomenological approach, there is minimal literature available on it and it is also considered to be the least formalized tradition in the study of professions. Hence, we only focus on the other two approaches in this study.

Under structural-functionalism, a profession is seen as a unique occupation with a unique role in society that has undergone a dynamic process through which it has acquired certain crucial characteristics and its groups have gained specialized skills (Johnson, 1972). Under the above definition of a profession, professionalization is regarded as a dynamic process which is a 'series of stages that usually follow the core characteristics, marked by changes in the

formal structure of an occupation as it aspires to professional status'
(Eliot, 1972, p113), while the 'end-state towards which certain
occupations are moving and others have arrived' (Mayiga, 2008, p19)
is known as professionalism.

Using the power-relations approach, Johnson redefined the concepts
of professions, professionalism and professionalization. He argued
that "changing power relations bring about new social problems and
needs, hence changes in knowledge and skills and definitely changes
in the institutionalized forms of control of occupations" (cited in
Mayiga, 2008, p25). From this perspective, professionalism therefore
is not an 'expression of the inherent nature of particular occupations'
(Johnson, 1972, p45) but a form of occupational control. Likewise, a
profession is a means of controlling an occupation rather than just an
occupation, while professionalization is seen as a 'historically specific
process which some occupations have undergone at a particular
time, rather than a process which certain occupations may always be
expected to undergo because of their essential qualities' (Johnson,
1972, p45).

3.6 Summary

A number of media scholars, for example Chalaby (2012), Moran (2009) and Keane (2006), have attempted to theoretically conceptualize the phenomenon of format adaptation, analyzed overarching structures of the international format trade, and explored the specific consequences that format adaptation has in particular television systems. Instead, the thesis fills the lacunae in current research by examining the influences of television formats on television production practices and the consequences of local political and economic contexts upon format localization in China. This chapter has presented reviews of the academic literature relating to the issues most relevant for the aim of the research by covering relevant theoretical concepts and perspectives. In order to achieve the maximum of clarity and understanding of the issues during the transformative phase of format production, the researcher chose to cover the key themes expressed in the substantive subject: media globalization, television formats, television genres, production ecology, reality television, political economy and professionalism. The theoretical aspects presented in this chapter will subsequently be put into methodological use in the following chapter, which

describes methodological choices and sets up the research design for the entire research.

Chapter 4

Methodology and research design

4.0 Introduction

Despite the fact that each research has its distinct research concern and research process, all researches have an identical objective to solve certain theoretical or applied problem. As Rubin *et al.* (1996) noted, research is an objective, empirical and cumulative process that seeks to 'answer research questions not already answered by past research or to test hypotheses, which specify relationships among independent and dependent variables' (p231). The researchers' method choices are thus reflected in the approaches to test hypotheses or answer questions. Based on the contextual and theoretical insights of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, this chapter articulates the researcher's consideration of methodological choices and constructs the specific research design of the two methodological approaches- field observation and semi-structured interviews with industry professionals and policy makers. This chapter also discusses possible methodological problems, obstacles and limitations of the

research design, addresses some relevant issues that emerged during the fieldwork, and explains the precautions taken to ensure the largest possible validity and reliability of the results.

4.1 The practical research design

The research design is based on semi-structured interviews and field observation to explore the changes in production practices consequent upon the format adoption and the constraints and benefits of the local political and economic contexts upon the format localization. The main sources for the research are primary literature from broadcasters and regulatory bodies, press coverage on format production, 23 semi-structured interviews with representatives of policy makers, regulators, content producers, flying producers and broadcasters, and field observation of production.

4.1.1 Different purposes and methods for each part

The thesis consists of two parts.

Part One delivers the methodological framework and contextual background of television format production in China, investigating

the format localization in a historical, political, social and economic context and exploring the complex production context that Chinese TV professionals deal with in the adoption and localization of television formats. This first part of the thesis builds on reviews of the academic literature relating to the issues most relevant for the aim of the research. In order to achieve the maximum of clarity and understanding of the issues at stake during a transformative phase of format production in China, I chose to cover the key themes expressed in the substantive subject (always in relation to television formats) in separate substantive, methodological and theoretical reviews: globalization of television in China, global television flow, television format as transnational production ecology and regulation.

Part Two forms the analysis and results of this research. It draws together the findings from the qualitative research including field note analysis and fieldwork interviews with policy makers, regulators, content producers and broadcasters.

4.1.2 Schedule

The research project commenced in January 2012. During the first phase of research the candidate was mainly engaged with the

literature review. The second phase included the semi-structured interviews and field observation, which took place from August 2013 until December 2013 in China, with the main bulk of interviews being undertaken by December 2013 and a phase of final interviews during the writing up phase in May 2015.

4.2 Methods and practicalities of data collection

As a contributing field in the sociological research, the communication study adopts diverse research methods that can be classified into two main categories: qualitative research and quantitative research. Each research employs several specific methods that are used for distinct research objectives, such as content analysis, questionnaires, quantitative sampling, participant observation, interviews, focus groups, quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. It is believed to be helpful 'to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research. The status of the distinction is ambiguous, because it is almost simultaneously regarded by some writers as a fundamental contrast and by others as no longer useful or even simply as 'false'' (Bryman, 2004, p19). Enlightened by Bryman's Table 1.1 in his research (2004, p20), I

outline the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research

Three fields	Quantitative	Qualitative
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Inductive; generation of theory
Epistemological orientation	Natural science model, in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism

Source: Bryman (2004, p.20)

Table 4.1 clearly shows quantitative research places strong emphasis on quantification in the collection and analysis of data,

'Entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories; has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular; and embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality.' (Bryman, 2004, p19).

Qualitative research, by contrast, generally emphasizes on words rather than on quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As Bryman states,

'[it] predominantly emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories; has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world; and embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation'. (Bryman, 2004, p19).

It is suggested by Marvasti (2004) that 'quantitative research involves the use of methodological techniques that represent the human experience in numerical categories, sometimes referred to as statistics. Conversely, qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience' (p7). But in fact there exists considerable overlap between those two forms of research methods. Some researchers turn to 'mixed methods' that combines both quantitative research and qualitative research (Marvasti, 2004). As Neuman (2006) points out, no matter what methods researchers opt for, they try to 'be systematic in gathering data, and to use the idea of comparison extensively' (p14).

Through the above analysis, which is closely pertinent to quantitative and qualitative research approach and to the main research purpose and the core research questions, this doctoral thesis is regarded as qualitative rather than quantitative research. Thus qualitative research approach is adopted as the fundamental research method of this thesis, which involves semi-structured interviews and field observation.

4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviews are aimed to provide the study with valuable inside information that is impossible to achieve otherwise, and are conducted with policy makers, regulators, relevant Chinese television professionals and flying producers from format franchising companies. The information provided by the interviewees serves as a vital link between the format adoption and television professionals' perception on their practices' change and an illuminating explanation on the constraints and benefits of the local political and economic contexts upon the format localization. As such, the statements given by the interviewees are primarily used in Chapter 5 and 6 to illustrate, qualify and examine the process of format localization.

4.2.1.1 Interview guides

The interview guides I used were all semi-structured, as it provides enough flexibility for spontaneous changes during the interviews and offers the opportunity to compare the statements of the interviewees easily. Questions were open-ended, which allowed the interviewees to account for the most important aspects in their own terms and in

turn gave me an idea of their priorities as regards to format adoption in China. This meant I did not ask interviewees about very specific questions relating to, for example, shooting or directing. Instead I adopted the approach that I followed with more detailed and closed questions after the interviewees touch upon the aspects that I wanted to know about.

As illustrated in figure 2.1, the production of a localized format involves three levels of television professionals: the format originator, the international distributer, and the foreign broadcaster. As Jensen (2007) described, if the original version is successful with local audiences, the format may enter the international market, in which 'the format originator sells the format rights via an international distributor to one or more foreign broadcasters and production units' (p19). In this respect it is important to note the existence of the organizational hierarchy. There are mainly three levels of individuals within the divisions of local broadcasters and production units: the management level, the mid-management level and the hands-on production level. The management level would typically consists of the heads of programming and the heads of the different departments who are in charge of commissioning formats

for local adaptation. The mid-management level is made up of people in between the management level and the production level. In the process of format localization, this level would typically include executive producers and editors from both broadcasters and production companies who are responsible for following through decisions from the management level onto the hands-on production level. The practical tasks of casting, directing, shooting and editing are given to the hands-on production level. For the purpose of this research, both the management level and the mid-management level are represented for the 'foreign broadcaster' illustrated in figure 2.1.

Below are the four different interview guides that I worked with for four different kinds of informants.

1. Interview with executive producers: the first interview guide was designed to ask specific questions concerning the actual format production process and these producers' perception about the changes in their production practices consequential upon the format adoption. The questions typically revolve around the use of bible, concrete changes made to the original format, casting, etc.

2. Interview with broadcasting executives: the second interview guide had more general questions concerning criteria for the selection of formats for local adaptation, station policy on the format adoption, etc.

3. Interview with developers of original formats: the third interview guide was designed for the interviews with the original Dutch developers of *The Voice*-TALPA. The questions mainly revolved around the ways in which they help local teams to set up format shows.

4. Interview with format brokers (e.g. IPCN): the fourth interview guide was designed to understand market/government/broadcasters' concerns for the selection and local production of television formats through interviewing format brokers who introduce transnational formats to China.

Below is a schematic outline of the names, positions, organizations, and related formats of the interviewees, whose interview statements contributes to the findings of the research and are referenced throughout the thesis.

Table 4.2 List of the interviewees

Name	Position	Organization	Related format	Date
Ms. Lin Mi	Production director	Canxing Productions	*The Voice of China*	12 August 2013, Shanghai
Mr. Jin Lei	Chief production director	Canxing Productions	*VOC*	12 August 2013, Shanghai
Mr. Lu Wei	Publicity director	Canxing Productions	*VOC*	13 August 2013, Shanghai
Mr. Su Xu	Camera operator	Canxing Productions	*VOC*	12 August 2013, Shanghai
Ms. Yang Yuancao	CEO of IPCN	IPCN- format agency	*VOC*	10 November 2013, Shanghai
Ms. Gao Ya	Researcher	IPCN	VOC	10

				November 2013, Shanghai
Victor	Flying producer	Talpa Media	VOC	11 November 2013
Alex	Flying producer	Talpa Media	VOC	11 November 2013
Ms. Li Wenyu	Producer	SMG	*China's Got Talent*	14 August 2013, Shanghai
Ms. Chen Qian	Producer	SMG	*CGT*	14 August 2013, Shanghai
Mr. Li Baigu	Producer	SMG	*CGT*	14 August 2013, Shanghai
Mr. Guo Weihua	Producer	SMG	*CGT*	15 August 2013, Shanghai

Ms. Qi Yue	Director	SMG	*CGT*	15 August 2013, Shanghai
Ms. Li Xueyan	Researcher	Shixi Media	*Tonight's The Night*	24 December 2013, Beijing
Mr. Luo Ming	Vice president of Shixi Media	Shixi Media-format agency	*TTN*	24 December 2013, Beijing
Mr. Jiang Minhao	Director	ZJTV	*TTN*	12 January 2014, Beijing
Ms. Li Yan	Producer	ZJTV	*TTN*	11 January 2014, Beijing
Mr. Zhang Chi	Camera operator	ZJTV	*TTN*	11 January 2014, Beijing
Ms. Zhang	Researcher	CSM		20

Xiaohan				November 2013, Beijing
Ms. Xu Yuanyuan	Consultant	CSM		26 November 2013, Beijing
Mr. Ming Chao	Researcher	SAPPRFT		12 November 2014, Beijing
Mr. Paul Jackson	Creative director	Houghton Street Media		21 November 2013, Beijing
Mr. Hu Zhengrong	Professor of media studies	China University of Communications		22 November 2013, Beijing
Mr. Xu Tao	Producer	Hunan Satellite	*Where*	12

		Television	*Are We Going, Dad?*	December 2014, Beijing
Mr. Hu Zhen	Producer	Guangdong Satellite Television	*The Great Survivor Challenge*	15 December 2014, Shenzhen

4.2.1.2 Independent production companies and broadcasters

As with most other forms of television production, local format production involves both the broadcaster and the production company. These two parties work closely together in the production process and their relationship is a hierarchical employer-to-employee relationship, since the broadcaster hires the independent company to make the actual localized format show. The broadcasters are in charge of making decisions on whether they want to air the localized format show in the first place and then setting out the requirements on how to fit the format show into their channel image and time schedule. And the independent production companies are responsible for making the actual programmes by responding to the

guidelines given by the broadcasters. In order to incorporate as many points of view and aspects of the production process as possible, representatives of both television stations and production companies are interviewed in this study. The hierarchical relationship between those two also means that there might be different vested interests they want to mention in the interview, which I have to pay attention to when analyzing their statement. For instance, it may be likely that the broadcaster would blame the production company for not making the show by meeting the requirements set out; whereas a producer from independent production company would probably blame the television station for scheduling the adapted show in a unsatisfied slot as expected.

4.2.1.3 Management level and middle-management level

Within the organizational hierarchy, three levels of staff and individuals are involved in the production of a localized format show: managers, middle managers and hands-on production staff. The management level consists of the very top-level people who are in charge of commissioning the format for adapting it into local context. They are typically the heads of different department and the heads of

programming within the organizational hierarchy. The middle-management level is made up of executive editors and producers who are responsible for negotiating and communicating between the production level and the management level. The hands-on production level includes the people who are exercising management decisions into actual production. They are given the practical work of researching, designing, casting, directing, shooting, and editing the format production.

