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### **Media reform and democratization in post-Mao China : a television case study.**

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# **MEDIA REFORM AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-MAO CHINA**

## **A TELEVISION CASE STUDY**

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requirements of the University of Westminster for the  
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## ABSTRACT

Social reform movements in the communist state are a simultaneous, dialectical process of the revival of socioeconomic dynamism on the one hand, and the abandonment of Party-state praxes on the other. As a result, the Party-controlled media system is bound to proceed to organic transformation. However, by using the medium of television as a key example, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that, under the conditions of Deng Xiaoping's particular and contradictory reform programme and in the context of Chinese society, Chinese mass media have created their own pattern of media transition that is unparalleled by that of other communist states, particularly those under the Gorbachev-style reform programme. The main characteristic of the Chinese case is that the growth of the industry and the reform of the media institutions have spontaneously become a twofold theme governing the whole process of post-Mao media development. Therefore, its adopted policies and strategies, institutional transactions, media performance, structural changes and the ways of delivering resources and increasing productivity, have all been conducted and constrained within that framework. The style of media transition in post-Mao China is not radically revolutionary, but evolutionary. It entails growth that incrementally redefines reality, producing its own dynamics and conflicts.

The evidence of the thesis suggests that Deng Xiaoping's reform formula for the Chinese mass media --- an unintended contradiction of promoting the growth of the media industry and rationalizing its performance without allowing the parallel development of institutional democratization and fundamental changes of the power structure of Party's media --- cannot obtain its intended objective. Rather, it tends to produce a boomerang effect: although it can protract the process of media democratization, the new social forces, the changing economic relations and political culture in post-Mao China have provided the solid foundation for a further change with the overall media reform tendency continuously gaining momentum. The historical logic and irony become explicit here: Deng's reform programme, as a desperate resort to save the Party-state system and to prevent the advent of democracy, has turned out to be the midwife of far-reaching societal transformation and democratization in China. Thus, despite the sufferings and frustration of the 1989 Beijing pro-democracy movement, the present course of social reform is almost impossible to reverse.

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Although it cannot be immediately evident, the search for the present topic of this thesis was prompted initially by a very personal response to the Beijing events of 1989 known by the term the "Tiannenman Square tragedy". On that day, the 4th of June, two of my university's classmates in China were killed by bullets of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. One of them -- Mr. Chen Laishun -- was a close friend of mine. These events exerted a powerful influence on my political outlook and led me to pursuing the research which is recorded in the pages below.

I grew up in Mao's China -- an entirely different world. During the extraordinary period of the Cultural Revolution, I remember every person in the morning had the hour-long collective ritual of reading aloud from Mao's Little Red Book, then performing the people's loyalty dance to Mao, then participating in mutual criticism and self-criticism, ending with bowing before Mao's portrait and shouting "Long Live Mao and the Party!"

In 1968 when I was about twelve, my father, a senior doctor, was sent to a labour camp for about two years on the ground that he was a "bourgeois intellectual", and for another two years was made a hospital cleaner. At the time I naively thought -- as did almost every one around me -- that this kind of punishment was a form of inevitable class struggle and was necessary in the interests of building a pure Red Communist China.

Small children such as myself were inculcated with the idea of the New Man. For a period of Mao's ideas penetrated the whole of China, convincing most people of the nobility of communism's Utopian aims. People genuinely believed we had a duty to liberate the world from the sufferings under capitalism.

However, their success was their failure: the country gradually,



in the early 70s, became disillusioned with Maoism. The reality was that society was endlessly in conflict in the name of class struggle, for instance, 90% of Chinese intellectuals were purged or punished. When the euphoria faded away, people found that their traditional Chinese culture had been destroyed; political life was in a constant state of flux; the economy had come to the edge of collapse. By the mid-1970s people began to question the Cultural Revolution, even the whole communist system. Daily personal experience taught us all too graphically the great contrast -- indeed, absolute contradiction -- between reality and the Maoist ideals which we required ourselves to express.

By the early 1980s I was one of those questioning the system. However, as Deng Xiaoping's reform programme began to make progress, it revived some hope in me that the party-state would reform itself.

Then came Tiannenmen Square.

By then I was in England studying mass communications. With a democratic and free debate academic circumstances of the Centre For Communication and Information Studies, University of Westminster, I was developing a better understanding of problems in China.

Immediately after the Tiannenmen massacre, my first instinct told me that the reform movement was over and that China would return to classical totalitarianism. In an attempt to understand this great tragedy, with tremendous encouragement and vital support of Professor Nicholas Garnham and Dr. Colin Sparks, I started researching the development of the Chinese mass media and the role of the media in the context of the post-Mao reform era.

In the course of the research and the post-Tiannenmen development, I readjusted my position and found that in fact it is almost impossible for anyone to reverse current course of profound social transformation in China. Eventually, I emerged

from the emotional trauma and subsequent shadow of Tiannenmen Square.

For the reason outlined above, from the personal point of view, this thesis is a way of expressing my loyalty and moral duty to my motherland. I dedicate this thesis to the effort to search for a better China.

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The study of the Chinese media within Western culture and in English language is a big challenge to me. Many people have contributed to accomplishment of my thesis. To them, my thanks and wish that I could have been a better student. I owe a great intellectual debt to Professor N. Garnham, Dr. C. Sparks for their insightful inspiration, pointed criticisms, valuable suggestions and patient assistance. I would also especially like to thank Dr. R. Barbrook, Dr.P. Morris, Ms. Virginia Tym, and Mr. Wang Te Yung. Grateful acknowledgments are due to the British Council and the Sino-British Friendship Scholarship Scheme, to the Educational Section of Chinese Embassy, to the Great Britain-China Education Trust, and to the Centre For Communication and Information Studies, University of Westminster. Finally my deep gratitude to my wife Lei Wang and my parents, who have far more to do with this thesis than they realize.

## INTRODUCTION

Democracy, let us admit it, has overcome the challenge of historical communism. But what means and what ideals does it have to confront those very problems out of which the communist challenge was born?

Norberto Bobbio (1991)

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### **Media Studies in (Post-) Communist Transition: Wider Context**

Perhaps the single biggest event in recent history has been the rise and fall of communism and the prevalence of liberal democracy. The "post-historical" argument which proposes "the end of history" (Fukuyama, 1989; 1992) turns out to be largely the end of the human experiment with two major social choices: Western liberal democracy and Soviet communism. It seems that, behind the controversial rhetoric, the exponents of the post-history debate have unmistakably delivered a crucial message to the world: **After communism, there can be no real challenge to liberal democracy.**

However, against this background of neo-liberal triumphalism, it is also important to point out that liberal democracy is neither the flawless nor the optimal solution to the very problems of modernity brought about by the modern industrialization movement and the capitalist mode of social production.

Looking back on modern history, it appears that the process of modernization constantly demands a social structure which would efficiently create and fairly allocate wealth amongst all members

of society. However, it was proven that the answer provided by capitalism based on classical liberalism was a failure. Its profit-driven approach does indeed create wealth, but it cannot distribute it fairly. As a result, capitalism has led to gross social injustice and left the majority of people living at the level of marginal subsistence, which in turn seriously undermines overall social stability and progress. As the economist J. Galbraith remarks, "Capitalism in its original or pristine form could not have survived. ... The system has survived only because of its capacity, in a liberal political contest, to adapt" (J. Galbraith, 1990:24). In other words, what we imagine to be the success of today's western society is in fact a combination of the democratic political system and the free market economy with some measures ensuring a degree of fairness in the distribution of wealth, which have long been advocated by the social democratic movement.

The Soviet model communist experiences in this century, on the other hand, have been even more dismal. Its totalitarian social engineering turned a whole society into a giant Gulag, which could only end up in debacle. However, one point remains clear for the sake of a better future for humankind: Universal human values such as liberty, equality, and solidarity, require the transcendence of an individualist, liberal doctrine. The construction of the social democratic institutions is essential in order to break through the limitations of liberal democracy, and in the long-term, it can provide some means and ideals that "it have to confront those very problems out of which the communist challenge was born"(Bobbio, 1991:5). It is in such a process of developing the social-democratically oriented institutions that the mass media play a crucial role; and it is here that questions surrounding media democratization have to be dealt with. At the juncture of the state's drive towards a maximization of power and the market's drive towards a maximization of profit (Splichal, 1992; Sparks, 1992), two forces merge in the public communications media, the very arena in which modern democracies hold there should be neither oppression nor



compulsion, neither coercion nor deprivation, but rather freedom of information and democratizing the means of public communication.

In communist states the question of freedom of the press and media democratization was always the most vexed one, the Achilles heel of the regimes' commitment to Marx's doctrine. For one thing, the Party defended central control of the media on the grounds that it was for the good of the people as laid down by the officially interpreted Marxism, even though Marx himself fervently advocated media freedom. As a result, the Party destroyed a facet of its own credibility and constructed for itself a hypocritical image, purporting to follow Marxist theory while at the same time suppressing all forms of freedom of expression. Worse still were the Party's efforts to exert power over people not only by force which was much used, but by dictating their thoughts and opinions through its overwhelming media hegemony.

In the last decade we have witnessed the world-wide decline of the communist movement, most visibly in the case of the Soviet model system. In response to this, initial reform programmes took two major directions. One was led by Gorbachev and the other by Deng Xioaping. Gorbachev sought to change the political structure of the communist state in an attempt to revive the dynamics of society, whereas Deng concentrated on market-oriented economic reform.

The result of the Gorbachev reform programme was the total disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the reconstruction of the whole socio-political system in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union with the painful task of effecting an economic transition from a state command economy to a market economy.

Deng Xioaping's reform programme, in contrast, has created certain social dynamics in post-Mao China. He has tried to give people economic freedom while maintaining Party power in a

political dictatorship. Social transition, in his view, means attaining the neo-authoritarian model society already successfully operating in South-East Asia's "Four Little Dragons" -- Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan (Deng, 6.3.1989). However, what he has not taken into account is firstly that mainland China is a communist state fundamentally different from the Little Dragons in terms of ideology, political institutions, legal system, state structure and so on. Secondly he has failed to recognise that these countries are now on the fast track to democracy. Taiwan, for instance, has almost fully implemented a democratic political system. The others follow close behind.

In short, the Party-state of mainland China to some extent bears little resemblance to the socio-political foundations of those countries. Thus this single issue creates a fundamental and antagonistic contradiction in Deng's reform programme, namely, capitalist-oriented modernization and economic liberalization versus the communist "Four Cardinal Principles" (i.e adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Mao's Thought, Communist Party Leadership, Proletarian Dictatorship, and the Socialist Road). However, this contradiction, as we shall see in the course of the thesis, constitutes a basic dialectical movement between continuity and convergence on the one hand, and dynamics and change on the other. The ultimate anti-thesis is that society is driven towards post-communist evolution.

The transitional course of China's post-Mao reform indicates the discontinuity of the Soviet model of communism in China. The question is: what is China headed towards? One major suggestion being made is of the likelihood of the neo-authoritarian arrangement. This author argues, however, that a neo-authoritarian rule may indeed be successful economically, but that it can last for only a short period. The structural problems of the existing party-state and the irreconcilable contradictions between the growing social forces and the weakening old formations as well as the momentous demand for social democratization have created a firm base for further political

changes. But such changes may not occur in the radical short term in the revolutionary style, but in the long term evolutionary struggle towards building up Chinese democracy, albeit with seesaws of set-back and advance.

### **Overall Purpose of the Thesis**

The mass media provide the principal arena of interplay -- often a battleground -- of social forces in the process of reform and democratization with the key issue that of fundamental transformation of media institutions in (post-) communist states.

The overall purpose of this thesis is to present a study of major aspects of post-Mao Chinese media reform and development in an attempt to explicate the structural changes and dynamic trends in the present period of profound social transformation. By using the medium of television as a key example, this thesis seeks to show that the media institutions in the post-Mao era, especially television, have found themselves placed in the forefront of change, redefining their roles and in themselves demonstrating the effect and the process of commercialization, pluralism and democratization.

The study is based on the following three hypotheses:

**First**, as part of society and as a product of a particular socio-political system, the mass media can only be understood through their social context and through their connections with the wider society. Therefore, the study attempts to link the development of the Chinese mass media to wider political, economic and cultural movements within its overall social formations at the time of post-Mao China's transition.

**Secondly**, during the past fourteen years the process of Chinese dynamic reforms and the unbalanced development between politics and the remaining sectors of society (especially the economy)



seem to indicate that China is undertaking its own transitional course which is likely to involve the process of a zig-zag long march towards democratization. This delicate and complicate process is slow, and could well include a short period of neo-authoritarian rule.

**Thirdly**, under Deng Xiaoping's style of reform programme in the circumstances of Chinese society and within the context of weakening party-state institutions, China may, with its pragmatic solutions and social interaction, provide a model of the media development and reform under communist-towards-(post-)communist conditions.

### **Dialectical Changes**

The focus of this thesis is on the dialectical movement and dynamic changes in media development and institutional reform under the Deng's solution. In effect, the evolution of post-Mao Chinese mass media has almost certainly prompted a set of questions concerning continuity and changes in society. It reveals how culture, politics and economics have interacted with one another to engender far-reaching social transformations. It brings into focus the key problem that has acutely faced post-Mao China, namely, the intensifying conflicts between the entrenched political institutions and alien and fast-growing socio-economic formations. On the one hand, all the dynamic forces for rapid changes and growth come from the reform programme led by the new impulse towards economic liberalization. This tendency indicates that the Chinese media industry has been forming a new logic of media performance ranging from production, organization, resources allocation and institutional rationalization -- a process which is a far cry from the original Party media model. On the other hand, the existing party-state apparatus remains formidable, retaining monopoly power over the mass media. The Party has made every effort to stop the tendency towards liberalization and pluralization. However, despite the Party



temporarily gaining some ground by conducting political campaigns and tightening media control against so-called "Bourgeois Liberalism" at intervals of two or three years in post-Mao China, the spontaneous massive challenge for political freedom and media democratization has never been staunched.

It is this author's understanding that the interplay and dialectical movement are producing a powerful driving force for fundamental institutional reform both in the mass media and the political system as a whole. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that it is these dynamic changes and contradictions which will ultimately determine the fate of Deng's reform programme and the future of Chinese society.

### **Media Democratization in China**

One of the major themes of the present study is media democratization in post-Mao China. In the thesis I consider media democratization as a series of institutional changes and social movement whether through evolution or revolution, whether dramatic or not, towards the praxis of democracy. It is tempting to argue that, in all past and present communist states, media liberalization is the first step towards media democratization; and that a large-scale political-or-economic reform movement generated by the indigenous social conditions is vital to foster a media liberalization-to-democratization process. As far as China is concerned, two distinguishing factors can be identified:

a) That China was a communist Party-state which suffered an extraordinary experience with the catastrophic consequences of Maoist rule (1949 - 1976), and that Deng's subsequent reform programme has brought about immense diversification of interest groups and created new social formations demanding further political changes in the direction of (post-) communist pluralisation and a long-term evolutionary process of democratization.

b) That China is an underdeveloped country, the largest in the world, which has been constantly constrained by its low level of material productivity. Thus, pressure for national development has always been a paramount task and economic modernization became a priority.

It is these two interrelated factors that have had an overwhelming impact on, and to a large extent dictated the course of Chinese media development and the crescendo of institutional reform. Thus, media democratization in China may differ substantially from its western counterparts as well as from its counterparts in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It has the following characteristics:

1. It appears to be gradually weakening the Party's monopoly power over the operation of the mass media.
2. It involves a process of structural decentralization of the media which has resulted in fostering local autonomy, allowing different social groups (such as local industry, local authorities, media corps, and the public) each to pursue its own interests and to produce something approaching a pluralistic media policy.
3. There is an ongoing attempt to establish a legal framework to protect individual civil rights and to allow greater independence within media institutions vis-a-vis the Party control mechanism.
4. There is growing forum - of momentous import - for cultural diversity along with the increasing editorial autonomy, allowing more space for the expression of heterodox views within the changing media environment.
5. Modernization of the media and its commercialization of affiliated industries have increasingly rendered the media economically independent of the State, creating a potential base for political change and democratization.

6. Instead of being accountable only to the Party, the media are increasingly accountable to the public and public opinion; and are becoming influential sources in the process of public policy makings.

These six major aspects reflect the trends of media democratization in post-Mao China. Although separately they may be small steps, they are all in the long term heading towards evolutionary change, and their cumulative effects will be irreversible.

### **The Case against Technological Determinism**

The thesis sets out to examine the relationship between social changes and media development. With the evidence contained in the study, this author challenges the influential argument put by McLuhan and Sola Pool that the determining factor in transforming socio-economic-cultural structures of a society is the mass media equipped by new information and communication technologies (McLuhan, 1965; Sola Pool, 1983). Malik even argued in 1984 that the advancement of new information technology would simply defeat the Soviet communism, as he put it in his long article "Communism v.s the Computer":

The USSR and its associated countries cannot survive the large-scale introduction of information technology in any meaningful way and be recognizably the same system that has evolved over nearly seventy years (Malik, 1984:10).

However, the relationship between media development and social change in post-Mao China, as this thesis illustrates, provide counter-examples: It is socio-economic forces and their interplay within the given political and cultural circumstances, in an energising spiral and loop with the mass media, that have created the dynamics of social change, and that have transformed not only



information and communication technologies but the politics of the country. Moreover, what seems clear in China's case is that the fall of communism and the rise of the liberal-oriented reform movement have not resulted from the introduction of new information or any other technologies. Rather, it was its internal movement of institutional contradictions, namely, the fatal failure of the communist system in terms of dictatorship over human consciousness, and the irreconcilable, cumulative and intensifying conflicts between the state and society, between the Party and the masses, that created the foundations of antagonistic contradiction which in time cannot but entirely, from deep within China's social formations, undermine the whole communist structure and push the society towards fundamental change.

Meanwhile, the evidence of the thesis is also set to oppose another type of technological determinism, namely, "the pessimism of technological development" or "the dystopia school of technological determinists" (e.g H.Schiller, K.Robins, F.Webster) in which it argues that new information technologies are technologies of greater social control and manipulatory tools of power elites. Contrary to this argument, the study suggests that technological advancement in the communication media does play a positive and important role in increasingly reducing once-all-powerful the party-state's capacity to isolate, encapsulate, atomize, and, eventually, total control the people living in such a system. Therefore, I also argue that the rapid development of information technologies and revolutionary changes in Chinese communication industries (with special reference to the growth of television) have had a profound and catalytic effect in the process of creating greater openness, information flow, opinions exchanges and thereby, fostering sweeping social reform movement and democratization in post-Mao China.

The case of television development and social transformation in China clearly reveals the flaws of technological determinist arguments in both schools. The underlying problem with their



arguments is that, as Garnham points out, "it overlooks the fact that technological developments are themselves shaped by the prevailing structures of economic, political and cultural power and more importantly that they offer a range of potential which will only be actualised by the prevailing structure" (Garnham, 1991:28). In short, the advancement of information technologies cannot determine the direction and process of societal change, but it can have the potent sociopolitical and socioeconomic effects on influencing the pace and scope of societal change.

### **The Study of Chinese Television**

In the 1960s, factories on the mainland China were producing about 3,000 to 5,000 television sets each year. In the nearly twenty years of the television broadcasting in the Mao's era (from 1958 to 1976), only 925,000 TV sets were made in China, a very tiny figure against a population of 700 million at the time (now 1.2 billion). But in 1989 alone, China produced 27.67 million television sets, and the total number of receivers reached 165 million with a viewing public of 700 million -- a ratio equal to the world average, equal to countries such as Malaysia and Thailand where the per capita GNP is four or five times as high.

These statistics underline the fact that compared to both the West and the former Soviet Union and its former satellites, the development of China's television industry, though recent, has been extraordinarily rapid. Moreover, as the pioneer and part of far-reaching social changes, its impact on all aspects of society -- from affecting one's trivial round of daily life to fostering macro socio-political transformation (most visibly in the case of the 1989 Beijing pro-democracy movement) -- has been widespread and strongly felt. Clearly, something has profoundly changed.

One of the basic aims of this thesis has been to augment available information on the development of Chinese television by finding relevant records as well as conducting interviews with individuals involved in the field. In the course of the research an area of consideration reveals itself, an area which provides complex ground against which to set the documentary findings, and which invites further research in the future. In brief, this is the dynamic, causal, and contradictory relationship between the Party's fostering of television expansion for modernization and political control on the one hand, and the far-reaching, grass-roots drive towards social democratization, of the pluralization and commercialization of a key communist industry (which is still regarded as the Party's mouthpiece), and the consequent breakdown of the Party-state on the other.

The Chinese case of gradual organic growth from communism to pluralism raises general issues of media-society interaction and institutional transformation. The evolution of television in post-Mao China invites reconsideration of Western academic interpretations of the actual or desirable relationship between the media, the state and society. The way of China's progress in the last decade as yet seems preferable to the consequences of the Gorbachev-style of political reform in its (abortive) attempt to transform "Glasnost" into the fruits of economic wealth. But even so, one should not underestimate China's problems, such as commercialism run riot in a country whose media regulation and legal framework have not kept pace with commercial greed and corruption, and a cultural sieve which cannot contain an excess of low-quality television game-shows, thirty-minute blitzes of advertisements, and all that those two examples imply. Ironically, from this dross might arise the phoenix of a new democratic order. The unique Chinese approach to media reform and the industrial leap into the late 20th century, remains a challenge and valuable case for mass communication studies.

## Method and Sources

This work mainly considers Chinese television development against the background of radical socio-economic transformation in post-Mao China. As stated, the focus will be on the growth of the television industry and the reform of the media institutions in their social contexts. Although television programmes will be examined, the emphasis is not on surveys of empirical data and content analysis, but rather on institutional perspectives and analyses of the social formations and their macro-level effects of interplays between television expansion and post-Mao socioeconomic changes. Also it is not the aim of this thesis to examine the nature of micro-level, motivational nuances or alternative psychological and material perspectives of the subject. Rather this study provides a descriptive account and detailed analysis to explore the sociological nature of the subject systematically. This may be the first broad and deep inquiry into the development of Chinese television broadcasting both in the West and in China.

It was only a decade ago that the discipline of media study was introduced to mainland China (L.Chu, 1986), but progress has been made, particularly in respect of print media and opinion research (including audience surveys). The literature published concerning media study has increased gradually both in terms of quality and quantity.

However, up till now little systematic research has been done on the subject of Chinese television broadcasting, and information has been hard to come by. Therefore, I have relied mainly on two principal sources to undertake the present study: The first is documentary, both published and internally circulated. In so far as data are available on every source and aspect of the Chinese broadcasting, I have traced its development from the pioneering stage of the mid-1950s to the present. Chief among them are the Chinese Journalism Yearbook (since 1983) and Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook (since 1987), media study journals, audience surveys,



policy-making documents and public debate reporting.

The second and probably more valuable primary source comes from my interviews with some key figures involved in Chinese broadcasting, including broadcasters, decision-makers and academic researchers which I conducted on a visit to China in September-October 1990. I am much indebted to my interviewees in developing my research work, for providing comprehensive information ranging from the recall of important events concerning early Chinese television development to current trends. A list of name of interviewees is provided in the reference section of the thesis.

### **Arrangement of Chapters**

The thesis has been arranged as follows. Chapter 1 provides a theoretical review of the media role in modern society within the three perspectives: liberal democracy, social democracy and communism. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of studies of the Chinese mass media and social contexts of media evolution in mainland China since 1949. From Chapter 3, the main theme concerns Chinese television. An historical survey of the origins and development of Chinese television in the Mao's era is provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 and 5 are devoted to decentralization policy, commercialization, structural change and rapid growth of the industry after Mao. Chapter 6 deals with the cultural and social impact of television expansion. Chapter 7 examines media institutional reform and the evolution of freedom of the press in the field of broadcasting. Chapter 8 is the conclusion.

### **Terminology**

A word about the terminology used in the thesis is necessary because it reflects certain basic authorial premises and

assumptions about the subject.

The academic convention of using the general term "communist state" (or system or society) is followed. This is not meant to suggest that the author supposes that the communist state which Karl Marx envisaged more than a century ago has been achieved. Rather, the terminology refers to the state or the system based on Marxist and Leninist doctrines, established along the lines of the Soviet model, given the name "communism" rather than "social democracy", and possessing basic features of the totalitarian hyper-rationalist genre in which the communist ruling party commands politics, economy, culture and daily life in an attempt to create a society of "New Man". It is beyond the scope of this thesis to argue as to what constitutes genuine Marxism or Leninism.

The thesis entails a notion of progressive historical evolution of communism in what appears to be three phases, two of which are already almost complete. The first stage was the phase of "classical totalitarian communism" in which the Party power virtually penetrated the whole society. The major examples are identified in Stalin's Soviet Union and in Mao's China.

The second stage involves what we might call "post-totalitarian communism" or "authoritarian communism". Here the Party still dominated society but control became loose, allowing some personal freedom. The emphasis was on material advancement rather than the political transformation of man's mind. These shifts started a process of peaceful evolution in which the communist totalitarian system was being damaged and decaying, opening the way to the third stage. The major examples are found in Khrushchev and Brezhnev's Soviet Union as well as in Eastern Europe during that period, and, less obviously, in China in the late '70s and early '80s immediately after Mao's death and during the early stage of Deng's consolidation of power.



The third stage, which China is currently entering, exhibits much greater variation than the previous two. No consensus yet has been reached on how to define it, but two categories may be suggestible: The first might be called "post-communism", and refers to the drastic direction and revolutionary change taken in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The other category might be called "communism in a state of profound transition" which may identify what has been happening in China and other south-east Asia communist states, where the market-oriented economic reform initiated by the leadership has progressively undermined the Party power and driven the society towards pluralization. This is a complex, delicate stage inviting research, and it is the one with which this thesis is primarily concerned. For the purpose of generalization and convenience I sometimes put bracket on the prefix "post-" as (post-) communist to loosely identify this stage situation as a whole. In the course of the following chapters, Deng's China is mainly discussed as a developing, communist-transitional country, as defined above.

The use of the term liberal democracy is used to connote liberal ideas current since the Enlightenment; the term social democracy or democratic socialism is used to connote socialist ideas current since the Industrial Revolution.

The use of the term democracy in this thesis is entirely conventional. It refers to a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for choosing and changing governing bodies, which provides a social mechanism permitting the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions, and which has constitutional means to ensure citizen's basic rights, such as free speech, freedom of association and freedom of press. The term "democracy" as used here does not refer to definitions based on theories of "class struggle" and "proletarian dictatorship" by which, from Lenin to Mao, the Party forced people to believe that the communist system was the most "democratic" one even though discussion of democracy was

forbidden there.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MEDIA, STATE, AND DEMOCRACY**

#### **--- A Theoretical Background Review**

Since the modern mass media took their rise from the Enlightenment, and developed, mutated and re-shaped by the large-scale social movements ranging from the Industrial Revolution, the October Revolution to the current waves of global marketalization and democratization, the primary purpose of this first chapter is to provide a theoretical background review by surveying the role of the mass media in the broad contexts of liberal democracy, social democracy and communism. In the first section, an overview of research approaches and paradigms to the study of media system will be provided, followed by the three parallel sections covering media theories and approaches in the framework of liberal democracy, social democracy and communist doctrines.

### **1.1 THEORIES OF MEDIA SYSTEM MODELS**

#### **1.1.1 Four Basic Models of the Mass Media and Variations**

The mass media in all societies are perforce forged by and attached to the socio-political system and are determined by the nature of the state power. In 1956, there appeared an important work in the systematic examination of the relationship between the general characteristics of the mass media and the socio-political system: S.Siebert, T.Peterson and W.Schramm published their seminal book of Four Theories of the Press. They presented four models of the media system, calling them "authoritarian,"

"libertarian," "social responsibility," and "communist". Essentially, the book seeks to answer the fundamental question of why and how the different media systems are formed and how they function and what is the relationship between social systems and media institutions. Throughout the four-case studies Siebert et al. have cogently argued on the premise that "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted. We believe that an understanding of these aspects of society is basic to any systematic understanding of the press" (Siebert et.al, 1956:1-2).

Although the shadow of the Cold War and the threat of the Soviet communist expansion at the time made the analysis of the communist media model hostile within the us(good)-versus-them(bad) framework (Altschull, 1984), Siebert et al.'s research did establish a solid paradigm of media-state-society. It focused on the issues of socio-political control and the nature of the communication media under the conditions of the different state powers. In particular, their research produced an accurate anatomy of the Soviet media performance and a deep grasp of its institutional failure. Thus, the analysis still remains relevant in assessing the evolution of communist totalitarianism in the field of mass communication. The four media models may be summarized as follows:



Table 1.1  
Four Models of the Mass Media

Model 1: Libertarian		Model 2: Social Responsibility
Chief purpose	to seek truth to check on government	similar to Model 1, but to act more responsibly
Norm of management	autonomous & professional ethics	similar to Model 1, plus a degree of state regulation
Financial viability	self-reliance, commercial-orient	can be self-reliance, or state support, or mixture
Relation with market	free market & competition	controlled market & regulated competition
Relation with state	freedom from state interference	negative & positive freedom the right to communication
Essential difference from others	media act being free & independent, society's watchdog	similar to Model 1, but media assume obligation of social responsibility
Applicable to the media	mainly press	mainly broadcasting
Model 3: Authoritarian		Model 4: Soviet-type communism
Chief purpose	to support or obey policies of the authorities, to serve the state	being loyal to the Party, to contribute to Party success to mold views & change behavior according to communist ideology
Control method	mainly non-ideology e.g. license, censorship	ideological-oriented plus political action of Party
Financial viability	can follow either Model 1 or Model 2	rely on the state entirely
Norm of management	limited to none autonomy, guided by the state	to run as a branch of the Party and political & ideological orientation
Relation with market	can follow either Model 1, or Model 2	absent
Essential differences from others	no watchdog function, ancillary to the government in power	an instrument of state and Party's mouthpiece

Source: Siebert et al. (1956); Hachten (1981); McQuail (1983);

Altschull (1984); Head (1985).

D.Grabar (1980, 1984) later simplified the four models into two categories: authoritarian media control systems and non-authoritarian media control systems. Within the category of authoritarian media systems are the non-ideological and ideological sub-sets requiring either an authoritarian administrative power or communist ideologies to control media activities in order to maintain the social order. Correspondingly, the two sub-sets of non-authoritarian approaches are the American model of "libertarian" and the western European model of "social responsibility".