Both management level and middle management level are interviewed to provide useful information for the purpose of this research. Interviewees of the management level provide information about their policy and strategy on format production in general and also the specific reasons for selecting the particular formats. Interviewees of the middle management level can be informative of the general idea about the more practical hands-on aspects such as the ways of localizing format show to meet audiences' taste and the choices of casting, shooting and editing.

4.2.1.4 The problem of access to interviewees

Interviewing individuals who work in television stations poses a number of challenges all related to how to get access. Researchers have to negotiate with broadcasting and production organization to find access, because they are, as opposed to public space, within a relatively private space. In addition, the people working in media organizations 'hold a high cultural status and power in society and often have moral obligations as well as economic interests to protect and cultivate' (Frandsen, 2007, p44), which makes it even complicated and difficult to get access to the right interviewees. The problem of getting access may have vital consequences for the final results of the research, and therefore this issue is worth of special attention. Below are four important aspects to be taken into consideration when doing production studies and having problems of getting access (Frandsen, 2007, p44).

1. Interviewees' internal status: internal power plays can motivate access. Does any individual within the targeted organization have any vested interest in accepting the request to be interviewed? Is the interviewee the head of department, the director or the executive producer? What duties does he or she have within the organizational

hierarchy? All of these issues will impact on the kind of information that the researcher can get, and then the researcher will need to address it accordingly. This is for sure something that I have been aware of and dedicated to assess accordingly. For instance, production staff responded to my questions in a more willing way and without 'political' apprehension, whereas people on the management level were relatively more strategically and 'politically' apprehensive when answering interview questions.

2. Media organizations' external status: the external status of the targeted organization is decisive for the researcher in getting access. Does the organization have any vested interested in getting the researcher involved and letting him or her in? When negotiating the access, it is not likely that the organizations had any vested interests in allowing me to interview their staff, and I approached to the interviewees directly and not through their organization.

3. Formal and informal information: is the access achieved restricted to formal official interviews, or is the researcher informed through informal conversations or confidential meetings that he is invited to? Since I have taken part in the

actual production of format show, I received formal information as well as informal information.

4. The problem of reliability and validity: the difficulties in theoretical validity and methodological reliability can be potentially caused by the problem of access to interviewees. It is possible that research findings may not have enough reliability and validity if a researcher cannot have access to sufficient and effective data to address his or her research questions. In addition, since getting involved in organizational processes is not accessible to anyone, it is hard to control the reliability and validity of research precisely. Therefore in this research, adopting a methodological triangulation of empirical data collection rather than relying on the interviews alone has addressed the problems of reliability. And the data collected through different methods are addressed and assessed accordingly.

4.2.2 Field observation

I field observed the production of *China's Got Talent*, *The Voice of China* and *Chinese Dream Show*, localized versions of *Britain's Got*

Talent, *The Voice of Holland* and *Tonight's the Night* respectively. Each format show was observed for three episodes. I undertook the field observation study by not only observing but also working with the production team. The following questions are examined in this study:

1) What are the development and production procedures of the format?

2) What are the guidelines of the production from the government and the media organizations?

3) What are considered as western elements of the format by the production team?

4) What exact changes do they make to cater to the taste of Chinese audiences?

5) What exactly do they do to stimulate commercial investment from advertisers in order to generate as much as advertising revenue?

6) How does the production team respond to the growth or decline of audience ratings, which reflects in the subsequent production of format shows?

Conducting the field observation allowed me to 'learn the language, perspectives, routines, and practical considerations to determine

how people do things and what they actually do' (Altheide, 1996, p75). Through the observation, I obtained rich data from what was being seen and heard on the location of format production. Machin (2002) points out that 'good fieldwork means connecting behavior to the wider context' (p21), which suggests the particular production practices and personal perspectives need to be understood through looking at how the institution works. Based on the field observation of the three localized format shows, this research examines the influence of their original format *Britain's Got Talent*, *The Voice of Holland* and *Tonight's the Night* on the local programming.

The field observation in this research was eventually used to complement some limitations of the interview method. An observation of the daily work routine in Zhejiang Satellite Television (ZJST) and Canxing Media supports the justification of the interview statements and my interpretation of the data achieved from interviews and primary literature. As Wengraf (2002) stated, this approach provides 'an opportunity to evaluate and synthesize the partial viewpoints expressed by each of the informants and allows cross-checking the authenticity and accuracy of the interview data' (p105).

Table 4.3 The criteria for selecting the analyzed format shows

Original format	*The Voice of Holland*	*Britain's Got Talent*	*Tonight's the Night*
Chinese version	*The Voice of China*	*China's Got Talent*	*Chinese Dream Show*
Genre	Reality talent show/singing competition	Reality talent show	Reality talent show
Country of origin	Netherlands	UK	UK
Rights holder	Talpa	FremantleMedia	BBCW
Number of seasons	2	5	6
Producers	Canxing Productions	Shanghai Media Group (SMG) Radio and TV Shanghai Fremantle	ZJST

		Syco	
Format broker	IPCN	IPCN	Shixi Media
Broadcast channel	Zhejiang Satellite Television (ZJST)	Dragon TV	ZJST
Run	13 July 2012-present	25 July 2010-present	2 April 2011-present
Slot	Fri 21:15	Season 1:Sun 21:05 Season 2: Sun 21:30 Season 3-5: Sun 21:05	Season 1-2: Sat 21:21 Season 3-6: Fri 21:10

According to Murray and Ouellette (2008), reality television has three subgenres, namely, reality documentaries, studio-based reality shows and reality game shows. When it comes to the format adoption and localization, studio-based reality shows are by far the most important subgenre and also the focus of this study. All of the three selected format shows are all studio-based reality talent shows, which enables me to study each of them through interviews and field

observation and then put together the data drawn from the fieldwork in the end as a final conclusion.

The Voice of China: It has been widely considered to be one of the most successful and influential format shows in China. Originating from the Netherlands, the *Voice* format was created by Dutch television producer John de Mol as *The Voice of Holland* and managed to capture the eyes of viewers in more than forty countries and territories around the world. In July 2012 the Chinese version of the format, *The Voice of China*, premiered on ZJST and became an instant ratings hit in China. A Chinese production company called Canxing Productions, acquired the copyrights to the format by signing a three-season contract with the rights holder and co-produced the format show with Zhejiang Satellite Television, a provincial satellite channel that is one of top broadcasters in China. It is unprecedented in China's TV broadcasting history that an independent production company and a television station have started to collaborate with each other in the way of 'both parties' inputting, risk sharing and profit sharing'. Since the great success of *The Voice of China*, independent production companies began to achieve a lot more attention from the media industry in China.

China's Got Talent: It is widely believed that *China's Got Talent* represents the first licensed copy of the transnational format that achieved great success in the real sense in China. Even though Hunan Satellite TV purchased formats properly and made the localized versions before the appearance of *China's Got Talent*, none of them had achieved nationwide success.

Chinese Dream Show: It is the format show that has gone on the air for the largest number of episodes and seasons since its first-season launch in 2011.

Based on the field observation of the three localized format shows, this research examines the influence of their original format *Britain's Got Talent*, *The Voice of Holland* and *Tonight's the Night* on the local programming. However, the candidate chose to look at other cases to illustrate the benefits and constraints of the political and economic contexts upon format localization. By examining *Chinese Dream Show*, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* and *If You Are The One*, we can gain insight into how the regulatory practices are reflected in the local adaptation of international television formats and how ambient political

ideologies are disseminated through final television products. These three format shows are more representative than the cases chosen to answer the first research question, since they are more readily associated with politics to examine how the subtle political discourses are embedded in the localized television products. In addition, by analyzing the format show *The Great Survival Challenge*, the conflicts and contradiction between the commercial operations of television production and the long-established television broadcasting institutional system have been examined. This case not only serves as a cutting-edge example to illustrate that key players in the domestic television market become anxious to win the audience ratings battle, but also highlights obstacles that the production team were faced with in the local programming.

4.3 Problems and solutions

The thematic analysis has been adopted in this research as the analytical method, which seems most appropriate for the research aim as to examine the field of format production by way of interviews and field observation. As Steemers (2010) points out, 'by examining the broader field of production including institutional and

competitive relationships, dependencies, key players, and professional practices, we can better understand media outputs and the internal and external factors that determine these' (p39). In this process of data analysis, an inductive approach was used, where major themes emerge from the collected data through closely reading transcripts and notes from the interviews.

In the first phases of thematic analysis, re-reading data is required to examine the themes that have emerged in the first round of reading, which can lead to re-ordering of data to more specific themes. When the report is produced in the end of the process, themes that make meaningful contributions to answering research questions must be decided on and linked to selected interview quotes.

As mentioned above, the candidate encountered several problems when employing the chosen research methods. There are two main problems when conducting semi-structured interviews. The first one is that some interviewees, especially policy makers and media practitioners, are not willing to reveal their real thoughts and views on some interview questions. It is mainly because trust between the interviewer and the interviewee has not been established. Therefore

it is crucial to do some work of public relations in order to build up a trustful relationship between the two parties before arranging the actual interviews. Furthermore, certain interview skills are necessary to effectively solve the above problem. For example, each question can be asked in multiple ways: in order to encourage the interviewee to be more responsive to answer questions, the researcher can start with broad questions that is very easy to interpret; and then follow-up questions will lead the interviewee toward to the core of the research.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has introduced a comprehensive account of the research design used to answer the proposed research questions and the two primary research methods adopted in this thesis (semi-structured interviews and field observations). In addition, it has addressed the methodological problems that can occur when collecting data and also offered solutions accordingly. The significance of this chapter lies in that it draws a map of how to find out the answers to the research questions, which will not only facilitate the research findings but also guild the writing of the following chapters. The next

chapter, 5, will present discussion and analysis on the first research

question and provide the key findings.

Chapter 5

Key findings on research question 1

5.0 Introduction

Since the format *Got Talent* achieved great success in China, we can see the prevalence of format franchising and the Chinese industry's reliance on western expertise. Television formats have provided Chinese TV professionals with not only new creative inputs into indigenous production practices but also a license to experiment with ideas that may not fit in with the legacy of the national culture or the brand of the channel or network. Producer Chen Qian said,

> Propaganda documentaries dominated the television industry in the 1980s and 1990s. But now, the viewers have been provided with abundant reality shows featuring flashy set designs. And we, as producers, have subsequently learned the systematic production process through the adoption of formats and the collaboration with global networks (interview, 2013).

Now from the perspective of Chinese television industry, the adoption of international TV formats is a new mode of production, which brings in advanced norms and means to internationalize and professionalize provincial TV networks in particular and Chinese TV in general. This chapter will illustrate how Chinese professionals perceive the development of their practices and that of the whole TV industry consequential upon the adoption and localization of formats. In doing so, it will describe how the format shows are produced in the local context, how the international formats influence the local production procedures, and also explicate how Chinese professionals perceive the knowledge about the production they learned from the international formats, and what transnational television formats mean for Chinese TV.

5.1 Perception on professional practices' development

Since formats began to be introduced into China, the grammar and vocabulary of Chinese television has been subsequently expanded and the visual appearance has been greatly changed, as my interviews have revealed. The analysis will indicate a number of professional practices' development, which will be discussed in more

detail below.

5.1.1 Casting (Casting categories of contestants)

One of the major changes in production process that has come about because of format adoption is the way in which contestants are selected. The format guide provided by FremantleMedia required Dragon TV to search for contestants on the basis of a detailed list of casting categories, which was as with the format shows *The Voice of China* and *Chinese Dream Show*. As the director Li Wenyu introduced,

> It is required that particular psychological archetypes, such as the introverted, the disabled, the elderly, the chef and the dancer, should be included in each season. Dragon TV producers are also encouraged to learn about typical Chinese fairy tales for inspiration in case that the types originated from the West do not work well with local cultures and audiences' taste (interview, 2013).

This orientation in searching for psychological archetypes rather than potential popular stars brings a fresh angle to Chinese talent

shows. Producers and directors are guided by this new approach to casting to look for talents from the lowest stratum of society. The contrast between these contestants' appearance and their talents is to be found potentially the greatest. The memorable performances of many grassroots contestants have left deep impressions on the viewers. For example, the homeless man from Shenzhen city makes a living by garbage picking but sings well in both Cantonese and English; the young assembly line worker in Shanghai turns her low paid work and monotonous life into lyrics and sing it in a rap song; the Chinese version of Susan Boyle[2], 55-year-old Cai Hongping who works in a countryside grocery store, won the second place in the second season by recomposing Pavarotti's *Nessun Dorma* into a delightful and humorous song about fresh vegetables and chicken wings; the group of cancer patients produce their own interpretation of the ballet Swan Lake and give a performance. As the producer Li Baigu stated,

It could be the first time in Chinese television history that so many members from lowest stratum of society have been shown as talented performers who deserve to be treated with full

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[2] Susan Boyle: A Scottish singer who appeared as a contestant on the talent show *Britain's Got Talent* when she was 48 years old and eventually finished in second place.

respect rather than incapable victims of fate who need to be sympathized by the public. This is also a big social change brought about by this TV relationship. People are encouraged to be less fatalistic, and they can have a 'can-do' attitude. Because they can at least start to progress and to realize their potential, thanks to the media (interview, 2013).

We will discuss the social implications of this remarkable consequence of format production in our concluding chapter. This quest for archetypes is a most important point demonstrating difference between earlier and later programmes consequential upon format adoption. And it is also unprecedented in Chinese television history. As the experience of the contestant Liu Wei demonstrated, the 'search for the next talent' in previous copycat talent shows was restrictive. The armless pianist Liu participated in the audition of Hunan TV's *Happy Boy*[3] before being part of *China's Got Talent*. He was immediately eliminated from the audition because his physical condition was not considered to be meeting the general standards of the popular music industry. However, Liu Wei got on the stage of

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[3] *Happy Boy*: a Chinese singing competition show for male contestants, named as *Happy Boy* or *Super Boy*. It was produced and broadcast by Hunan Satellite Television and had three seasons so far.

China's Got Talent in the first season, and played the piano with his toes. The media commentator Zhang Xiaohan points out,

> The judges and audiences were amazed by his magic talent of playing and also his remarks, 'there are always only two options in front of me: to die timidly or to live life fearlessly'. His talent and courage shown on the screen helped him become the winner of the first season, and he was viewed as a perfect symbol for the show's slogan – 'believe in dreams, believe in miracles' (interview, 2014).

Enli (2009) cites the examples of the contestants Susan Boyle and Paul Potts in his study of *Britain's Got Talent* and argues that the tale of unexpected performance given by ordinary people is 'a prominent generic formula in contemporary talent shows' (p487). As with the other two format shows *The Voice of China* and *Chinese Dream Show*, *China's Got Talent* not only adopts the formula but also gives more emphasis on the word 'ordinary'. This effect is achieved by evoking the dream narrative repeatedly and explicitly throughout the programmes. As the director Lin Mi said,

After the contestants' performance, the judges often ask two similar questions to prompt each contestant's story telling: "Why do you come to this show" and "what's your dream". Typical answers given by the contestants are that they come to fulfill their own dreams they had for many years, the dreams of their beloved ones, or the dreams of a certain group of people they think they can stand for (interview, 2013).

5.1.2 Use of the bible

Production bibles and their application have had a number of fundamental influences on production processes. As Fung and Zhang (2011) stated, the 'bible' is 'a production manual that must be adhered to in producing a franchised format television programme' (p267-268). The most secure way for the Chinese production team to produce a localized version of a format is to translate the 'bible' faithfully as prescribed by the format holder and adhere to its formula.

Though the producers did not provide the author with their actual 'bible', since that is regarded as a commercial secret, the content of

the production manual could be inferred from interpreting the production flow, the story line, and the key personnel and their corresponding functions in the process of the production. To take as an example the plot lines in *The Voice of China* (series 2 in 2013), it starts with the 'blind auditions' in which a "two-way selection" is introduced. That is, four coaches listen to the contestants in chairs facing opposite the stage and select their teams of contestants based on the quality of their 'voices' alone. Contestants also have the final choice as to which team they would like to be part of if wanted by more than one coach. At the end of the first stage, each coach must recruit 12 contestants to their team to progress on to the next round[4]. In the second stage- the 'battle phase', coaches divide their team members into six pairs and have two members of each pair battle against each other by singing the same song simultaneously. Each episode features battles within each team, and each battle concludes with the respective coach choosing one of the two members to advance. In the series 2 (2013), a new 'steal' twist was introduced for the first time to the battle phase, which gives the chance to the losers in the head-to-head battles to be 'stolen' by opposing coaches. The power shifts to the contestant if more than

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[4] The blind auditions end when each coach selects a set number of contestants to work with (such as 12 in the Chinese version).

one opposing coach presses their buttons. The third stage of the competition- the 'knockout phase' was also first introduced in the second series. In this round, the contestants choose their own 'killer songs' to perform individually and then the coaches pick three members from each of their teams (six winners of the battle phase and one stolen member) to go through to the live shows. Finally, *The Voice* ends with the 'live shows' where the top contestants from each team compete each other during a live broadcast. The coaches have a 50/50 say with the audience to decide which one moves on to the final four phase- 'final concert'. And from these four, one is to be crowned 'The Voice'. The sequential plot line described above is sketched in the Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 *The Voice* formula

The Voice format=Blind audition +battle phase +knockout phase+ live shows

Based on the field observation, any significant deviation from the formats' relatively fixed formula might lead to failure as was evident

in the case of *The Voice UK*'s third season in Britain. The publicity director Lu Wei noted,

> Following the bible is not only a requirement by the copyright holder but also a guarantee of the market success. We learned that UK production team made great changes to its third season, which led to a sharp decline in audience ratings (interview, 2013).

For the format show *China's Got Talent*, what makes it stand out from many of the other similar programmes is that it not only properly purchased the intellectual property but also endeavored to live up to the production standards required by the format. However, it is not easy to transplant international production procedures faithfully. As the director Chen Qian revealed,

> At first the Dragon TV producers intended to broadcast the live show in order to make it more dynamic and interactive with audiences, but flying producers from the format holder, FremantleMedia, insisted on recorded broadcast. Because the bible came with editing templates that was specifically designed

for the format. By using the editing templates, we edited the footage of around 110 hours into an episode of two hours, and were amazed by the polished end product (interview, 2013).

The above are another two changes resulting from format adoption: editing methods and preferring prerecorded over live transmission.

After that, Dragon TV decided to follow the instructions listed in the bible and given by the flying producers as closely as possible in order to achieve the best result. In addition to editing, a special "story group" was required to be set up as part of the production team, which was responsible for collecting and recording background information of all contestants and processing it into interesting stories. To be more specific, according to the producer Li Wenyu,

> For each contestant, there is a formulated story template based on the collected information. On the templates, definite kinds of information are included, such as the most appealing part of their stories, filming tips for each shooting stage, use of aesthetic lighting, and sample questions the host and judges could possibly ask the contestants (interview, 2013).

Through following the bible and cooperating with flying producers, the production team gradually grabbed the essence of production practices to make high quality programmes. As the producer Li Baigu said,

One of the key points is to keep records of production details and daily meetings. The different technical staff writes up whatever stage or element they are responsible for from the devising stage to the final distribution stage. These pages finally compile a written bible that should not only serve as a resource for the producers to keep everything consistent but also a sales document to pitch the programme to potential television networks (interview, 2013).

However, the executive producer of entertainment programming at Endemol UK Productions, Linda Clifford, reveals that local production teams are allowed to make reasonable changes to the original version as a result of having fairly loose adaptations:

We, as a format rights holder, have always been easygoing with format adaptations in local countries and territories. Every country has a different way of producing the shows from others, because they have different amounts of budgets and resources so they have to adapt the format to meet the local needs (interview, 2013).

5.1.3 Research & Development

Keane (2004) has written that research and development (R & D) describes 'how the format process contributes to 'know-how' and ideas, which are developed either internally within the organization or transferred from outside the system' (p89). With an increasing number of formats adopted in China, systematic attention has been given to the pre-production phase in order to increase the adaptability of formats in local TV environment. As producer Jin Lei noted,

In order to make format shows as high-quality as their original versions, professionals started to redefine their previous idea of

production and systemize the research and development work
associated with programming (interview, 2013).

A case in point is that based on the results of systematic viewership
surveys guided by the originator, the production team of *China's Got
Talent* did not strive for the high level of audience involvement by
tapping into the interactive potential of digital technologies from the
fourth season. As with the original format, the Chinese production
team took efforts to encourage audience participation and media
coverage in the first season. For example, the producers of the show
set up an official website named 'Daren.smgbb.cn', with a BBS for
discussion; uploaded video clips of the show on popular video-
sharing websites such as Letv.com and Youku.com; and used Weibo
marketing to improve promotion by registering a dozen of show-
related accounts on Sina Microblog. However, these efforts did not
spark much discussion about the show on the Internet as expected.
The director Qi Yue put it like this,

> The BBS of the official website appeared to be virtually dead and
> for most of the posts there were no replies. The official account
> on Sina Microblog provided the link to the live broadcast of the

third-season finale, which gained the highest number of feedback. However, most of the comments were complaints about the unfair result of the contest (interview, 2013).

The situation on video-sharing websites such as Youku.com was more complicated. The feedback about the video clips of Talent contestants were either inactive or tampered with by the 'internet water army', meaning 'paid posters hired by public relations firms to post comments or initiate threads on the Internet for the purpose of swaying pubic opinion' (Chen *et al.*, 2011, p38). But as of March 24th 2012, the third season of the show had been viewed nearly 60 million times on Youku.com, which solidly proved its popularity among netizens. By all accounts, *China's Got Talent* is a show that millions of netizens watch but few like to discuss or debate about. In this circumstance, the production team decided to do the analysis as the format holder did, in order to examine the reasons for the show's high viewer ratings but relative silence on the Internet. Based on their research, one of the reasons is that the show appeals to young audiences to a limited extent. As the director Qi Yue explained in detail,

The format show has reached all age groups only in Shanghai, and it has turned into a television event, partly due to the influence of Zhou Libo, an extremely popular stand-up comedian in Shanghai and the only judge who has been involved in the show throughout all three seasons. According to the viewership survey of the second season finale in Guangzhou province, the age group, 45-54, is the largest group of the show's audience and it is almost 2.5 times as many as the second largest group, 25-34 (VAV Media, Research, 2011) (interview, 2013).

Therefore, the production team altered the promotion strategy to turning to the mild dose of audience involvement rather than provoking large-scale discussion on the Internet. As the director Qi Yue explained,

The show aims to achieve an immediate shocking effect and steady, long-term viewer ratings rather than any aftertaste that it went after before (interview, 2013).

5.1.4 Primetime schedule

It is widely believed that *China's Got Talent* represents the first successful licensed copy of the transnational format in China in the real sense. When it first appeared on Dragon TV in June 2010 and soon achieved a huge success, *China's Got Talent* generated great interest in format production among Chinese television professionals, and had a great influence on the decision-making about format selection. When it came to commissioning formats from abroad in recent four years, talent shows would be the top choice for Chinese professionals to consider and select for the content of primetime schedules. It is interesting to notice that once a particular transnational format achieved success in terms of audience ratings and social impacts, many other similar formats will be bought. This is one of the considerations in commissioning transnational formats. As programme consultant Xu Yuanyuan said,

Before launching *China's Got Talent*, factual television genres were mainly divided into news reports, current affairs programmes, documentaries, specialist programmes and [...]. The appearance of this new television format challenged our established knowledge of existing television genres in China and made talent shows

vastly prevailing on provincial satellite channels (interview, 2013).

But interestingly, as the producer Guo Weihua described, it was FremantleMedia [5] that approached Shanghai Media Group [6] and invited the latter to join the franchise of *Got Talent*. At first, Dragon TV hesitated to make a decision on duly paying for its license fee to join this project.

One reason was that those who properly purchased the format do not necessarily win the television market, when there exist so many copycats of the same format. This was the problem with international formats that we considered at that time. A case in point is the ratings battle between two dating shows, Hunan TV's licensed copy of *Take Me Out* and Jiangsu TV's copycat version of the format. Both shows were launched in 2010 and originated from ITV's *Take Me Out*. However, JSTV's illegal copy *If You Are the One* completely overshadowed Hunan TV's legal copy *Let's Date* in terms of audience ratings and social impact. It was partly because JSTV appointed one more thoughtful host

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[5] Fremantle Media: the owner of the *Got Talent* format franchise
[6] Shanghai Media Group: abbreviated as SMG, the owner of Dragon TV

and relationship experts as guest commentators to the show. This turned out to be one of the biggest selling points of *If You Are the One* (interview, 2013).

The other concern Dragon TV had was that each season of *Got Talent* format requires a production team of around 500 staff, but Dragon TV had never had such a big team to make programmes before. In order to persuade Dragon TV to join the franchise, FremantleMedia offered an "incredibly low" fee of $ 174000 to sell the format and also a sponsorship deal with Procter & Gamble. In these circumstances, Dragon TV eventually assembled a team of 170 staff for the production of China's Got Talent (Wang and Huang, 2010). This is another development that I have discovered through research: Chinese production teams are, in response to the requirements of format production, changing in size and composition.

The positive nature and feel-good effect were also the main qualities that Chinese professionals saw in the format *Got Talent*, and therefore they sought to keep the humorous and optimistic tone in their local production of the format. SMG executive producer Li Wenyu put it like this,

In the past, most of the rather similar singing or dancing competition shows had a nasty side to them, where the contestants competed each other in sometimes quite degrading ways and the judges commented on the performance of contestants in a very harsh way. However, *Got Talent* format gives to the public a mixture of humor, warmth and feel-good tone (interview, 2013).

5.2 Insights into the framework and structures

Technology transfer plays a role as crucial mechanism for the continuous growth of the format adoption in China. The Chinese television industry seeks to absorb the dominant international advantages by gaining crucial know-how and practices from foreign independent production companies, and thus make it possible to obtain a prime position in the global TV market. The increasing use of foreign television formats has provided opportunities for China to connect with global TV production practices and professional culture. In this respect, technology comes in various forms. As the director Chen Qian introduced,

Television formats are a good medium for these technologies, including specific knowledge about R&D, as well as those found in machinery and physical goods. They contain not only detailed information about how to make particular format shows, but also offer more general lessons and insights into the framework and structures from which they are derived (interview, 2013).