### **1.1.2 Achievements and Shortcomings**

The methodological and theoretical paradigm set out by Siebert et al. was nearly universally accepted in the West and became the widely used normative approach in conducting media system studies. In effect, it was not until the 1970s that major revisions were made beyond the framework of the four theories. As a result, a great deal of literature based on this paradigm was generated with the three following characteristics:

1) it usually followed from a set of preferences and desirable goals about the nature of the media performance and social process and tried to provide some analysis of ways to realize them (Bobrow, 1974:107-108);

2) a considerable number of analyses focused on the problems of establishing a democratic system in various nations and the role that the mass media can or does play in that process (e.g Pye, 1963; Gregg & Banks, 1971;); and used the concept of press freedom as the key index of political democratization to examine and assess media systems, especially media political behaviours, management and ownership (e.g Namurois, 1964; Lowenstein, 1970;

Wells, 1974); and analyses of the institutional performance of the mass media (e.g. Nixon, 1960, 1965; Lowenstein, 1970; Tustall, 1977).

3) national and international media systems studies were commonly projected in the bipolar framework of the libertarian/social responsibility model and Soviet communist model; and there were, therefore, aggregated in the particular areas of western European and north American media systems on the one hand, and of Soviet media system on the other hand with most of such researches being restricted to an investigation of a specific national media system or comparisons of different media organization on a nation-by-nation basis (e.g. Inkles, 1956; Emery, 1969; Dizard, 1966; Paulu, 1974; Markham, 1967; Hopkins, 1970; Liu, 1970; Yu, 1964).

While it continued to predominate in media system and media-state relation studies, the Siebert et al. approach with the four press theories drew considerable criticism which mainly concentrate on three aspects. First, there was the problem of inadequate dimensions employed in the four press models and a lack of flexibility in the descriptions and analyses of existing media systems. It was argued that their approach was based mainly on the dimension of political/ideological conflicts (e.g. freedom v.s dictatorship) and thus tended to ignore other important economic-cultural factors which shaped the structure and operations of media systems (Mowlana, 1976).

Second, (a problem related to the first one) the over-concentration on the political dimension led to an ideological bias of the stereotypical us/them, good/bad formulation, and thus a lack of objectivity and rational analyses (Bobrow, 1974; Hardt, 1988). One criticism even went so far as to argue that there are in fact "fundamental similarities" between western media systems and Soviet ones and claimed that the Siebert et al. approach "minimizes the similarities and exaggerates the differences" (Altschull, 1984:108).



A third problem was that because the four models theory was produced in the heyday of the Cold War with a bipolar West v.s Soviet structure, it largely neglected the situation of newly-independent and developing countries which probably belonged to neither. As a result, it failed to identify with the different characteristics of the media system and its performance in these countries. The phenomenon that Mowlana (1973) and Dinh (1979), among others, criticised as an ethnocentric bias in media research and lack of literature in media system analyses of developing nations, was to some extent attributable to such theoretical and methodological limitations.

### **1.1.3 Reformations**

Thus, since the work of Siebert et al. came out, many attempts have been made to modify or redefine the mainstream approach both in terms of theoretical innovation and model construction in response to the inadequacy of the four theories of the press within the context of growing concerns about the developing world and the changing reality of media performance.

#### **1.1.3.1 Williams' Four Models and the Critical Approach to Media Studies**

As early as the 1960s, R. Williams, amongst others, began to indirectly challenge the Siebert et al. classification of existing mass communication systems. Instead of following the prevailing approach to analyze the media system, Williams set his own criterion of media democratization to examine the media performance, and thus transcended the framework of the us-v.s-them. By focusing on the problems of media systems both in Soviet type society and western industrialized society, Williams also proposed his own four models of mass communication systems: Authoritarian, Paternal, Commercial and Democratic (1962, 1966,



1976). In his classification, roughly speaking, the authoritarian model covers both Siebert et al.'s authoritarian and communist ones, while the counterparts of the libertarian and social responsibility models fall under his paternal and commercial one. His major contribution, however, was his democratic model upon which he believed that modern communication systems should rest. Although, Williams agreed that paternal and commercial models were better than the authoritarian one, he also sharply criticised their undemocratic essence. For democratic communication, Williams argued, should not only be against "paternal control of what ought to be said", but also against "commercial control of what can profitably be said, because this also can be a tyranny" (1976:133). As he saw it, the existing free press practice in Western society would not go beyond the limitation of freedom for profits within the principle of commodity exchange law. In this way, he concluded that only the democratization of the communication media would provide a solution to overcoming the problems of media systems currently dominating the West.

The inadequacy of Williams's proposal is obvious. As he himself acknowledged, his blueprint of democratic media is based on the idealistic model of what should or may be achieved rather than what already exists. Consequently, it remained, by his own admission, at the stage of discussion and imagination (1976:133). Inevitably, the influence of his version of media models was limited. Nevertheless, he was one of the pioneering exponents of a critical approach to communication studies and was the first to cast the light on the issue of media democratization.

In view of the press-state relationship and the role of the mass media in the advanced capitalist societies, it must be mentioned that the critical approach has made significant contribution to studies of communication by rejecting positivism and scientism in social thought and by paying attention to the social context of the media performance and the media institutions with other social relations. From a critical perspective, the mass media is

perceived in both its political-ideological and economic dimensions as unevenly reflecting and reacting with the perspectives of commodity production and the structure of social relations. Thus critical scholars view mass media in capitalist society primarily as serving commercial interests determined by the market pressure, or as agents of established powers, or of existing the socio-cultural order (J.Altschull, 1984). L. Althusser, for instance, regards mass media as "state ideological apparatus" whose function is to reproduce the conditions of the existing social production (1971). In a similar vein, S.Hall argues that the mass media are the chief source to transmit and produce the ruling class (i.e capitalist) ideology (1977). Political economists, on the other hand, approach the mass media basically as part of the information and cultural industries. By examining media performance within the mode of capitalist production, they explore the deeply unequal social relations in terms of media structure, ownership, access and the power of control (Garnham, 1990; Murdock & Golding, 1977).

#### **1.1.3.2 Developing-Media Approach**

By the 1970s, the growing awareness of the Third World consciousness and the intensifying international debate over the New World Information and Communication Order resulted in the proliferation of literature concerning Third World media studies. Thus arose a new media approach addressing the issues of Third World communication that came to be known, in varying terms, as the development media model. An early influential version of this model was provided in W. Hachten's book The World News Prism (1981, 1987) and similar studies in scattered publications (e.g A.Lent, 1977; C.Salinas, 1980; C.Ogan, 1982; and D.McQuail, 1983,1987). According to Hachten (1987:30-32), the development media concept was "an amorphous and curious mixture" of liberalism, socialism and nationalism. The key issue involved in this model concerned using the mass media to promote economic development and national integration. Indeed, this has become a

common theme widely accepted in the developing nations as Kwame Nkrumah, president of Ghana (1960-1966), said some twenty years ago:

The press does not exist merely for the purpose of enriching its proprietors or entertaining its readers. It is an integral part of the society, with which its purpose must be in consonance. It must help establish a progressive political and economic system that will free ~~the~~ from want and poverty (cited in Altschull, 1984:150).

In effect, the development media model is a model for nation building and therefore it shares some basic features with nationalism and utilitarianism -- with particular reference to media relations with the state. These may include belief in the media as a unifying and constructive force rather than a divisive and adversarial force; belief in the media as an instrument of national development and a device for the beneficial social change. The state is expected to oversee and intervene in media performance with the aim of facilitation national development. The media assist in entrenching national cultural identity. The media seek partnership with government (Hachten, 1987:30-31; McQuail, 1987:119-121).

It is clear that, by redefining nations in the world into three groups (the rich western group, the eastern communist group and the developing or poor group), the development model reflects an attempt in Third World countries to escape from the dominance of the West-East context and thus seek to establish a media model distinguished from both western and eastern models. At the heart of the approach is an assumption that media performance and media institutional arrangement in today's world are more concerned with a nation's level of economy and wealth than that of other factors, particularly when it views the scantiness of some of the material conditions or backward communication infrastructure (e.g capital investment, the production and cultural resources etc.) necessary for adopting other developed media models (mainly refer



to the western ones). In this way, it plausibly argues that media freedom should be subordinated to the development need and is less important than the viability of the nation (Hachten, 1981; McQuail, 1983). Surely, there is a lot of truth in this argument: First, it highlights the correlation between the material conditions and the construction of a national media system and media freedom; second, it exposes the serious problem of unequal distribution of communication media resources -- an increasing disparity between the North and the South, between the rich group and the poor.

However, the idea of the media performing a positive role in line with national development is in fact required by all types of society ranging from the pluralistic to the totalitarian one. The vague term "national development" can mean anything even merely in terms of economic growth. In other words, the objective of development in this context is always questionable: Development for what? For building a democratic prosperous society or one governed by military might or a dictatorship? The goal and priority of national development in the same rank of developing countries can be fundamentally different, for instance, between the current Iraqi authority and the Egyptian government. Therefore, the defined media role for national development needs to be justified -- a key issue to which the solution can only be provided by a society according to the nature of its social formations and systems. The other problem with this theory is that it misinterprets media performance in relation to its social conditions. For the truth is that while the nature of the media system and the degree of the performance of media freedom are constrained by the material condition of society, they are to a large extent determined by its socio-political structure.

Nevertheless, the development media model, with the new category of the media relations with the state in the developing nations, did offer an alternative and thus better approximated to the realities of the changing world in the 1970s and the 1980s. Thus,



it was widely accepted and the typology of three worlds (i.e the West, the East and the Third World) and their media systems became a new research paradigm in conducting the studies of media-government and media performance, particularly in aspect of comparative perspectives.

Since then, the paradigm of the traditional four (or two for simplicity) models has been replaced by that of three in an attempt to distinguish different characteristics and problems of media system and media performance among the three types of society. The main academic reference to such efforts, among many others, may include, for instance, Comparative Mass Media System (L.Martin & A.Chaudhary (ed), 1983), Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs (J.Altschull, 1984), and World Broadcasting Systems: A Comparative Analysis (S. Head, 1985).

#### **1.1.3.3 Robinson's Six Patterns**

Meanwhile, M. Robinson seems to remain dissatisfied with the relative simplicity of three typologies of the media systems compared to the more complicated reality reflected in the range of varying functions that different media systems actually exist and perform. In focusing on the analysis of different patterns of media performance in society, he, therefore, with no dissent concerning the Soviet media system, proposed the existing media system in the world (excluding the Soviet media model) into six basic patterns: 1) antithetical, 2) adversarial, 3) symbiotic, 4) bureaucratic, 5) partisan, and 6) obeisant.

According to Robinson (1989:227-229), the antithetical media reject several of the basic values of the political system and refuse to link with the dominant power structure in any ongoing way; whereas, the adversarial media accept the basic political values of the system but define its relationship to the governmental institution in an aggressive and "negative" way, particularly when it is believed that the government or its

officials have broken the basic rules of the game. By contrast, the pair of symbiotic and bureaucratic media are by and large identified with the existing social order and are formally or informally tied to the state. The difference between the two, however, mainly lies in their financial resources and the degree of autonomy and state intervention. The symbiotic media are more likely to be financially independent and therefore have more autonomy, while the bureaucratic media as the term suggests, tend to rely more on the government in terms of funding, operation, policy and general journalistic practice. Partisan and obeisant media represent another two patterns which are outside the mainstream of the above four patterns of media system. The main difference between partisan and obeisant media is that the partisan media have a directorate that is linked to a party and tend towards a soft partisan stance; while the obeisant media have a directorate chosen in large measure by the party and therefore, retain a hard partisan stance. In research practice, however, this approach seems to be more useful to the individual case of analysis but less applicable to the institutional and macro level of media studies.

In recent years, there has emerged another theoretical approach which is increasingly becoming popular in communication policy debate and media studies. It may be called the "Democratic-participant media theory" (McQuail, 1987:121) with the central theme being media democratization. Since I believe this approach is grounded on ideas of social democracy and is closely related to the tradition of critical media studies, I will review this approach later in the context of a social democratic framework.

## **1.2 LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE MASS MEDIA --- An Appraisal**

Perhaps the ethos of liberal media theory is best revealed in the First Amendment to the American Constitution which declares that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press". Clearly, the basic assumption behind this is the liberal belief that negative freedom should be put first and foremost with two basic factors concerning press activities: 1) freedom to express views and gather information, 2) freedom from outside interference (i.e an almost equivalent reference to the state). In that sense, the government must be committed to free speech and free press.

The last decade has seen the rise of liberalism and the triumph of the (liberal) democracy movement world wide. In the field of mass communication, with the advance of communication technology, liberal argument of communication and de(re)regulation has become an increasingly dominant theme in the policy debate as well as in media studies in contemporary western society; while, more imperatively and ironically, liberal media doctrine seems to become the **only** alternative remedy in the reconstruction of media institutions in all former Soviet type societies -- an ongoing process of returning to the starting point of liberal democracy's value, the notion of free press model [cf. Introduction]. This hard fact yet again reminds us that, both in theory and in practice, liberal democracy is easily criticised and difficult to replace. It is largely for that reason that we need to examine some essential lineaments of liberal democracy and its understanding of media freedom.

### **1.2.1 Liberalism and Democracy**

According to N.Bobbio, the reciprocal nexus between the liberal state and democracy is the individual. Both liberal state and democracy repose on an individualist conception of society. And



both are necessary tied each other, in the sense that only democracy can bring about the liberal doctrine and only the liberal state has so far fulfilled the condition for the rise of political democracy (N.Bobbio, 1990).

However, it is worth noting that the democratization of liberalism (or what we now understand as liberal democracy) is in fact the result of historical evolution in response to the 20th century challenges (e.g fascism and communism) and massive public demands (e.g trade union movement) which could no longer be ignored (T.Qualter, 1985).

Liberalism views democracy as a derivative political value within the framework of general theories of rationalism and the natural law. Its ideal model of society is perceived in the formulation that the state can be controlled by the civil society and the government can be controlled by the people. It emphasizes individual liberty and negative rights as the paramount condition to implement democracy and as the inalienable base to deal with collective action. Meanwhile, its attitude toward positive aspects of freedom (in Berlin's sense) -- freedom to take action to promote progress and good -- is sceptical and tends to treat it subordinate to the negative one. In effect, this basic point of view determines the feature of liberal democracy. The political philosopher I.Berlin (1958:50) viewed the relationship between democracy and liberty in this way:

Perhaps the chief value for liberals of political -- "positive" -- rights, of participating in the government, is as a means of protecting what they hold to be an ultimate value, namely individual -- "negative" -- liberty.

Democracy is thus designed to ensure individual liberty and, at its best, an effective mechanism to avoid pervasive and abused power from the state. To liberalism, as influential liberal theorist F.Hayek argued, democracy is not an end in itself;



rather, it is a means, "a utilitarian device", to help safeguard the highest political end: liberty (Hayek, 1960). Therefore, democracy was/is always given less high expectation in the liberal doctrine than that in social democratic thinking and even seen as the "least worst choice" among other alternatives. W.Churchill once put it bluntly, saying that democracy is "the worst political system except for all the others" (quoted in A.Nathan's "Tiananmen and the Cosmos", The New Republic, 29.7.1991). To liberal thinkers, the risk for democracy is to demand too much and to expand its function beyond its proper defined boundary. In that case, S. Huntington (1991:9) argues that it "raises all the problems that come up with the definitions of democracy by source or by purpose". Because it is held that "the long-term effect of the operation of democratic politics is probably to broaden and deepen individual liberty. Liberty is, in a sense, the peculiar virtue of democracy. If one is concerned with liberty as an ultimate social value, one should also be concerned with the fate of democracy" (Huntintions, 1991:28). In short then, liberal democracy is a democratic safeguard for individual liberty and civil society, no more, no less.

From a liberal perspective, society would only be held together through the reciprocal transaction among individuals. In trade and commerce, men and women were able to realize their self-interests that would in turn facilitate conditions for civil society to flourish. Thus the essence of exchange relations -- **liberty, equality and independence** -- became a cornerstone of civil rights and natural laws which, in principle, is seen to guarantee that everyone has a fair opportunity to participate and to gain or lose in society. "No one", Locke asserted, "ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions" (Locke, [1689] 1960:311). Accordingly, the state is only conceived as a necessary institution to protect these rights and interests of individuals. No state could violate them without becoming a tyranny (Paine, [1791-1792] 1969:69). To liberalism, the major threat to an individual's freedom always comes from the intrusion

of state power and unjustified institutional intervention in civil society. Therefore, the less the state becomes involved, the better off for freedom (R.Nozick, 1974; Manning, 1976; Macpherson, 1977).

Related to the above discourse, liberal democratic doctrine, however, also possesses an important feature that is reflected in its theory of searching for the truth. Regarding men as rational beings, liberalism sees that "men desire to know the truth and will be disposed to be guided by it" (Becker, 1945:33), and the truth would only emerge through a free marketplace of ideas and information. Indeed, the encouragement of pluralistic ideas, the protection of dissenting views and the toleration of antithetical expression are essential to the liberal democracy society.

### **1.2.2 Liberal Media Approach**

The implication of the liberal doctrine to the realm of public communication is that the mass media are of vital importance to the survival of liberal democracy in a sense that the media should function as a potent check and counter balance to the power of the state which presumably no other institution is able to substitute. In doing so, the mass media are expected to provide sufficient information and diversity of views for the truth to emerge and for citizens to make rational choices, through, for instance, the general election, in deciding how their communities are governed. Traditionally, this referred to the Fourth-Estate function with which the media is regarded as the public watchdog being acted upon citizens "in much the same way as courts, kings and parliaments did in their wielding of other kinds of social power" (Sparks & Spilchal, 1991:92). In Siebert's expression, "the right and duty of the press to serve as an extralegal check on government" is the essential feature of the liberal democratic performance of the media system which distinguishes it from the others" (Siebert, 1956:56). T.Glasser,

on the other hand, provides his digest of liberal democracy's connection between a free press and the building of a (liberal) democracy:

A free press can best meet the public communication needs of a democratic society; first Amendment protection for the print and electronic press is desirable because it fosters a robust and uninhibited press; a robust and uninhibited press is desirable because it is a press able and presumably willing to accommodate divergent points of view; divergent points of view are desirable because they sustain public debate; public debate is desirable because it nurtures an informed citizenry; and an informed citizenry is desirable because it bring about a more perfect polity and, in the end, legitimates the very idea of self-government (Glasser, 1984:137).

The argument of the relationship between the mass media, the state and (liberal) democracy can thus be understood as follows: In a free society, freedom of speech and press is the first freedom and precondition required by the exercise of democracy. By definition then, in order to maximise press freedom and concomitant political and civil rights, not only the operation and management of the communication media and the flow of information and opinions must be free from outside intervention but also the media institution should be free, at least in principle, to challenge and even defy the state authority. Through such arrangements, the practice of media freedom has been regarded as the rational mechanism that a democratic system needs to remain on course.

Historically, four major sources on liberal media theory are traceable. According to John Keane (1991:11-21), They are:

- 1) the theological approach, most eloquently expounded by John Milton in his Areopagitica, criticized state censorship in the name of the God-given faculty of reason enjoyed by individuals;



2) the idea that the conduct of the press should be guided by the natural rights of individuals (e.g J. Locke and many other liberal theorists);

3) the theory of utilitarianism viewed state censorship of public opinion as a licence for despotism and as contrary to the principle of maximizing the happiness of the governed (e.g J. Bentham, J.S.Mill);

4) a fourth defence of liberty of the press is guided by the idea of attaining Truth through unrestricted public discussion among citizens (e.g Enlightenment thinkers).

In development of the practice, particularly in modern western society, however, a fifth factor of defending a free press in terms of validation of market principle may be included (Leading exponents of this view may include F.Hayek). According to the argument, the implementation of press freedom should be justified on and through the free enterprise system within which the media operate independently as an industry. Hence, the economic dimension of media performance, with the hallmark of the commercialization, remains conspicuous. Media should behave like any other economic entity functioning on the market paradigm. The influential economist R.H.Coase argues (1974:389): "I do not believe that this distinction between the market for goods and the market for ideas is valid. There is no fundamental difference between these two markets, and in deciding on public policy with regard to them, we need to take into account the same consideration". Consequently, it is important to recognise that the commercialization of communication media and commodification of cultural products have become a major feature in reckoning the evolution of liberal media history.



### 1.2.3 The Strengths and Problems

Developed from the Enlightenment project of rationalism and universalism, liberalism came to stand for a cosmopolitan ideology in a way that it created a legal system of formal equality for the universal rights of every citizen. Liberalism put the negative freedom -- freedom from outside interference -- in its central place and offered its solution to the emancipation of human beings and realization of a rational social order through free market economy and political democracy. With little dispute over democracy insofar as the best solution to the problem of modernity, however, there is also growing consensus that the development of a modern economy cannot dispense with the complexity and autonomy of market relations (Nove, 1983). Nevertheless, one may still argue that, despite its imperfection and deficiency, the western democratic type of society has still been the model second to none that human beings have so far experienced. In other words, under the present condition of human society, it is only through the prevalence of the liberal democratic stage that other more advanced solution, not based on the idea of perfect and total social engineering but on the logic of the process of human evolution, may be founded in searching for a better future of humankind. Thus it is important to stress the validity of the two fundamental principles of the historical materialism which were first articulated by Marx in his 1859's work "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" and later summarised by Gramsci. The principles state:

1. that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for the further forward movement;
  2. that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary condition have not already been incubated, etc.
- (A.Gramsci, 1971:106).

To be sure, after the grand failure of Soviet model society and bankruptcy of its communist ideology, this point is even more

relevant to today's world situation. This explains why all former communist countries are now struggling to establish a social structure based on liberal democracy and restarting a historical process of western experience both in political and economic realms which seems to be the only alternative available to them. The conquest of liberal democracy of the modern world, as remarked by Norberto Bobbio (1991:5) the influential Italian political theorist, "if and insofar as it is possible -- cannot but be the starting point for the countries of the upturned utopia" (i.e a term to describe Soviet type communist state).

#### **1.2.4 The Universalism versus Individualism: an Institutional Contradiction**

However, the dual strand of the liberal solution entails a profound institutional conflict concerning social systems between the political realm and the economic realm and social relationship between individual roles as a citizen and a consumer. The problem is further compounded by its prejudiced position of human value judgement. Liberalism, as understood, regards liberty as the paramount need of human beings. Yet, we can't see why some other essential human values, for instance, equality, should be subordinate to liberty. As a matter of fact, liberty and equality both belong to the human essence and therefore, we can hardly prove in an ultimate sense which of the two is supreme or more important than the other.

As reviewed previously, the essence of liberal media theory is based on the principle of the dichotomy of political democracy and free market economy. The media is thus seen as an instrument of the liberal solution towards the opening of the mass society and the consumer world in the process of modernity. With that scenario, therefore, two points can be made here: In the first place, the liberal media performance adopts the idea of political universalism by setting up a formal equality for free speech practice -- a classical liberal doctrine that everyone should/can

in principle receive and send any information or opinion without prior censorship or posterior punishment provided certain inhibitions (e.g libel) by the law. To this extent, the principle is universalism, and the door is genuinely open to all. In the second place, it identifies the means of free speech/press within the free enterprise system based on the private property and capital capacity in which the realization of free speech goals and the right to get the access to the public communication field prescribed in the first place would virtually be indexed to each individual capability in terms of his/her economic status. Here, however, the guiding principle becomes individualism, the authority is the law of supply and demand of the free market; the concerns is the consumer interest; the motivation is profits (through, in market economics theory, satisfying customers); and with little doubt, the more determined power is capital. Grasping this core of the institutional problem of liberal theory with respect to the mass media, Garnham (1990:111) provides the following important argument:

The site of the problem (of liberal media theory) is the fundamental contradiction between the economic and the political at the level of their value systems and of the social relations which those value systems require and support. Within the political realm the individual is defined as a citizen exercising public rights of debate, voting, etc., within a communally agreed structure of rules and towards communally defined ends. The value system is essentially social and the legitimate end of social action is the public good. Within the economic realm on the other hand the individual is defined as producer and consumer exercising private rights through purchasing power on the market in the pursuit of private interests, his or her actions being coordinated by the invisible hand of the market. ... The field of the mass media is a key focus for this contradiction because they operate simultaneously across the two realms.



It is this contradiction that had a profound effect in determining the basic performance of the liberal media. A constant tension and disparities between "the ostensibly democratic ideals that the mass media are supposed to serve and the communication structures and practices that actually prevail" (Gurevitch & Blumer, 1990:270) is thus faced with liberal media approach. Just as J. Keane (1991:89) points out, under today's condition of capitalism, **"communications markets restrict freedom of communication** by generating barriers to entry, monopoly and restrictions upon choice, and by shifting the prevailing definition of information from that of a public good to that of a privately appropriable commodity."

Central to this is a basic dilemma linked with the problem of liberalism dichotomy of political democracy v.s market efficacy: On the one hand, there is the ideal of universalism -- a politically appealing role -- assigned for the media to fulfil in the process of democratic performance. On the other hand, there is the underlying tendency that the media are driven towards the sphere of free exchange in order to pursue commercial interest and maximum profits. In this way, freedom of the press and the right to communication is, as Splichal remarks, "reduced to, and thus condemned to decline by, the freedom to maximize profit"(1992:139).

In short then, the problem of the liberal media theory has always been associated with principles of the free market and its reliance on success in serving those who are able to control or own the means of communication media. Thus it sets impediments to the application of the liberal universalism of free press doctrine in the political realm and tends to push it to an impasse.



### **1.3 SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE MASS MEDIA**

The deficiencies of the liberal democratic solution to modern society and the challenge of democratic participation produced the response of the social democratic alternative in an attempt to overcome the underlying predicament of the liberal dichotomy of equal entitlement of citizenship of every person in the political realm and unequal property ownerships and capital power in the economic realm. Indeed, what made social democracy a more appealing challenge to the liberal approach was the context of unregulated (capitalist) market performance and the reality of increasingly socio-economic inequality. Thus one can hardly be surprised that, in contrast to the liberty (in particular, the aspect of negative freedom) as the core of liberal doctrine, the notion of equality with special reference to the positive freedom is central to the construction of the alternative approach. In social democratic thought, freedom means the equal enjoyment of certain opportunities and social rights to realise human capacities as well as individual autonomy. For liberal democracy, the notion of equality implies equivalent exchange relations in the marketplace and thus equality before the law in the legal terms; by contrast, social democracy employs equality as positive discrimination to rescue the disadvantaged based on the equal consideration of human needs and capacities. Historically and theoretically, it developed out of four major complexes of sources: 1) Rousseau's idea of equal society and radical democracy doctrine; 2) Marx's theory, particular Marx's critique of political economy of capitalism; 3) "revisionism" approach initiated by E. Bernstein of the Second Internationals; and 4) varying schools of socialist thoughts proposed by advocates of socialist reform movement ranging from Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier to the Fabian Society.

#### **1.3.1 Democracy and Social Equality**

The vision of democracy or instituting a democratic society in

social democratic thoughts is a much more positive and wider one. For them, as Held has observed, to take equality, liberty and justice seriously is to challenge the liberal view that these "great universal ideals" can be realized by individuals left, in practice, to their own devices within a framework of a free-market economy and a minimal state (Held, 1987:269). Their starting point is, therefore, to look at the problem of inequality and the class-base of modern western society with the major concerns of how unregulated capitalism could be reformed and transformed into an industrial society which all members in the community will get benefit from, and be happy with (Lichtheim, 1975). By focusing on the contradiction of liberal separation of human beings' political rights and economic acquisitiveness, social democracy emphasises the importance of equality in regulating the opportunities for acquiring and the means of distributing wealth for all citizens; and argues that only within such a common life framework based on equal right and social provision to remedy unjustified liberal dichotomy imposing on citizens that the society could be held together cohesively and its institutions and relationships could be formed legitimately (Gamble, 1981; Eccleshall et al., 1984; Held, 1987; Keane, 1988).

The issue of realizing social equality remained crucial in the social democratic tradition with positive freedom occupying a significant position (although negative freedom is not denied). Positive freedom, as generally understood by the social democratic approach, involves a certain moral duty to exercise power in an attempt to alter unequal social relations and create conditions for a better and constantly improving society which would use its increasing material wealth to the best advantage in the interests of the whole community (Picard, 1985:25-56). Therefore, contrary to the liberal idea, social democracy views the major threat to the very existence and development of democracy as generating by increasing capitalist economic domination and commercialization of socio-political life. In other words, unregulated free market performance is the chief

source of social injustice and inequality with the underlying tendency of polarization of social structure that would fundamentally undermine the process of democratization.

In order to reverse such a tendency, the (democratic) state has thus been endowed with a moral duty in the social democratic approach to exercise positive power to correct the worst abuses of the private enterprise system and to provide a certain equality for every citizen to exert his/her due rights. However, it is worth noting that the call for state action in theorists of social democracy is grounded on the principle of modern democracy within which its minimum common base is accepted by both liberalism and socialism, and therefore, a democratic state is the key to implement the social democrats' idea of state involvement. It is with this touchstone that decisively parted the social democratic approach from the Soviet type's communist one and made it a challenging alternative where society has been increasingly disillusioned with the liberal solution. From a social democratic perspective, as summarised by Gamble (1981:223), the function of democracy "comprising all citizens would exert such pressure on politicians and governments through elections and public opinion as to ensure collective measures to make the conditions of life more equal, to correct huge imbalances in the distribution on incomes, and to use public agencies to remedy shortcomings in the performance of the market. In this way the state would guarantee certain rights, opportunities and services for all its members".

In brief, while liberal democracy regards pursuing individual interest and freedom through the "invisible hand" of the market as supreme; social democracy by contrast gives priority to social equality to promote the general good and universal fairness through extension of citizen's right to the wide-ranging social realm and through a certain degree of state intervention. Nevertheless, both are a dialectical mirror-images of one another in the process of historical development. In fact, it is not difficult to tell that the contending ideas stemmed from two



basic philosophical traditions: the individually-oriented v.s socially oriented tradition of Locke, Mill and contemporary neo-liberalists on the one side; and Rousseau, Marx and the new-left movement on the other side.

### **1.3.2 The Media For (Social) Democracy**

Based on the above general framework of social democracy, an alternative media approach is being constructed with its conceptualization of the role of the media in modern western democracies. As P. Jacklin expresses (1975:49) that "A society is democratic to the extent that all its citizens have equal opportunity to influence the decision-making process. Clearly, communication is essential to this process -- just as essential as voting itself." For that purpose and to counter the problems of implementation in liberal media approach, he then argues that proper regulation of communication media is needed "not only to insure a competition of ideas, but so that all citizens have an equal opportunity to influence and shape this competition" (Jacklin, *ibid.*). Thus, from the point of view of media democratization, the traditional version of freedom of speech and press in the social democratic thoughts has more to do with communication than with expression through which the issue of equal access to the public communication becomes essential.

J. Curran (1991a:31) further articulates the media function of the social democratic approach (in his analyses, he terms it as radical democratic approach) within the comparative context with liberal approach:

In traditional liberal theory, the media are conceived primarily as vertical channels of communication between private citizens and government: they inform individual choice at election time, and they influence governments by articulating the collective view of private citizens. In contrast, radical revisionism (i.e social democratic



alternative) advances a more sophisticated perspective in which the media are viewed as a complex articulation of vertical, horizontal and diagonal channels of communication between individuals, groups and power structures. ... The role of the media is to facilitate this intricate system of (liberal democratic) representation, and democratize it by exposing intra-organizational decision-making to public disclosure and debate.