5.2.1 Transition from in-house production to independent production

In this emerging post-broadcasting environment, a proliferation of independent companies has emerged, all jockeying for a position in the rapidly forming tv market. In many instances, these production companies are operating with greater degrees of flexibility than was allowed over the past few decades, when production units were linked directly with television stations. In this regard, old relationships and structures are changing. One of the changes in Chinese TV landscape brought about by the format adoption is the transition from in-house production to massive independent

production, which will be illustrated through the following three points.

5.2.1.1 Roles of independent production companies

Globally, television format production is sub-contracted out to independent production companies, which is aimed to follow 'a publishing model'. As Liu (2009) noted, 'independent companies have taken the lead in defining the international TV format market' (p46). The shift to independent production began with American television network in the 1950s, allowing production to be 'outsourced' to independent producers. The trend toward independent production occurred later in Europe, as Channel 4 in the UK was established in 1982 as the catalyst for change. With the first independent company officially registered in 1994, independent production occurred much more recently in China, due to 'the nature of the market and a propensity on the part of governments to regulate control of content by opting to deal with broadcasters' (Liu, 2009, p47). And in the recent decade, they have moved quickly into making format shows. Compared with state-owned TV stations, as the CEO of IPCN said,

Independent companies have less resource but they are more flexible and efficient in producing programmes. Most of the founders of independent companies began their careers in the state-owned TV stations, so they maintain close relationships with the personnel of stations after leaving from there. This enables them to have local connections and at the same time keep themselves more space to be creative (interview, 2013).

There are currently three modes of programme production in China. The first is the way in which programmes are produced in the studio of the state-controlled TV station. For the state-owned media system, each TV station has its own production units. In particular, news programmes including political discussion are kept for in-house production. The second mode is that independent companies devise and produce programmes to provide for broadcasters. In return for the content, broadcasters trade a certain amount of advertising time by which independent companies attract sponsors to gain financial profits. As producer Lin Mi introduced, some channels have traded substantial channel time to independent companies for the content provided, such as Beijing TV's Life Channel and Hainan's Travel

Channel. The third production mode is that TV stations, which used to produce everything in-house, cooperate with independent companies to make programmes. For instance, one of Dragon TV's brand shows, *So You Think You Can Dance* (舞林争霸), is produced by an independent production company- Canxing Productions. Lu Wei detailed the usual way in which independent production companies and television stations work together:

> The way is that production companies deal with the entire production process and television stations simply make a decision about whether to buy the show and broadcast it after viewing the demos. The broadcasters will set the price for buying the show mainly based on its potential viewer ratings and estimated advertising revenue. After receiving the fixed fee paid by the network, the production companies will get no more profits related to the show, no matter how much is generated from commercials and sponsorships (interview, 2013).

This way of organizing the collaboration usually compels production companies to skimp on production expenses at the cost of programme quality in order to maximize net profits. With the advent

of the mainstream adoption of transnational formats in China, a new mode of cooperation between independent production companies and television stations has gradually brought into the Chinese TV landscape.

5.2.1.2 New mode of cooperation between independent production companies and broadcasters

In co-producing *The Voice of China*, Canxing Productions and Zhejiang Satellite Television formed a joint venture, a partnership in which both parties share both the revenue and the risk. It is unprecedented in China's TV broadcasting history that an independent production company and a television station have started to collaborate with each other in the way of 'both parties' inputting, risk sharing and profit sharing' (共同投入、共担风险、共享利润). Jin Lei, the chief director of Canxing Productions, echoes the point above on the cooperation mode.

> This new mode of cooperation puts both parties in the same boat, which means that the broadcasters have to take on a greater amount of financial risk than before. It is really a good

thing for us; however, at the same time, it took us quite a lot of time to find a network that was willing to sign on at the very beginning (interview, 2013).

Compared with the traditional way of cooperating, the new partnership makes both Canxing Productions and Zhejiang Satellite Television motivated to strive for investing in the best possible resources. As Lu Wei revealed,

Since there is no cap on profit sharing, both parties are willing to make their best efforts to offer the best possible show and related promotional campaigns. With this kind of motivation we've got, we invested large amounts of money to make sure that everything from stage setting, sound equipment to post production are top-class. At the same time, Zhejiang TV put forth its best efforts in the advertising bidding and successfully attracted a title sponsorship deal worth 60 million RMB with Wong Lo Kat, a beverage company. The fierce bidding also drove advertisement placements during the shows of the first season to reach 360,000 RMB per 15 seconds slot (interview, 2013).

5.2.1.3 A big move towards 'real sense' commissioning

In the recent decade, the term 'commissioning' (separation of production and broadcasting) has frequently been discussed by television producers and media scholars. However, this advanced business operation framework has not been properly introduced to the Chinese television industry. Television professionals tend to see the new mode of cooperation between independent production companies and broadcasters as a big move towards the 'real sense' commissioning. As the SAPPRFT researcher Ming Chao noted,

> The Chinese television industry is going through a stage of development as the British industry did in early 1980s. Nowadays, the separation of manufacture and broadcast has been well established to direct the British TV industry toward innovation. In order to encourage the TV content to be diverse, the British government requires broadcasters to commission independent production companies to produce a certain proportion of their programmes. It has also been supporting the growth of the independent sector deliberately by granting independent production companies more rights, such as

production rights and international franchising rights, after the sector took off in early 1980s (interview, 2014).

This is echoed by Paul Jackson, former ITV and BBC Director of Entertainment Programming and now Creative Director of Beijing based independent production company Houghton Street Media.

Regulatory rules are made that guarantee independent production companies will get reasonable payments of commission from broadcasters, and this has made London the centre of innovative television industry (interview, 2013).

In China, independent companies were given the rights to produce TV programmes in 2004. A growing number of private companies have been gaining recognition from broadcasters and viewers in the recent years, especially after Canxing Productions successfully produced *The Voice of China* for Zhejiang Satellite TV. However, independent production companies are facing financial risks constantly in the situation of no proper legislation, especially before the appearance of the new cooperation mode. Gao Ya from IPCN explained,

Independent production companies are sometimes required by broadcasters to sign a contract promising to reach a certain viewer rating. The payment will be deducted if they fail to reach it. In another scenario, production companies are paid a certain amount of fee, which includes their profits, to make a show. They have to dip into the profit margin when broadcasters keep requesting changes once the production has started. This kind of contracts discourages the sustaining TV innovation (interview, 2013).

In the short term, it's more practical for broadcasters to change their way of thinking. Hu Zhengrong, a professor of media studies at China University of Communication, suggest,

A new job evaluation system can be introduced to the workplaces in TV stations, which places originality as one of the criteria or even ahead of viewer ratings. And now it is a perfect time for changes, as broadcasters are facing challenges from inside and outside. In the long run, the production and broadcast must be separate if we want to see a flourishing TV content

market. With the tremendous success of *The Voice of China*, the commissioning model was established in a real sense for the first time. The problem we have is that we have so many broadcasters but such a shortage of quality television content. The increasing adoption of international formats would be a good opportunity to fill in gaps of content and also initiate the reform of TV industry's framework (interview, 2013).

5.2.2 Shift from genre production to format production

'The format is a stage of development in the evolution of television, anticipating and responding to the media post-broadcasting environment of increased market uncertainty'. (Keane, 2005, p3).

Keane (2005) argues in his study of TV formats that the dramatically increasing use in television formats is a sign of unprecedented change in the television industries worldwide. The global television industry has been compelled to reconsider what it can do, how its viewers have drifted, and how it can generate revenues. While in China, producers have found television formats as strategies to seek

to break away from stereotyped traditional genres. One of the major changes undergoing in Chinese television has been a shift from genre production to the emergent practices of formatting[7]. In academic critiques, genres and formats are usually fused together, however, formats function differently from genres. Genre deals with a bundle of narrative forms within standardized conventions that are widely agreed upon; that is, it is closely associated with narrative structure. However, it does not make much sense to talk of the trade in television genres. In today's global television we can see an unprecedented level of change in modes of production, workflows, product life cycles' planning, and advertising and marketing strategies, as with the Chinese television. These changes are occurring as global formats travel to local territories, viewers migrate away from television screens to interactive choices, and viewers come with diminishing loyalty to channels and programmes. In the fierce competition for quality content and the struggle for ascendancy in the multi-platform era, the television industry has gradually used formats adoption as new engine for industry development. As Lu Wei pointed out,

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[7] Formatting: Moran (1998) uses the 'pie and crust' metaphor to imply that formatting is basically a matter of providing the television format with local filling when it travels to local territories. In this research the formatting is a generic term for licensing television formats' copyright in different geographical markets.

Television format plays a role as a catalyst for change in local content. We can see through the recent popularity of talent shows and reality shows in China that the adoption of global formats turns out to be a shortcut for TV institutions to make their content more diverse and competitive. Dragon TV, ZJTV, HSTV and JSTV have all benefited commercially from the format production. *China's Got Talent*, *The Voice of China*, *Divas Hit the Road*, and *You Are the One* made these top four provincial satellite channels nationally famous respectively. Television formats in the end help the Chinese TV institutions stand out from the fierce and homogeneous content competition under the strict content control of the state (interview, 2013).

5.3 What television format means for Chinese TV: new engine for growth

In the distribution market of global television, China used to be categorized into the 'D level territory' which features the lowest value, 'simply because of the low return and high probability of cloning' (Keane and Moran, 2008, p166). However, the production of

China's Got Talent signals 'an important change of heart of global format conglomerates concerning the value of the Chinese market' (Ouellette, 2014, p529). In recent years, Chinese television professionals have gradually realized the benefits of purchasing formats properly than copycatting, and turned their attention to format production as a whole new approach for the development of Chinese TV industry.

As McCabe (2013) argued, 'emergent television territories like China have only recently entered the global TV marketplace, and so what is required from a TV format is not necessarily the same was what the Germans or Spaniards want' (p12). Like licensing the format *The Voice*, what Chinese producers wanted from the format deal were not only the content but also, more importantly, an industry development strategy. The knowledge about financial decisions about 'product placement, artist packaging services, programme promotion and derivative product arrangements' (McCabe, 2013, p13) is mostly wanted by Chinese producers. Based on the field observation of *The Voice of China*, product placement had a direct and important impact on the format's local production. As the programme's title sponsor, Wong Lo Kat appeared frequently in the

programme and was built into the narratives of the competition. On August 10, 2013, the team was producing the battle rounds within Na Ying's team, during which the director ordered the photographer specifically to give the Wong Lo Kat trademark close-ups for several times.

The prevalence of format franchising in China has been the result of many developments in Chinese media environment and the formats' own advantages.

First (technologically), buying TV formats is seen as an effective means of promoting the competitiveness of the TV stations amid the fierce market competition of China's media industry.

A format at its most basic is a core idea or a concept of a programme (Moran, 2006, p20). When a format is franchised to other territories, its production package may contain narrative elements, scripts and character dialogue. It may also provide suggestions for staging (camera angles, musical arrangements) and distribution (promotion, auxiliary markets) (McCabe, 2013, p12). In other words, format franchising is the transfer of expertise. Regarding the question of

weakening Chinese media institutions' creativity and innovation by fashioning formats, there have been political and economic discussions among scholars. However, as de Burgh et al. (2011) stated, 'TV format is among all sorts of modern media software that has to learn from the successful western experience of economizing the creative and culture industries' (cited in Zhang and Fung, 2014, p515). To a certain degree media institutions have to rely on advanced know-how of the West, especially in their adolescence of development.

According to Zhao (2008), China has integrated into global capitalism since the post-Mao economic reform. Based on Huang's (2007) observation, China's media industry is 'in a transformation from a pure propaganda machine to a market socialism model or a state-controlled capitalist corporation model' (cited in Zhang and Fung, 2014, p515). However, the Chinese TV sector is still in its adolescence after decades of reform and has a huge number of television stations that compete each other in chaotic market environment that has few high quality programmes (Keane, 2002). In addition, with the advent of multi-channeling and the convergence of delivery platforms, the demand for TV content has been increased

dramatically. Since the TV format is known for its transfer of expertise, fashioning formats has become an industry development strategy for Chinese broadcasters.

Besides (financially), as Miller (2010) noted, 'executives optioning formats for development prefer the sense of security obtained through formats having been 'proven' in a market with similar tastes' (p203). Formats, as a proven record of success, are usually adopted in China as a means of financial and cultural insurance, which somehow reduces a sense of risk.

Third (culturally), the TV format is known for, upon localization, having the advantage of cultural proximity to local audiences. By combining both local preferences for cultural tastes and the basic components of a TV format, local versions of formats reduce cultural gap by modifying original format frames. In the process of format franchising and reproducing, cultural hybridity as a result of the global trade in television formats, eliminates the problem of contradictory ideology at the level of audiences' reception in China.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have identified the concrete changes in Chinese production practices and management, as deriving directly from format production. My research uncovered that since formats began to be introduced in China, the grammar and vocabulary of Chinese television has been subsequently expanded and the visual appearance has been greatly changed. One of the major changes in production practices that have come about because of format adoption is the way in which contestants are selected. The orientation in searching for psychological archetypes rather than potential popular stars brings a fresh angle to Chinese talent shows. In addition, the bible and its use have had a number of fundamental influences on production processes. For example, through following the bible and cooperating with flying producers, the production team gradually absorbed the essence of production practices to make high quality programmes. One of the key points is to keep records of production details and daily meetings. Furthermore, systematic attention has been given to the pre-production phase in order to increase the adaptability of formats in local TV environment.