In general then, four theoretical characteristics of the approach are identical: 1) being against commercialization of human sentiment and market domination of mass communication with particular concerns about unequal access to the media; 2) maintaining and promoting citizen-cultural/political or public media model with special reference to the British model of public service broadcasting, against the background of consumer-market driven media model; 3) stressing the democratic right to communication and the necessity to provide certain material means to realize it; 4) regarding public (through democratic state) regulation of communication media as a necessary measure to strengthen citizen's positive freedom and the need to restrict commercialization of media performance.

In practice, however, until the 1980s and more or less still relevant now, the British broadcasting system and the western European experience in general can largely be said to have been characterised by the social democratic approach, whereas the American media performance can be loosely identified with the liberal approach [cf. 1.1.1]

### **1.3.3 "Democratic-participant Media Theory"**

Among the various social democratic media versions, the one called "democratic-participant media theory" (McQuail, 1983) or "Democratic socialist press theory" (Picard, 1985), has been

proposed, debated and tried in varying scales and levels. Under this approach, according to Picard, media freedom no longer means merely the right to communicate without outside interference, but also the public's right to have equal access to the media and to a full accounting of the events and opinions of society. The main purpose of the media is to provide avenues by which diverse views can be made public, and to promote democracy in all social spheres. Public regulation and other state actions can be employed to insure the ability of citizens to use the media and advance media plurality. Media ownership can be mixed, but ultimately, should be public and not-for-profit through foundations, non-profit corporations, journalist-operated cooperatives, and other collective and feasible means and methods (1985:67-70). In another case, the approach stresses the needs, interests and aspirations of the active "receiver" in a political society. It favours multiplicity, interchange of sender-receiver roles, horizontality of communication links at all levels of society, interaction, commitment (McQuail, 1987:122).

As can be perceived, at the heart of this approach is the notion of equality and the balance between negative freedom and positive freedom. For social democrats, the main obstacle to media freedom and democracy is the polarization of increasing social inequality resulting from free market competition, a fact that can not be willed or wished away, but that has to be (partially) altered through positive state intervention. It has developed from Williams's model of democratic communication with many valuable and concrete proposals to implement it. Thus, it has made a step forward in media democratization. It also reflects a growing sense of disillusionment with the liberal democratic solution both to society and public communication. Therefore, as Picard points out, the struggle to democratize the mass media is a microcosm of the struggle to democratize society (1985:150).

However, the problem with this media model as well as the approach of social democracy is that, like its counterpart of liberalism, it still remains trapped within, in Garnham's term

(1990:106), "the bind of the state-market dichotomy" while seeking a solution. Although it rightly identifies the problems of free press practice, it fails to understand that the state intervention could easily transfer the media from market control to bureaucratic control, neither of them would further advance the course of the realization of media freedom and media democratization.

#### **1.3.4 The Public Sphere and the New Approach towards Media Democratization**

In recent years, efforts have been made to break with the thinking of the bind of the state-market dichotomy with special reference to the Habermas' notion of the public sphere. "By the public sphere we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1979:198). Based on the study of the rise and fall of the "bourgeois public sphere" in early capitalist society, particularly in Britain, Habermas argues that the public sphere involves the idea of a common space or **polis** zone for public debate and political discussion through which the dissident view is registered, public opinion is formed and eventually rational choice and/or agreement can be made among private individuals. It is open to everyone that all citizens may participate with low entry cost and with equal access to information necessarily provided by the mass media. More importantly, it seeks to insulate it from state domination; at the same time, to free it from (market) economic pressure. Therefore, democracy can be implemented without being manipulated by either authority's power or market interest. The mass media, Habermas argues, are important in the process of creating such public spheres by providing availability of multiple contexts with wide-ranging accessibility of information to conduct rational construction of social affairs that would redeem the emancipatory interests of humankind (Habermas, 1979:198-201; 1989; also cf. Garnham, 1990:104-114; Curran, 1991a:27-57).



Although the discourse of the public sphere has some deficiencies and blind-spots (e.g idealised the early evolution of bourgeois model) as identified by, among others, Dahlgren (1991:3-5), Keane (1991:35-36), and Curran (1991a:38-46), it is reasonable to argue that Habermas' notion of the public sphere does provide a good starting point to transcend the bind of the state-market dichotomy traditionally featured in communication policy debate; and, as Curran remarks, offers "a powerful and arresting vision of the role of the media in a democratic society" (1991b:83). It thus advances the social democratic media approach in response to the challenge of current development of public communication and global democratization in the changing situation of the contemporary world.

Inspired by the theory of the public sphere, recent studies of the media have produced several new visions of media democratization which to varying degrees have drawn upon Habermas. Among them, Curran (1991b:102-111) offers a seminal working model which has three distinguishable characteristics. First, it redefines the democratic functions of the media institution in three ways together with proposals for the practice of media democratization: (a) that media should generate a plurality of understandings and balance the interests of collective and individual sides without relying on social engineering; (b) that the media system is to act as an agency of representation; and (c) that the media perform to assist the realization of the common objectives of society through agreement or compromise between conflicting interests. Secondly, it contains major principles of the notion of the public sphere which may include practical universality, economic viability and rational normality. Thirdly, it attempts to combine the liberal and socialist media approaches in a synthesis that incorporates the strengths of both. In brief then, the model is constructed around the core sector of public service media compounded by the civic sector, private enterprise sector, social market sector and professional sector.

Curran's model is sophisticated and has many strengths. Judged from the democratic point of view, it makes an effort to compromise and balance the interests of the public sector and the private sector. It attempts to provide a tentative solution to the needs of contemporary communications by "changing the relation between autonomous public spheres, on the one hand, and the areas of activity governed by money and administrative power, on the other" (Habermas, 1991:42). Meanwhile, as Curran argues, it draws upon and composites features derived from the practice of different European countries and thus approximates to the realities and works with the grain of what is attainable (1991b:105). Although it still has lots of technical difficulties and terminological problems (e.g social market?) to be worked out, the model clearly reflects the growing consciousness and current trend of media democratization.

In short, the importance of media democratization can be summarised in the recent remark made by J. Habermas:

The challenges of the twenty-first century will be of an order and magnitude that demand answers from Western societies which cannot be arrived at, not put into practice, without a radical-democratic universalization of interests through institutions for the formation of public opinion and political will (Habermas, 1991:45).

## **1.4 THE COMMUNIST STATE AND THE MASS MEDIA**

### **1.4.1 The Party-State**

The 20th century communist state or the "established Soviet Model socialist-to-communist system/state/society" is very different from any other type of modern society which are based on their essential social formations of capitalist/market economy (N.B in many cases especially in some developing countries, however, the economic framework can also be taken in its major form of nationalization, but still perform on the market paradigm) plus either political pluralism (e.g western style democratic state), or political authoritarianism. As analyzed by many scholars, a self-declared vanguard Party monopolizes power in the name of proletarian class and of waging class struggle. In this way, it establishes an unprecedented modern totalitarian society with the framework of absolutism of command economy, command politics, command culture and command life-style in order to achieve complete control of society and to eliminate any islands of exemption, no matter how trivial, from political/ideological intervention.

Thus, the key of the Soviet model communist system is the concept of the party-state which possesses two crucial factors: complete dominance of official ideology over society, and the supremacy of the Party's interest. The hyper-rationale for establishing such a system lies in its vanguardism that only the Party represents people's interests and can lead people to a situation of material abundance and the final victory of the world communism movement. It thus justifies its leadership on the ground of ideological purity rather than approval by citizens; of unity between the Party and the people rather than a sense of the social contract. In so doing, it needs to routines the application of reason into a rigid political formula. Therefore, it does not allow the emergence of alternative political groups or the existence of the public sphere. In a word, it is the



Party's power that is pervasive in all sectors of society. This phenomenon largely explains why the praxes of modern democracy, particularly its rule and form of governing society is virtually irrelevant to the Soviet model communism (cf. Z.Brzezinski & C.Friedrich, 1956; M.Djilas, 1957; B.Womack, 1990; J.Kornai, 1992).

#### **1.4.2 Media Theoretical Framework**

From Marx to Lenin major contributions were made towards building up a media theory for the communist state to justify its tight control over mass communication on the one hand, and active promotion of the media for achieving the Party's designed goals on the other. The communist media theory largely flows from the legacy of Marx's notion on communication in the class-base society through the mutation and reinterpretation of Lenin's media theory. In China, Mao also had his own understanding of Marxism-Leninism and developed his approach for the use of the mass media [cf. 2.3].

In all established communist states, the role of the mass media is firmly placed on the political/ideological ground, solely serving the Party's interest as a propaganda instrument. In order to understand this, it is necessary to provide some basic points of Marx's and Lenin's versions on the communication and the role of the media, which were laid down as foundation of communist media theory.

##### **1.4.2.1 Marx: the Media as an Instrument of the Ruling Class**

Perhaps the basic work that Marx did for his later followers was his thorough understanding that the mass media were a crucial instrument in the service of ruling class in a class society.

In the German Ideology, Marx examined the relationship between

the mode of social production and its implication to political and ideological conflicts in society. As such, he (with Engels) presented a key argument:

The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it ([1845], 1970:64).

The mass media, then, became a crucial instrument of the Uberbau (i.e. superstructure) to the ruling section in society. Consciousness itself, according to historical materialism, can only come into being and develop in the process of material production through social communication. Individuals feel their existence and become conscious of themselves only through interaction with others. The process of interaction relies on information exchange, and the essential means to do so is to use human symbolic systems, particularly language. That "which is the dominant material force in society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force" (Marx, *ibid*). In this way, those who control the means of the use of a symbolic system virtually control people's minds. Since human history entered class society, the ruling class has got every necessary privilege to create, use, and disseminate symbolic systems through the superstructure such as schools, churches and the communication media. Because of the power and nature of mass communication in modern society, the mass media thus play the vital role not only in the process of shaping ideology, but also in that of ruling the society. From this point of Marx's view it might draw the following conclusions:

- 1) The material interests of the dominant social class are also reflected in the sphere of ideology, culture and communications.
- 2) The mass media always serve the power of the ruling class.
- 3) They are used by the bourgeois state to maintain the status

quo of the exploitation of man by man.

- 4) Therefore, when the historical evolution moves on to a new stage with the success of the proletarian revolution, the mass media shall be used by the state of the proletarian class to change the existing world, eliminate bourgeois consciousness and guide mankind entering a free and classless society.

Thus Marx provided a general framework of the double roles that the mass media play both in the capitalist and the initial post-capitalist societies. Underpinning his media approach is Marx's rational judgment that the mass media at heart were instrumental.

However, it is important to point out that Marx's vision of the future evolution of social transformation was quite different from Lenin's Soviet Russia and Mao's China in their later experiences. For Marx, it was grounded in his analysis of historical materialism about the basic contradictions of capitalism. He believed that the full maturation of social conditions, particularly the development of material production with an advanced class consciousness was crucial for a genuine revolution of socialism-to-communism. It was with this touchstone that theorist Marx parted company with his revolutionary disciples Lenin and Mao.

#### **1.4.2.2 Lenin: Towards the Construction of the Party's Media**

The above idea of Marx, particularly his understanding of the instrumental nature of the mass media in a class-base society, was developed and revised by Lenin in his ideas about the Party's media. He created a newspaper-party to pursue and secure dictatorial powers. In so doing, he (and his successor Stalin) devoted a major effort to strengthening the media role in propaganda, mobilization and organization on the one hand; and to using the media as an internal organ of the Party-state to control the general public in the guise of class struggle on the



other hand. Lenin regarded mass communications as extremely important Party work. In essence, Lenin argued that class consciousness of the proletariat could not be automatically rooted and developed in the proletarian class itself (it could only grow up into, in Lenin's word, "trade-unionist consciousness"); therefore, it must be brought from without to the proletarian class and brought to it by a **Leninist Bolshevik Party**. Hence it was Lenin who carefully re-channelled some of Marx's essential texts to fit his pragmatic uses and transferred them into a much more radical, eloquent, conspiratorial and determined approach in order to serve the needs of the Bolshevik Revolution and Leninist Soviet Power (cf. A.Inkles, 1956; J.Markham, 1967).

A media theory in Lenin's mind was central to his framework of the three major roles for the mass media, which were postulated on the ground that human consciousness was subject to dictation. Lenin put great stress on a closed organizational relationship between the media and the party's leadership. It was in an article of the Bolshevik newspaper The Spark headlined "**Where to Begin**" (No.4 1901), that Lenin identified three role concepts and presented his famous argument:

A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator; it is also a collective organizer. ... With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organization will naturally take shape that will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence those events.

According to the terminology of orthodox communism, the Party shall always represent the collective will, so that the word "**collective**" in this context means "**the Party's**". To Lenin, the media was thus primarily conceived of as the Party's instrument,

or, in his own words, the "wheels and cogs" of the Party apparatus, asserting its paramount leadership over the whole society. "There can be no question", Lenin wrote in his famous Party Organization and Party Literature (1905), "of revolutionary proletarian newspapers standing outside the Party of the proletariat" (Lenin, [1905] 1972:130).

With respect to this essential understanding, the basic task of the mass media was designed with three identities. **1) As an educator:** socializing people by providing them with selected information and appropriate views based on socialist doctrine. **2) As an organizer:** mobilizing the masses to accomplish production targets as well as various Party goals. **3) As a defender:** suppressing any dissident voice to defend the Party's authority.

#### **1.4.2.3 Mao: An Endless Two-way Communication**

There was not, however, a clear line of distinction from Lenin to Mao. What was different between Lenin and Mao was only a matter of degree, and probably Mao even went much further who constantly prepared to resort to radicalism and put more emphasis on voluntarism. Mao adopted the Leninist Party media doctrine with some indigenous specifications and tactical modifications. In addition to the Party's media theory, Mao further argued that the role and power of the mass media "consists in their ability to bring the Party program, the Party line, the Party's general and specific policies, its tasks and methods of work before the masses in the quickest and most extensive way." (Mao, 1975:4:241). Therefore, in the expression of Chinese communist leadership, the mass media are described as the tongues, ears and eyes of the Party.

Mao also viewed the mass media as the key battle-ground of class struggle and in the forefront of ideological propaganda. In 1962, he warned the Party that the work of the media, art, literature

and other cultural forms was extremely important for the Party to establish and maintain the state power by putting his famous argument in this way:

In order to overthrow a political regime, it is always necessary to prepare public opinion and carry out work in the ideological field in advance. This is true of the revolutionary class; it is also true of the counter-revolutionary class (cited in People's Daily, 16.2.1967).

Theoretically, the Leninist Party media in the Chinese context was largely embellished into a two-way communication process which was based on Mao's rhetoric about **"The Mass Line"** and **"Unity of Theory and Practice"**. In the first place, the mass media carry out the Party's initiatives and policies toward the general public, which are supposed to originate with the masses; then the mass media will bring feedback to the Party for its reassessment and readjustment in an attempt to meet people's desires and interests before a new round starts. The process itself is endless. Thus the media are operated as a vital transmission belt through which information and opinions are supposedly exchanged between the Party and the masses. This style of media management, in Mao's jargons, was called **"Walking on two legs"** and **"three-in-one combination"**. The first means that the media work should not only rely on the professional staff, but also non-professionals. The second refers to the unity of party leadership, professional media and the masses in carrying out party's media missions (cf. F.Yu, 1964; J.Markham, 1967; J.Chu, 1978).

#### **1.4.3 Defining the Role of the Party Media**

The sacred mission for a Leninist media approach is ultimately to serve two interrelated purposes: firstly to defeat the subversion of class enemy both from within and without the Soviet Power through the function of exposure and criticism; and



secondly to create a "**New Man**" society with the common bond of collective consciousness, selflessness, and class brotherhood through the function of persuasion and indoctrination. To achieve this, the media submission to the Party leadership is not only necessary, but also unconditional. For Lenin, the contribution of his three roles was no more than the manifesto of justification that mass media should be of the Party, by the Party, and for the Party. Thus, the Party media approach is of the life-and-death importance to all established communist regimes in spite of disputes they may have from time to time.

Accordingly, as identified by A. Liu in the Chinese context, the substance of the mass media in communist states may be characterized as ideological, didactic, hortatory, and partisan. It is primarily ideologically-oriented, as all media contents must be explicitly framed in the context of the communist doctrine. It is didactic in that mass media are also used to fulfil an instructional function for the needs of various Party programs. It is hortatory in the sense that media communications make a great effort to achieve "desirable" social effects at the expense of the truthfulness of information. For instance, "Truth and fact reporting must serve the need of class struggle" became overwhelming journalistic canons and media praxis in Mao's era. It is partisan in that, although all the information provided by the media is to be put in the framework of Marxist-Leninist doctrine, specific interpretation of Marxism-Leninism is in the hands of whichever ruling faction of the party is currently in control (1986:265). In a word, the role of the mass media is incorporated into the overall strategy and goals of the party-state.

It is clear that at the heart of Party's media approach is the assumption that the Party is omnipotent, always right, and exclusively represents the people's will. The vital problem of the legitimacy is thus intrinsic and insoluble which is in fact inherent in its institutional failure.

#### **1.4.4 The Party Media towards Institutional Transformation**

However, the fatal deficiency of the Soviet type communist system itself has created the condition for a fundamental change and therefore, has pressed the society towards returning to the starting point of western experience of liberal solution -- a dichotomy of political democracy and market economy. In the last decade, we have witnessed the world-wide decline of the communist movement and the debacle of the Soviet system. The situation has been drastically changed. In eastern and central Europe, after the 1989-1990 popular revolution and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, all the formal communist states have been (or, are being) transformed towards a kind of pluralistic structure based on the market economy and political democracy. As a result, the process of media institutional transformation is underway with the emphasis on establishing liberal media institutions. In parallel, the south-eastern Asian communist states except North Korea seem to be proceeding to market-oriented economic reform first, choosing the path of "peaceful evolution" with an uphill transitional period towards a genuine pluralism. No doubt, the mass media have played a central role in that process and, consequently, themselves have started a movement of fundamental institutional reform.

Thus, as will it shown in the later chapters, the essence of the media reform in post-Mao China has been precisely to redefine the role of media towards commercialization and pluralism and, furthermore, democratization. It is for that major reason that this thesis will present a study of media development and the media reform in post-Mao mainland China since 1976 with special reference to television broadcasting. The evolution of the Chinese broadcasting medium and the role that it has played in the process of the breakdown of communist totalitarianism on the one hand, and of the modernization drive on the other, revealed that the Chinese experience presents a unique case deserving of study. The main purpose of the research project is thus to explore how the growth of media industries, especially

television, as well as institutional changes have taken place as reflections of complex interactions of the media, culture and society in post-Mao China. The present study seeks to advance our knowledge of:

( a ) the fundamental relationship between the mass media and the overall social system (in this case, the Party-state) in the context of post-Mao China;

( b ) the media performance in the process of pursuing economic rationalization and political democratization against the background of profound social transition;

( c ) the social conditions that generate the changes of the media system;

( d ) the institutional problems and politic-economic constraints on such changes;

( e ) the impact on society and its connection with a broad social reform movement.



## CHAPTER TWO

### A REVIEW OF STUDIES OF THE CHINESE MASS MEDIA AND MEDIA EVOLUTION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

This chapter is divided into two major parts: first, a review of the literature on communist China's media studies; second, the Chinese social contexts and media development since 1949, as a general introduction to the major theme of Chinese television studies.

#### 2.1 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

##### 2.1.1 Media Studies of Mainland China in Mao's Era

During Mao's rule of China three important books appeared in the West on the subject of China's mass communication studies and the relationship between the (party-)state, the mass media and society. Nothing remotely similar was published in mainland China: politically it was virtually forbidden and was held to be unnecessary. As a matter of teaching and study, the media was primarily considered to be the mouthpiece of the Party, not a possible area of research or criticism [for background, see 2.2].

The three books are Frederick T. C. Yu's Mass Persuasion in Communist China (1964), James W. Markham's Voices of the Red Giants: Communications in Russia and China (1967), and Alan P.L.

Liu's Communications and National Integration in Communist China (1971). As noted, these texts were produced during the heyday of the Cold War, and thus there was virtually no dispute about the nature and function of mass media in communist China. As a result, the three books have very similar approaches to the subject matter, though there are significant details in their different objectives and arguments.

In general, these early studies have four similarities: Firstly they all follow the framework of Four Theories of the Press (1956) laid down by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm [cf. 1.1.1], presenting the Chinese media system as a copy of the Soviet's, but viewing it in a different stage of development and with different characteristics. Secondly, they attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis and descriptive account of political nature of the mass media in the Mao's era, focusing on how the Party employed the media to build a communist society. Thirdly, although they rarely develop an explicit theoretical elaboration, their frameworks reveal their basic assumption that the success of consolidating Chinese communist power and implementing its social transformation was largely a matter of mass mobilization and communication penetration. Fourthly, because China at the time was an isolated and closed world, these early studies have a big problem in terms of information collection and the authors could not for instance visit China to do first hand research. Thus, their primary sources have to rely on Chinese official publications plus some unconfirmed reports and phenomenal observations, using techniques of careful textual exegesis and documentary reviews.

It is well known that the omnipotent power of the Soviet model of the party-state is legitimated on the basis of its pursuing Marxist-Leninist ideology in an attempt to create a "New Man" society supposedly for the good of the people. As the Party's instrument, the mass media perforce serve this paramount goal. However, there is a basic dilemma persistently facing the communist state between ideological legitimacy and constant

pressure for material improvement. That is to say, on the one hand, the Party can only build its totalitarian ruling power upon its premise of ideology. On the other hand, in order to maintain grassroots support, the party has to find some pragmatic solution to develop the economy and to produce something to satisfy the people's demands of improving living standards. In practice, this means the party-state has to yield some power to the society, allowing a limited personal freedom in an effort to revive economic dynamism. It thus inevitably results in diversity of social interests and a spontaneous tendency towards what the party may rightly label "bourgeois" liberalism, which has a potent effect of ideology dilution, thereby undermining the party's ruling legitimacy. Therefore, tension arises between the need for ideological purity and the need for material progress. In the case of Mao's China, this tension tended to be reflected in the form of the bitter party internal struggle between the pragmatic faction led by Deng Xiaoping (then the Party's general secretary) and his ally of state paternalism, Liu Shaoqi (then the State president) on the one side, and Mao and his radical Maoists left-wing on the other side. There developed a politics of "pendulum swing" between a tightening ideological control when Maoists took command, and a striking economic development when Deng-and-Liu group was ascendent. Since the party-state's media are closely tied to this dilemma, they also play a unique role in that process: the role of agent signalling the alternating requirements of the political pendulum swing. To observe a communist society and its media performance, this "pendulum swing" phenomenon can become a distinctive parameter in which a better reading of the party-state's policy shift and the change of the direction might be reached [cf. 2.2].

Frederick Yu's Mass Persuasion (1964) was the first major work to explore communist China's mass communication system. It was a study comparable in importance to Alex Inkeles's Public Opinion in Soviet Russia (1950). Yu's major contribution was that he described and interpreted how the Chinese Communist Party's media institutions were organised and how they functioned under Mao.



Apart from the conventional media studies such as the press, broadcasting and film, Yu also paid special attention to some indigenous forms of mass communication employed by the Maoists to conduct political campaigns and mass mobilization. For instance, "Dazibao", which literally means "a paper of big letters" (the English translation is "big character poster"), was simply a large sheet of paper with hand-written content and posted at any convenient place for people to read. It is a peculiar, crude and low-cost medium extensively used -- often on a dramatically large scale for political campaigns, and most favoured by Mao himself. Mao viewed Dazibao a very effective weapon for mass mobilization as he once remarked it at a conference for cadres in 1957, that "Dazibao is a good thing and I think it will be handed down to future generations. ... I think it is a good idea to use it, the more, the better. ... Dazibao as an instrument favours the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie" (Mao, [1957] 1977:464). In August 1966, for example, Mao explicitly gave his full support of the Red Guards movement and declared his determination to launch the Cultural Revolution just by issuing his own famous big character poster "Bombard the (Liu&Deng-led capitalist) Headquarters". This poster has been regarded by historians as the turning point of the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. But when Deng regained power, he ordered a ban of Dazibao in 1980, and it was constitutionally forbidden in The 1982 Chinese Constitution.

However, "Dazibao" was scarcely addressed by previous western scholarly studies on communist China's media let alone researched. Yu made an effort to analyze how the Chinese communists made ingenious use of this medium and help us to understand that "Dazibao" actually played a unique and important role in Mao's communication system and mass persuasion. Yu argued that using the medium of "Dazibao", under some circumstances such as targeting the "criticism and self-criticism" campaign (i.e a common form of communist ideological control), was far more effective than the newspapers (Yu, 1964:142). He also revealed how Chinese communists did an enormous amount of work to turn

this form of mass communication into a powerful weapon for mass ideological control which can partly explain why China -- technologically backward and materially impoverished -- could establish its own effective and giant mass communication network.

In sum, by focusing on Mao's use of the media to effect his politics-in-command solution, and on the consequence of pervasiveness and penetration of such a propagandistic communication system, Yu made a big step forward towards media study of Communist China at that time. However, his heavy emphasis on Mao's political and ideological significance in the Chinese media was unbalanced by his neglecting the effect of China's political pendulum swing -- a key issue which would have revealed the inherent contradictions of the social system. Yu thus failed to sort out and examine the underlying problems of the party-state and its media policies. In particular, Yu ignored the influence of Liu-and-Deng group which tended to provide an alternative to use the media for economic development and to offer people a more elaborate and better quality of cultural life. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Yu's work was the first comprehensive investigation of the mass media in communist China, it still remains a classical case with respect to the subject.

To some extent, the shortcomings and research vacuum left by Yu was fulfilled by Liu's work Communications and National Integration in Communist China (1972). Liu put his finger on a central issue when he focused on the complex relationship between mass media and social systems in the context of nation building. As he states: "Previous studies of the media system in Communist China have not adequately considered its political and social context, and thus have missed the most important part of the system: its function in the national integration of China. This aspect is the theme of the present study" (A.Liu, 1972:2). He argues that the role of mass media in the communist state is essentially that of a facilitating agent. The effective functioning of the mass media as an integrative force, as Liu

identified, depends on three interacting sets of factors which he claims fostered the integrative influence of the media performance: (1) a social infrastructure (such as transport networks, the linguistic framework); (2) political culture; and (3) the administrative organization of the media. Based on these premises, Liu provided an analysis of the subject which revealed the role media played in the evolution of communist national integration with a widening of the focus on the ruling elite power struggle and the bi-polar tension between maintaining ideological purity and pursuing economic improvement.

Liu tracks China's alternating media policy shifts between Mao's position and Deng-and-Liu's, between left and right, from the 1949-1953 Leftist attacks on the past to the 1953-1957 period of Deng-and-Liu consolidating their bureaucratic power, through Mao's campaign of the Great Leap Forward of 1958 to its failure, from his opponents' attempts at economic reconstruction to Mao's 1963 counter-attack and finally his 1966 Cultural Revolution. The author's major contribution is to put the mass media into these concrete contexts of the China's political pendulum swing of each period, showing how and why the media was manipulated to function as the servant of the prevailing political faction, fighting the battle on behalf of each successive master.

Liu concluded that the media did not achieve fundamental national integration in Mao's era because of China's economic underdevelopment and political instability (Liu, 1971:6). However, his analysis is limited by his not taking into account the institutional arrangement of the party-state or its way of social organization which in my view was the chief reason for the media's failure to achieve national integration in China.

In Markam's Voices of the Red Giants (1967), he gives a historical perspective on social development to approach the mass communication and communist power in the USSR and China. He examines the media performance in their social settings using the method of system analysis. Like Liu he did not regard the media



as existing in isolation from other aspects of society, but unlike Liu, he took a much wider and comparative approach to study the media performance of the two major communist giants and to try to find their internal dynamic and contradictory movement of such a type of the entirely different and eccentric -- to the western world -- communication system. His major concern, as he indicated, was the relationship between communist regimes, mass media and society (Markham, 1967:445-457).

Central to Markham's research is his opposition to the media-centric view to the study of communication. He argues that "the mass communication system is a product of a society in which there is a reciprocal influence in operation among all the interacting social forces including the other system of institutions that serve the society" (Markham, 1967:ix). Following historical materialism, he observes that "How well a mass communication system serves its society is determined, then, not only by the nature of the system's capability but also by a whole host of other systems and facets of the society that both limit and expand that capability" (Markham, 1967:x).

In this fruitful 500-odd page book, Markham contrasts the different Soviet and Chinese political approaches towards the use of the mass media. He finds the Soviet model more conventional and more oriented towards the bureaucratic control of society. China, in contrast, because of its own cultural, political and economic conditions, and in particular, because of Mao's charisma power and his radical ideas, creates its own dynamic (and limitation) to use the communication system to build up a communist society. Markham analyses and compares to Soviet Russia all the main organs of Chinese party media system -- from newspapers to (wired & wireless) broadcasting networks. He finds in general that the media all serve the party interests and that there is no basic difference between the two communist giants in this regard. But how, tactically, to use the media as ideological apparatus to reach their goals and objectives, is substantially different between the two nations. To this extent, Markham

regards China as a quite distinct case from Soviet Russian which mainly employed a conventional praxis in its communist media systems. He reveals that China developed more target oriented methods, aimed at reaching the vast and diverse Chinese population with its specific indigenous social conditions by which the media could change minds and attitudes.

One of the strengths of Markham's analysis is that he sets it within a comprehensive historical context which includes their origins, so that for instance, his discussion of the development of the press in China is set against the 19th century western missionary importation and promotion of newspapers which introduced at the time a new form of communication.

The considerable scale of Markham's comparative study of Soviet Russia and China means that there are some difficulties in his historical account of the Chinese media institutions. He for instance, does not give an adequate analysis as to how China, given the precedents or their absence, developed its unique styles of communication such as the Chinese way of using the media in promoting political campaigns. Despite these shortcomings, Markham's work remains amongst the most valuable of publications dealing with that period of communist media systems.

#### **2.1.2 Media Studies of Mainland China in the Post-Mao Era**

Mao's death and Deng's regaining power in the late '70s marked a beginning of the new era with a wave of change dramatically taking place in post-Mao China both in direction and in approach. The economic reform programme and open door policy rapidly brought the nation out of the stage of classical communism, affecting all aspects of Chinese society including the mass media [cf. 2.2].

As noted, changes in China correspondingly alerted Western scholars of Chinese communication studies who in turn were now able to adopt new approaches and more methods to conduct their researches on the subject. Firstly, no longer were they confined to the traditional framework of communist studies -- relying on decoding "Black Box" information and observation from a distance -- but could conduct field studies within the country and obtain easier access to many necessary documents and publications hitherto withheld from public scrutiny. Secondly, foreign scholars no longer stuck to the Cold War's us-versus-them dichotomy, but let go of stereotypes and out-dated media performance about mainland China, and began to see the new dimension of the media in terms of post-Mao industrial development even while was as yet subject to political control.