Technology transfer is a crucial mechanism for the continuous growth of the format trade in China. Technology in this sense mainly comes in two forms: one is specific knowledge about particular television formats (ideas and know-how) as described above; the other is general insight into the structures and framework from which they are originated. One of the changes in Chinese TV landscape brought about by the format adoption is the transition from in-house production to massive independent production.

Chapter 6

Key findings on research question 2

6.0 Introduction

Television is a heavily regulated industry; the government intervention inevitably impacts upon the television production market. An example is found in the rules that SAPPRFT introduced in October 2013 to reduce the number of television formats that Chinese broadcasters can acquire and further limit reality shows and other entertainment shows on satellite television stations. Consequently, this chapter aims to answer the second key research question and to explore the constraints and benefits of the political and economic contexts upon format localization. It will cover the corresponding regulatory, economic and ideological environment in China, and will also examine how national regulatory regimes and policy actors impact on the ways in which television formats are localized.

6.1 The political economy of format television

6.1.1 Commercialization took place

Television in China was a propaganda institution and a state-controlled industry from its inception in 1958. As the mouthpiece of the authorities, television was the most powerful and influential China's state-owned media outlets by disseminating information and messages and promoting social progress and stability through narrative forms that primarily include news programmes and television serials. Officials who were in charge of the cultural development had sought to ensure that television broadcasting institutions and departments carried out the tasks that were assigned to them, since the arts policy issued by the Communist Party of China was formalized in the 1940s. The assigned tasks entailed ideological issues rather than issues of profit making, investment activities or competitive strategies. The media outlets in China, as public propaganda institutions, were protected and isolated from competition, since cultural officials whose interests and focuses were ideological set out the guidelines and carried out the planning decisions. Based on the requirements of the authorities, content was

hence fittingly tailored to a targeted domestic audience, alternatively termed as the 'people' or the 'masses'.

One of the most significant changes in the development of China's television industry in the recent decade is that Chinese programmes have been gradually accessible in many other countries and territories. As a consequence of the recent China's *'Going Out'* strategy, the internationalization of China's media is changing the ways in which media researcher look at the media industries. Prior to the 1990s, media were highly correlated with propaganda that is supportive of government policies, and media scholars played a role in appraising the effectiveness of domestic propaganda work. However, an increasing number of critical book and reports on the culture industries had been published from the year of 2001, which coincided with the authorities' designation of culture as an industry and China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) that would ultimately be a driving force for the television industry to look outwards.

There were two factors that served as a catalyst for the term 'culture industry' to come to prominence in China in the mid 1990s. The first

one was China's impending entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). And the other factor was the need to keep a certain proportion of media production to do propaganda work for the government, and at the same time separate out the rest to find its way to market and carry out professional television production such as apolitical entertainment. The 16th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party took place in November 2002, in which broadcasting was announced to be a cultural industry. Later the same year the detailed information on how broadcasting should function as a culture industry was released. Culture industries were allowed to attend to commercial interest while cultural institutions were expected to serve for the public good. The tension between public interest and private interest was most evident in the Chinese television industry, and it was the key problem for policy makers and authorities to find an appropriate balance between didacticism and commercialization.

6.1.2 Regional satellite channels went national

The principal players in the Chinese television market are China Central Television (CCTV), provincial stations (for example

Guangdong Television) and municipal stations (for example Guangzhou Television). The number of satellite channels has now reached to close to 100 with CCTV itself. CCTV is responsible for operating twenty of those channels including its overseas language channels targeted for overseas territories (English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic). The province owning the second highest number of satellite channels is Xinjiang (nine), followed by Guangdong (six) and Shanghai (five). A number of other broadcasting networks that operate three channels include Beijing, Hunan, Jiangsu, Chongqing, Shandong and Fujian. However, the reality embedded in the television landscape of China is that the market is dominated by a small number of well-resourced satellite channels that possess abundant financial support and professional production approaches. According to what Ming commented on satellite channels,

> The A-list of satellite channels is comprised of CCTV Channel1, Zhejiang Satellite TV, Hunan Satellite TV and Beijing Satellite TV. Channels and their parent media corporations have sought to target national audiences by establishing distinctive brand strategies (interview, 2014)

6.1.3 Television entertainment: Chinese television industry's response to commercialization

It is worth reviewing the development of television entertainment during the 1990s briefly in order to demonstrate the significance of this period to the history of television entertainment in China. The entertainment value of television started to dawn upon an increasingly great number of television professionals around the year 1990, in which case a variety of events acted as catalysts, such as the immense popularity of locally produced drama series and imported soap operas in the 1980s, the phenomenal national craze for *Yearnings* (*渴望*) that was China's first soap opera broadcast in 1991, and the inauguration of two entertainment programmes - *Variety Panorama* (*综艺大观*) and *Zhengda Variety Show* (*正大综艺*) - by CCTV respectively in 1990 and 1991. In order to keep pace with the trend, provincial television stations started to produce their own 'variety' programmes. It is worth mentioning that these entertainment programmes are better to been regarded as continuity of television entertainment in the 1980s, since they are basically amalgamation of artistic performances that are presented by specialists for the audience and presided over by two smiling

anchorman and anchorwoman. The discovery of television entertainment was, however, soon to be overwhelmed by CCTV's experimentation with its first news magazine programme in 1993 – *Oriental Horizon* (*东方时空*) and its launching of the extremely influential in-depth news programme in 1994 – *Focus Report* (*焦点访谈*), which signaled a strong tide of interest in news innovations. By contrast, entertainment programmes experienced significant declines in the mid 1990s. It was widely believed that television was transforming from 'entertainment to documentary' (Zhang, 2002, p24) around the year 1996. Nevertheless, it is worth nothing that there had always been the undercurrent of television entertainment in the form of drama series throughout the initial years of television commercialization.

The supply of entertainment programmes became increasingly steady in the late 1990s by taking up the share of the total hours of programming from 16% in 1992 to 39% in 1996 and 44% in 2000. By contrast, the share of news programmes had experienced a marked decline from 28% in 1992 to 15% in 1996 and 6.9% in 2000 (Zhang, 2002, p28). The dramatically increasing number of entertainment hours can be attributed to the large proportion of

entertainment programmes and the proliferation of television channels (especially the doubling of television channels from the number of approximately 1200 in the year 2000 to more than 2100 in the year 2001). The total hours of television dramas actually broadcast must have experienced a greater increase due to the increase in television channels and the increase of television dramas on individual channels, despite that television drama production appeared to have reached a plateau of around 9,000 hours a year since the late 1990s. For instance, the total hours of television dramas actually broadcast on CCTV increased by around 600 hours from the year 1996 to 1999, though the total drama outputs in each year remained almost the same. With the launch of the game show *Citadel of Happiness* (快乐大本营) in 1997 and the dating show *Date with Rose* (玫瑰之约) in 1998 that were both produced by Hunan Television, entertainment programmes took on a new look and came to prominence after the decline of variety programmes. The popularity of these two programmes soon gave rise to a nationwide tide of cloning and copycatting so that almost all television stations made their own versions of *Date with Rose* or *Citadel of Happiness*. Even CCTV started to produce similar programmes such as *Happy Dictionary* and *Lucky 52* in order to compete with provincial

television stations for audience ratings and fight against its diminishing monopoly over variety programmes. Other television format programmes such as reality shows and talk shows continued to find their way into the Chinese television market by travelling from Europe, the US and Japan. These new genres of entertainment programmes centre around games and feature the joint participation of celebrities and audiences, which are remarkably different from entertainment programmes broadcast in the earl 1990s. If taking into consideration an increasingly number of entertainment-oriented news and information programmes, it is believed that entertainment has been taking over the Chinese television.

The rise and rapid development of entertainment television can be attributed to a number of factors, such as the increasingly intense competition among domestic television stations towards the late 1990s and the intensification of competition against other forms of media like newspaper, radio and new media for advertising revenues.

6.1.4 Television formats: looking overseas

With China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 and its sponsorship of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, China has been facing both a great number of unprecedented opportunities and many challenges. As Lee (2003) stated, 'China and its media have been caught in the crosscurrents of nationalism and globalism in the post-Tiananmen and post-Cold War milieux' (p1). On one hand, as we know the mass media are owned by the state except in Hong Kong (de Burgh, 2003). An order by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) was issued in October 2011 and came into effect on 1 January 2012 to reduce entertainment broadcasts by two-thirds during prime time, which shows that the government is trying to retain its 'monopoly over tremendous coercive power and resources' (Lee, 2003, p2). On the other hand, it has long been the dream of Chinese broadcasters to be one global player in the worldwide market. And the launching of The '*Going Out*' Policy[8] has also offered Chinese broadcasters a much promising prospect to step out of Chinese market and export more of their own creative content. For instance, as part of China's '*Going Out*' strategy, 'US$ 7 billion has been earmarked for external communication, including the expansion of Chinese broadcasting

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8 The *Going Out* Policy (走出去战略): it is a current strategy initiated in 1999 by the Chinese government to encourage its enterprises to invest overseas.

networks such as CCTV News' (de Burgh, 2016). In addition, because of the changing nature of audience consumption towards online and mobile media, the curb on 'excessive entertainment' has not prevented, but driven some among the audience to turn to streaming-video sites with both inland and overseas entertainment content (Chao and Tejada, 2012). From above we can see that there has been a bit of tension between regulatory practices and corporate strategies in China.

In this greater context, Chinese media has to take challenges from competitors from abroad as well as those inland. According to Zhao (1998), 'although the media are still owned by the state, their economic basis has been shifted from complete reliance on state subsidies to increasing dependence on commercial revenue from advertising, sponsorships, and business operations in other areas' (p67). In addition, with the development of multi-channeling (increasing number of channels), we can see the appearance of audience fragmentation, namely, lower average audiences per channel (Economic Analysis, 2004), which means that audiences have more choices and that competition among media conglomerates has also intensified (Chen, 2008). Therefore, Chinese television

stations increasingly began to search for the formula which is already well established as popular entertainment and proven successful in other markets. As Chen (2008) argued, 'those who can generate more resources and create more popular programmes will be the winners in the market' (p16). But as to why Chinese broadcasters tend to simply buy formats rather than create their own, Lei revealed that the 'media business is a risky business as the taste of audience is unpredictable. The most important part in content production is the idea which is equivalent to R & D in corporate function. Buying some successful formats can surely reduce the risk comparatively and to some extent have cost efficiency' (cited in Chen, 2008, p24).

Therefore, the deployment of formats from foreign countries has been becoming prevalent in the television industries of China and has also been seen by Chinese broadcasters as a means of increasing audience share. However, there is a tendency to view copyright and intellectual property as something that can be overlooked when copying such formats by the broadcasters. One of the reasons why this situation has often occurred is the historical legacy in China that 'the practice of imitation has been around since antiquity' (Keane, 2003, p9). At present, it has become a public secret that there exist

the problems of piracy of content ideas in China. For example, one popular entertainment programme made by Shanghai Media Group (SMG), *Wu Lin Da Hui* (translated title – *Let's Shake It*), was said to be a copycat of *Strictly Come Dancing* which has run on BBC One since 2004.

However, it could not be a long-lasting solution to achieve instant ratings by rapidly cloning the intellectual endeavor of other broadcasters and taking it for granted without the need for programmes R&D (Keane, 2004). But after initially replicating such formats, what exactly made Chinese broadcasters take the initiative to purchase the copyright of foreign programme formats legitimately and then adapt to appropriate localized forms? One reason is that they found they might get a better selling product by importing formats from abroad in a proper way. Although it is easy to clone formats by getting some videotapes from overseas broadcasters, there is also a great possibility that it would become a fatal weakness for the copycats of original formats to clone simply on the surface. Television format is not a simple layout but an overall system of concept, premise and branding of a copyrighted television programme, which is tailored to a particular market and its local

audience. As to successful shows adapted from overseas formats, the format 'becomes a vehicle for experimentation with producers taking the 'crust' and inserting local ingredients' (Keane, 2004, p95). Another reason is that Chinese media groups began to have the ambition to become one of the global players in the worldwide media market and export their own content over the next decade. And they also realized that they must abide by the international rules first of all if they want to have a say and earn money in the international market (Chen, 2008). Therefore, as Keane (2004) claimed, 'as China's moves to tighten up its intellectual property regime and as the principal broadcasters begin to realize the value of copyright in the media marketplace, we may see a greater formalization of format exchange within China and between Chinese television stations and international format distributors' (p104).

Since the initial contact with British broadcasters about the introduction of their TV formats, Chinese broadcasters have learned far more than the ways to make programmes from format trading (Chen, 2008). As the interior report of GBS (Golden Eagle Broadcasting System) summarized what they had learned from the cooperation with BBC Worldwide, 'since cooperating with the BBC

production team, we have learned a lot from the production bible, their work procedure and their great attention on details and precise control over the length of programmes' (HSTV, 2008, p26).

This part mainly described the emergence and evolution of the TV format business in China through several questions, that is, why Chinese broadcasters tend to simply buy formats rather than create their own and what exactly made them take the initiative to purchase the copyright of foreign programme formats legitimately.