Research methods became more diverse. Data collection and research projects operated in a much wider field ranging from empirical studies, content analysis, sampling survey and personal interview; and employed varying disciplines including anthropology, sociology, mass communication and political economy as well as traditional political-ideological studies. Among them, direct and in-depth interview from senior Party officials, media executives to ordinary Chinese people brought the most interesting and valuable information concerning post-Mao media development. As a result, the standard of media studies of the mainland China and the quantity of publications in the West has increased since the early '80s.

However, this is not the case in mainland China itself. Chinese media researchers were and still are largely restricted in the nature of their investigations. Thus, compared to the West, there has been no parallel movement inside the Chinese academic community of the deeper and wider examination of media system and performance which has emerged in post-Mao western publications. The main reason, as noted, is that the Party believes that the media are too important to be allowed as a



subject of independent research. The legitimacy of control of the media -- in the authorities' view -- can be damaged by enquiring students and scholars.

Therefore, media system studies on mainland China, especially institutional analysis, has become taboo -- a high risk area with political sensitivity: the state maintains careful vigilance towards the people engaged in media (journalism) research. A pre-emptive strike is often employed by the authorities concerned to restrict any potential "trouble makers". A research department supervisor, for instance, will not allow in the first place a student to choose any topics which may lead to questioning the existing media institutions. Thus independent research work comparable to western studies conducted in the last decade is practically impossible.

For these reasons, as far as I know, little of direct relevance to this thesis has been published in mainland China or in the Chinese language in the last decade. Because of this unfortunate absence, the following review will not include the products of Chinese texts. This is by no means to deny that there have been many insightful analyses and challenging views hinted at or expressed in coded language or by hinted expression in scattered Chinese publications. Instead, I will focus on the research achievements in the West.

Amongst the various books concerning Chinese media that have been published in English since the early '80s, the four most influential have been chosen for brief discussion. These are Mass Communication in China (1982) by John Howkins, Mass Media in China: The history and the future (1989) by Won Ho Chang, Qi Lai! -- Mobilizing One Billion Chinese: The Chinese communication system (1989) by Robert L. Bishop, and most recently, China Turned On: Television, reform and resistance (1991) by James Lull.

Howkins provides not a deep analysis but a useful general introduction to the Chinese media in the early period of the post-Mao era when the social reform movement was just instituted. Most of his information is based on his China tour in October/November 1979 at the invitation of the Chinese Foreign Ministry during which he had extensive personal interviews with senior officials as well as people working at all levels in the media and the government, including Zhao Ziyang, who shortly afterwards became the prime minister and the Party's general secretary (1980-1989). In the pioneer stage of China's reform era at the beginning of the '80s when he was writing this book, Howkins found that mass communication in China still remained, by and large, the old model of Chinese communism. He hung on to the old view that the main agent of communication was not broadcasting or newspapers or the cinema, but the Communist Party itself; that the main resources of communications were not printing presses but party members; that their main tools were not TV programmes but political discussions (Howkins, 1982:5). However, he also detected that major changes were brewing and just underway. He gives a detailed account of the new emerging social forces and how the post-Mao policy change started to effect the communication industries. He is the first to provide an analysis of the economic as well as the usual political dimension of the Chinese media performance. He also devoted his attention to the telecommunication and advertising areas: the former was seldom dealt with in mass communication studies and the latter was just emerging at the time. His discernment of communist problems put him in a position to predict that the clash between the traditional totalitarian system and the protagonists of modernization would be one of the motifs of post-Mao China (Howkins, 1982:6).

After a long pause two major books devoted wholly to Chinese media studies appeared in the same year: Bishop's Qi Lai! and Chang's Mass Media in China.

Bishop approaches the subject from the communication study point of view. He isolates the sender (the Chinese Communist Party) and the receiver (the ordinary Chinese citizen) in order to examine comprehensively how the Chinese communication system functions. He made some progress in understanding the evolution of Chinese mass communications, especially media development after Mao. But his conclusion was fraught with problems. According to him, "China and her communication system will remain **socialist** and authoritarian. A violent change, either toward Maoism or **capitalism**, is unlikely" (Bishop, 1989:171. emphases added). The difficulty lies in his terminological use of the term "socialist" and "capitalism". He seems to believe that socialism can be identified with Deng's dictum of building "a socialism with Chinese characteristics", a delicately designed basket into which can be thrown a mixture of capitalism market economy and one party political dictatorship. It is not clear in fact why this can be called "socialism", and why this to a degree cannot be called (authoritarian-style) capitalism -- particularly in the age of post-Mao China's booming joint ventures and private enterprises, busy property transactions, in-flow of overseas investment, rampant commercial advertising, and flourishing stock markets with massive share speculation -- and all that those current trends imply. It is evident that Bishop did not consider media changes within the context of the social reform movement and within Deng's contradictory solution in post-Mao China. Therefore, he failed to assess the underlying tendency of the Chinese media towards liberalization, commercialization and, furthermore, democratization. This major flaw make his premises and assumptions too vulnerable to sustain his whole research framework. However, his factual research data and analysis are useful.

Chang's work concentrates on analysis of the Chinese mass media in the traditional journalism format. The chief purpose of his book "is to present an up-to-data description and analysis of the mass media system in a country whose population exceeds one billion people". And, particularly, it is to show "the changing



trends in the Chinese media", and to provide "a context for comparing the Chinese media with other media systems" (Chang, 1989:x). In many ways, the book consists largely of case studies with updated versions of much of Markham's work. Moreover, he devotes much attention to the contents of different media (e.g. press, TV, radio) comparative analysis, editorial policy, administrative organization, journalistic control patterns and the historical development of journalism and its education in China. In a word, as a narrow focus study, he reveals in-depth the operation of the mass media in China today.

James Lull's China Turned On is presented in a readable, interesting and journalistic style. Its strength is not that it deals with television study itself, as does this thesis, but rather that he examines the effects of the media, especially TV, on the hearts and minds of the Chinese people against the background of the far-reaching social reform in the post-Mao era.

Lull made some innovations in the research by mainly employing sociological and anthropological methods. As he explained, "to research this book I wanted to enter more ethnographically into everyday life in China and to focus specifically on television's roles in culture and politics" (Lull, 1991:40). In doing so, he conducted two types of extensive interviews: one was with China's leading television executives, media researchers and varying levels of authorities concerned; the other was with 100 ordinary Chinese families in lengthy in-home friendly conversations. The families were randomly chose in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Xian. Through these face-to-face direct talks and his first hand observation, he gives us a vivid account of the major events from a cultural studies point of view during post-Mao China's modernization drive, showing that the dramatic expansion of television in China's urban areas in the last decade has been a powerful stimulator of political resistance to the party-state system. He is also the first western scholar to reveal comprehensively the television-watching behaviors of the urban Chinese. He finds, because of the cramped living space in China's

cities and the family as the centrepiece of Chinese tradition, and because of a relative lack of leisure activities, television has fulfilled a particularly important function in post-Mao China's cultural development. He argues that television has intensified basic contradictions in the society, inspiring visions of a more free and democratic China. His analysis focuses on how oppositional readings through the television medium are reached, which is, according to him, through three ways: 1) the heterogeneity of opinion constructed with the television institution, 2) the polysemy of TV programmes, and the role of a politically engaged, active audience (Lull, 1991:208-219). Lull also tries to explain why and how the 1989 Beijing tragedy occurred, and the role of television during that extraordinary period. Despite the 1989 Tiananmen setback, Lull remains relatively optimistic about the future of China and its movement towards pluralization and democratization. In short, his impressive work presents a cultural study with wide political, economic and social significance in the context of post-Mao China's profound changes. However, his work has a tendency to exaggerate the role of the television medium in the process of post-Mao transformation in Chinese society which, in my view, television itself as well as other new information technologies could not directly generate or determine the large scale of social changes as the evidence of this thesis is revealed.

To sum up, post-Mao media studies about mainland China have entered a new pluralistic mode, as these examples above indicate. They are relevant to this study, providing as they do a macro-background of western academic understanding of the media in communist China.

## 2.2 THE MAOIST LEGACY AND THE POST-MAO REFORM PROGRAMME

### --- A Background Overview

When Mao led the 1949 communist victory in the mainland China, he had a vision of building a communist society. By this he meant that the revolution of human mental or spiritual life must precede the material life. Mao persistently argued that the major challenge faced in a communist-led society was the pressing danger of the **spontaneous** tendency towards the restoration of capitalism through pursuing material progress, and as such, he viewed class struggle and political campaign as the "key link" upon which all other development hinged. The essence of Maoist was therefore, embodied in his famous formula: politics-in-command --- that correct thought could produce social miracles. In practice, Mao thus constantly sought to change human relations of production and relied on mass mobilization in an attempt to construct what he believed an ideal society.

Yet Mao's impulsive revolutionary radicalism, which virtually dominated the whole nation between 1949 to 1976 and which was characterised by one mass campaign after another in the name of carrying on the class struggle, made the Chinese people pay a huge price. In 1958, for instance, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward aimed at the success of economic self-sufficiency, especially vis-a-vis the untrustworthiness of Soviet Russia. However, it failed devastatingly and, according to Chow's study, China's agricultural output during that period (1958-1962) dropped by 28%, light industry by 21%, and heavy industry by 23% (G.C.Chow, 1987:72). Moreover, it resulted in record-breaking famine that was directly responsible for 25 to 30 million people dying of starvation (the official admitted figure is 15 million). There followed a period of reaction led by the Deng-and-Liu group, emphasising economic modernization.

However, the new effort made by Deng-and-Liu group to institutionalize social order, to pursue material progress and



to implement the pragmatic and professionally oriented policy in the cultural field had worried Mao a great deal. The rise of state paternalism was unacceptable to Mao. As he was to reveal later, Mao believed that this would lead China down to the path of the Soviet "revisionism" (a term employed by Mao to justify his radical approach) and jeopardize his utopian ideal and revolutionary purity. Mao thus decided to launch another extraordinary campaign called the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in an attempt to reverse the tendency with the re-imposition of his approach. The aim of the Cultural Revolution, according to Mao, was "to settle the question of **who will win** in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Peking Review, No.25, 17.7.1977); and "to establish the overwhelming ascendancy of Mao Zedong Thought" (cited from the editorial of Red Flag -- the Party's Central Committee's journal, no.15, 1967).

From the outset, Mao determined to mobilize the masses into a rebellion against the Party bureaucracy as he defined it. Through his personal charisma, and with the help of mass communications, he attempted to smash the "revisionists" within the Party from the bottom to the top. Yet, Mao's fantasy about the Culture Revolution soon turned out to be a nightmare and a total disaster. As the result, mainland China experienced a decade of the personality cult accompanying massive violence, chaos and mass terror which led to a total national catastrophe: On the political front, China found itself in a near-anarchy situation and close to civil war with fierce fighting involving the ruling officialdom, the Red Guards, numerous political factions and varying military lords. On the economic front, the devastating consequence was worse than the Great Leap Forward: collectivised production and self-reliance became the paramount principle that must be employed to conduct all economic activities, production condition for economic growth rapidly deteriorated and the annual gross output value of industry and agriculture fluctuated between \$US 70 billion to \$US 90 billion against a population of 700 million at that time. On the cultural front, there was total

denigration and prohibitions on both traditional and foreign cultures -- from Confucianism to Shakespeare, from Chinese opera to western classical music. On the international front, China's bid for self-reliance turned into almost total isolation. By 1969 it seemed that an all-out war with the Soviets was imminent. It was only due to the western Cold War strategy that this explosive situation was relieved in the early 70s by a new compensatory solidarity with the political anxious the United States of America to cast the China trump card.

Thus, the Cultural Revolution brought the whole country on the brink of collapse and if this general crisis went on any further, there was a real danger, as the Party latter admitted, of "the extinction of the Party and the nation" (wangdang wangguo). In this way, the Maoist approach actually resulted in the opposite effect to the one intended, and created the conditions for fundamental reform both in public opinion and the ruling elite. Indeed, at the time of Mao's death in late 1976, a change of direction to save the country was not only urgent but almost inevitable. At this critical juncture, Deng Xiaoping and his supporters won the decisive power struggle within the Party and proceeded with a reform programme. On The Communiqué of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Chinese Communist Party Central Committee in late 1978, the ruling elite led by Deng declared that "the main concentration of party work and the full attention of the people of China would shift toward socialist modernization and construction" (People's Daily, 24.12.1978). Thus, starting in 1978, the far-reaching modernization drive was initiated.

As economic development has become the Party's priority, Deng is virtually conceding that the Party's legitimacy now increasingly depends on the progress of modernization and prosperity, rather than revolutionary commitment and communist dogmas. This, however, has inevitably led to gradual ideological flexibility and even doctrinal dilution, whereas much of the Maoist legacy, particularly his unrelenting emphasis on the class struggle and persistent appeal to egalitarianism, populism, asceticism and

isolationism, had to be discredited. In effect, Deng readily put Marxist-Leninist ideology behind his pragmatism and was to encapsulate his new guideline most famously in his dictum: **"It doesn't matter whether the cat is white or black so long as it catches mice"** (it first appeared in 1962 when Deng made a speech on agricultural production; Deng[1962], 1989:305). Whereas, under Mao, "class struggle was the key link" with Mao's catchword of "politics-in-command", under Deng, this has to be reversed and the new catchword is now **"To get rich is glorious"** (Deng Xiaoping). The Chinese people are being reassured that the socialism sought by their leader will be one with "Chinese characteristics", meaning that socialism would be stressed when there was a challenge to the Party; Chinese characteristics will be given priority if a departure from communist ideology is required for the sake of economic growth (T.Tang, 1986). Of course, the official interpretation of Dengism -- especially his "cat philosophy" -- is more rhetorical with some lip service being paid to the terminology. According to Hu Qili (Party ideological boss, 1983-1989), the Party's reform programme is based on the essence of the Marxist thinking of seeking truth from facts. In China's present situation, the first priority is to develop the productive forces. So, he remarked, "whatever benefits the development of the productive forces is required or permitted by **socialism**, and whatever does not benefit it is contrary to **scientific socialism**" (Speech on Propaganda Work, 1987, emphasis added). To be sure, since the late 1970s, Deng's "cat philosophy" has been increasingly popular among the ruling elite and has become a **de fide** principle in policy making.

Central to Deng's ambitious economic reform programme were two radical strategies which are fundamentally alien to the party-state system: one is the "Open Door policy" towards world capitalist market of trade and investment, the other is the restructuring of the economic order with the disciplines of the market by allowing competition to be the spur to greater production increases and profitability. The purpose of such reforms is said to establish "a socialist market economy in



China" (Beijing Review, 1.11.1992). This becomes the Party's "new historical mission and basic line" formally adopted by Deng's disciples in the latest 14th Party National Congress in October 1992. Ironically, as stated before, by "socialist", it now only means to maintain monopoly of the political power of the communist Party; but, by "market economy", it actually means to use whatever capitalist means is necessary to keep the economic growing.

Nevertheless, the economic reform in the last fourteen years has struck a great success. According to a recent comprehensive China survey conducted by the prestigious magazine The Economist, China's GNP has since then grown by an average of 9% a year and by 1994, China's economy is almost sure to be four times bigger than it was in 1978 (The Economist, 28.11.1992). Meanwhile, China has also showed huge gains in Foreign trade and western investment. Total two way trade grew from \$US 13.4 billion in 1976 to \$US 160 billion in 1992 roughly accounting for 30% of China's GNP, and overseas investment from near-zero level in 1978 to \$US 16 billion in 1992 (Financial Times, 29.12.1992; People's Daily, 31.12.1992). By 1992, China had absorbed \$US 23.7 billion worth of direct foreign investment, set up 21,000 overseas funded enterprises, used \$US 52.7 billion of foreign loans to build over 1,000 big and medium-sized projects (figures cited from the speech by China's vice-premier Zhu Rongji at Royal Institute of International Affairs, UK, 16.11.1992).

As noted, the rapid economic expansion has been chiefly approached by the adoption of quasi-privatization in agriculture, the creation of "special economic zones", decentralization policy, commercialization of industries, de-regulation of state-controlled price, liberalization of state allocations of producer goods, and most recently, massive introducing stock market and property market. As a result, China's overall economic performance has decisively moved out of the original central planning paradigm. In 1978, for instance, around 700 kinds of producer goods were allocated through the hands of the planners in

Beijing; by 1991, the number was significantly reduced to less than 20. In the fast growing non-state sector (e.g private or local cooperatives, joint ventures or overseas investors) which now accounts for over 45% of the Chinese economy, almost all inputs or outputs are operated in the market mechanism. Even in the case of the state sector, the situation has also changed remarkably. By the end of the 1980s, only within the span of ten-year time, about 56% of inputs were uncovered by the plan and 40% of output sold outside the plan. Therefore, in today's China it is not surprising to see that 60% of coal, 55% of steel and 90% of cement -- the typical goods controlled and allocated by the state under the command economy -- are actually delivered by the market rather than the planners in Beijing (China Survey, The Economist, 28.11.1992:7). "The market economy", in the liberal minded Chinese vice-premier Zhu Rongji's words, "is no longer a textbook term but a living reality in the everyday life of the Chinese people" (speech at Royal Institute of International Affairs, UK, 16.11.1992). Clearly, The general trend of Chinese economic reform since 1978 has indicated an upward spiral towards forming a new market-oriented social order and thus deeply affects all aspects of the society.

Indeed, the sweeping reform movement initiated by the drive of economic modernization has profound and wider-ranging social impacts on the post-Mao Chinese society. In brief then, there are several broad, interrelated trends at work pushing China proceeding of fundamental institutional transformation.

The first obvious change, for all Deng's protestations about "Chinese characteristics", has been that the arbitrariness and scope of Party control have been much reduced and the state has become less intrusive, that popular opportunities for local political participation have been increased. The Party's retreat from many aspects of the social arena, its yielded move of political rationalization and partial liberalization followed by economic development, and its new strategy of "reform and openness", has created the conditions for the growth of

autonomous-nature public sphere which tends to further expand its space through more differentiated and pluralistic activities.

Secondly, the role of ideology has dramatically declined and rampant political propaganda has increasingly lost its hegemony over society. This has produced two results. In the first place, there is considerable recognition of the virtues of pragmatic approaches to varying social issues and as a result, many policy matters have been addressed on the basis of instrumental rationale rather than dogma. In the second place, the ideological laxity has fostered cultural genres including media entertainments and other less ideologically loaded materials. Not only Western knowledge and thoughts have been introduced in a large scale and unprecedented rate, but listening to foreign broadcasts (e.g the BBC, the VOA) and the consumption of foreign cultural goods, audi-video in particular, have now become commonplace. Moreover, heterodox views may now be expressed in a range of forms of cultural forums provided they are not politically too sensitive.

Thirdly, where Mao went in for mass mobilization campaigns to pursue his radical revolutionary vision at the expense of social stability and economic development; Deng, in contrast, has sought to take measures to stabilise elite politics, fostering more orderly procedures, injecting more younger and better educated people into the state bureaucratic machines, and introducing more legal praxis to maintain an authoritarian social order. This, however, gives the rise to institutionalize the policy-making processes and to regulate the industrial behaviours such as media product distribution, advertising and libels. It thus in turn has moved China, though slowly and gradually, towards the path of rule by the law and therefore, has fostered social pluralization and democratization.

Fourthly, while it has been less and less constrained by doctrinal considerations, post-Mao China has been increasingly affected and re-shaped by the commercial forces. With the urgent



need for capital accumulation and rapid expansion of economy, the market has played ever growing role in challenging or undermining the infrastructure of the Party-state and are pulling society far away from the state power which, in a positive sense, may prove to be necessary for transformming communist totalitarianism.

Thus, the great reform movement has made China much less totalitarian. In fact, the structure of the party-state has been deeply shaken by the dynamics and impact of the open-door policy, commercialization, decentralization, cultural pluralism and de-ideologilazition in the post-Mao era. However, the evolution of the party-state transition is by no means smooth. Some of the difficulties may have been endemic to all Soviet model system, but others are peculiar to China. The central and irreconcilable contradiction lies in the so-called "Deng Xiaoping Style" reform program, namely, to pursue economic liberalization while maintaining the Party's political dictatorship. It has thus generated the intensifying social confrontation between the entrenched political institutions and alien and fast-growing socio-economic formations [see Introduction]. Therefore, a tug-of-war scenario has characterised the post-Mao reform era and has a momentous impact on social changes.

To sum up, I cannot do better than cite T.Tang's lucid remarks as my conclusion:

In undertaking to reform that (party-state) system, Deng ~~a~~ to pursue a middle course, balancing two sets of potentially contradictory principles. He was to play a decisive role, for better or for worse. But the three factors -- the party's retreat from society, the split within the party, and the impact of outside world -- interacted so as to produce tremendous social forces for reform and openness that Deng could not control. In the ~~a~~ Deng himself and the system he represented were directly challenged by the forces that he had unintentionally unleashed (T.Tang, 1991:277).

## **2.3 MEDIA EVOLUTION IN COMMUNIST CHINA: A Profile**

The mass media always played a vital role in the communist state, aside from the important fact that the party itself, exercising its totalitarian control over the whole nation, obtained much of its coherence and convening powers by means of media activities.

The evolution of media development in mainland China from the time Mao took over in 1949 until the present day, can be divided roughly into three phases:

- (1) from 1949 to the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1966;
- (2) the ten years of political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution;
- (3) from Mao's death in 1976 to the present.

### **2.3.1 The First Phase (1949 -- 1966)**

In the first phase (1949 -- 1966), the Chinese communist party consolidated its national power and established its control system over the mass media. This task was completed around the mid-1950s when the party formally committed itself to "the socialist construction cause". The media model was copied from the Soviet Union's and overlaid it with some of Mao's much more radical ideas and methods. Basically the components of national media were all owned, operated, financed and staffed by the party. The pyramid structure of the media system rested on the party propaganda department which was directly responsible to the party's politburo.

The People's Daily was officially designated as the party's mouthpiece. Its administration belonged to the ministerial level. Its editorial policy was devised by the politburo in charge of

party ideology affairs. The primary purpose was to convey party policies and strategy direct to the masses and in Mao's era, the party -- particularly Mao himself -- heavily relied on the media to conduct large scale political campaigns.

In 1957, for instance, Mao wrote an editorial for the People's Daily calling for "let a hundred flowers blossom and let a hundred schools of thought contend" aimed at encouraging people's free expression of their views to his regime. Unfortunately, this was proved to be Mao's plot of "luring the enemy into the trap". A few months later Mao wrote another editorial to launch "Anti-Rightist Campaign", mobilising the masses to identify the self-confessed anti-socialist elements in their communities. As a result, half a million people, mainly intellectuals, would thenceforth be labelled "rightist enemies". The ratio of rightists among journalists was higher than other groups, exceeding 10% and in some media organizations it reached 30% (B.Liu, 1990:90).

The role of the media during the campaign of the Great Leap Forward was notorious. The media were engaged in producing various fabrications of "the great achievements" in an attempt to raise revolutionary spirit and further support the apparent good sense and uplifting purpose of Mao's strategy. So, for instance, reports on "high production" of crops being produced by some rural communes were incredibly exaggerated or simply falsified out of all proportion, giving the impression that Mao's approach would soon bring China to the economic level of Britain and America.

Conversely, the media's silence and subjection to Party authority had its own heinous consequences. For instance, when 25 to 30 million people died of starvation in the early 1960s, the authorities forbade, and the media organizations dared not, to cover and gather this information. The tragedy remained strictly hidden from the outside world as well as the Chinese people themselves. Only about a few top leaders had been allowed to know



some detail about the extent of this man-made disaster into which Mao had led the country.

During this phase, the media were also frequently used in the power struggle. When Mao's political campaign brought economic depression, he had to yield power to Deng-and-Liu group. The media were permitted to signal consequent policy changes from pursuing ideological purity to promoting state paternalism and for economic and cultural development and vice versa [cf. 2.1, 3.3.2].

### The Newspaper

In 1949 there were about 400 newspapers in China, mostly run by private companies. After the communist took power, the party paid much attention to the development of the print media. by 1954, the state took over all private newspapers. The number of state-own newspapers increased to around 560. Circulation amounted to about 18 millions. All the newspapers were virtually organs of different levels of the party or authorities (e.g national, provincial, city, county levels or official sponsored mass organizations such as Trade Unions, Youth League). Most were state subsidized and free of charge. However, before the cultural revolution, there were also some evening papers without such a strong political dimension.

### Radio

Radio broadcasting developed substantially during the first period between 1949 to 1966. The party's strategy was divided into two: in the urban area concentration was on wireless broadcasting while in the rural areas every effort was made to establish a wired broadcasting network [cf. 3.1.2].

### The Film Industry

By the end of 1965 the national film industry was well established. There were 16 film studios which normally produced an average of one feature film a week. Whereas in 1949 the Chinese film market was dominated by the USA and cinema admissions were only about 47 million a year, by 1965 the state, with its provision of mobile film show units was recording admissions of 4.63 billion. The average person saw seven films a year.

### **2.3.2 The Cultural Revolution ( 1966 - 1976 )**

This was a period of extremism, today in China referred to as "the dark age". Mao had found that criticism of him and his policy was being largely conducted under the guise of the Chinese heritage of multiple-perspectives, and through the cultural sphere. So he took it upon himself to launch counter-attack, as he saw it, called "the Cultural Revolution". Mao used the media in an increasingly coherent, radical as well as self-destructive way. The number of publications declined markedly from about 1,000 to 200, the number of magazine dropped from 790 in 1965 to 191 in 1966 to 27 in 1967. Worse still, from 1966 to 1969, almost all television stations stopped offering service for nearly three years. In the meantime, the giant propaganda machine of Chinese communists put into highest gear to disseminate Maoism. According to Chinese official report, between 1966 and 1968, the Beijing authority issued 150 million sets of Mao's Selected Works in Chinese, Mongol, Tibetan, Uighur, Kazakh, and Korean; 140 million copies of Mao's Selected Readings; and 740 million copies of Little Red Book of Mao's Quotations freely distributed to almost every Chinese adult (Peking Review, No.2, January 1969:3).

The media cult of Chairman Mao reached maximum pitch. Various Mao's statements were quoted in journal's articles, cited in newspapers' editorials and broadcast on wireless and wired

broadcasting and, later, on the television medium. On every newspaper, for instance, the upper right corner of the front page was exclusively reserved for a daily display of Mao's sayings, always framed in a box and entitled as "The Supreme Instruction". As a rule, wherever Mao's quotation appeared, it must be printed in boldface type. If anything went wrong with these formats, there could be a "political incident": the authorities would take the matter seriously and the editor or reporter in question could be severely punished.

Moreover, hundreds of local media outlets parroted the Maoist controlled The People's Daily by simply copying this paper even from the headline to the typeface as a widely spread saying at that time described: "the job of small newspapers (i.e county and city level newspapers) is patterned after big newspapers (i.e regional and national level ones); and the job of big newspapers is to follow The People's Daily". Only in the next phase of media development did it become evident that previously the media had been subject to what was wryly termed "a thousand Buddhas with the same face". Eighteen of 26 minutes of news programme could be devoted to Mao's slogans, commonly used as bona fide news copy which in fact simply furthered his version of the class struggle and denounced his political opponents. As a result, media was known as "the manufacturer of Falsehood, Boastfulness and Emptiness", a special term now used to describe Maoist extremism of media performance during that period.

Meanwhile, as Mao saw the intellectual group as dangerous to his regime (he believed that "the more knowledge you have, the more reactionary you will be") and was closely identified with "the overthrown bourgeoisie class", thousands of reporters, editors, broadcasters, and filmmakers were imprisoned or forced into labour camps. More than 2,000 films and operas were banned almost overnight. For ten years, only a few revolutionary model operas, films, music and songs were allowed to cast. Media censorship intensified.



"Dazibao" the Big Character Poster [cf. 2.1.1] were encouraged by Mao to be used nationwide to engage the class struggle movement. Together with mass rallies, these up to a point replaced the conventional, formal mass media. Mao personally favoured these indigenous forms of communication which were simpler, cheaper, and based on face-to-face contact. He described this -- relying on the two forms of communication (i.e. conventional media and indigenous means) -- as "walking on two legs", which he believed the most effective and efficient means to influence people. The situation continued until Mao's death and shortly afterward the arrest of Madam Mao-led Maoist group (i.e. labelled "the Gang of Four") in late 1976.

### **2.3.3 Media Evolution After Mao (1976 - )**

#### **2.3.3.1 Media Proliferation**

In his editorial introduction to the 1982 survey of the Beijing media audience, the first of its kind conducted on mainland China, Womack made some lucid observations into the new situation of post-Mao Chinese media development:

The variety and quantity of print media have gone far beyond previous levels. Instead of quotations from Chairman Mao, TV digests are the most popular reading. ... the newspaper public is shifting toward more local and informal papers and away from the stodginess of the major provincial and national party papers. Technical, specialty, and professional periodicals are mushrooming. Television is beginning its great ascent in Chinese audience share. Within the journalism profession a new emphasis has been given to quality news reporting, investigative reporting, and experimentation. International news is quite accessible, both directly through Voice of America, the BBC, and Soviet Station and

indirectly through coverage in the Chinese press  
(1986:14).

The proliferation and expansion in the Chinese mass media in the post-Mao era is a remarkable achievement which can be observed from the vertical comparisons of 1978 (with population about 900 millions) and 1990 (with population 1140 millions ) sketched in the following tables:

**Table 2.1**  
**Growth of Newspapers in Mainland China**

Year	Newspaper til	% of Party's	Average total run(mil)
1978	186	75.6%	42.8
1990	1,442	28.16%	139.86

Source: the 1978 figure comes from China Statistical Yearbook (1983), pp531; the 1990 figure comes from China Journalism Yearbook (1991), pp457.

**Table 2.2**  
**Growth of Periodicals in Mainland China**

Year	Periodical titles	Average total run ( mil)
1978	542	60
1990	5,751	162

Source: China Statistical Yearbook (1991), pp755.

**Table 2.3**  
**Growth of Radio Broadcasting in Mainland China**

Year	Radio stations	No.of receiver ( mil )	Per 1,000 inhabitants	Coverage of population
1978	93	75.46	80	30% (est)
1990	635	262.26	235	78%

Source: the 1978 figure comes from China Statistical Yearbook (1983), pp379; the 1990 figure comes from China Statistical Yearbook (1991), pp 760.

**Table 2.4**  
**Growth of TV Broadcasting in Mainland China\***

Year	TV stations	No.of receiver ( mil )	Per 1,000 inhabitants	Coverage of population
1978	32	3.04	3	15% (est)
1990	509	165	145	80%

\* More detailed data are provided in appropriate chapters.  
Source: same as Table 2.3.

As can be seen from Table 2.1, there were only 186 newspapers in 1978; and the figure rose nearly 8 times to 1,442 in 1990. From January 1, 1980 to March 1, 1985, 1,008 newspapers emerged (Chinese Journalism Yearbook, 1986:121). In other words, one newspaper was started every other day.

The biggest changes, however, came from the structure and content genres of the print media. Before 1978, the character of the Chinese press was monotonous and the phenomenon of the Party organ was overwhelming. In 1975, for instance, out of a total of 180 newspaper titles, 152 (84.4%) were directly subordinate to various levels of Party committees concerns as their organs, and most of the rest of the papers belonged to Party-led organizations such as the Youth League, trade unions etc. Since 1978, however, the size and volume of Party organs have been greatly reduced. The following Table is the structure of the 1990 Chinese newspapers which shows the overall trend of post-Mao China's print medium.



**Table 2.5**

**The Structure of Chinese Newspapers in 1990**

Category	No.of titles	% of titles	Annual cir (mil)	% of total
<b>Party organ</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>28.16%</b>	<b>7106.71</b>	<b>38.04%</b>
National	2		142.95	
Provincial	30		3484.42	
City-level	290		3332.14	
County-level	84		147.2	
<b>Target papers</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>18.1%</b>	<b>2900.17</b>	<b>15.52%</b>
Workers	21		887.43	
Peasants	24		436.95	
Youth & Student	62		899.55	
Minorities	80		158.33	
Others*	74		517.91	
<b>Specialty papers</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>41.75%</b>	<b>6132.95</b>	<b>32.83%</b>
Economic	137		751.57	
Scientific	75		310.96	
General/digest	16		1584.88	
Culture	42		627.01	
TV guides	55		915.97	
Others**	277		1942.56	
<b>Evening papers</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2.64%</b>	<b>2345.27</b>	<b>12.55%</b>
<b>Enterprises</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>9.36%</b>	<b>196.93</b>	<b>1.05%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1442</b>		<b>18,682.03***</b>	

\* Including those for defense, women, the elderly, non-CCP groups, overseas Chinese, and foreign-language papers.

\*\* Including those for legality, education, sports, health,

population and social life, and occupations.

\*\*\* The original source incorrectly sums up to 18,729.96 million copies (annual).

Source: Calculated from China Journalism Yearbook (1991), pp457.

As can be seen from Table 2.5, while Party organs still retain their major position with 28.16% of the total titles and 38.04% of the total annual circulation, there has been a substantial improvement in diversity, with varied publications ranging from targeted papers (18.1% of the total titles), enterprise papers (9.36%), evening papers (2.4%) to specialty papers (41.75%). There are now newspapers managed by non-official organizations, run by various social and professional groups, owned by non-government units and even published by individuals (particularly in the period before 1989). Among them, the most remarkable case is the evening newspapers: 38 papers, which only make up 2.4% of the total titles, virtually have the share of 12.55% of the circulation nationwide. Others such as general-interest, special-subject and digest categories also have gained popularity. Moreover, there are increasing signs that the Chinese press is moving towards a two-tier British-style newspaper market, namely, one for serious (or quality) papers, one for popular (or tabloid) papers. The former tend to deal with politics, economics, international relations and social life with the emphasis on information and analysis; the latter have a softer, more lively content with heavy use of human interest stories, sex (but less strong than, for instance, Britain's Sport, or Page three of The Sun) and violence.

However, the increased diversity of the mass media does not imply that the Chinese media system has already become a pluralistic and politically autonomous one. It is still overshadowed by the Party's political power and constrained by the existing party-state control mechanism (e.g censorship, political, financial and administration pressures). In fact, any further reform that leads to fundamental institutional change will face strong resistance,

and its success will ultimately depend on the success in transforming the party-state to a democratic state.

#### **2.3.3.2 Media Institutional Reform**

It has been in post-Mao reform era that the growth of the Chinese mass media have gained a real "great leap forward". This is particularly true in the case of the television industry which has experienced an unprecedented booming period, the speed of which compares with the development of television anywhere else in the world. In the meantime, considerable changes have also taken place in the media institution itself. By adopting a decentralization strategy with a degree of autonomy for running media (particularly at local levels), and introducing a market mechanism with increasingly commercial involvement, the reform of the Chinese mass media have opened a new chapter in which the institutional performance of the media have virtually departed from its original unified, centre-dominated, politics-in-command model. Thus a process, however long-term-transitional, of what Weber may call instrumental rationalization is underway, by which the forces of the state, local regimes and the media industries pursue their own goals with a diversity of interests. Significantly, the costs of the institutional arrangement and operation have been reduced, and much progress (including many attempts) has been made in the practice of freedom of the press such as favouring greater informational openness, greater diversity in reporting, better representation of public opinion, increasing media oversight over policy-making and seeking greater editorial autonomy all of which could hardly have been thinkable in Mao's era.

In a broad sense, the rapid expansion of the mass media in post-Mao China has facilitated social changes in a direction that is beyond the control of the party's dictatorship and towards the process of democratization. The massive increase of media products and audience size, the proliferation of the



communication means, have reinforced each other to create dynamics that have fostered a diversity of cultural and social sentiments at the expense of further weakening the Party's hegemony. It is Deng's hope that his economic reform programme would come to aid and maintain the party-state system. But the dynamics of the reform movement and new social formations created by the reform have led to the emergence of a less ideological and pluralistic mass media system and, furthermore, have driven the media towards democratization.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TELEVISION IN MAO'S ERA ( 1958 -- 1976 )

#### --- A Historical Survey

In this chapter, I have set out to examine systematically the historical development of Chinese television prior to Deng Xiaoping's era (1958-1976); I have focused on its establishment, policy evolution, the change of programming content, the structure of its political/ideological control, and its operational models. As a result of this examination, I have tried to make two particular contributions to the current debate:

- 1) Assessing the origins of Chinese television and its performance in Mao's era with particular reference to primary materials;
- 2) Producing the argument, based on the above study, that Chinese television was a political creation; that, although media development in communist China (with reference to television) was broadly in line with that of the Soviet Union, the Chinese case presents a unique experience with typically Maoist characteristics in pursuit of its radical ideological goal.

### **3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1.1 The Early Development of Chinese Broadcasting**

Radio broadcasting reached China by the end of 1922, roughly at the same time as the original BBC (the British Broadcasting Company) was established in London. It was introduced by westerners as a commercial operation in an attempt to exploit the virgin land of the huge China market. On Jan.23. 1923, an American journalist E.G. Osborn, financially sponsored by an overseas Chinese businessman in Japan for the purpose of selling radio receivers and other wireless equipment to China, set up the first radio station "Radio Corporation of China" from his own Shanghai department store. It was equipped with a 50-watt transmitting set, to broadcast news and music in the Shanghai area. However, the station only lasted three months and, in 1924 the second station "The Kellogg Radio Company" was established by an American firm in Shanghai to provide a regular service. The British, French, Italian and Japanese soon followed suit, setting up their own stations around the urban areas particularly along the eastern coast of China (G.Lai, 1978:155-156; Y.Zhao, 1987:7; Z.Liu, 1988:29-32).

In August 1928, the Chinese Nationalist government formally set up its 50-kilowatt national network, "The Central Broadcasting Station" in its capital city, Nanking. Four years later, it installed a Garman-made, 75-kilowatt short-wave transmitter which was brought the whole China and most of Southeast Asia into its coverage. It was chiefly used for newscasts and was controlled by two state agencies: the Central Broadcasting Administration in charge of policy matters and the Ministry of Communications which administered the system. Prior to the Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945) Chinese radio broadcasting flourished briefly particularly in the private sector. Between 1932 and 1936, 63



privately owned commercial stations went on the air compared with the 16 non-commercial stations emerging at the same period and controlled by various levels of authorities over the country. The radio sets reached more than 200,000. In 1936, the Ministry of Communications revised the 1932 provisional broadcasting regulations (which set many restrictions on private radio stations) in an attempt to promote the industry. However, the Anti-Japanese War and the following the Civil War (1946 - 1949) between Jiang's Nationalist government and Mao's communists guerrillas seriously disrupted the process. Before 1949 the number of radio stations in "Nationalist" China was about a hundred (half of them privately run), mostly urban-based, with a total power capacity of 460-kilowatt. There were just one million radio sets at the time averaging 1.3 for every 1,000 persons, also largely concentrated in big cities such as Shanghai, Peking and Nanking (cf. Q.Bai, 1990:10-11; G.Lai, 1978:161-162; Z.Liu, 1988:34; J.Markham, 1967:341-343).

### **3.1.2 Communist Experience**

From the beginning, Mao's communists developed radio broadcasting under political and military pressure in order to counteract the influence of the Nationalist authority. They paid high attention to this new medium in an effort to launch their own propaganda campaigns as part of the strategy designed for their 1949 nationwide victory. In the spring of 1940, when Zhou Enlai, the first prime minister of communist China (1949 - 1976) brought back a 300 watt transmitting set to Yanan from Moscow, the Communists started preparations for transmitting a radio service. By the end of 1940, the Communists set up their first radio station in the headquarters at Yanan. Under hard conditions, the "Yanan Xinhua (i.e New China) Broadcasting Station", with the call letters XNCR, managed to provide a two-hour daily service, mainly broadcasting news and commentaries about Mao-controlled areas and party policies. It was housed in several cave dwellings halfway up a mountain with its electricity generated from the motor of

a used car which was fuelled by gas made by burning charcoal. At one point, the station had only an old manual gramophone, but no records. It was reported that Mao made his personal contribution and turned over to the station more than 20 records of his own (People's Daily, 15.9.1977). Undoubtedly, the Communists drew immediate benefits from using the radio broadcasting. On May 5 1941, Mao gave his directive to the Party's Central Committee in which he remarked that "all liberated areas (i.e the areas under communist control) should regularly receive Yanan's broadcasts. If they haven't got a radio receiver set, they should try every means to get one" (cited in Z.Liu, 1988:36). However, the station ceased to function two years later due to the technical problem of the transmitting set and it was not until 1945 that the station resumed services. As Mao's guerrillas were heading to the triumph of seizing state power, a relatively sizable broadcasting system was steadily built up by the communists in order to use the medium to mobilize mass support. By the end of 1948, there were 16 radio stations in communist controlled areas of Chang Kiakow, Manchuria, Shnkian and eastern and northern China, providing news, bulletins on the war and official announcements as well as some entertainment programmes. Meanwhile, in an attempt to make the Red voice heard to people outside China, the communists also managed, starting from 1947, to provide limited English and Japanese services (Beijing Review, 22.2.1982:20; W.Emery, 1969:466-467).

When the Communists took power and founded the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the development of the broadcasting industry, especially the radio network and rural wired broadcasting system, was immediately put on the Party's agenda: this mass medium had proven to be powerful, indeed crucial, in establishing and consolidating the power of the Soviet type communist state. On 5 December 1949, the "Yanan Xinhua Broadcasting Station" was formally renamed as the national radio station, the "Central People's Broadcasting Station" (CPBS), broadcasting about 15.5 hours daily of which roughly 50% was taken up by news and political-related programmes, 25% by

entertainment and the rest to educational and cultural programming. In April 1950, the Central Press (and Broadcasting) Bureau, the state agency which supervised and regulated the media communications at that time, issued an important policy document the "Decisions Regarding the Establishment of Radio-Receiving Networks" in which all levels of authorities, state institutions, factories, schools, Army units and public organizations were asked to do their best to install transmitting stations and wired loudspeakers and to train monitors (Y.Kang, 1982:19). As part of the attempt to establish a wired broadcasting system in the rural areas, the State Council announced a plan in 1955 to provide receiving stations free of charge; the network, known as point-to-point radio communication, was patterned after the Soviet Union radio-diffusion exchange system. It employed a central receiver, with an amplifier and switchboard housed in a studio, to provide a service using wired loudspeakers connected with each household in the village and installed in any public space -- village squares, school playgrounds, rice paddies, communal mess halls, and even on treetops and telephone poles. With state promotion, the wired broadcasting system grew rapidly. It reached almost all of the more than 2000 counties in China with about 70 million loudspeakers in the early 1960s to serve a 400 million rural population. Despite the underdeveloped economy at the time, by the end of 1965, however, a giant radio broadcasting system was established in Mao's China. There were 87 radio stations covering most urban areas with about 12 million radio sets; the county rediffusion stations stood at 2,365 accommodating 87 million loudspeakers. In a sense, Chinese broadcasting communication was effectively integrated into the communist state system and used by the Chinese authorities to advance the social engineering program (cf. F.Yu, 1964:123-131; J.Chu, 1978:27-30; B.Womack, 1986:25-26; W.Chang, 1989:151-162).

The early development of the Chinese television industry followed a similar pattern, but with its own distinguishing characteristics within rather unusual political circumstances.



### 3.2 A POLITICAL CREATION: The Origins of Chinese Television

#### Chronicle Of Events

- Feb.1955** The Central Broadcasting Bureau (later called the Ministry of Broadcasting) makes a formal proposal to the State Council to establish the first TV station in Beijing.
- May 1956** China begins to experiment with TV equipment.
- Aug.1957** Initial period of setting up the Beijing Experimental TV Station (China's de facto state television station at the time).
- 1.5 1958** The Beijing TV Station starts to broadcast in the Beijing area, and some other provinces soon follow suit.
- 1961-1963** Under the three-year austerity programme the number of Chinese TV stations (incl. relay stations) reduces from 36 to 8.
- 1966-1969** All 14 TV stations in operation have virtually no service due to the Cultural Revolution.
- May 1973** Start of colour television broadcasting using the PAL system.
- Sep.1976** Mao Zedong dies.
- Dec.1978-** Deng Xiaoping becomes China's paramount leader and launches the modernization movement.

### 3.2.1 Politics-in-Command and the "Great Leap Forward"

As analysed in the preceding chapter, central to Mao's intellectual concerns after the 1949 victory of Chinese communists, were the need to keep the population keyed up for his continuation of the revolutionary course: the question was how to turn the latent revolutionary spirit into a powerful material force inspired by guerrilla warfare, and how to avoid the fate of a revolutionary socialist state evolving into a bureaucratic-technocratic dominatory state (a reference to the Soviet Union in Mao's mind). As a result, Mao, out of a combination of commitment to constructing genuine socialism and his experiences with guerrilla warfare, developed his deep faith in the power of ideas with his solution of politics-in-command. He argued that man with proper motivation could transform his environment significantly and therefore, political considerations must take precedence over everything else in the formulation of policies or in the guidance of action (cf. Mao, 1964:397-520).

In the late 1950s, Mao's idea of politics-in-command began to prevail in the ruling Party as a guiding principle. The first crucial test was the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958. It was designed by Mao to modernize China in a single mass campaign chiefly by relying on the power of the mass revolutionary spirit to "catch up" with major western industrialized nations. The leadership even set a timetable to enhance the morale of the masses, for instance, to surpass Britain within 15 years (People's Daily, 1.1.1958). Of course, this was to be done by mobilizing mass political enthusiasm and participation which was believed to be the key for bringing the communist revolution to successful fruition in 1949. Thus with Mao's logic that the modernization of China and the transformation of the Chinese people's mentality were two sides of the same coin, politics-in-command and mass campaigning became the dominant approach. It was precisely under these social circumstances that Chinese

television was born, formed and developed [cf. 2.2].

### 3.2.2 The Pioneering Stage of Chinese TV

In Feb.1955 the Central Broadcasting Bureau made a proposal to the State Council about the possibility of setting up the first television station in Beijing. Soon afterwards, the broadcasting authority received a formal reply from prime minister Zhou Enlai saying: "This issue shall be included and discussed in the "Five-year Culture and Education Plan." By 1956, two Chinese students having returned from studying television technology in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, China began to experiment with some limited key items of television equipment. Given its industrialization level, China could take only this small step towards developing a television industry and there was no question of setting up a television station or providing a service at that time. However, the situation changed dramatically as a result of an accidental event. One year later, the Beijing Government discovered to its surprise that its Nationalist rival in Taiwan had publicly transmitted a certain TV programme using equipment supplied by the "Radio Corporation of America" (RCA). Obviously the Beijing authorities had reason to feel threatened. Y. Mei, the general director of the Central Broadcasting Bureau at the time, clearly made this point in his later memoir (Mei, 1988:102):

We were planning to set up our TV station in the early 1950s and began some training and preparations. However, only when we got some information that the Nationalists in Taiwan were about to provide a TV service in Oct.1958, did we become aware of its political implications and take a swift decision to set up our TV station ahead of the Taiwanese schedule. At that time the Soviet broadcasting adviser Cheranko told us that China lacked the basic expertise and



equipment to do so in the short term. We simply ignored his words and made up our minds to show the Taiwanese and the Soviets otherwise.

Thus both sides of the Taiwan Straits competed to set up a television service, albeit with an ulterior political motive: both sides of the Straits claiming legitimacy to rule and represent all the people of China. Moreover, the worry of mainland China was reinforced by rumours that the Taiwan authorities were about to start a regular television service on Oct.10.1958, the day Taiwan was to celebrate its National Day (in fact, not until on Oct.10.1962, did Taiwan set up its first television station and provide the regular service). In response to this challenge, the Broadcasting Authority in mainland China declared it would launch television broadcasting before Oct.10.1958 as a top political priority, and quickened its preparation for establishing a television station. This also coincided with the "Great Leap Forward" which was then approaching its zenith. To some extent this irrational, peasant-style mass movement did inspire people to achieve some sort of miracles. There was a Mao saying popular all over the nation at that time that under the leadership of the Communist Party, as long as there are people, every kind of miracle can be created. Dominated by such passionate and optimistic devotion, Chinese television, despite its immaturity, began its own "Great Leap Forward".

### **3.2.3 The "Great Leap Forward" of Chinese Television**

At the end of 1957, a television delegation was sent to the Soviet Union and East Germany to learn from their experience of running a television station and to ask for technical aid; the following year, China imported 200 Russian TV sets and produced a very small number of Russian models to supply the domestic market by hire purchase. In the meantime, the country brought together top technologists to tackle television technical

problems and made some progress. Shortly afterwards, the first 1,000W transmitter together with a few other key items of equipment, were produced on an experimental scale. This was already enough to strengthen the position of the radical line to take further bold action. On April 7th, 1958, the Fifth National Broadcasting Conference, the top policy making instrument taking place every 2-3 years, was held in Beijing. The broadcasting chief Y.Mei proposed a policy report "Politics is the key to the Great Leap Forward in broadcasting work" in which he stressed the importance of putting political needs first and foremost in developing the broadcasting industry. Y.Zhou, the Party propaganda chief, on the other hand, told the conference that there were two ways to develop the broadcasting industry as well as to conduct propaganda work: one was to wait for material conditions to be met and rely on professionals; the other was to create the condition by the revolutionary spirit and rely on politics, the Party, and the masses. He then demanded that the second path be taken and called for a Great Leap Forward in all aspects of broadcasting to accelerate the pace of development (News Front, No.5, 1958). It was also reported that, as part of the Great Leap Forward, the first TV station would soon be established in Beijing followed by a national TV network within a few years. By then, there was every reason to encourage the Chinese broadcasting authority to realize its ambition of providing a TV service before Oct.10.1958 and , in this way, to win a political battle with the Nationalists in Taiwan as well as Western countries (Z.Guo, September 1990; S.Fang, October 1990).

At 19:00, on May.1.1958, International Labour Day, China's first television station -- Beijing TV Station (later renamed China Central Television) formally went on the air with one channel in the Beijing area only. The major equipment of the station included just four image-orthicon cameras, one Outside Broadcast van, and one 1,000 Watt transmitter (VHF, band 1, channel 2). Despite the inadequate equipment, very poor working conditions, with the staff operating on both transmission and production

amounted to no more than 50, and despite there being only about 30 TV receivers mostly owned by governmental bodies at that time, the Beijing authorities chose that day to start a TV service in an effort to pursue their political and ideological goals. It initially broadcast twice, and later increased to four times a week for 2-3 hours per day. It carried news, documentaries, entertainment and educational programmes. The first night's show was rather dull. Here is the list of programmes forming the two-hour broadcast offered on the opening celebration (C.Zhuang, 1985:3-4):

- 19:05 Political talk about the future plan of the Great Leap Forward, by labour models;
- 19:15 "Going to the Countryside", a political documentary;
- 19:25 Poem and dance, art performances;
- 19:50 "Television", scientific&educational documentary, supplied by the Soviet Union.

Even by the standard of that time, the above programmes fell short of being a television service in a real sense. The Chinese ruling Communists, however, were quite satisfied with its political significance. The state news agency, "Xinhua" immediately announced the news to the world that the first TV station of the People's Republic of China was born in Beijing; others claimed that this was a victory for the politics-in-command strategy, and a demonstration of the advantage of socialism over the system of Taiwan and its American-led allies (Y.Mei, 1987:164). In short, the birth of Chinese television, imbued with Mao's radical passion, carried the hallmark of the mass media in the communist state: the Party's need to judge, conduct and interpret social events was of paramount importance.

With the atmosphere of the Great Leap forward in the late 1950s, Chinese television entered its initial stage of development. Outside the capital Beijing, provincial people also showed great interest in television. They hurriedly set up one station after



another by every conceivable means. Thus many stations were inevitably of a poor standard. Jilin province, for instance, whose TV station was originally scheduled for around the mid-60s; in fact, "after five months utter devotion, the broadcasters of Jilin province successfully established a television station at the incredibly low cost of only 190,000 Chinese Yuan (approx \$US100,000 at that time) as early as 1959" (China's TV Stations, 1987:116). However, after long inauguration period, Jilin province was still suffering from poor quality TV reception as well as other long term technical problems. From 1958 to 1960, at least sixteen out of twenty nine provinces had their own television stations offering two to three hours service for audience, despite the very small number of television receivers available (between a few to over a hundred sets in each province). As far as the program production and transmission were concerned, all stations at that time had to rely on films and tapes being "bicycled" from one to another, a term used to describe sending TV programmes by any transportation means, such as plane and cars, due to the situation of the absence of electronic transmission (J. Howkins, 1982:27). Moreover, the 1960 National Broadcasting Conference set forth a timetable for all other provinces to set up their television stations by the end of 1962 with a target of 50 (Y. Mei, 1960). Obviously, this excessive target, like most of the Great Leap Forward, was the creation of boastfulness and totally unrealistic. In fact, during that time of ferment, slogans such as **"Hard working and self-reliant"**, **"Getting on with the job with indigenous (Chinese) methods"** and **"Making do with whatever is available"** were so popular that they were almost like magic formulas in establishing television. By 1962, there were 36 Chinese television stations including some relay stations, the maximum number before the mid-1970s.

#### **3.2.4 Setback**

With the failure of the Great Leap forward, and the divorce

between China and the USSR which resulted in all aid from the Soviet Union being withdrawn in the early 1960s, the development of Chinese television immediately came to a stand-still. Just one year later in 1963, the number of Chinese television stations was heavily axed to a mere eight under the severe austerity policy. A dismal picture indeed! The crisis then deepened when another political storm further hampered the progress in Chinese television. This was the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During its early period, the nation wide television service was virtually stopped; and not until the late 1960s did a select number of the stations again move to provide some programmes.

### **3.3 THE EVOLUTION OF PROGRAMMING POLICY AND CONTENT**

#### **3.3.1 Two Approaches to Policy Making**

There were two major approaches involved in conducting cultural and media policies in Mao's era. The first was Mao's radical approach based on his belief that "thought determines action". In arguing the power of correct thought and ideas, the People's Daily presented the following text concerning this key point of Maoism:

Work is done by man and man's action is governed by his thinking. A man without the correct political thinking is a man without a soul. If politics does not take command, there can be no direction. In every job we undertake, we must always insist that politics take command and let political and ideological work come before anything else. Only when we are both thorough and penetrating with our political and ideological work can we guarantee the accomplishment of our task (editorial, 11.11.1960).

In other words, Mao believed that if people could be made to think correctly, they would accordingly act correctly. He argued that the mass media should be used to mobilize ordinary people into participating in the long revolutionary cause with the goal of revolutionizing man and creating a "New Man" society.

In Mao's term, this was a revolutionary approach based on the principle of "from the masses, to the masses", which was later developed into mass mobilization and participation [cf. 1.4.2.3; 2.2]. Moreover, against the state paternalism adopted by the Soviet Union and the eastern European socialist states, Mao also concluded that the Soviet approach would inevitably breed bureaucracy, professionalism and an elitist culture and, as a result, alienate the Party from the masses.

Thus, in theory, Mao's doctrine appeared to provide an alternative to that of conventional Stalinism and attracted much attention in the outside world; in reality, however, the radical approach was built on an extraordinary emotional appeal of that wishful thinking and a tendency to go to extremes. As H. Harding (1986:15) remarked, the Maoist approach in general was "radical and populist and tended therefore to undermine political stability". Therefore, the practice of this approach often exalted the cult of Mao himself and created a chaotic situation (e.g the Great Leap Forward), or, even social turmoil (e.g the Cultural Revolution). In the historical context, this approach, as examined previously, gained the upper hand in the initial period of Chinese television and dominated the activities of television during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

In contrast to Mao's approach, the second approach, that of state paternalism, gave priority to the role of the state apparatus in national integration and its adjustment to the requirements for modernization. According to this approach, broadcasting was chiefly defined to develop national culture and education. Though it also paid attention to political/ideological



propaganda in order to control the public mind, it placed much stress on the idea of the obligation to edify the audience within the frame of reference of authority-defined values. In this respect, this model tended to accord priority to institutionalization, modernization and professionalism. Apart from its political and ideological concerns, the combination of central administration, technocratic operation and a strong commitment to treat the audience as subjects of tutelage, virtually gives this approach an affinity with the broad base of classic public service broadcasting in Western Europe. Supported by Liu Shaoqi (then the State President) and Deng Xiaoping (then the Party General Secretary) state paternalism gained some progress in developing television, particularly in the early 1960s and the early 1970s when the infant Chinese television industry suffered severely from the policy failure of Mao's radical approach.

### **3.3.2 Three Periods of Policy Change and Content Analysis**

As I have indicated previously, the Chinese communists cemented the mass media into a rigidly Leninist framework. To discuss the programming content in Mao's era is largely to deal with the Party-state politics. In fact, it was the swinging of the unfathomable pendulum of domestic and international forces that shaped media policy in Mao's China. General speaking, the evolution of television programmes and the change of the policy can be divided into three periods:

- ( 1 ) from 1958 to 1960;
- ( 2 ) from 1961 to 1965;
- ( 3 ) from 1966 to 1976.

### 3.3.2.1 Initial Period ( 1958 - 1960 )

During this pioneering phase, the service and operation of Chinese television remained unsophisticated and primitive in terms of production, technology and professional performance. It took some time before the Chinese Broadcasting Authority could form a television programming policy, as the regime had little knowledge on how to run the medium. In general, however, Mao's radical approach to the conduct of propaganda and cultural work including television remained in the ascendancy.

Meanwhile, since it had always been held that television tends towards entertainment, some of the decision makers of Chinese television in the early days practised a programming policy with a large entertainment dimension. This position was justified and strengthened by the fact that few television stations had the ability to produce their own quality programmes, particularly in the area of news and current affairs which they could only broadcast irregularly with simple techniques and limited sources. The first news item was produced by the Beijing station on 15 May 1958. It was a report, chiefly using photographs, about the successful production of a Chinese-made car. Two weeks later, Beijing TV station broadcast its first black and white news film concerning the content of the publication of the Party's theoretical journal Red Flag. News programmes using talking heads together with stills and film became the main forms of presentation at this early stage (X.Li, 1991:344). Meanwhile, China also tried to produce TV dramas. The first of its kind was "A Bite of Cabbage Cake" a story reminding people of the past miserable life under the Nationalist regime and of the present happiness under the Communists. The drama was broadcast live by the Beijing Television Station on June 15 1958, because China did not have recording facilities at the time (in fact, this situation remained little changed until the mid-70s). In general, about 70% of all Chinese TV shows were devoted to films, dramas and various fine art performances. They should be imbued,

according to Mao, with revolutionary spirit. The following is a list of the programme schedule taken from the Beijing Station in 1960 (source: C.Zhuang, 1985:5-6):

### 1960 Beijing TV Programme Schedule

18:30 Children's programme (Wednesday & Saturday)  
Culture and education (Monday & Thursday)  
Science and technology; also sports etc. (Tues & Friday)  
18:55 Items with pictorial reporting  
19:00 Entertainment variety  
19:30 News  
19:40 Current affairs  
20:00 Movies or Chinese operas or sports and ball games  
21:40 News in brief and weather

However, two themes -- the Great Leap Forward and the "Cold War" between the Soviet-led bloc and the American-led bloc in which China was at the time firmly on the Moscow's side -- dominated Chinese politics at that time. As a newly-born mass communication medium, television was, without delay, employed for serving these political objectives, although its influence was quite limited compared with that of radio broadcasting at this stage. In 1958 the Department of Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party issued a directive laying down the principle for conducting and planning broadcasting (including television) programmes. It stated: "At present broadcasting should promote the propaganda of the Great Leap Forward. ... Broadcasting should put more emphasis on implementation of the goals rather than on goals themselves, more on previous experiences, on model workers and on masses' creativeness" (New China Fortnightly, No.11, 1958, pp.118-119). The policy issued here indicated the authorities' intention to implement its priorities in programming content. Whether this should be fulfilled through sophisticated cultural entertainment, or through straightforward ideological propaganda was not always clearly defined, and often a matter of



political struggle between the Mao approach and the state paternalism.

In response to some doubts about television's function in the implementation of the Party propaganda tasks, the Broadcasting Authority, at the time of the dominance of the Mao approach, firmly defended its stance that television should serve the Party as a propaganda tool, rather than an entertainment tool. Lou Dong, first director of the Beijing TV Station (1958-1962 ?), clearly made this point in a working report in Dec.1958:

Some think the function of television is merely to broadcast entertainment programmes such as movies, drama and art performances. We must point out this view is wrong. ... Television, like radio broadcasting, is the Party propaganda tool as well as the Party news medium" (CCTV Files, 1957-1958, No.9).

Within that framework, television in this period was used as an adjunct to the massive propaganda campaigns of the Great Leap Forward, although within a limited scale compared with other media. Programming priorities were also dominated by a basic formula of "us v.s them", namely, the great achievements of the Chinese communists as well as those of other Soviet bloc countries on the one hand, and the deepening general crisis of the capitalist world on the other. Therefore, topics such as working harder, accomplishing wonders, loving the Party, hating American imperialism, giving thanks for Soviet aid and overtaking Britain within 15 years frequently appeared on the Chinese screen.

Meanwhile, the Soviet television format began to be adopted in China and the labour division among reporters, editors and anchors also modeled the "big brother". TV reporters often borrowed the practices of shooting documentary film to cover their story, but they normally could not be seen and heard in their own programmes. This work was done in voice-overs, mostly

by TV presenters (Z.Guo, September 1990).