6.2 Political ideology and identity construction of Chinese individuals

With the further development of the market-oriented economy in China, advertising revenue plays an increasingly important role in the survival of the Chinese television industry. Since the advertising accounts for 90 per cent of the total generated revenue, audience rating is becoming one of critical criteria when evaluating the financial success of television programmes. Furthermore, as China's post-revolution economic reform is often characterized as a de-politicization process (Zhong, 2010), television programmes are

required to take on a political role by delivering state ideologies to national audiences in a more subtle way, but also have to maximize financial profits for their sponsors and advertisers. As Zhong (2010) notes, 'the waning of traditional political ideology increasingly positions the market as an adhesive factor holding society together' (p13). By analyzing three television format shows, this section is aimed to examine how the regulatory practices are reflected in the local adaptation of international television formats and how ambient political ideologies are disseminated through final television products. As Barker (1997) states, it is critical to see television 'from a political and inevitably value-laden position, the ideological construction and potential consequences of television' (p218).

6.2.1 Redefining of the Uighurs

On 28 October 2013, a jeep ploughed through a crowd in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in what police described as a terrorist suicide attack. Five people were killed and nearly forty injured in the incident. On 1 March 2014, an attack by knife-wielding men at a railway station in Kunming in southwest China left at least 29 dead and another 130 people wounded, in what authorities said was a premeditated,

violent terrorist attack. Both violent attacks were affirmed as acts carried out by Xinjiang Uighur Separatist Force, according to the Xinhua News Agency. For decades, Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking Muslim ethnic group native to China's far western region of Xinjiang, have been fighting for autonomy within the Chinese state over domestic matters in order to preserve their own culture, and their resistance movement has become increasingly radicalized (Beech, 2014). After the March bloodshed in Kunming, there was a tide of thought towards Uighurs in a negative way. As media commentator Chunshan Mu (2014) points out, 'the Uighurs' online image is a combination of prejudice, fear and distrust, and the lack of trust between the Uighur and Han ethnic groups will continue to frustrate the nation's efforts to achieve ethnic unity'. Given the Chinese public's negative perception towards Uighurs, the featuring of the Uighurs in entertainment shows are required by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CCPPD)[9] to revert the negative image of Uighurs and thus promote ethnic unity. Therefore, this part illustrates the central direction of television production by examining the format show *Chinese Dream Show* and indicates how the show was aimed specifically at redefining the image of Uighurs in

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[9] Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China: abbreviated as CCPPD, is an internal division of the Communist Party of China that enforces media censorship and control in China.

a positive light.

Throughout the entire competition in the show, Muhammed, the winner of *Chinese Dream Show* in the season of 2014, takes on an important role as the Uighur ambassador who contrasts sharply with those violent and intimidating individuals of the Uighur extreme separatist force and also showcases the rich and diversified Uighur culture to national audiences. At the same time, the whole demeanor of Muhammed also serves as a constant reminder that Uighur people are, not unlike other ethic groups, friendly, humble and kind-hearted. In her first appearance on stage, Muhammed has temporarily 'fixes' the negative stereotypes towards ethnic Uighurs to some extent by introducing herself as a mother, a wife and a dance teacher and also leaving the audiences with a folk dance brimming with happiness and vitality. During the commentary section after her initial performance in the studio, the host invites both her four-year-old daughter and her husband to join Muhammed on stage. The camera captures the images of Muhammed carrying her daughter in her arms and her husband standing beside her with his arm around her shoulder. And the camera also presents multiple close-ups of Muhammed's daughter by portraying her sparkling eyes, chubby cheeks and bright

smiles. The family reunion on stage serves a highly symbolic purpose by juxtaposing Uighur people with positive images of family and love, and the visual presentation of Muhammed's daughter illuminates the innocence and purity in Uighur people which distances Uighurs away from those commonly associated with terrorist attacks or extreme separatist force.

The direct requirements of the CCPPD are reflected in the featuring of the Uighurs in the local production of *Chinese Dream Show*. Although Muhammed is an excellent western contemporary dancer, she constantly presents the national audiences with ethnic dances from her hometown with Xinjiang's eye-catching and gem-studded costume. Throughout the entire competition, her colorful ethnic costumes and graceful yet powerful dance style refreshes the impressions that audiences have on the exotic Uighur people who reside in China's far western region of Xinjiang. And her bright smile also serves as a constant reminder of Uighur people are, like other ethnic groups, passionate and enthusiastic with their love of life. In addition, the judges, most of who are from Han ethnic group, show appreciation for not only Muhammed's dance achievements but also her creative ability to innovate traditional ethnic dances. As the judge

Huang Doudou said, 'We mentioned that it is most important to show the contestant's fine technical skills in the first place when presenting ethnic dances and then to showcase the culture embedded in the folk dance. But you have reached the highest level by presenting the audiences with the ethnic group's totem through your performance'. On the surface, the above media text appears to be recognition from judges towards Muhammed's fine dance skills. However, the underlying meaning of the text suggests that the core of Uighur culture is delivered through her performance to the national audiences and characterized as peace, strength and vitality rather than violence and brute force.

Chinese Dream Show 2014 is therefore not only a localized talent show in which China's top dancers and signers have a chance to achieve their dreams, but also a platform in which the Uighur ethnic minority reshape its image in a positive light. The featuring of the Uighurs not only reflects an act of recognizing the Uighur people's love of peace and life, but also illustrates the central direction of television production by authorities in order to serve the political purpose of promoting ethnic unity in China.

6.2.2 Pleasant peasants

Deng Xiaoping's wide-ranging economic reforms have not only contributed to the rapid economic development for decades but also lead to widespread economic stratification and social inequality within China's domestic sphere. As Sun and Zhao (2009) point out, 'the richest 10 per cent of the urban population own 45 percent of the assets in urban China, compared with 1.4 per cent owned by the poorest 10 per cent' (p99). Public anger towards the new rich has been inevitably incited by the acute class polarization in China, which in turn intensifies the existing class divide between the urban middle class and the rural population. Given the fact that the television broadcasting industry is highly regulated, the question remains in this regard: how the tensions between the urban middle class and China's vast rural population can be ameliorated by the use of television narratives. And how do national regulatory practices impact on the ways in which television format shows are localized accordingly?

As one of the most popular localized format shows in China, *Where Are We Going, Dad?* is centred around examining issues pertaining to

the parent-child relationships. The programme documents the interactions between celebrity fathers and their young children when travelling together and completing various assigned tasks in China's rural villages. As Yuan (2013) notes, the popularity of the show is mostly attributed to its attempt to address social reality and the premise of the show to real how celebrity fathers interact with their children in the absence of mothers. As the decades of market-oriented reform led to the high cost of urban living and the fierce career competition in big cities, domestic families in China have gradually been put under immense financial pressure. Many young parents are faced with the dilemma of working overtime to keep their jobs and achieve career promotions with no time to spend with their children. Parents from rural areas also face the dilemma of struggling to make a living in urban cities and leaving their children at home under the grandparent' care. As the media commentator Yuan (2014) reveals, 'more and more people from rural villages are now working as migrant workers in urban cities, such as southeastern coastal areas. While parents devote themselves to earning money and creating a better life for their family, they have failed to spend time with their children, which consequently led to the reality that a whole generation of Chinese children has grown up

in the absence of their parents'. Given that it premised upon capitalizing on the concept of fatherhood, the format show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* is centred around repairing the broken relationship and strengthening the bond between fathers and their children in a broad sense. The show thus emotionally captivates a great number of national audiences to reflect upon their own father-child relationship.

Moreover, upon the requirements of the CCPPD, the show deals with the issues of urban-rural divide by using its televisual narratives to ease the tensions between the urban middle class and the rural population. In order to meet the requirements, the shooting location of the show is one of the most important factors in achieving the objective. Each season of the show is comprised of twelve episodes that are shot in six different remote and underdeveloped rural villages, which brings the audiences to rural areas in China and unravels the lives of people living in the countryside. For instance, Episode 1 of Season 2 is shot in the village of Tiankeng in Wulong county of Chongqing province, where celebrity fathers and their children are brought to live and complete various assigned tasks. The village is situated in the splendid Karst landscape and surrounded by weathered Karst hills, cliffs and stone bridges. Camera drones are

used to capture aerial views of the village and its surrounding areas, and the visual presentation of the primitive scenery is cinematically splendid. Directors of the show present vivid pictures of the life in the countryside by using close-up views of duck crowds swimming in the pond and rise famers working in the field, which are portrayed as tranquil, peaceful and rejuvenating. When the five celebrity fathers and their children first arrived in the Tiankeng village and saw the splendid sceneries, all of them were so impressed by the scenic views that they remarked 'whoa', 'so pretty' and 'it's amazing'. These televisual images and narratives implicitly suggest that people residing in Tiankeng village live in a place with splendid landscapes and natural sceneries that city dwellers cannot afford in their daily life.

When fathers and their children arrive at a new shooting location, the first assignment for them is to select houses for accommodation that are pre-selected by the production crew. They will compete with each other in games to determine the order of selection after having a round of house viewing. Each house is distinctive and unique in terms of its condition, amenities and location. However, the selected houses tend to be in a substandard living condition, which is aimed to

build up the dramatic conflict. Such housing is an indication of the existing poverty and underdeveloped economy of rural areas in China and the economic stratification within China's domestic sphere. In spite of this, the show attempts to reshape audiences' impression about the primitive living condition and underdeveloped economy of the countryside and redirect audiences to regard those houses as dream houses that all children and their fathers in the show compete for, by using television narratives and televisual presentations. The following dialogues originated from Episode 1 of Season 2 offer some insights into how the show constructs an idealized conception of the living conditions in the countryside amongst its audiences.

Table 6.1 Television text translation of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* (Season 2, Episode 1)

Voiceover: The first house is the Mill House located at the foot the hill. It is tidy and clean.

Joe: Wow! Let's take this one into our consideration, dad!

Duoduo: Dad! I don't think it's the countryside here. This house is like a castle.

Gary: Grace, how do you like this one? Do you like it?

Grace: Yes!

Voiceover: The second house is the Corn House. The entire living room and bedroom are decorated with corns from the ceiling to the floor. All of the children are instantaneously drawn to the piles of corns at the corner of the room.

Voiceover: The third house is the Bee House, which is owned by a beekeeper of the Tiankeng Village. Are the children going to ask the beekeeper for honey to eat?

Voiceover: In the fourth house, there is a wind chime hanging in the centre of the room. However, this house seems to appeal to none of the children.

Voiceover: The last one is built in a cave that is high up in the hill. It has the most beautiful scenic view of the entire village.

Duoduo: This house is the best one! It's so pretty and romantic.

As the voiceover repeatedly highlights the unique features, amenities and location of each house, audiences shift their attention away from the substandard living conditions of the countryside. And the children's reactions towards the houses even prompt audiences to imagine about living in the rural areas if they have a chance. These tranquil and fascinating televisual images of the rural areas contrast

sharply with those often described by the media. As Sun and Zhao (2009) point out, 'the media often occupies itself with sad stories soliciting the public to donate money to either migrant worker who needs and astronomical sum for her child's medical procedure, or the family of a peasant who commits suicide because he cannot find money to pay for his son's university fee' (p101). Upon the requirements of the CCPPD, the production team of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* attempts to reshape the perceptions of the urban middle class towards the countryside by presenting that the primitive way of living in rural areas is popularly sought after. As Xu (2014) states,

> Media product provides a systematic way for images of the modern lifestyle to circulate among television viewers, creating texts as mirrors of reality (interview, 2014).

Although Xu points out the correlation between media products and modern lifestyles in particular, it applies to the television narratives and the primitive way of life in the countryside. It is believed that the televisual images and television narratives used in the format show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* contribute to the affirmation that the life of Chinese peasants is pleasant, which in turn enables the stable

economic development of the nation. Since the production practices above are instantiated in the programme as a consequence of the CCPPD's policy, it can be seen that a delicate balance between ideology and financial profit can be achieved if responding to the political constrains properly. And television formats also leave much space for ideological reconstruction in the local production.

6.2.3 Featuring young generations

As China rapidly integrated into the global market and subsequently joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, a great number of Chinese people achieved the opportunity to explore the world outside of China. Although the stories of successful Chinese who achieved success abroad have inspired millions of young people, the life in the West and the experience of those successful people remains mystical. As Zeng (2008) points out, the craze for going abroad and exploring the life in the West became a prevailing desire amongst the domestic young, metropolitan urban Chinese. Nevertheless, a great many middle class young individuals residing in urban cities have limited opportunities to achieve the goal, whereas the majority of young Chinese living in rural China are even confined

to their homeland with living more traditional ways of life. Moreover, the rapid development of satellite television stations in recent years has led to kinds of television shows that not only promote urban lifestyles but also portray to the national audiences a more modern image of the middle class young urban generation, by capitalizing on the social trend of idolizing the western culture.