In general, the content of television reporting at this stage was to a large degree subject to the Party priority of mass mobilization. The tone was dogmatic, the style artless, the quality poor and the skill primitive. Therefore, the audience response was unfavourable. According to an informal survey conducted by the Beijing TV Station in the early 1960s (with 2,150 questionnaires representing about 120,000 viewers), one of the audience's major demands was to have more programmes with better quality. Even the television authority had no desire to deny this. In 1960, the Beijing TV Station made a self-criticism admitting that its reporting was "dull", "monotonous" and "insipid" (CCTV Files, 1960, No.10).

In contrast to its domestic performance, Chinese television made considerable headway in international cooperation. The most important development at this time was the establishment of a business-like relationship with the Soviet bloc, which enabled the newly-born Chinese television industry to enjoy immediate benefit. In July 1956, the Soviet Union first signed a bilateral agreement with China on broadcasting (including television) cooperation. After China inaugurated a television service in 1958, a dozen countries mainly from the eastern European nations, soon followed suit. The agreements were: Sino-Romanian (Oct.1958), Sino-Hungarian (April 1959), Sino-Polish (April 1959), Sino-German (GDR) (April 1959), Sino-Czechoslovak (April 1959), Sino-Bulgarian (Aug.1959); and Egypt, Cuba, North Korea, Albania and Viet Nam also joined in later on (Chronicle of Chinese Broadcasting, 1987).

The establishment of cooperation between China and the above countries during this period was a substantial factor in improving Chinese television. Starting from 1959, China developed an exchange project of television programme with the countries that had signed a cooperation agreement. In 1959, China received

about 1,000 foreign TV programmes including news, current affairs, features and TV dramas. The principal contributors were Hungary (459 items) and Soviet Union (349 items). At the same time, China sent out 61 television programmes in return. From then on programme exchanges steadily increased. Programmes provided by these countries also comprised a considerable proportion of air time in the underdeveloped Chinese television service. The Beijing TV Station, for instance, devoted a regular amount of airtime to foreign programmes from late 1959. In addition, about 30% of the movies on Chinese television at this period came from Soviet Russia and its socialist allies (C.Zhuang, 1985:217; CCTV Files, 1965, No.12).

It should be understood that the increasing "cooperative activities" in Chinese television at the time were part of the Soviet strategy seeking ways to unify the bond of the "Big Socialist Family", in an effort to retain Soviet ultimate control over its Bloc. Thus the impact of the extensive introduction of pro-Soviet foreign programmes on the early development of Chinese television was enormous and twofold. On the one hand, it gave the backward Chinese television industry the impetus to improve its service; on the other hand, as pro-Soviet stories and Soviet TV format dominated the Chinese screen, Sovietization seemed to be an inevitable result.

### **3.3.2.2 The Rise of State Paternalism ( 1961 - 1965 )**

The fiasco of the Great Leap Forward and the break between China and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s drastically changed the balance of Chinese politics. As the country was precipitated into a devastating crisis, the first priority faced by the authorities was to ensure the public quiescence and to unite the nation to deal with the abysmal situation. Thus, the political pendulum was bound to swing and the adoption of the new pragmatic policy became a necessary act of historic adjustment. So far as the policy towards the mass media and cultural work was concerned in



this period, Mao's radical approach was declining, whereas state paternalism, led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping was rising and eventually gained the upper hand.

The significant policy shift took place in July 1961, when the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party formally issued an important document on propaganda and cultural work known as the "Ten Articles on Art and Literature." In several important ways, the document discarded Mao's approach, with the emphasis now on the quality of cultural activities and professionalism. To counter Mao's political penetration of people's everyday life, the new policy now called for the reduction of political-ideological indoctrination. Some advocates of state paternalism even, indirectly and bravely, criticised Mao's idea and his radical approach. Y.Zhou, for instance, concurrent deputy director of the Party Propaganda Bureau and minister of Culture, argued: " Politics will lose its meaning if we keep talking about it at every breath" (cf. People's Daily in an article of the Maoists attack on Zhou's argument, 15.7.1966). He also warned in June 1961 that radio and television should not always be used to propagate support for Mao (cf. F.Yu, 1978:45). It is interesting to see that, under the new policy, artists and cultural workers were encouraged to provide non-political, educational, classical and entertainment items to meet the diverse needs of audience and readers. As a result, more attention was now paid to the media's education function (in terms of disseminating various kinds of knowledge) with more fine art works and performances, both traditional and contemporary, appearing, and more comedy films being shown. Popular taste was now acknowledged, and a certain degree of freedom in cultural activities was "guaranteed" by the Party again. As far as the journalistic work was concerned, the state president Liu Shaoqi issued a document in 1960, calling for a "professionally oriented broadcasting policy" with emphasis on using broadcasting to serve all kinds of audience and to cater to popular interest (J.Chu, 1978). It was within that atmosphere that programming policy in Chinese television changed course.

In 1961, in line with the new pragmatic Party policy, the Beijing Television Station was quick to make a proposal on programming and reporting. For the first time, it was devoted to diversity and quality without so much as mentioning politics. It also stressed that programmes should cater to audience enjoyment. The response from the top policy makers to this initiative was very positive. The broadcasting chief Y.Meì praised this proposal and recommended it to all other stations. He pointed out that television programmes should be more associated with the daily life of the ordinary people than radio's. The content should be not only meaningful, but also attractive, with more entertainment elements (CCTV Chronicle, pp14).

From then on the changes in Chinese television became evident. The result of the implementation of the new programming policy during this period can be seen in the growing number of relatively "pure" and "light" entertainment shows: in producing many quality children's programmes, in introducing more "know-how" programmes, in broadcasting a considerable number of classical plays and operas, and, in presenting a better balanced and more sophisticated content in programming and reporting. Therefore, the function of Chinese television during the post Great Leap Forward period tended to be more cultural and less political in its orientation.

In the meantime, there was another important development in that a great deal of effort was expended on using television for teaching-and-learning activities. Despite very limited numbers of TV sets then (around 50,000, but they were mainly publicly owned with the "collective watch"), educational TV programming provided wider access to higher education. In his pioneering book of "Mass Communication in China", Howkins even credits China as "the first country in the world to have a television university". Starting in 1960, he remarks that the Chinese "Television University" was "a full decade before the UK's Open University" (J.Howkins, 1982:44). Of course this comment should be understood

in a narrow sense, since educational TV service in the US, the UK, the USSR and Japan already existed at that time.

In March 1960, the "Television University" was initiated in Beijing and its example was soon followed in Shanghai and several other provinces which owned TV stations. In general, the educational service offered basic courses ranging from science, technology, literature to foreign languages. Between 1960 and 1965, these "Television Universities" enrolled about 40,000 students and more people benefited from the service (X.Xu, 1987:123-124). By any standard, the newly-born Chinese television industry made a considerable contribution to China's educational development.

As far as international news coverage was concerned, there was some progress during this period. Because of the Sino-Soviet split, Pro-Soviet stories suddenly disappeared from Chinese screen and Chinese television virtually stopped broadcasting TV programmes provided by its Soviet counterpart. Consequently, international reporting was now very limited and low-key. However, the situation improved somewhat later on, as Chinese television stations started to make contact with a few Western commercial TV companies. In 1963, China formally signed a contract with VISNEWS Ltd ( UK ) for the exchange and purchase of TV programmes. From then on China used more and more VISNEWS materials to cover international affairs though they were re-edited to serve propaganda and ideological needs (The Contemporary Chinese Broadcasting, Vol.2, 1987).

### **3.3.2.3 The Cultural Revolution ( 1966 - 1976 )**

During this period, Chinese television experienced two phases. Generally speaking, the first three years (1966 - 1969) can be identified as the first phase, with the remaining years the second phase.



In the first phase, the nation-wide television service virtually stopped as a result of the popular practice at that time called "Stop working (or studying), make revolution". This chaotic and absurd situation was revealed by the announcement for the suspension of service issued by the Beijing TV Station shortly before the station ceased to operate. Here is the solemn statement:

In order to answer Chairman Mao's call that you people should be concerned about the important affairs of our country and should continue the great Cultural Revolution to its full extent, we have decided in the coming year of 1967 to launch an all-out general offensive on a tiny number of capitalist power holders within the Party. So, from January 3 1967, our station will stop running normal service except on important matters and occasions (cited in C.Zhuang, 1985:8).

By contrast, radio broadcasting was extensively used by Mao and his radical supporters. Every one of Mao's "supreme instruction" and the Party's new decision firstly reached the masses through radio broadcasting, usually a day ahead of the newspapers. To some extent, broadcasting messages was regarded as authoritative instructions to conduct the masses carrying out the Cultural Revolution (cf. J.Chu, 1978:31-32).

In the second phase, the resumed television service was very limited and it was under the stifling control of Maoists. Television, as in other mass media during that period, was fully engaged in totally one-sided and blatant propaganda which was characterized by falsification, exaggeration and paranoia. Many types of television programs, mostly cultural and entertainment-related, ceased to exist. Not a single TV drama or TV series, for instance, was made and broadcast between 1967 and 1976. A visiting British broadcaster was incredulous when, in 1970, he found that 18 out of a total of 26 minutes of the main evening

news bulletin one night in Beijing consisted of rolling captions of Mao's words with Mao's paeon music in the background (cf. J.Howkins, 1982:28). Another foreign observation was made by an NBC news team in Hong Kong by monitoring Guandong provincial TV output for three weeks in January 1970: "The TV schedule commenced at 7p.m. with the appearance of Mao's portrait and the singing of "The East Is Red", China's unofficial national anthem. The opening program was a newscast consisting of several film stories on topics such as the commemoration of a hero, the work of an educated youth in a remote village, the reception of foreign visitors by the Chinese leadership, and the "heroic struggle" of the North Vietnamese. Next came revolutionary ballet and films, usually old Chinese movies about the anti-Japanese war or the war against the Nationalist Chinese. ... Sign-off on Canton (i.e Guandong) TV came at 10:30 P.M." (cf. J.Chu, 1978:37).

As a matter of the fact, entertainment was reduced to such a minimal level that only approved "revolutionary arts and performances" could pass for broadcast and the so-called "Eight Model Operas" sponsored by Madam Mao, were repeated endlessly on the screen. The situation changed little till 1976 when Mao died and the Cultural Revolution ended.

#### **3.4 MAO'S PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL AND MEDIA CONTROLS**

It has been acknowledged that cultural activities and media performance under Mao had been designed primarily to maintain and reinforce political authority and the ideological homogeneity of the Party; not surprisingly, the development of Chinese broadcasting in that era was, to a large extent, politically overpowering, aesthetically weak and socially malfunctional. This was made possible by adopting the following measures (L.Zhang & Y.Huang, 1992).

#### **3.4.1 "Welfare" Model**

Mao's cultural approach and the Party's enthusiasm for broadcasting as a medium with substantial political and educational capacities, facilitated at least some sort of formation of the "welfare" model. Of course, the welfare model also accounted for the harsh and insufficient economic situation at the time. For people, of the rural areas in particular, who were not even well-fed and often illiterate, media consumption, especially television, was almost inconceivable. Like food, cooking oil, clothing, transport and other living necessities, broadcasting services (i.e radio in the urban areas, wired broadcasting in the rural areas and television in the metropolises) was also provided, heavily subsidised by the state, to the large majority of the population. Almost every household in the rural areas, for instance, was offered a loudspeaker free of charge and television receivers were mostly purchased by the public bodies as a kind of welfare benefit to enhance the cultural life of the public (apart from the political concerns). Thus, Mao's China developed a method of media consumption called "collective listening or viewing" in which the media production was highly and evenly, in the service of the communist state, distributed and consumed by the public.

#### **3.4.2. Control of Entertainment**

The broadcasting medium in Mao's era was not only seen as the most powerful political tool of the Party, but also as an influential and accessible means of entertainment. It was due in part to the short supply of entertainment and, consequently, the absence of a popular culture. The scarcity of cultural resources at the time was striking. Between 1958 to 1965, China produced and sold only 26,000 TV sets. Even in 1978, there were only about 3 million TV sets in China, a tiny figure against a population



of 800 millions then. With minimal technology and resources available, the mass communication system in Mao's China remained its indigenous and pre-modernization stage with the strong characteristics of communist totalitarianism -- pervasive, penetrating and intense. The worst came in the period of the Cultural Revolution when most entertainment activities such as western dancing, literature, music and even fishing or gardening were labelled as "bourgeois life styles" to be banned forthwith; moreover, almost all Chinese tradition and cultural heritage was attacked and censored [cf. 2.2]. In such a repressive political context, broadcasting entertainment programming was employed to serve the Party's political and ideological needs and, as a result, to provide the audience with a cultural life within the framework of Mao's class struggle.

#### **3.4.3. Centrally-Planned Economic Control**

The command economy in the Party-state presented a non-market pattern of administrative domination, within which cultural production and distribution were dictated by the Party's ends through a bureaucratically-planned structure. In other words, the political power is directly engaged in redistribution of surpluses created elsewhere in material production to support cultural institutions in general and the mass media in particular. It not only determined the way in which economic performance of the media was to be operated, financed and distributed, but also, through it, how the effectiveness and dominating power of a ruling ideology in a totalitarian state, could be safeguarded and harmonised. This provides some explanation why this model functioned well to the Party's benefit. The broadcasting industry, as a technological and capital-consuming activity, a powerful means of mass communication and a major propaganda instrument, granted the state an ideal area in which to exert its full planning power at the disposal of the Party's will. Thus broadcasting production, for instance, from "theme" to "genre", from distribution to

transmission was all carefully planned according to the political needs at the time. In a similar vain, how much money should be spent on developing television was not only dependent upon the overall development of material production, but also, probably in a more determined sense, conceived of, and treated as a political/ideological issue to be dealt with. All stations were operated in a absence of a modern economic accounting system. From this point of view, we know that revenue necessary to run television came 100% from the state budget; but, we do not know how it was distributed and divided in either overt or covert forms.

#### **3.4.4. A Preliminary Assessment: Financing Chinese TV in Mao's Era**

Nevertheless, the Party-state system had its own economic alternative to operate cultural activities and to conduct media production. The conventional method was simply to separate the software from the hardware. While there remained some forms of commodity exchange in maintaining labour and capital costs, it virtually disassociated the production of television programming from economic activities. Therefore, the sources of the financial support of Chinese television in the initial stage of the 1950s and 1960s can be understood in two parts: countable and uncountable. Countable expenditure on labour maintenance (i.e staff wages) and equipment was normally within the jurisdiction of the "planned economy" covered by the state budget. Uncountable costs involved cultural resource distribution, programming production, dissemination and exchange, which, in the context of Mao's China, was subject to direct state arrangement without any monetary mechanism involvement. In other words, it was free of charge and integrated within a unified system in which a commercial motivation was virtually denied.

According to some statistics now available, I shall try to make a preliminary reckoning of financing hardware (i.e the labour and

capital costs) in Chinese television industry. For the Beijing TV Station and others provincial stations such as Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangzhou, the state spent about \$US 800,000 each on capital expenditure in the initial stage. Meanwhile, with the average number of 50-70 staff in each station at the time, for each TV stations the state paid costs of labour maintenance and renewal of equipment ranging from \$US 50,000 to 70,000 annually from 1958 to 1976. (cf. China TV Stations, 1987). During that period, the annual national expenditure on the broadcasting industry including radio, wired, external and television was estimated between \$US 40 to 50 millions. Television expenditure could account for 20% to 25% (cf. Y.Zhao, 1987:26).

On the other side, it is important to note that the high cost of filling air time in other social systems did not exist here. All the TV stations at that time enjoyed almost unlimited access to cultural material for broadcasting. These included virtually free live transmission of various theatre dramas, sports and arts performances as well as lots of new movies. It was common practice then that every new film would be shown on the television screen a few weeks ahead of the premiere. In 1961, for instance, the Beijing TV Station showed 244 film, 51 of which were premieres. As early as January 1960, the Ministry of Culture and the Beijing Municipal Party Committee even made a joint decision that all new movies should be sent to the Beijing TV Station at least two weeks in advance of the premiere. (cf. CCTV Files, No.12; Chronicle of Chinese Broadcasting, 1987:131). These practices reflect an important financial feature in the Party-state system that the profit motive has played virtually no role in running the mass media. It is impossible, therefore, to find out the real cost of providing a television service at that time, though some inferences may be drawn.



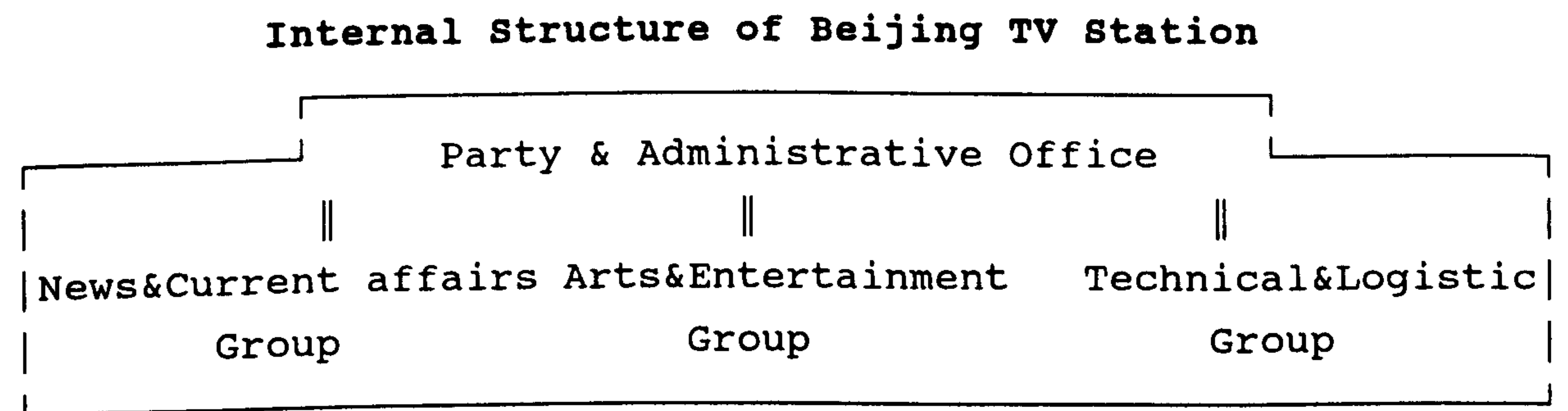
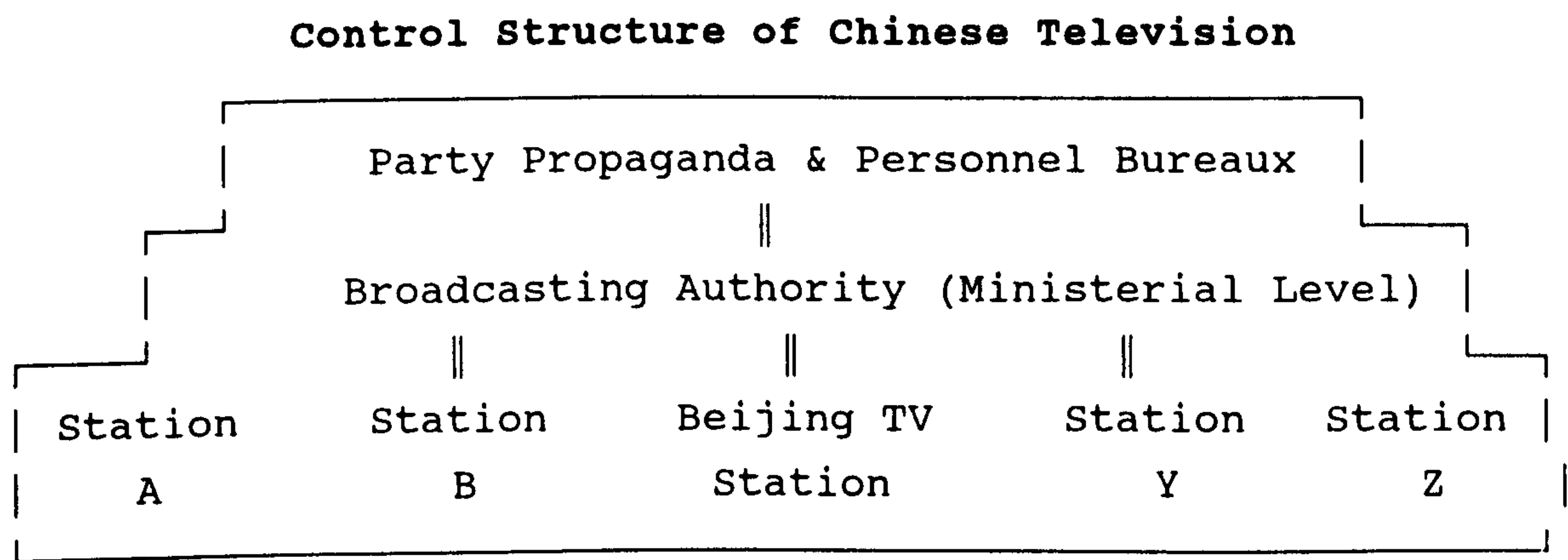
### 3.5 STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

The Chinese broadcasting system was designed to set up a separate supervisory arrangement with the aim of ensuring that the Party had pre-determined power to monopolise information and public opinion. Specifically, the structure of Chinese television in Mao's era had two noticeable characteristics:

- One of them was that, politically, it constructed a copy of the Soviet vertical control system which was highly compartmentalized, enabling the Party to exercise pre-determined power over broadcasting. So, a dual hierarchy of party and government organs was employed for conducting and supervising television operations. In practice, the Party side, through its functional Propaganda and Personnel Bureaus, provided the political line, issued directives and placed officials in the key posts. On the government side, the Broadcasting Authority executed the Party's policies and dealt with the television business ranging from programming performance to technological development. Thus the Party effectively cemented the television structure into an authoritative consistent whole.
- The second characteristic was that, technically, Chinese television at the time was far from having a pyramid functioning structure in terms of the relations between respective stations. This was mainly due to the inherent deficiencies in the establishment of Chinese television as examined previously. As China's de facto state station, the Beijing TV Station could only play a regional role in the nation wide operation with little influence and authority on others. In addition, a dozen of the established regional stations were quite separate from one another. Each station (including Beijing) usually communicated with authorities above, and not with one another, though they sometimes exchanged programmes

under the arrangement of the Party Propaganda Bureau, or the Broadcasting Authority, but not initiated by themselves.

Relevant to this underdeveloped state of Chinese television at the time, the internal structure of each station was simple. It was normally divided into four functioning sections with about 50/70 staff altogether. They usually included: 1) administrative office, 2) news and current affairs group, 3) arts and entertainment group, and 4) technical and logistic group. The whole external and internal structures can be seen in the following diagram:



With such a structure, Chinese television thus operated strictly in line with Party interests. In 1958, the Broadcasting Authority set three major tasks for the newly-born television industry: propaganda, education and entertainment. To secure these goals, it practised so-called "self-censorship" enforced by the station's decision makers. Routine material that mainly concerned entertainment programmes, did not require approval but occasionally needed prior consultation with top officials in charge of ideological supervision. However, programmes such as news, political education and other sensitive topics would either be referred to higher authorities or directly follow the instructions of Party leaders. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that forming television policy and conducting its activities became an essential part of Party work.

### 3.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Many of the broadcasting experiences of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were not applicable to mainland China. While the Eastern Bloc mainly relied on state paternalism to develop its broadcasting industry, the Chinese communist leadership, by contrast, benefited much from Mao's charisma and built up broadcasting in general and television in particular by using the similar method employed for mass political campaign. In view of the development of Chinese television, I want to argue that the decision to launch television broadcasting at that time was both immature and ill conceived. Motivated by political and ideological needs, and impelled by the Great Leap Forward, the whole foundation of the Chinese television industry was thus dictated more by will power (so-called "revolutionary spirits") than by the social reality, particularly regarding the underdeveloped economic capability and the general poverty in society at that time (approx \$US 150 per capita GNP). As a matter of fact, the given Chinese context plus the impact of the "Cold



War" in the 1950s led the Chinese Communists to create television broadcasting for political ends. Chinese television, with its inherent deficiencies, was inevitably condemned to a difficult, erratic and frustrating future in the short to medium term.

However, the failure of Mao's politics-in-command strategy of building a modernized China and the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) brought the whole nation so close to the verge of collapse that a change of direction and approach in the post Mao era was compulsory. The development of Chinese television thus entered a wide-ranging stage of reform .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OPENING A NEW CHAPTER

#### Decentralization Strategy and China's Burgeoning Television

In all established communist states, media centralization is essential for the ruling Party to monopolize its power over society. Generally speaking, four control mechanisms are employed in mainland China to maintain the centre-local relation. These are 1) administrative control pattern (through the operation of a bureaucratic system and personnel arrangement), 2) ideological control pattern (through providing an official doctrine to cement the people's opinion), 3) political control pattern (through political campaign and policy adoption), and 4) economic control pattern (through resource distribution and remunerative measures). Since the Chinese communists took power in 1949, all the four patterns have played important roles in the Chinese media centralization. In Mao's era, ideological and political methods were apparently more favoured and more effectively used by the decision makers. However, with the progress of the economic reform programme and de-politicalization in post-Mao China, the relationship between the centre and the localities has increasingly involved the different interests concerned and thus the old political control pattern in media institutional operation hardly worked. As a result, the economic control pattern has gradually become a dominant paradigm in the conduct of the central power and local interests in the 1980s. This is particularly the case in the television industry, and the adoption of the decentralization policy in 1983 is an extraordinary measure which has had a profound impact on all aspects of mass media development as well as the society.

Moreover, the mushrooming of the Chinese television industry and the establishment of its new two-tiered structure since the mid 1980s, has enabled the medium to play a leading role in the mass communication system through which it changed the public consumption of the mass media with the evolution towards the television-led media environment. It is through these developments that television becomes the most efficient information, entertainment and advertising medium in the post-Mao China.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an analysis of: 1) the process of China's decentralization movement on television structure, 2) the rapid development of the television industry, 3) the changing relationship between the centre and the localities, and 4) the impact of television expansion and the emerging television-led media system in post-Mao China. But first, let us briefly look at the television medium in the recovery stage of the early post-Mao era.

#### **4.1 EARLY POST-MAO DEVELOPMENT ( 1978 - 1983 )**

As noted, with the replacement of Mao's radical approach, the gathering momentum of China's modernization movement in the post-Mao era also paved the way for the rapid development of Chinese television.

##### **4.1.1 Recovery Stage**

Recovery and change from the stifling control of Maoism in the television medium first occurred in the content of television programmes with a gradual move from an extreme propaganda orientation to a relatively information and entertainment oriented programming. In 1978, Chinese television network, for



the first time, broadcast live the World Cup Football March held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, via satellite transmission. In 1979, with increasing audience pressure for more and better TV shows, the Chinese broadcasting authority made a bold decision to purchase foreign programmes, particularly TV dramas and soaps from the West. The first few included "The Man from Atlantis" (TAFT-HB Productions, US), "Anna Karenina" (BBC, UK), "Robinson Crusoe" (BBC, UK) and "Katasa Shiro" (Japan). Also many popular western films were imported and shown by television such as "Death on the Nile" (UK), "A Respected Prostitute" (France), and several Chaplin movies. They received public acclaim. Since then the purchase and trade of foreign TV products has become a regular practice and a considerable proportion of air time is taken up by the imported materials, which have often played a controversial role in Chinese politics. In TV dramas/films, for instance, the 1985 figure (the official data available from that year) shew that the foreign programming took up 32.3% of the total number in this category. In fact, the trend has continued in recent years and largely owing to the concerns of the cost-effectiveness in programming production. An hour of imported television series only cost \$US 500 to \$US 800, four to eight times cheaper than that of a series produced domestically (information provided by Jin Wenxiong, broadcasting researcher, the ministry of Broadcasting, in interview with the author, Beijing, October 1990). Between 1988 and 1989, overseas TV dramas/films (including Hong Kong's, Macao's and Taiwan's) reached 1874 and 2073 respectively, accounting for more than 40% each year; and, according to a survey, the average audience rating for these programmes on Chinese television was about 22% (cf. China Broadcasting Yearbook 1986, 1989, 1990; J.Chen, 1991).

Meanwhile, the Chinese Broadcasting Authority began to redress Mao's radical line and returned to the traditional state paternalism to develop television. In so doing, investment efforts were made by the state to improve the network service, technology, professional performance and management. However, this was no easy job for the revolutionary leaders as one Hong

Kong journalist observed: "China has saddled herself with a task which her leaders are not fit to perform. The leaders may be and actually are professionals in revolution, in guerrilla warfare, but they are amateurs or novices in administration and in the running of corporate business" (K.Chang, 1984).

#### **4.1.2 China Central Television and the Development of Network**

In the late Mao era, 28 regional stations were established in each of the provincial capitals except Tibet in mainland China. By the middle of 1970s, the de facto state station -- the Beijing TV Station could, at least in theory, provide a national service to large parts of the country through the cooperation of regional stations via microwave trunk lines. However, this was far from being a network in any real sense.

A major step towards that direction was taken in 1978 when the Beijing Television Station was well defined as the central government station and renamed as China Central Television (CCTV) under the direct administrative control of the state broadcasting ministry. The national network was formed by two basic requirements: 1) provincial and city-level station would be responsible for sending their news-related programmes to CCTV for comprising a national service; 2) CCTV's main national and international news bulletin was required to simulcast on all local stations. Technically, these were done either through an opt-out system arrangement or CCTV had exclusive right to use the particular frequency (or the local channel) according to the appropriate condition. With providing a regular national service and its authority over programming performance, CCTV has, since then, developed into a more sophisticated organization and played the key role in the network operation. Its structural model can be largely seen as a miniature of the organizational pattern of the lower-level station in the national broadcasting system. The executive power of the station is vested in the hands of the director under which functional operation is conducted, while the

station office of the party committee has ultimate political power. In the early 1980s, the institution employed over 1,000 people and by the end of 1989 the figure of CCTV staff doubled to nearly 2,500. Among them professionals related to program production made up about 40%, technicians 22%, political and administrative personnel 20%, and logistic workers 18% (China Journalism Yearbook, 1982:36; The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1990:105; China Broadcasting Yearbook, 1990:39-40).

In general, the internal structure of CCTV is divided into three functional sections: the political & administrative control section, the programme production section, and technical & logistic section (see the following table).

**Table 4.1**

**Organizational Structure of China Central Television (CCTV)**

<b>Political Control Section</b>	<b>Program Production Section</b>
Office of Party Committee Office of Party Commission for Discipline Inspection Personnel Dept. Financial Dept. Security Dept. Administrative Office Foreign Affair Dept. Audience Research Group	Chief Editorial Board News Dept. Feature Dept. General Entertainment Dept. TV Drama Production Centre Sports Dept. Overseas Program Dept. Economic Program Dept. Children Program Dept. Advertising Dept.
<b>Technical Section</b>	<b>Logistic Section</b>
Relaying Dept. Videotaping Dept. Film Developing & Printing Dept. Acoustics & Lighting Dept. Engineering Dept.	Goods & Equipment Supply Division Service Company Property Management Division Data Centre

Sources: CCTV Thirty Years ( 1958-1988 ), 1988:694;  
The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991:105.



#### 4.1.3 CCTV Programming

As a national station, CCTV is well equipped with 20 up-to-date studios and in recent years has spent more than 10 million US dollars on imported equipment alone. Every day CCTV offers two sets of national services, each transmitting about 15 hours of programmes throughout the country on hundreds of regional and local stations which can receive signals from Beijing via communication satellite links and retransmissions facilities (cf. China Broadcasting Yearbook 1990). Like other television stations in the world, in the post-Mao era, CCTV offers a colourful selection of programmes which contains news, entertainment, education and public information.

The news programme is considered the pillar of the CCTV schedule. It is not surprising that the central authority makes every effort to determine what the people should know through the information service and as such, television news is regarded as the most effective way to communicate with the public and promote the task set by the ruling elite of the day. Currently, CCTV's news is broadcast nine times daily with 100 items on average, of which nearly half were broadcast in the evening national network; and news-related programmes account for about 13-15% of the total number of programmes. The 19:00-19:30 network service which relays domestic & foreign news throughout the country is the most important one with very high viewing. In 1987, a nation wide survey showed that the network news commanded 42.5% of the regular national television audience roughly equivalent to 250 million viewers, and is estimated to reach 50% in recent years (The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991:10).

International news remains most popular among viewers. Supplied by VISNEWS, ASIAVISION, CNN and other foreign agencies via satellite, CCTV has edited and broadcast 10-15 minutes worth of world news daily since 1980. This has by and large enabled the

Chinese people to see what really happened outside China. Domestic news is dominated by the theme of modernization and economic reform, with the majority of the coverage devoted to the "positive side of the society", meaning the Party's achievements, as required by authorities as the principle for conducting reporting work. I shall provide further analysis of this issue in the later chapters.

There is always a heavy demand from audiences for entertainment and it comprises a large part of CCTV programmes. It includes various shows, sports, TV dramas, soaps, feature films and art performances. In the early years, new feature films were more readily available on television than in the cinema [cf. 3.4.4]. However, in post-Mao China this is no longer the case as box-office profit becomes vital to the film industry. As the TV set rapidly entered a large majority of Chinese homes and there was increasing viewers' pressure for more new films, the film industry took tough measures to protect its interests by only allowing some selected films (usually under the condition of not affecting the box office) to be shown on TV after a six-to-twelve-month run in the cinema (Y.Ling, 1981:21-23). Thus the Chinese TV industry has to find its own way largely by strengthening its own ability to produce more programmes. That is why the prevalence of TV shows and TV plays/films has greatly increased in the 1980s. In 1980, for instance, CCTV screened 103 plays. By 1984, the figure stood at 478 and is now around 1,100 annually (China Journalism Yearbook; 1989:9; W.Chang, 1989:223).

CCTV educational and public information programmes deal with issues of culture, morality, social and family relations, science and technology, and educational topics. It also offers foreign language teaching. In general, most of these kinds of programmes have touched people's feelings and received a popular response. It has approached "everyday life and common sense" with aspects such as career, friendship, love, marriage and so on. Many are in praise of people and things contributing to on-going economic reform; some recalled the sufferings during the period of the

Cultural Revolution; others criticise bureaucracy, traditional backward-looking values and various other problems (Y.Ling, 1981:23). The following are the two days programmes (a weekday and a weekend) taken from CCTV's two channels in September 1979, which give some concrete indications of Chinese television contents in the early post-Mao era (source: Howkins, 1982:38-41).

Thursday, 27 September 1979

**CHANNEL 2**

17:30 Algol programming (No. 22)  
18:20 English lesson (No. 3, 15-16)  
19:00 News  
19:25 Live coverage of the finals of the Men's and Women's Volleyball Championship at the national games.

**CHANNEL 8**

19:00 Comic dialogue: Sons-in-law on trial  
19:20 Film: "Morning Songs from the Prairie"  
21:20 News

Sunday, 30 September 1979 (the eve of the National Day)

**CHANNEL 2**

A collection of programmes from Beijing and elsewhere to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic China.

8:30 From Shandong province:  
A children's program; Film: "Who is Best?"; A documentary; Opera: "Tales from the Top of the Wall".  
11:00 From Guangdong province:  
A documentary; Music: Solo songs; A children's film; Opera: "Choose a Son-in-Law"; Music and dance.  
13:30 From Shanghai:  
News; Two documentaries, one is about the educated youth of Shanghai, the other is about a hundred years of Shanghai's changes.



14:00 From CCTV:

An introduction programme about making-up of the Peking Opera; A children's program; Live coverage of the banquet of the closing ceremony of the national games; Song and Dance.

19:00 News

19:20 Live coverage of the Banquet of the State Council to celebrate the National Day.

19:50 Meeting of the Conference of Outstanding Workers

20:00 Around the world: Industry in Kuwait

20:15 Around China: The River Min flows on

20:45 Theatre: "Future Summons"

#### **CHANNEL 8**

19:00 Around China: The happy Dai people

19:15 Film: "Investigation of a Wife" (Hong Kong)

21:10 News

21:25 World Knowledge

To sum up, with the establishment of a national network service and the advancement of CCTV and other regional stations, it seemed that modernizing the Chinese television industry was pursued under state paternalism in the early 1980s. However, the centralization strategy could provide no solution for further grassroots development. As the economic reform rapidly progressed and in consequence, the capability of central authority to deliver resources was increasingly weakened, a movement towards changing the development strategy was well underway.

## **4.2 DECENTRALIZATION STRATEGY: to be or not to be?**

### **4.2.1 Changing Macro-Contexts**

Changes in the macro-background of political economy took place both inside and outside China. Since the 1970s, world capitalism has experienced a new phase which has been described as "disorganized capitalism" or "post-Fordism" (cf. S.Lash & J.Urry, 1987; K.Offe, 1985; Lipietz, 1987). It is generally characterized by deregulation (or, re-regulation) marketization and globalization of capital movement with the rising tide of neo-liberalism which had enormous impact on socio-economic development, particularly in the communications industry at global level. That general tendency has been presented even more persistently, strongly and wide-rangingly in post-Mao China with a movement of decentralization, as the priority set by Deng's leadership was to tackle the unworkable structure of the centralized command economy.

Towards the end of the 1970s China's reform programme began experimenting with decentralizing the economy, whereby the central planning institution increasingly relaxed its direct control over distributing economic resources and industrial activities. The basic idea of this decentralization policy was to give the grassroots enterprises more power to determine their own economic performance with self-responsibility for gains and losses. In this way, it seemed that several steps, though far from being sufficient and systematic, were taken by the ruling elite in that direction. Starting from the early 1980s, the central administration initiated a system of financial responsibility concerning investment and profit distribution. The system devolved some important discretionary authority to the enterprises and local governments. As a result, the cage

imprisoning locality and industries was slowly opened in the direction of building up the economic dynamics. However, the move also brought about some serious consequences which to a large extent were unanticipated and unintended by the decision makers in Beijing. In the first place, the central government rapidly lost its control over financial resources. Taking state revenue as a proportion of national income for example, it accounted for 37.2% in 1978, then decreased to 26% in 1984, and to only 19.2% in 1988. Moreover, the percentage of such revenue controlled by the centre also fell from a high of more than 70% in the 1950s, to 60% in the early 1980s, and to 42.8% in 1989. In the second place, the structure of its capital investment and accumulation programme also rapidly shifted away from central authority to regional and local institutions. During the 1978-1988 period, capital investment outside the state planning sector (i.e either by individual enterprises, or by local authorities) grew from 16.7% of total investment to 67% (China Statistics Yearbook 1983-1989; C.Cheng, 1990:22-23). In effect, the implementation and expansion of such decentralization measures have dramatically altered many aspects of centralized economic control. Therefore, economically, the emergence of local autonomy under the current reform movement, gradually formed a favourable base for taking the initiative of decentralization in the Chinese broadcasting industry.

Meanwhile, Deng and his reformers set a political and ideological framework for policy makers to take some further bold measures to promote industrial growth. In August 1980, Deng Xiaoping made an important speech in an enlarged Politburo meeting in which he viewed the problems that were impinging upon China's economic progress. These included the old politics-in-command thinking, the excessive concentration of central power within its institution and the bureaucratism. He then concluded that there was a need to adopt pragmatic politics in order to serve the goal of national modernization (Deng, 1984:302-305). Clearly, its intention at the time was to encourage some sort of decentralization initiatives. Liao Gailong, one of Deng's



supporters and a reform-minded ideologist, took an even more radical attitude towards the existing Party-state centralization system. Also in 1980, he gave the bluntest and boldest analysis so far ever seen within the ruling elite on the problem of centralization. In particular, he strongly criticised misguided Leninist political theory and its serious consequences. He virtually demanded an end of centralism:

Lenin's political theory neglected the democratic aspect of proletarian dictatorship, and attached too much importance to the aspect of violent suppression. He even said that proletarian dictatorship was "iron" dictatorship not bound by any laws.... This dictatorship over-emphasized the role of force and emphasized the role of not being bound by anything. Thus, the power of the party and the state became over-centralized in the hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and finally became over-centralized in the hands of one or a few leaders.... **Thus, over a long period of time, it seemed to us that socialism was centralism, a high degree of centralism** (my emphasis); that the concentration of power in the hands of a party central committee and then in the hands of leaders was socialism (Liao, 1980).

In short, the interaction of these economic, political and ideological changes had a decisive influence on the direction of development of Chinese broadcasting. As a result, the pressure to adopt a decentralization development strategy in the television industry began to mount.

#### **4.2.2 Policy Debate and Consensus**

In the context of the process of central power retreating, the main impetus to the growth of the Chinese television industry actually came from below, not above. As early as 1980, there were signs that many local authorities, particularly in the newly-rich

coastal areas, started to challenge the existing centralized policy regarding broadcasting development which meant that local level institutions had no authority to engage in the business of broadcasting. They actively lobbied the policy makers by boldly demanding Beijing's sanction to set up and run their own local stations. He Dazhong, chief engineer of the ministry of Chinese Broadcasting and one of the major architects of decentralization policy concerning broadcasting, described the situation at the time:

From 1949 (i.e the year that the communists took power), the development policy of Chinese broadcasting was characterized by centralism. This was employed as a practice called "Centre First and Local Second". In particular, the power to run the television service was only bestowed on the authorities concerned at central and regional (i.e provincial) levels. In other words, the local cities and counties were not allowed to engage in television business. After 1978, however, things had to be changed as economic reform progressed. With decentralization measures implemented and the degree of local autonomy enlarged, the vast majority of local institutions (e.g cities, counties township and enterprises etc.) which benefited from the new strategy, strengthened their hand. Now they had more money at their disposal and were more interested in developing television at their local level. At one time the situation became so peculiar that the Beijing side had no money and the local side had no authority to invest in the television industry. Because of this, the development of Chinese television remained in a state of stagnation. Entering the 1980s, many people from the local levels had a strong desire to set up a television station, but their demands were all rejected by the broadcasting authority due to its contravening the existing regulations. (D.He, 1990:607).

Thus, by 1982, the issue became so acute that tension was running high between the centre and the localities, and the heated debate on policy reform was inevitable both within and without broadcasting circles. Among many arguments employed to change the existing regulation was the one made by the influential He Dazhong, the man in charge of the technological development of Chinese broadcasting. He provided four reasons why a new decentralization policy was urgently needed. First and foremost, the increase of local autonomy and the implementation of financial responsibility system (i.e. an economically viable practice mainly concerning the change of fiscal distribution) had changed the balance of the relation between the state and the local units in general, and the overall investment structure in particular. Second, the de-collective rural reform, in dismissing Mao's peasant commune's system, since 1978 had improved the peasants' living standard and increased their leisure time. As a result, people who were becoming more wealthy in rural areas were now eager to have a TV set and there was a growing demand for access to a local television service. Obviously, the existing centralization development policy could never meet the demand, and as such, became a major obstacle to progress. Thirdly, many cities in prosperous areas showed a great deal of enthusiasm for setting up a station and running the service with their own revenue. Lastly, the enormous nation-wide demand for a TV set in the post-Mao era had strongly stimulated the output of the television receiver industry, and this in turn further compelled the central authority to find a solution focusing on quantitative development of the service supply side. He Dazhong concluded that it was time for adopting a new development strategy which would benefit all sides by pursuing decentralization reform (D.He, 1990:606-608).

Wu Lengxi, the minister of Chinese Broadcasting at the time, was another major advocate of decentralization in the Chinese broadcasting industry. In his view, broadcasting communication should not only be treated as a political and ideological apparatus as it always has been in China, but also be treated as



an economic entity in the process of China's modernization. As such, the key to the development of radio and television media largely became a question of capital accumulation. In his plain words, it was a matter of spending money, and finding someone to pay. The decentralization policy is thus designed to initiate people at the grassroots levels involved in the broadcasting industry and make them willing to pay (Wu, 1984:96). This was "a policy to bring the initiative of the local people and various sections of society into full play" (Wu, 1984:116). The logic of the argument is simple: in order to speed up Chinese broadcasting development, you have to find money outside the state treasury; in order to get extra money, you have to change the existing entry rule (i.e. centralized regulation), and concede its planning supremacy to the rest of society. In a word, something must give.

There were some people, however, who regarded the power to run the broadcasting service as too important to delegate to local agents and other units. Hong Minsheng, deputy director and editor-in-chief of China Central Television (CCTV), strongly criticised the proposed decentralization initiative and described it as a policy of which "haste makes waste". He, among many others, argued that there were far more negative than positive effects should such a strategy be implemented. It would result in serious consequences which could include 1) a chaotic administrative situation; 2) a weakening of the authority of central and regional television; 3) driving stations into a plight of unnecessary competition; 4) a degrading, rather than improving, the quality of programming; and 5) an enlargement of the gap of access to the services, making information-rich areas richer and information-poor areas poorer (Hong, recalled the debate in a personal communication to the author, Beijing, Oct. 1990).

Between these two arguments, stood the people with a moderate view who, though readily admitting the problem of the existing policy, took a rather cautious attitude towards the

decentralization approach. They were inclined to take a balanced position which endorsed some degree of decentralization on the one hand, and stressed the importance of continuing central dominance on the other. To them, decentralization could only be used as a makeshift measure to supplement the inadequate performance of the centralized approach. Zhao Shufu, a senior broadcasting policy maker, put his view in this way: In order to speed up the development of Chinese broadcasting, we should adjust our existing policy which was, in many ways, outdated. The new policy should give local people incentives to develop broadcasting. However, this also should be done without detriment to the leading role of the central institution (Zhao, 1989:212-219; he also provided a detailed outline of the debate in conversation with the author, Beijing, Oct.1990).

In the same vein, some others expressed their concern that it was premature to introduce radical decentralization measures, but they tended to agree that the existing centralization strategy should be modified.

Perhaps in policy formulation, one of the major factors that dictates the choice is the balance of costs and benefits, risks and opportunities. If the Chinese leadership firmly committed itself to the economic reform with the effort of increasing productivity, then the rules of the game would be altered in a way that ought to opt for reducing the cost of institutional operation. As in the case of post-Mao China, the conduct of policy affairs is further compounded by Deng's pragmatic thinking which identifies ways and means with the target of modernization performance with minimum concern for ideological offence. As a result, the pro-decentralization argument was favoured and got more popular response among the policy makers. The consensus was thus to head for decentralization and three conclusions were gradually reached:

- 1) the central government could no longer cope with the growing demand for developing local broadcasting industry, in particular,

with the regard of resources allocation;

2) therefore, the existing centralized policy must be changed;

3) the proposed new approach should be focused on the quantitative development through incentives to local people and enterprise initiatives.

#### **4.2.3 New Strategy: Arrival of a 4-level development policy**

Before I continues my analysis, it is necessary to explain the use of "level" in the Chinese context and the division of the Chinese administration system. In mainland China, the whole nation has been divided into four major levels since 1949: the central, the regional (i.e provincial), the local city and county. Below the fourth level there are also township, district and village levels. The first two levels (i.e central and regional) are directly under the jurisdiction of the state and are regarded as the centre of state institution; the rest are local levels. Territorially, China now has 30 regional units (i.e provinces), about 450 city units and 1,900 county units, which make up the major sectors of the Chinese administrative control system. The significance of this division, however, not only lies in its governmental operation but also in its organizational control. In principle, everyone in society must belong to one unit, and every unit belongs to a level of governmental authority mentioned above. The unit is not only concerned with administration, but also with economic performance and political/social activities. The peculiar thing is that all units ranging from manufacturing to television stations receive different treatment and authority to do their business according to the defined level they belong to. In the area of television, for example, if the central authority took a policy to develop central and regional stations, it meant that only the central and regional institution was allowed and financed to run the service. The so-called decentralization in Chinese television development



chiefly meant that the central authority ceased to take responsibility for the arrangement of grassroots television development and simply transferred its power to local levels.

The gathering momentum of the process of major policy changes concerning broadcasting development culminated in 1983 when the China Eleventh National Broadcasting Conference, the top decision making instrument attended by chief executives of all major stations (TV and radio), policy makers and leaders in broadcasting administration, convened in Beijing to review the existing policy and formulate the new one. The Chinese broadcasting authority finally decided to adopt a new strategy called "four-level development policy", in an effort to speed up the pace of Chinese broadcasting development in general and television in particular. In effect, the move was a major shift in the direction of decentralization in industry which was coupled with the appropriate features of the sweeping economic reform movement across China at that time.

Realizing the importance of having an effective policy to meet the goal of the growth, the broadcasting authority finally came to form a new strategy and put forward its proposal before the eleventh conference. In the opening speech, the broadcasting chief Wu Legnxi articulated a "four-level policy of developing radio and television":

In the past, we conducted the centralized approach with official sanction given to the authorities of the central and regional levels concerned to establish and manage our broadcasting service. This is particularly the case with regard to television development. Now the macro contexts and conditions have greatly changed since the 1978 reform programme initiated by the Party. In response to the new situation with growing pressure of demand from both the general public and local governments, and in order to accelerate our broadcasting development, we must adjust and reform our existing regulation and bring the

initiative of grassroots people (i.e local cities, counties and townships) into full play. Therefore, we lay down a two-point new policy for future development:

--- four-level development and management of radio and television service;

--- four-level mixed coverage.

From now on, local people can be engaged in the broadcasting field by setting up their stations and running their service provided they meet the required condition (i.e mainly refers to financial conditions and ensuring the priority of transmitting a certain number of central and regional programmes). The local authorities are bestowed with the major role of managing and financing the local service while the broadcasting central authority supervises local performance through policy consultation and administrative instruction. Our principle is simple and clear: whoever invests, should benefit. We believe that this new developing policy will inspire local people to strive for success and so advance our cause (Wu, 1984:64-65,92-93).

This speech still employed some Chinese official cliches such as "to bring local initiative into full play" to justify the policy reform. In three important respects, however, the minister's statement suggests that the rules of regulating Chinese radio and television development began to change. First, it involves a substantial reduction of mandatory operation conducted by the central institution with a shift of developing priority to local levels. Secondly, the economic performance for the first time became a necessary condition of entry to the broadcasting field; in other words, it is financial power that is now given sanction to run the service. Finally, the right of the investor is generally acknowledged, and the boundary of exercising power is preliminarily defined; in this way, the relation between the centre and localities is defined in a marginal way towards the direction of economic rationalism.

As far as the issue of spectrum arrangement was concerned, in order to solve the problem of spectrum shortage, an opt-out system was adopted: most of the local stations could only enjoy limited spectrum, so they should relay certain programs of CCTV and regional stations as the condition to use the frequency in the area. After the completion of transmitting programmes of the national network, these local stations opt out and broadcast their own programmes. In some other areas where frequency can be met the need, CCTV (now more and more relying on the satellite transmission), the regional station and the local station can exclusively use each own spectrum without interfering one another.

At any rate, the designed decentralization drive in this respect was to bring about a degree of dynamism; and as the question of "to be or not to be" was solved, the situation was soon to change.

### **4.3 NEW DYNAMICS**

#### **4.3.1 The Burgeoning of the TV Industry**

The implementation of decentralization policy in 1983, together with the growing commercial involvement led by advertising provided a dynamic impetus to the television industry. A new chapter of the Chinese television development has, since then, been opened. Since I will analyze the impact of commercialization on Chinese broadcasting in the next chapter, I shall focus on the process of decentralization program and the progress of the industry in this chapter.

In October 1983, the Party's ruling politburo issued a central committee's document "On a Programme of Radio and Television" in



which the "four-level development policy" was approved to replace the old centralized one. Now, to run television, a typical example would be: a local level broadcasting unit would make an effort to raise funds; it needed about one million Chinese yuan (i.e US\$ 250,000 in 1988) to set up a county-level TV station and three to five millions for a city-level station. A major part of the revenue would come from the local authority in question, however, in recent years, in some southeastern areas, revenue from commercial sponsorship and enterprises, or even from bank loan, has been rapidly increased. When the money became available, the local institute presented its case to the provincial broadcasting authority to be granted a license (since 1988, however, the power to grant has been again referred to the Broadcasting Ministry in Beijing). Once the license was granted, the station could provide its local service and enjoy a large degree of autonomy in organization, operation, and management. The central body virtually had no mandatory power to dictate to the local service, and no financial responsibility either. The precondition for that agreement, was that every local station must give priority to transmitting a certain programmes -- especially news and current affairs -- of CCTV and regional stations.

Nevertheless, once the opening was created, the latent initiative of local power swiftly manifested itself, and the development of Chinese television experienced a rapid growth and a wave of reform in which the industry changed out of all recognition. To begin with, let's look at the development of the supply side -- the growth of the stations and transmitters. The following tables give the general picture of the advancing pace from 1978 to 1990.

Table 4.2

## The Growth of Chinese TV Station &amp; Transmitters (1978 - 1990)

Prior to the Period of the New Policy (1978 - 1983)				
Year	Station	% incr.	Transmitter	% incr.
1978	32		n.a	
1979	38	18.8%	n.a	
1980	38	0%	2,469	
1981	42	10.5%	4,117	66.8%
1982	47	11.9%	5,635	36.9%
1983	52	10.6%	7,475	32.7%
Average Increase			Average Increase	
1978 - 1983		12.5%	1980 - 1983	
			67.6%	
Under the period of the New Policy (1984 - 1990)				
Year	Station	% incr.	Transmitter	% incr.
1984	93	78.8%	9,708	30%
1985	202	117.2%	12,159	25.2%
1986	292	44.6%	15,177	24.8%
1987	366	25.3%	17,570	15.8%
1988	422	15.3%	19,876	13.1%
1989	469	11.1%	22,139	11.4%
1990	509	8.5%	n.a	
Average Increase			Average Inc	
1984 - 1989		80.9%	1984 - 1989	
			28.5%	

Sources of table 4.1 & 4.2: China Broadcasting Yearbook, (1986); (1987); (1988); (1989); (1990); Concise Broadcasting Dictionary, (1989:420); China Statistics Yearbook, (1991).

As the above tables indicate, prior to the implementation of decentralization, the growth of Chinese TV stations was very slow and solely relied on the investment scheme of the central and regional authorities targeted by the planner's unified arrangement. Before 1983, there were only about a dozen city-level TV stations mainly located in the minority areas and



sponsored by state projects. Furthermore, during that period, much effort was made to set up transmitters and relays, the average annual increase of transmitters stood at 1,600 from 1980 to 1983. The aim of the strategy was clear: to build up a centralized structure. In other words, this is a centralized investment model to develop a television industry copied from the Soviet Union.

When the new policy was introduced in 1983, the development of TV stations took off immediately at the grass roots level. As can be seen, the most rapid expansion occurred between 1984 to 1987 with an average increase rate of 98%. As a result, by 1992, the number of local stations reached over 550, covering approximately 70% of local cities and 25% of local counties (People's Daily, 2.19.1993). The policy spurred the initiatives of local authorities and the growing manufacturers, many of which now began to sponsor a local television service. Thus a great deal has been achieved in terms of the quantitative development in the industry.

Meanwhile, the decentralization programme also strengthened the industry's capacity in television transmission and penetration. The broadcasting authority could now concentrate its resources to develop Hi-Tech-led communication technology. In April 1984, China launched its first experimental television communication satellite, aiming at bringing programmes to the remote and mountain areas. As part of efforts to solve the long-term problem of reception in the remote areas, two more communication satellites were launched in 1986 and 1988; and three transponders on the INTELSAT were rented in 1985. There were 4,609 satellite-receiving earth station in 1987, and the number increased to 12,658 in 1989 (W.Xie, 1988:17; China Broadcasting Yearbook, 1990:529).



#### 4.3.2 TV Sets Production and Sale Market

Meanwhile, the dramatic boom of the local TV industry further accelerated the post-Mao consumer revolution after 1978.

In the late 1950s, China began to produce television sets on a small scale and the annual output merely remained at 3,000 - 5,000 sets during the 1960s. Later on, TV set production received a modest boost with the increasing output from 17,800 in 1971 to 184,500 in 1976 as the Maoist leadership became aware of the importance of this new medium for propaganda. However, only a total of 925,000 TV sets was produced between 1958 and 1977 (figure cited from Concise Broadcasting Dictionary, 1989:422-424) -- an insignificant figure in such a large country.

The modernization movement launched in 1978 provided a good opportunity to increase the production of television sets. As table 4.3 shows, the output and retail sales of television sets grew steadily from about half a million in 1978 to nearly 7 million in 1983. However, it was the 1983 decentralization strategy of developing the Chinese TV industry that produced the most successful boom in TV set production. Accordingly, a substantial marketing demand for TV receivers was created. By 1984, the output and sales of TV sets went up sharply to 10 million and 13 million respectively; and three years later the two figures were almost doubled. In addition, the increasing number of imported sets (on average two million annually, mainly from Japan) further spurred this massive TV proliferation. Today China's TV set production has become the largest in the world with an annual output of more than 25 million. The following table provides detailed data indicating the growth trend of the industry.

Table 4.3

## China's TV Production &amp; Retail Sales ( 1978 - 1989 )

( in million units )

Year	Total Output	Incl. colour	TVs sold
1978	0.517	0.004	0.551
1979	1.33	0.009	1.8
1980	2.49	0.032	3.64
1981	5.39	0.152	6.35
1982	5.92	0.288	7.51
1983	6.84	0.531	8.43
<b>Total (78-83)</b>	<b>22.127</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>28.28</b>
1984	10.04	1.34	12.93
1985	16.68	4.35	21.57
1986	14.6	4.15	21.98
1987	19.34	6.73	23.26
1988	25.05	10.38	26.63
1989	27.67	9.4	21.74
<b>Total (84-89)</b>	<b>113.38</b>	<b>36.35</b>	<b>128.11</b>

Source: For the figures of 1978 to 1982, from Concise Broadcasting Dictionary, appendix section, 1989:423-424; also from the Policy Studies of Radio & Television, 1989:518-520; and from China Statistics Yearbook (1986), (1987), (1988), (1989), (1990).

Today, China has built up a sizable television products industry. Of the country's 30 provinces, 25 had established their own television factories by the end of 1980s. Through 1982 more than 50 television factories produced all types of TV sets plus spare parts for family use as well as for various others. As far as the product quality is concerned, its main performance specifications



are close to that in other countries. China also imported a dozen colour-TV assembly lines from developed countries to improve its product quality and, in recent years it has started to export TV sets and other related products to countries competing in the world market (cf. W.Chang, 1989:216-217).

#### **4.3.3 Expansion of Private TV Ownership**

Related to the development mentioned above is a rapid expansion of private television ownership. During Mao's era, private ownership of a television receiver was often not only politically denounced as "seeking a bourgeois pleasure style", but also economically unfeasible to most Chinese families. The price of a 14-inch black and white TV set, for example, was the equivalent of two years' income, so television sets were, usually collectively owned by public units such as factories, institutes and peasants' communes. However, this situation has dramatically changed in post-Mao China. With the progress of economic reform and the increase in people's income, owning a TV set is no longer a dream. This phenomenon first occurred in large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou where TV broadcasts were already available. When the development of local TV stations in the mid-1980s started, it rapidly spread to the rural areas. A Chinese-made 14 inch black-and-white set now costs about £80, or three times the average monthly income, and the same size colour one can cost £ 200-250. The price is still high for the average family, but in a country where housing is still largely supplied by the state free of charge (there have been some changes regarding private purchasing property in some cities since 1990, but the scale is too small to reckon) and while private ownership of a car is still unrealistic, a television set has become the most popular durable goods on the purchasing list in most Chinese families. By 1990, it is reported that the number of TV receivers in China was over 170 million with a viewing public of over 700 million which means that China has 150 sets/per 1,000 inhabitants. According to 1990 UNESCO statistics, this figure is



far above that of Asia (53 sets/per 1,000 inhabitants, 1988) and equal to that of the world average (148 sets/per 1,000 inhabitants, 1988). Specifically speaking, Chinese television ownership in rural areas was 44.4% of households; in urban areas, almost every family had at least one set and the proportion of the b/w to colour was fifty-fifty. That is to say, in a nation where the current level of GNP has only reached about US\$ 500-600 per capita, the ownership of TV sets in China has already reached a level as high as that of countries such as Malaysia where the GNP is over US\$ 2,000 per capita. The following table depicts the trend.

Table 4.4

China's TV Ownership & Viewership ( 1978 - 1989 )				
Year	No.of Receiver ( million )	TV Viewership ( million )	No.of TVs/100 household	
			(urban area)	(rural area)
1978	3.04	80		
1979	4.85	120		
1980	9.02	200		
1981	15.67	250	57.65	0.39
1982	27.61	320	73.31	0.87
1983	36.11	370	83.2	3.99
1984	47.63	450	84.1	7.24
1985	69.65	540	87.42	11.74
1986	92.14	570	92.8	18.8
1987	116	590	99.4	26.72
1988	125	650	103.15	34.2
1989	165	700	107.18	41.13

Note: Among 1.1 billion Chinese population (1990), about 37% are urban residents and 63% are rural residents.