Jiangsu Television attempted to respond to the above phenomenon by developing overseas special editions for its dating format show *If You Are The One*. The format begins with 24 single women standing in an arc on stage with a light podium in front of each of them. The host then introduces a single man who chooses one of them as his 'dream girl' based on the first sight alone. His choice is initially known only to himself and the host of the programme. After that, more information about the single man is revealed through two or three video clips capturing snippets of his life, and each of the women makes a decision about whether or not he is date-worthy in her opinion by keeping her light on or turning it off. Since the year of 2011, Jiangsu Television had produced overseas special editions of the show to satisfy the national audiences' curiosity about the capitalist metropolitan life in the west and also to cater to the needs

of Chinese singles living abroad. Chinese single women and men working abroad are invited to the studio of *If You Are The One* in Nanjing to join the show for their love searching. While the programme is defined as an entertainment show with a mission of life service by pairing up single individuals, it also aims at satisfying the national audiences' curiosity about the life in the west. As Liu (1998) argues, 'television is a powerful media technology that can take the viewers almost anywhere in the world within the familiar surrounding of their home' (p39). Similarly, Zeng (2008) also points out in his analysis of transnational television serials,

> 'The impact of this 'transnational serial' was to break down the physical boundary of the space constructed by the national serial. It created an illusion of being in two cultures at the same time'. (p64).

Zeng's analysis of transnational television drama can be applied to the overseas special editions of *If You Are The One*, in which video clips that are used to reveal some personal information about single male participants often function as a medium to expose the mythic ways of life in the west to the national audiences. For example, the

special edition broadcast in 2012 features a love-searching journey for single Chinese studying or working in France. One of the male participants presents video clips in which he sits in a window seat at a rooftop café with modern European furnishing and gazes towards the Eiffel Tower in the distance. The scenes not only reveal the bourgeois lifestyle in France but also present idealized images of the capitalist west to the national audiences. And it is worthy to note that the show also develops a set of televisual images that facilitate the construction of the state's project of national image building by showcasing well-accomplished Chinese individuals. As Xu (2009) observes,

'Many of these shows target the urban middle class specifically, addressing aspects of their effort to establish and maintain a modern lifestyle and balance the demands of home and career. These programmes provide a space for the growing middle class to play a role in public media outlets, share their views on social issues or consumer matters, and express their creativity without endangering themselves politically'. (p159).

However, it is necessary to note that the appearance of well-accomplished young single Chinese in the show inevitably divert the attention of audiences from China's hundreds of millions of young people who live and work in underdeveloped rural areas. Zhao (2008) describes the life of rural women in her study of Chinese communication systems, which forms a sharp contrast with the urban women in the show. She argues,

> 'on the other hand, some poor rural women, who stay at home to look after the young, the old, the livestock, and the crops in depressed rural villages and who have found their cries lost in a cacophony of one-way mass 'communication' that seldom address their immediate needs and concerns, have found death to be their only means of social communication – suicide rates among rural Chinese women are the highest of all population groups in the world'. (Zhao, 2008, p158).

The way that *If You Are The One* portrays the image of young Chinese individuals is mainly targeted at highlighting the identity of the young generation as metropolitan, modern and well accomplished, which is required by the authorities. As Baruh and Park (2010) argue,

'reality television functions to reinforce the dominant ideologies associated with social groups such as class' (p8). Moreover, in its response to the further commercialization of China's television industry, the show *If You Are The One* adopts the special overseas editions as its marketing strategies to compete for audience ratings and thus generate advertising revenues. As Xu (2009) points out, entertainment programmes like *If You Are The One* provides a space where audiences can relate to the changing world beyond national boundaries.

6.3 Conflicts between western commercial operation of production and institutional system – the case of *Survival Challenge*

This part will examine the conflicts and contradiction between the commercial operations of television production and the long-established television broadcasting institutional system by analyzing the format show *The Great Survival Challenge*. Commercial factors (such as beauties and huge cash prize) started to be utilized in the local programming of its second season, which implies that commercialism started to be embodied in the production agenda of

the local format production. This case not only serves as a cutting-edge example to illustrate that key players in the domestic television market become anxious to win the audience ratings battle, but also highlights obstacles that the production team were faced with in the local programming. In order to make sense of the complex production environment that state-owned television stations have to deal with, it is necessary to analyze various aspects of the commercial operation, such as target market, advertising revenue, cost control, branding, sponsorship, publicity and distribution.

6.3.1 Dominance of advertising revenue

The media industry has developed into one of the mainstay industries of national economy in China over the past few decades. And the television industry, in particular, has been driven by the rapid national economic development to become a key growth engine of the new national economy. As the industrialization of the television broadcasting system gradually propelled television production to the marketing orientation, advertising has taken on a crucial role in the revenue generation of television stations, which results in the increasing significance of audience ratings in television

programme assessments. As Kilborn (2003) points out, 'in an increasingly competitive media environment the battle for ratings is more intense than at any point in television history' (p8). Moreover, as television is no longer the dominant form of the media as it was in the later 1990s, television broadcasters have faced with increasing competitiveness not only from other television channels but also from other forms of the media. Therefore, in the later 20th century television broadcasters launched a good number of television channels to compete for audience ratings and increase advertising sales. As Chan (1998) states, 'in order to gain and protect their own economic interests, various media organizations have engaged in severe competition for advertising' (p650). The authorities introduced a self-funding structure of competitive mechanism into the domestic state-owned television broadcasting institutions in 1995, which was aimed at achieving the goal in 2001.

Television advertising had become the major financial source for Chinese television stations and contributed more than 90 per cent of their overall annual revenues in the beginning of the new century (Weber, 2002). However, as it was reported that 1.115 billion people in China had access to watching television till 2002, the growth in the

number of the domestic audiences nearly reached its limit, which meant there was no more room to enlarge the size of television audiences. Theoretically speaking, the rise of audience ratings in one television channel implies the drop of audience ratings in other television channels. As a result, in order to compete for more advertising revenue, television broadcasting institutions, especially provincial television stations, had to develop beyond regional boundaries to win the ratings battle and achieve nationwide audiences' attention in the increasingly competitive supply-driven television market.

Shortly after China's entry into the WTO, producers of Guangdong Television started to become anxious about how to accommodate themselves to the changing television market. The production team not only struggled to compete with overseas commercial channels for audience ratings, but also attempted to compete with other forms of entertainment media such as the Internet to achieve the attention of their targeted and advertiser-desired urban young population. Therefore, in order to deal with these circumstances and ensure the survival of their production project in the long term, the production team was compelled to take marketing campaigns into serious

consideration. The application of the commercial attributes in the production of the format show's second season was indicated as the production team's direct response to facing with the stress that was brought about by the ratings competition.

6.3.2 Commercial approach

It is believed that being a pioneer reality format show contributed to the successful launch of the inaugural season of the format show *The Great Survivor Challenge* in the domestic television market. Since the success of the format inspired many other television stations to make similar programmes, various versions of the outdoor survival format started to appear on nationwide television channels. However, the phenomenon of such content homogeneity to a large extent shortens the lifecycle of newly emerged television formats. Therefore, it was a big challenge for the production team of GDTV to maintain long-lasting public appeals in the format show *The Great Survivor Challenge*. As Hu points out,

While the inaugural season of the show had significant influences in the domestic television market, the influence of the

second season was relatively limited. As a result, the television station was faced with certain pressure for the actual production of the third season (interview, 2014).

After the successful launch of the first season, the production team turned into an independent production team that was subjected to the Programme Production Centre of the Guangdong Satellite Channel 2. In the second season the production budget was increased to US$ 537,500 from originally US$ 220,500. As to GDTV, the localized version of *The Great Survivor Challenge* proved to be a high quality and name brand seasonal television show.

Since the outdoor survival format shows were no longer unique novelty television programmes in the domestic television market due to the content homogeneity, it would not be enough to maintain substantial public interests by merely advancing packaging strategies or polishing filming skills. With the increasing stress to compete for audience ratings and their improved perceptions of commercialization, the production team started to realize the importance of implementing commercial strategies to enhance the popularity of the show. As producer Hu explains,

The format show had become a name brand seasonal television show that received more and more public awareness. It would be very difficult to achieve our goal to maintain long-lasting public interests in the programme and thus create a brand influence in the domestic television market if we did not consider the selling points of the format (interview, 2014).

Chinese television professionals have become very familiar with the marketing terms such as 'brand influence' and 'selling points', and thus utilized the commercial attributes in the programming that are displayed very clearly in the final television product. Although they may not fully master marketing skills in the daily routine, the commercial mindsets had been deeply implanted into their production practices. In order to capture audiences' attention and create a high media profile, commercial factors such as 'urban beauties', 'overseas locations' and 'huge cash prize' were designed and utilized as selling points for promoting the television programme.

The production team kept the elements of survivor game and tribal scenario in the programming of the second season, and further

introduced a substantive cash prize into the game playing and set up a scenario of living as a tribe in a primitive environment in Saipan, an island in the Northern Mariana Islands. The cash prize was designed as a level of US$ 32,000 (CNY¥ 200,000)[10] in order to not only encourage the competition spirit among the contestants but also stimulate public interests in watching the show. It was the first time for the domestic entertainment shows to give out such a large amount of cash prize, which in fact generated much publicity for the show. For example, the final winner of Guizhou Television's *Canyon Survival Camp* was rewarded with US$ 12,500 (CNY¥ 100,000), and *Into Shangri-La* provided the final winner with a chance to realize his dream such as 'likely to take the form of college tuition, starting a private business, or foreign travel' (Lusby, 2001, p26). In addition, in order to maximize the entertainment values of the format show and attract their desired urban young audiences, producers chose the exotic places such as Saipan and New Zealand as shooting locations to catch up with the social trend of travelling abroad. In this part, the preceding development of the format show *The Great Survivor*

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[10] CNY¥ 200,000 was the maximum amount of money for a cash prize that was allowed by the authorities to be given out to contestants in a contest-based television show in China.

Challenge demonstrates the constraints and benefits of the economic context upon the format localization.

6.4 Summary

The deployment of formats from foreign countries has been becoming prevalent in the television industries of China and has also been seen by Chinese broadcasters as a means of increasing audience share. By examining television format shows, we have gained insights into the political significance of entertainment television and also developed a better understanding of how the more subtle political discourses are embedded in the localization of television formats. As China's post-revolution economic reform is often characterized as a de-politicization process (Zhong, 2010), television programmes are required to take on a political role by delivering state ideologies to national audiences in a more subtle way, but also have to maximize financial profits for their sponsors and advertisers. This chapter has also examined how the regulatory practices are reflected in the local adaptation of international television formats and how ambient political ideologies are disseminated through final television products.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

With globalization greatly intensifying interconnectivity among television industries worldwide, the television format industry has become a global trade worth an estimated €3.1 billion per year (FRAPA, 2009). Formatted brands reach almost all of the countries in the world, and many of viewers' favorite television shows are local adaptations of formats for local audiences. In China, the increasing use of international television formats has been witnessed in recent decades. The popularity of formats may suggest not only China's television industry's increasing interconnectivity with global television networks but also the standardization of content and technology. At the same time, the local political, commercial and ideological imperatives are impacting upon the ways in which formats are localized in China.

7.1 Original contributions to knowledge

Media scholars have been inspired by format scholars such as Moran

(2009) and Keane (2015) to look at the international circulation of television formats and examine what the cultural implications of global television flows are. Case studies of globally popular formats American Idol and Who Wants to Be Millionaire (Ganguly, 2011) and global television formats in Africa (Ndlela, 2011) provide substantial evidence that the traffic of international television programming flow not only promotes the global television format business, but also facilitates the construction of national and local identity. However, accounts of production practices' development consequential upon the format localization and debates on the benefits and constraints of political and economic contexts remained largely untouched in previous academic studies. This study will fill a gap by providing a more close up view of the subject that is more often tackled in the wide angle.

This study has explored the growing trend toward television format adoption and localization as an industry development strategy in China, and provided rich data by adopting qualitative methods such as field observation and semi-structured interviews. The results of the various analyses of the thesis have in different ways demonstrated how Chinese professionals perceive the development

of their practices and that of the whole television industry consequent upon the adoption and localization of formats. Television formats have provided Chinese TV professionals not only with new creative inputs into indigenous production practices but also with license to experiment with ideas that may not fit in with the legacy of the national culture or the brand of the channel or network. From the perspective of the Chinese television industry, the adoption of international TV formats is a new mode of production, which brings in advanced norms and means to internationalize and professionalize provincial TV networks in particular and Chinese TV in general.

Nevertheless, the analyses have also indicated a number of constraints and benefits of the political and economic contexts in China that impact on the ways in which television formats are localized. For example, as was discussed in Chapter 6, the regulations that SAPPRFT introduced in October 2013 reduced the number of television formats that Chinese broadcasters can acquire and further limit reality shows and other entertainment shows broadcast on satellite television stations.

7.2 Brief summary

In order to elaborate the uniqueness and complication of the television production environment in China, **Chapter 2** has provided background information and knowledge essential to the subject of this research by introducing the historical, political and economic contexts of the contemporary Chinese television industry. This background knowledge is necessary for the understanding of the complex production context that Chinese television professionals deal with in the adoption and localization of television formats.

The development of China's television industry has been divided into various historical periods. The foundation of the China's first television station, Beijing Television Station (China Central Television nowadays), on 1 May 1958 signals the beginning of this period. Regarded as political or ideological institution under a socialist command economy system, television in China during this time did not comprise profit-driven institutional units until 1978. Following the implementation of the reform and opening policy in 1978, the television industry, like most of other economy sectors, began to develop rapidly and to be liberalized gradually. In the meantime, advertising was introduced in the late 1970s, which

signaled that the commercialization started to change Chinese television.

It was not until the late 1980s that entertainment became an increasingly important means to attract audiences. During the period from 1984 to 1989 a total of approximately 6,000 episodes of television dramas were produced domestically (Zeng, 2009, p. 2). In some sense, this period of time can be regarded as inaugurating the age of Chinese entertainment television. By contrast with television drama that were, and still are, an unrivalled form of television entertainment in terms of output it generates, the supply of entertainment programmes such as variety shows, game shows and dating shows became steady and voluminous in the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, entertainment programmes took up an increasing share of the total hours of television programming, from approximately 26% in 1992 to 44% in 2000 (Zhang, 2002, p24). The *Zhengda Variety Show* (正大综艺), which was an entertainment show broadcast on weekends and sponsored by a Thai-Chinese agricultural fertilizer company, was launched by CCTV in 1990. This format show is considered as the first format adoption in China, which was

purchased properly through the process from acquisition to adaptation.

With China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 and its sponsorship of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, China has been facing both a great number of unprecedented opportunities and many challenges. As Lee (2003) stated, "China and its media have been caught in the crosscurrents of nationalism and globalism in the post-Tiananmen and post-Cold War milieux" (p1). Chinese media have to take challenges from competitors from abroad as well as those inland. According to Zhao (1998), "although the media are still owned by the state, their economic basis has been shifted from complete reliance on state subsidies to increasing dependence on commercial revenue from advertising, sponsorships, and business operations in other areas" (p67). Therefore, Chinese television stations increasingly began to search for the formula which is already well established as popular entertainment and proven successful in other markets. In recent years, the deployment of formats from foreign countries has been becoming prevalent in the television industries of China and has also been seen by Chinese broadcasters as a means of increasing audience share.

However, considering that the domestic television industry is still in its adolescent stage, the authorities sought rigidly to restrict the flow of foreign programmes into the local market, strictly regulate the domestic industry by keeping programme content under tight state control. Until now the mass media are still to some extent regarded as the 'throat' of the Communist Party of China, and are target to disseminate the propaganda on behalf of the authorities. Therefore, the roles that regulators play are very ambiguous in both supporting broadcasting institutions to foster growth and banning profitable programmes if they are considered to be 'harmful' to 'socialist values' of the Chinese society. For example, an order by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) was issued in October 2011 and came into effect on 1 January 2012 to reduce entertainment broadcasts by two-thirds during prime time, which Lee (2003) interprets as the government trying to retain its 'monopoly over tremendous coercive power and resources' (p2).

Since the format *Got Talent* achieved great success in China, we can see the prevalence of format franchising and the Chinese industry's

reliance on western expertise. **Chapter 5** has illustrated how Chinese professionals perceive the development of their practices and that of the whole TV industry consequential upon the adoption and localization of formats. Since formats began to be introduced into China, the grammar and vocabulary of Chinese television has been subsequently expanded and the visual appearance has been greatly changed. One of the major changes in production process that has come about because of format adoption is the way in which contestants are selected. The format guide, also called as the 'Bible', requires local production teams to search for contestants on the basis of a detailed list of casting categories. In the case of *China's Got Talent*, the format's copyright holder FremantleMedia required that particular psychological archetypes should be included in each season. This orientation in searching for psychological archetypes rather than potential popular stars brings a fresh angle to Chinese talent shows. Producers and directors are guided by this new approach to casting to look for talents from the lowest stratum of society. The contrast between these contestants' appearance and their talents is to be found potentially the greatest. The memorable performances of many grassroots contestants have left deep impressions on the viewers. This quest for archetypes is a most

important point demonstrating difference between earlier and later programmes consequential upon format adoption. And it is also unprecedented in Chinese television history.

Production bibles and their application have had a number of fundamental influences on production processes. As Fung and Zhang (2011) stated, the 'bible' is 'a production manual that must be adhered to in producing a franchised format television programme' (p267). The most secure way for the Chinese production team to produce a localized version of a format is to translate the "bible" faithfully as prescribed by the format holder and adhere to its formula. In addition to the casting categories of contestants, another two changes resulting from format adoption are the editing methods and preferring prerecorded over live transmission. Since the bible came with editing templates that was specifically designed for the format *Got Talent*, the local production team edited the footage of around 110 hours into an episode of two hours and they were amazed by the polished end product.

With an increasing number of formats adopted in China, systematic attention has been given to the pre-production phase in order to

increase the adaptability of formats in local TV environment. In order to make format shows as high quality as their original versions, professionals started to redefine their previous idea of production and systemize the research and development (R & D) work associated with programming. A case in point is that based on the results of systematic viewership surveys guided by the originator, the production team of *China's Got Talent* did not strive for the high level of audience involvement by tapping into the interactive potential of digital technologies from the fourth season. Based on their audience research, the production team altered the promotion strategy to turning to the mild dose of audience involvement rather than provoking large-scale discussion on the Internet.

Apart from providing opportunities for China to connect with global television production practices and professional culture, the increasing use of foreign television formats has also played a role as a good medium for transferring technologies. They contain not only detailed information about how to make particular format shows, but also offer more general lessons and insights into the framework and structures from which they are derived. One of the changes in Chinese TV landscape brought about by the format adoption is the

transition from in-house production to massive independent production, which has been illustrated through the following three points. First, there are currently three modes of programme production in China. The first is the way in which programmes are produced in the studio of the state-controlled TV station. For the state-owned media system, each TV station has its own production units. In particular, news programmes including political discussion are kept for in-house production. The second mode is that independent companies devise and produce programmes to provide for broadcasters. In return for the content, broadcasters trade a certain amount of advertising time by which independent companies attract sponsors to gain financial profits. As one of the interviewees introduced, some channels have traded substantial channel time to independent companies for the content provided, such as Beijing TV's Life Channel and Hainan's Travel Channel. The third production mode is that TV stations, which used to produce everything in-house, cooperate with independent companies to make programmes. And the usual way in which independent production companies and television stations work together is that production companies deal with the entire production process and television stations simply make a decision about whether to buy the show and broadcast it

after viewing the demos. The broadcasters will set the price for buying the show mainly based on its potential viewer ratings and estimated advertising revenue. After receiving the fixed fee paid by the network, the production companies will get no more profits related to the show, no matter how much is generated from commercials and sponsorships. This way of organizing the collaboration usually compels production companies to skimp on production expenses at the cost of programme quality in order to maximize net profits.

Second, with the advent of the mainstream adoption of transnational formats in China, a new mode of cooperation between independent production companies and television stations has gradually brought into the Chinese TV landscape. In co-producing *The Voice of China*, Canxing Productions and Zhejiang Satellite Television formed a joint venture, a partnership in which both parties share both the revenue and the risk. It is unprecedented in China's TV broadcasting history that an independent production company and a television station have started to collaborate with each other in the way of 'both parties' inputting, risk sharing and profit sharing' (共同投入, 共担风险, 共享利润). Third, the term 'commissioning' (separation of

production and broadcasting) has frequently been discussed by television producers and media scholars in the recent decade. However, this advanced business operation framework has not been properly introduced to the Chinese television industry. Television professionals tend to see the new mode of cooperation between independent production companies and broadcasters as a big move towards the 'real sense' commissioning.

Furthermore, another change in the Chinese TV landscape brought about by the format adoption is the shift from the genre production to the emergent format production. Keane (2005) argues in his study of TV formats that the dramatically increasing use in television formats is a sign of unprecedented change in the television industries worldwide. The global television industry has been compelled to reconsider what it can do, how its viewers have drifted, and how it can generate revenues. While in China, producers have found television formats as strategies to seek to break away from stereotyped traditional genres.

As China's post-revolution economic reform is often characterized as a de-politicization process (Zhong, 2010), television programmes are

required to take on a political role by delivering state ideologies to national audiences in a more subtle way, but also have to maximize financial profits for their sponsors and advertisers. **Chapter 6** has examined how the regulatory practices are reflected in the local adaptation of international television formats and how ambient political ideologies are disseminated through final television products. By examining television format shows, we have gained insights into the political significance of entertainment television and also developed a better understanding of how the more subtle political discourses are embedded in the localization of television formats. First, the direct requirements of the CCPPD are reflected in the featuring of the Uighurs in the local production of *Chinese Dream Show*. Throughout the entire competition in the show, Muhammed, the winner of *Chinese Dream Show* in the season of 2014, takes on an important role as the Uighur ambassador who contrasts sharply with those violent and intimidating individuals of the Uighur extreme separatist force and also showcases the rich and diversified Uighur culture to national audiences. The featuring of the Uighurs not only reflects an act of recognizing the Uighur people's love of peace and life, but also illustrates the central direction of television production by authorities in order to serve the political purpose of promoting

ethnic unity in China. Second, upon the requirements of the CCPPD, the production team of *Where Are We Going, Dad?* attempts to reshape audiences' impression about the primitive living condition and underdeveloped economy of the countryside by using television narratives and televisual presentations. It is believed that the televisual images and television narratives used in the format show *Where Are We Going, Dad?* contribute to the affirmation that the life of Chinese peasants is pleasant and the primitive way of living in rural areas is popularly sought after, which in turn enables the stable economic development of the nation.

Furthermore, this chapter has also examined the conflicts and contradiction between the commercial operations of television production and the long-established television broadcasting institutional system by analyzing the format show *The Great Survival Challenge*. This case not only serves as a cutting-edge example to illustrate that key players in the domestic television market become anxious to win the audience ratings battle, but also highlights obstacles that the production team were faced with in the local programming.

The prevalence of format production in China has been the result of many developments in Chinese media environment and the formats' own advantages. In the technological regard, buying TV formats is seen as an effective means of promoting the competitiveness of the TV stations amid the fierce market competition of China's media industry. Besides (financially), as Miller (2010) noted, "executives optioning formats for development prefer the sense of security obtained through formats having been 'proven' in a market with similar tastes" (p.203). Formats, as a proven record of success, are usually adopted in China as a means of financial and cultural insurance, which somehow reduces a sense of risk. Third (culturally), the TV format is known for, upon localization, having the advantage of cultural proximity to local audiences. By combining both local preferences for cultural tastes and the basic components of a TV format, local versions of formats reduce cultural gap by modifying original format frames.

7.3 Limitations of the study

The methodological approach employed in this study has proved successful in most ways. Nevertheless, the approach also has

limitations. Interviewing individuals who work in television stations poses a number of challenges all related to how to get access. Researchers have to negotiate with broadcasting and production organization to find access, because they are, as opposed to public space, within a relatively private space. In addition, the people working in media organizations 'hold a high cultural status and power in society and often have moral obligations as well as economic interests to protect and cultivate' (Frandsen, 2007, p44), which makes it even complicated and difficult to get access to the right interviewees or the format bible. Therefore, it is important to note that the problem of getting access may have some consequences for the final results of the research to some extent.

Appendix: Interview Questions

Interview with executive producers

1. What is your role in co-producing a format show (e.g. *The Voice of China*) with consultant producers (e.g. from UK)?

2. Could you describe how the local production team and flying producers cooperate with each other? How do you negotiate if the local team thinks the requirements in the bible do not suite the taste of local audiences?

3. What are the unexpected challenges and difficulties you have encountered in the process of local production?

4. Do you think it is an effective way to compete with rivals to make format shows?

5. What are the reasons that have led to the enormous growth of the TV format adoption in the recent years?

6. What have you learned from the cooperation with flyer producers in the local production of format shows?

7. What are the requirements made by the CCPPD in the localization of format shows? How do the regulatory practices influence the final products?

Interview with broadcasting executives

1. What are the reasons that have led to the enormous growth of the television format localization in the recent years?

2. What changes in the television production have been brought about by the format adoption?

3. There are hundreds of television formats circulating in the international market. How have these particular formats had been selected by Chinese broadcasters?

4. Can you tell me about the details about how the formats are introduced to your institution?

5. To what extent have the preferences of audiences had impacts on the selection of overseas formats?

6. In which ways do you evaluate the preferences and tastes of audiences?

7. What are the requirements made by the CCPPD in the localization of format shows? How do the regulatory practices influence the final products?

Interview with developers of original formats/ flying producers

1. What is your role in co-producing a format show (e.g. *China's Got Talent*) with Chinese professionals?

2. Could you describe how the local production team and flying producers cooperate with each other? How do you respond if the local team thinks the requirements in the bible do not suite the taste of local audiences?

3. What do you think are the differences in the production practices and work styles between UK and China?

4. Can you tell me about the localization process from the beginning till the end, such as lighting, theatrical design, stage setting and casting (e.g. standards for choosing the contestants in talent shows)?

5. What changes have been made compared to the original format?

6. How many countries has this format been sold to?

7. How about the audience ratings in other countries?

8. How did other broadcasters localize this format? Please give some examples to illustrate the differences between its version and Chinese version.

9. As we know, the ways of format trading include simply selling formats' licenses, or having consultant producers (flying producers) stay on site and pass on information to help local

teams set up the show. In what ways do you export formats?

10.   What constitutes creativity? How do you understand the creative labor?

11.   How about the professionalism of television producers?

12.   What do you think core abilities or competencies the creative television professionals should have?

Interview with format brokers

1. There are hundreds of television formats circulating in the international market. By what standards do you select particular formats?

2. Can you tell me about the details about how you work with local broadcasters and developers of original formats?

3. What are the requirements made by the CCPPD in the localization of format shows? How do the regulatory practices influence the

final products?

4. As we know, the ways of format trading include simply selling formats' licenses, or having consultant producers (flying producers) stay on site and pass on information to help local teams set up the show. In what ways do you import formats?

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