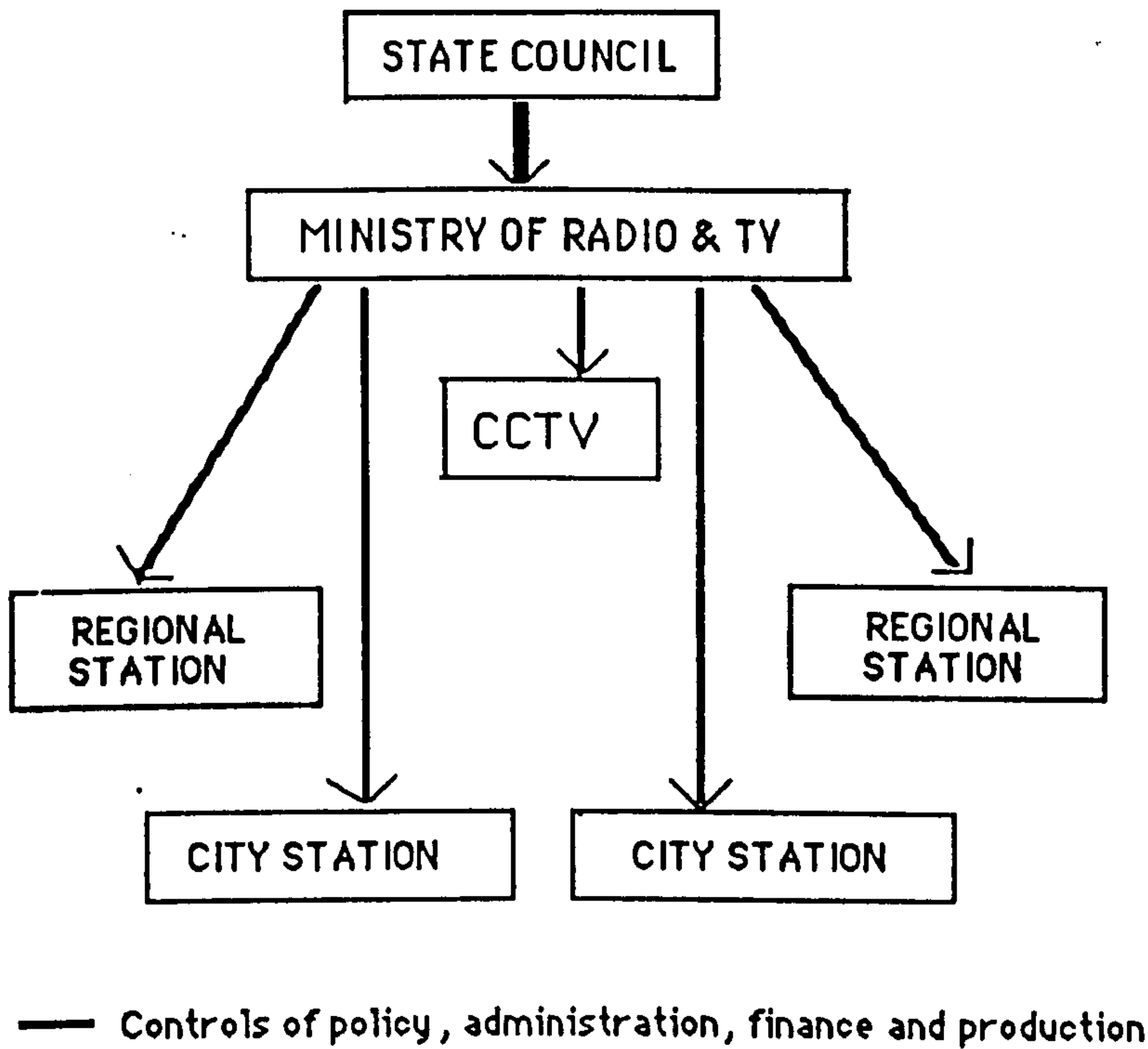
Source: for total number of TV sets and TV population, see Concise Broadcasting Dictionary, 1989:423-424; 1987 National TV

Audience Survey, in A Collection of the Chinese Media Surveys, 1989:349; and also The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991:5; for the number of TVs/ per 100 household, see China Statistics Yearbook, from 1982 edition to 1990 edition.

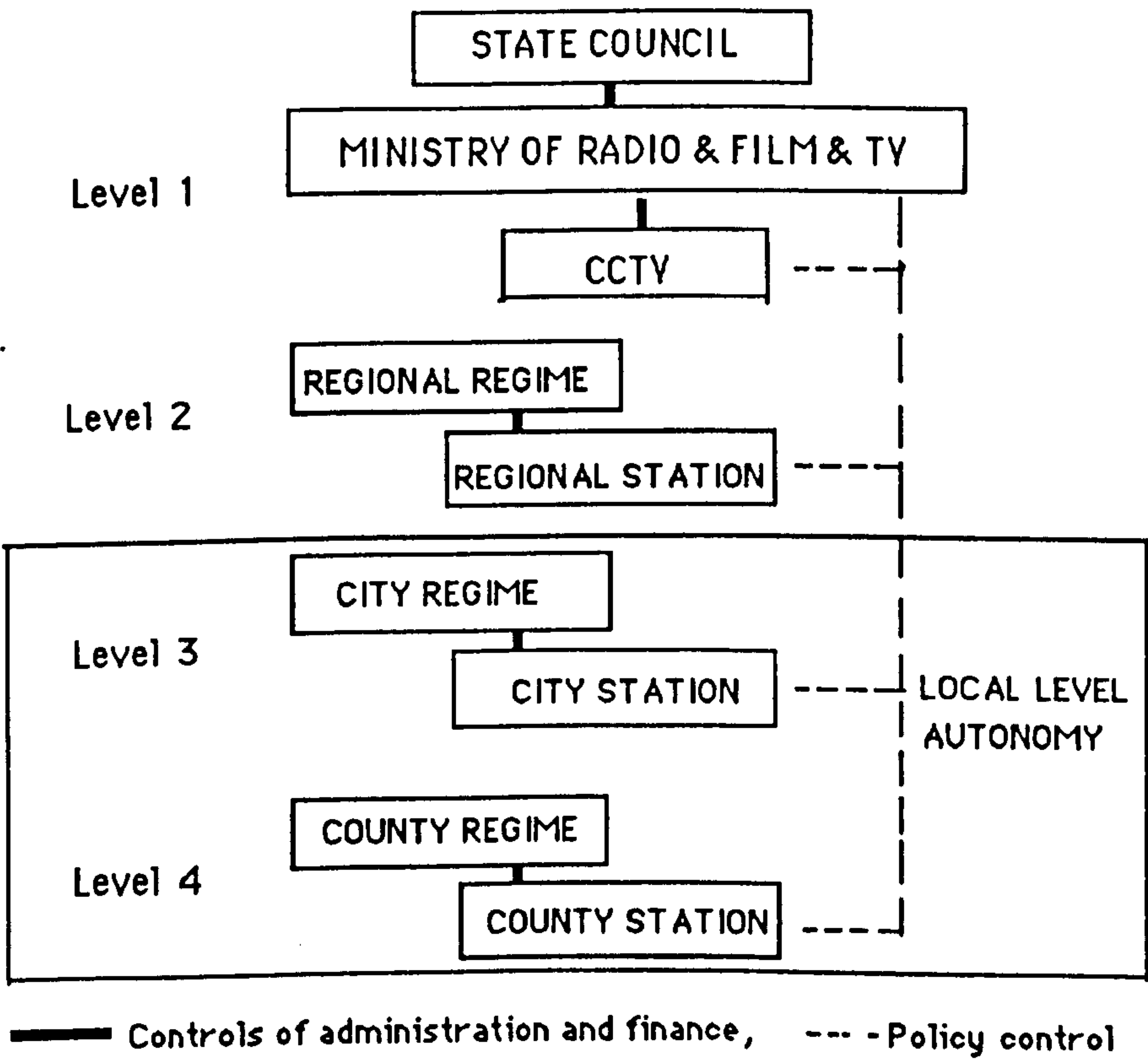
#### **4.3.4 New Structural Model**

Since 1983, the organizational structure of Chinese television has changes profoundly. A federation with pluralistic features has replaced the old centralized one. However, one should notice that this is very much sensed in terms of a delicate practice, and very much depends on the political climate of the day. In other words, it has been achieved without constitutional guarantee. The medium, at least in theory, is still controlled by the Party especially with regard to political and ideological matters. The following illustrates the old and the new models.

THE OLD CENTRALIZED STRUCTURE OF CHINESE TELEVISION



FOUR-LEVEL STRUCTURE OF CHINESE TELEVISION (1983- )





As noted, the implications of this new model are reflected on financial, administrative, managerial and programming production areas. Broadcasters at local units in particular, now have more autonomy to run their own television service.

As far as the structure is concerned, the four levels can be further divided into two types -- central control and local control. In other words, China's current broadcasting organization consists of a two-tiered system: state-led institutions and local confederative institutions. On the one hand, there is the centre-linked institution of CCTV and 30 regional stations that are continuously subject to state management (though these stations have become more and more market-oriented in recent years); on the other hand, there are large numbers of local-level stations which to some degree are controlled by the local broadcasters and largely subject to non-political/administrative means to maintain their service. In a broad sense, the four-level stations are also competing with each other in pursuing their own political and economic goals in society. The result of such a movement of structural change is very encouraging: First, the old centralized broadcasting system is being replaced by the new-federation style one which favours building a democratic media system in the process of communist-state transformation. Second, the change has produced new social forces in mass communication in China, laying down an important social foundation for progress in the future.

#### **4.3.5 New Paradigm of Centre-local Relationship**

To a remarkable extent, shifting paradigms of centre-local relationship in broadcasting structure and operation have had important implications for the exercising media power. As pointed out by Curran et al., recognition of the power of the media

raises questions as to how and by whom this power is wielded. Answers to these questions have been sought through the investigation and analysis of the structures and practices of media organizations (Curran & Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982:16). The emergence of the structural decentralization in the Chinese television industry has decisively shaken the Party' media control system. The central authorities concerned cannot easily impose their will upon the local stations without facing resistance and making concessions. To the centre, one major impetus to adopt decentralization in 1983, was the state's attempt to solve the long term problem of lack of investment in the industry by allowing local units to run their own services with their own revenue. The central authorities intended to continue political and ideological dominance by transmitting their programmes through local stations. In 1983 and 1984, the Broadcasting Ministry issued directives demanding that the local stations give priority to the programmes of central and regional stations. In 1988, the authority reaffirmed this principle with some tough restrictions (cf. Radio and Television Broadcasting in China, 1984:192; Z.Ai, 1989:74-76). In reality, however, these instructions from the centre are often, if not always, ignored, or merely partially obeyed, because the new structure in general has increased the power of localities. As remarked by J.Yu:

Post-Mao television is also characterized by the rising autonomy of local stations vis-a-vis CCTV in Beijing. Local units gained more power in making decisions during the reform decade, both in politics and in television. Local stations, supported by advertising and program sponsorship, were encouraged to develop their own programming. Thus, their dependence on CCTV was weakened. Instead, they built close ties to pursue regional interests (J.Yu, 1990:86).

The building of close ties among local stations has been progressed steadily in recent years. In programming, production and distribution, for instance, local stations have taken some



measures to strengthen their ties. Currently, three popular forms have been operated on a regular basis among the local stations. First, they exchange programs, sometimes for free, sometimes for a fee. Second, several station may pool manpower and investment to co-produce a better program or a set of programs. Third, they may manage a certain types of services within a regional scale to get mutual benefits and to reduce the operational costs (cf. J.Yu, 1990:76).

#### **4.3.6 Problems of Local Stations and Confrontation between the Centre and the Localities**

By the end of 1990, the number of local stations reached over 470 accounting for about 70% of city units and 20% of county units respectively. However, compared with the central and regional stations, local-level stations face a number of difficulties, the three major ones being a shortage of funds, relatively poor ability to produce their own programmes, and a lack of qualified professionals. As the new policy is one of financial self-reliance, the pressing issue facing local broadcasters is how to get sufficient revenue to maintain the service. Their efforts have led local stations to rely on buying/exchanging cheap but attractive soaps and on selling more airtime to advertisers. In reality, however, the development is uneven, particularly for those stations located in the southeastern prosperous areas and those in the rather underdeveloped areas, where the extent and degree of these common problems can be quite different. In 1986, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Broadcasting found that some local programmes, especially news, were popular. Several other empirical surveys in the past few years have also confirmed this. The following table provides a general outline of the capability of TV programme production and service offering time in each of the four level stations. It is calculated by the author on the basis of statistics provided by the Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook and a documentary book titled "The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting".



**Table 4.6**  
**Capability of Programme Production & Service Time in**  
**Each of China's Four Level Stations**

(time unit: hour/weekly)

By the end of the 1980s	Program Production	Service time
CCTV (two national channels)	70	230
Regional Station (1/2 chl)	30-35	60-100
City Station	12-15	25-35
County Station	5-7	12-20

As can be seen, there is a clear gap between the central-regional stations and the local stations in providing the service. While the local stations are unable to produce many original programmes, they, nevertheless, try every other means including program exchange, purchase, co-production and even piracy to fill up air time in order to survive, obtain greater autonomy, and attract commercial sponsorship. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the law of market forces has more power to determine local stations' fate and future. As a result, there is often conflict between the centre and localities over the distribution of air time as they fight to maintain their interests. For instance, as we mentioned above, the central broadcasting authority in Beijing has demanded several times that local stations transmit the central and regional programme unconditionally, but the local stations either take little notice of this directive, or, they use weaker transmitters to broadcast CCTV and regional services leaving the more powerful transmitters for their own programmes. This is quite a common phenomenon which someone described as "the small eats the big" (Ma, X. 1989:229). Most programmes for transmission also include advertising which is priced according to national or regional audience size. It is

precisely this economic concern that provokes contending interests. The local broadcasters argue: "Why should we transmit their advertisement-including programmes without receiving a penny of their advertising revenue? Besides, if we merely transmit their programmes, who is going to buy our advertising time?" (cited from my personal communication with broadcasting policy makers in Beijing, Oct.1990). It is important to point out that the economic performance of television stations has deeply influenced in the relationship between the centre and the localities. As a result of the emergence of a two-tiered system, local stations have a formidable power base allowing them to withstand pressure from the centre.

#### **4.4 TOWARDS A TELEVISION-LED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

Driven by the modernization movement in post-Mao China, Chinese television has experienced an unprecedented boom in the last decade, and this in turn has changed the practice of mass communication in China with a profound impact on society as a whole. The very presence of television demonstrated the fruits of the economic reform progress, its audiovisual combination proved to be more attractive than radio and newspaper and made it a domestic necessity. By the end of the 1980s, television entered most Chinese family homes. As a result, television began to transform people's mentality, providing new access to information and entertainment. It opened a new window on the outside world for a tightly controlled society and brought many innovations to the notice of the public, especially in the vast rural areas where the majority of Chinese peasants had little chance to enjoy cultural life due to their impoverished condition, limited media input (mostly through wired broadcasting system) and poor literacy (there is still more than 30% rural illiteracy). By any standards, Chinese television has become the most powerful means of mass communication, entertainment and



advertising. As a result, Chinese mass communication is changing from being dominated by press and radio to being television-led.

4.4.1 Changing Media Consumption of the Chinese Public

Until the early 1980s, radio and newspapers were still seen as the media most predominantly used by the Chinese public. Early empirical research shows that radio broadcasting had a high reception in the rural areas, whilst newspapers enjoyed a large readership in urban areas. This was partly owing to the different levels of literacy and partly owing to the fact that the authorities set up a vast rural network of wired broadcasting throughout Mao's era. Accordingly, most Chinese people perceived the outside world through newspapers and radio broadcasting. The first large-scale audience surveys conducted by the Chinese mass communication researchers in the regions of Zhejiang province, Jiangsu province and the capital of Beijing in 1982 and 1983, provided detailed evidence.

Table 4.7  
Regular Use of the Mass Media by the Chinese Public  
( 1982 -- 1983 )

Region	Radio	Newspaper	TV
Zhejiang (N=2,532)	68.9%	38.2%	34.3%
Jiangsu (N=1,994)	68.16%	29.12%	24.78%
Beijing (N=2,423)	51.0%	44.5%	38.8%
On average of all 3	62.7%	37.3%	32.6%

Note: "regular use" is defined here as an individual using the medium at least more than three times a week.  
Source: China Journalism Yearbook, 1983, 1984.



**Table 4.8**  
**Major Sources for Receiving News**

Regions	Radio	Newspapers	TV	Conversation	Others
Zhejiang	38.4%	24.6%	17.1%	7.7%	2.7%
Jiangsu	57.2%	15.2%	9.4%	13.5%	0.35%
Beijing	35.5%	38.9%	19.5%	4.9%	0.8%
Average	43.7%	26.2%	15.3%	8.7%	1.28%

Source: the same as table 4.7.

By the mid 1980s, however, the situation started to change as the development of Chinese television reached a breakthrough point both in terms of hardware (e.g station, TV set production) and software (e.g programme, service). Since then, research has shown that people now rely more on TV as their regular news and entertainment medium. For instance, by 1987, the regular media users in the region of Jiangsu province devoted to television, reached 70% of the people (S.Ji, 1989:321), a sharp 45% increase compared with the appropriate figure in 1983 (see table 5.9). The evidence suggests that television has become the number one medium used by the Chinese public. Here are some more examples to demonstrate this point.

Table 4.9

1987 National Audience Survey: the Public Use of the Media

( N = 24,893, in % )

Frequency of use	TV	Radio	Newspapers
Daily	54%	35%	32%
Regularly (3-4/weekly)	24%	21%	17%
Sometimes (1-2/weekly)	16%	19%	18%
Occasionally (1-3/monthly)	5%	9%	11%

Source: 1987 Survey of the National TV Audience, from China Broadcasting Yearbook, 1988.

Table 4.10

Beijing Public's Major Access to the Reception of News (1986)

Year	TV	Radio	Newspapers	Others
1986	41.7%	30.2%	26%	1.2%
Compared with 1982's	28.2%	- 5.3%	- 12.9%	- 4.5%

Source: Audience Survey Report of Beijing People's Radio Station, from A Collection of the Chinese Media Surveys, 1989:451

The rapid increase in TV viewing has undoubtedly affected the public's consumption of other media. In 1985, a targeted survey was conducted in Nanjing, the provincial capital city of Jiangsu, which provided the specific information on the subject. It confirmed that, 25% of Nanjing residents reduced their radio listening time considerably owing to watching more television, 6% even said they stopped listening entirely, and 12.8% of the people either cut down on their reading, or did not read newspapers at all (cf. "TV Communication Situation in Nanjing", from A Collection of the Chinese Media Surveys, 1989:420). On

average, Nanjing residents spent 59% of their spare time on television viewing. In other words, watching TV takes up most of people's leisure time.

In another relevant development, the Chinese film industry has been seriously affected by the popularity of television as it proved to be a major source of entertainment. According to the report of China Film Time on 28 Feb.1987,--an influential Shanghai-based professional newspaper, between 1979 and 1985, there was a 17% fall-off in the number of screening and a 43.5% decline in admissions to the cinema in urban area. In the countryside, whilst audience admissions continuously dropped, over 40,000 of the 150,000 mobile projection teams that serve the rural area folded up. In effect, the late 1980s saw a further decline and a series of crises in the film industry largely due to the rapid growth of Chinese television. In 1990, film admissions of Chinese audience dropped to 16.2 billion -- the lowest level since the 1960s; whereas, television ownership reached 50% of Chinese families and TV viewing commanded more than 700 million people. The following table of cinema attendance in China reveals such a tendency.

**Table 4.11**  
**Cinema Attendance in Mainland China ( 1977 -- 1990 )**  
(in billion)

1977	1979	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990
29.3	27.2	26.5	21.7	18.7	16.2	29.4

source: China Film Yearbook and China Statistics Yearbook (1980 - 1990).

From these facts, my observation is that the media consumption of the Chinese public has been transformed to the television-led formulation, and so has the adjustment of Chinese mass communication structure.



#### **4.4.2 The Emerging TV-led Media Environment: the Global Trend**

Historically, the world experienced two communication revolutions which greatly altered human civilization. The first one was that verbal communication developed into written communication which took place around the beginning of Christian times; the second one which started in the seventeenth century was characterised by the invention of the press medium and its subsequent replacement of elite communication with mass communication. A press-led media dominated the public communication up till the early 20th century when radio broadcasting emerged as another major source which co-existed with the press. With the development of the new electrical technologies that underpinned the culture and leisure industries, however, since the late 1950s, we have witnessed a third wave of the communication revolution sweeping the world that has led to a new era of television-led multi-media environment. This process has been gathering momentum which has not only reshaped public perception of the outside world, but also the style of mass entertainment. Clearly, the dominant medium is television. As we can see from table 4.12, in the last fifteen years, television development has made giant strides and the growth rate has been the fastest compared to that of the other media. Generally speaking, in the developed countries, the new communication revolution has entered its mature stage of development, and this trend is increasingly expanding to the rest of the world. As we can understand it for obvious reason the press development in the majority of the developing countries can never reach the level that developed countries now enjoy. Apart from the backward economy and poor literacy of these countries, the long term restriction lies in the constant scarcity of raw material (i.e paper) production and distribution. In other words, existing natural paper resources are unable to meet the demand of consumption in the world. As far as the dynamics of mass media development are concerned, it is clear that the press is declining, and whilst the radio still has

some space to grow, it remains secondary to television and the long term trend is towards static state, only television is keeping up the pace of rapid advance.

**Table 4.12**

**The Growth Trend of the Mass Media in the World (1975 - 1988)**

( in % )

<b>1975 - 1988</b>	<b>World total Increase rate</b>	<b>DDC* Increase rate</b>	<b>DPC* Increase rate</b>
<b>POPULATION</b>	25.21%	9.7%	31.04%
<b>NEWSPAPERS</b>			
No.of Dailies	8.7%	-4.6%	2.7%
Circulation (est)	27.5%	14.4%	76%
Per 1,000 inhabitants	2.7%	6.6%	34.4%
<b>RADIO BROADCASTING</b>			
No.of transmitters**	46.7%	35.3%	79.1%
No. of receivers	82.5%	43.8%	253.9%
Per 1,000 inhabitants	45.1%	31.6%	162%
<b>TELEVISION</b>			
No.of transmitters	202.8%	168.3%	872.5%
No.of receivers	82.6%	56.8%	317.1%
Per 1,000 inhabitants	45.1%	43.5%	214.3%
<b>FILM***</b>			
Annual cinema attendance	8.4%	22.2%	63.2%

\*DDC, DPC: developed countries and developing countries.

\*\* Number of world radio and TV transmitters covers the period between 1975 to 1987.

\*\*\* Film data do not include China and covers the period between 1975 to 1987.

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1990.

In post-Mao China, the general tendency of mass media consumption and development is very similar to that of the world. As this chapter shows, television development reached a breakthrough point in the 1980s, whilst radio broadcasting has remained stable and the press industry has diminished.



Once seen as the backbone of the Chinese mass media, the press no longer takes the leading position in today's Chinese mass media family. There was an increase in growth in newspaper numbers and circulation in the early 1980s and the phenomenon culminated in 1987 when on average per 1,000 inhabitants had 167.5 papers and 49 dailies respectively. However, its development, since then, has stepped down and has been constrained by considerable problems such as the shortage of paper supply, economic difficulties, the fall of readership and circulation etc. In addition, this has been further hampered by the alarming 1989 Beijing tragedy as the Party has re-tightened the scale and the numbers of press development. It is reported that scale of press development in 1990 reduced to the level of 1983. As an industry, the Chinese press medium has passed its golden age and is now on the decline as shown in the following table.

**Table 4.13**

**The Growth of China's Newspapers ( 1981 - 1989 )**

Year	No.of Dailies	No.of Total pa.	Run per Daily/1000	% Change	Run per Paper/1000	% Change
1951	n.a	390				
1961	n.a	260				
1971	n.a	195				
1981	143	476				
1982	150	659				
1983	168	792	34.6		94	
1984	220	1,049	44.7	29.1%	133.1	41.6%
1985	225	1,716	44.7	0%	146.6	10.1%
1986	247	1,813	46.9	4.9%	153	4.4%
1987	268	1,880	49	4.5%	167.5	9.5%
1988	260	1,836	46	-6.1%	155	-7.5%
1989*	250	1,700	31.8	-30.9%	109	-29.7%



Note\*: the 1989 figure is not the final published one.

Source: figures for the 1951,1961,1971 numbers of newspapers from China Statistics Yearbook, 1983; the 1989 figure is calculated from the report of Press & Publication (1.2.1989), figures for the rest from China Journalism Yearbook, 1982-1989.

Radio broadcasting development has shown a similar tendency. Wired broadcasting in recent years has reduced both in scale and degree. Meanwhile, from 1985 to 1989 the growth of radio receivers proceeded at a glacial rate just remaining at the level of 23-24 per hundred people, and the speed of radio broadcasting development slowed down with more attention being paid to television. Although, the quality of radio programming and transmission continue to improve, numbers of radio users have declined.

Table 4.14

The Growth of Wired Broadcasting in China ( 1980 - 1989 )

Year	No.of wired Stations	% Change	Loudspeakers In rural area(%)	Air-hours Per day	% Change
1980	2,610		49.5%		
1981	2,643	1.2%			
1982	2,631	-0.04%			
1983	2,619	-0.05%	44.8%		
1984	2,570	-1.87%	43.3%	15,052 (hr)	
1985	2,668	3.8%	42.1%	15,339 (hr)	1.9%
1986	2,560	-4%	41.6%	15,167 (hr)	-1.1%
1987	2,576	0.6%	41%	14,830 (hr)	-2.2%
1988	2,546	-1.2%	40.1%	14,746 (hr)	-1.1%
1989	2,525	-0.8%	38.3%	14,598 (hr)	-1.1%

Source: figures for 1980-1983, from China Statistics Yearbook,1983, 1984; for the rest of the part, from China Broadcasting Yearbook, 1986-1990.

The conclusion is obvious: modernization of the Chinese mass communication system has come to the point where television plays the dominant role in the multi-media environment.

\* \* \* \* \*

The centralization of the electrical media particularly television, could hardly claim to be rare. However, what is unique to the Chinese case presented here is the innovation of a decentralization strategy and its achievements in a transitional communist China. By allowing local broadcasters to enjoy a degree of autonomy and marginalizing the power between the centre and localities, the costs of institutional arrangements and operations have been reduced to a large degree and the development of Chinese television has thus experienced a decade of boom. Significantly, many new social forces have brought into being a freer and more dynamic media system. Despite the fact that the Chinese central authority still maintains its political control over the television medium, the authority has conceded many of its other powers to the localities and the broadcasters. If the decentralization solution has proved to be essential to the dynamics of the industry, another significant adoption in television development has been commercial forces led by advertising, a major theme discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TOWARDS COMMERCIALIZATION

#### 5.1 COMMERCIAL COMMUNISM AND MEDIA ACCUMULATION

##### 5.1.1 "Commercial Communism"

It would scarcely be controversial to state that the current form of Chinese communism has been changed out of all recognition in terms of its defined doctrine and historical praxis. In effect, since the late 1970s, China has experienced much of its socio-economic transformation through Deng's reform characterised by the adoption of a market-oriented approach which pushes industries (including the communication media) to pursue commercial interests as a way to realize capital accumulation. Despite being apparently inconceivable and ironic, the peculiar term "**Commercial Communism**" (from Z.Brzezinski, 1989:145) is now widely employed to identify what has been happening in post-Mao China. It is our view that the importance of the "Commercial Communism" phenomenon relies to a large degree on the understanding and interpretation of the word "Commercial" and its unusual association with "Communism" (L.Zhang & Y. Huang, 1992). This juxtaposition presents a number of questions: Why would a market-driven approach and commercialism be adopted by Chinese Communism? How well can commercialism itself function under the auspices of the remaining Chinese communist system? Where can this trend lead, and with what social consequences? Can communism really be commercialized or reformed by pursuing a market-oriented economic liberalization?



This chapter attempts to provide a descriptive account and a sociological interpretation of the post-Mao commercialization of Chinese television industry. The main purpose is to examine the role that the market approach has played in reshaping the structure of Chinese television and the process of commercialization in the industry with particular reference to the impact of increasingly retargeting resources via commercial means. As the advertising industry is of critical importance in the process, we shall provide an analysis of the development of the Chinese advertising industry and its powerful influence on the finance, operation, production and organization of Chinese television in the last decade. Finally, we attempt to address the problem of commercialization caused by the contradiction between the existing Party control structure of the medium on the one hand, and the rapidly emerging economic autonomy of the medium which has been increasingly left to market forces on the other. We argue that the market approach and the expansion of commercial forces in the context of the Chinese reform programme to some extent may favour a peaceful evolution of media pluralism, while also transforming the communist totalitarian state and allowing a commercial-oriented and open society to emerge. Furthermore, such an evolution may also favour long-term media democratization in China, although we should not idealize commercialism, or deny its problems.

### **5.1.2 Problems of the Communist System**

Whatever merit it may have, the established Soviet-style communist system, by its very nature, is alien to the commodity economy. Marx's arguments for the abolition of the system of private enterprise, for the replacement of the existing relations of capitalist commodity production to fit the high-speed productive forces developed from advanced capitalism, for the creation of an optimal society based on the premise of human altruism and through social engineering, for guiding mankind to

the stage of **Überflussgesellschaft** without material scarcity, are all regarded as the philosophical foundations of the system. The historical praxis, however, is that the "established communist system", from the Soviet Union to China, is contrary to Marx's predictions and prerequisites. It did not evolve from mature capitalism, but rather, from so-called "Asiatic society" (e.g. China) or "Semi-Asiatic society" (e.g. Russia). Its rise and success largely depended on a Leninist Party exercising totalitarian power over every aspect of the society through armed force and through symbolic force (such as censorship and propaganda). Its economic solution, known as the command economy, has been implemented on the basis of the non-market environment and bureaucratic resource allocation.

In short then, the established Soviet communism was a nomenklatura institution that was designed primarily to maintain Party monopoly control over society and a central planning structure that was also unable to tackle the economic problem of scarcity effectively. More acutely, this is a system that can deliver neither social justice, nor freedom, nor enough goods. The essential traits of the established communist system, especially its "dictatorship over needs", politico-ideological dominance and the giant centralized bureaucratic machinery, go against the grain of commodity production and the market discipline which are seen as the locomotive behind the development of modern society. It thus tends to generate persistent contradictions and dilemmas within the system which inevitably belie all its promises and once-widely-held utopian fantasy. In the end, maintaining and maximizing totalitarian control becomes the very existence of the system in itself. Therefore, the system contained an underlying tendency towards social retardation and self-paralysis wherever it was established [cf. 1.4].

On the other hand, however, the failure of the system constantly drove the communist pragmatists to seek alternative solutions. A partial reform program with the adoption of a market-oriented



approach was thus not only possible, but also apparently promising for continuing the dictatorship of the Communist Party in a way that, hopefully, could move the economy and give some vent to people's material aspirations. In the case of the Chinese communist experience, Mao's death and Deng's regaining of power in 1978 signalled such a change of direction with which much of the obsolete utopian social engineering and politics-in-command guideline were dismissed in order to ensure the survival of the Party-state [cf. 2.2].

### **5.1.3 The Adoption of A Market-Oriented Approach**

Given the Dengist commitment to modernising China, and considering the reality of the unworkable socioeconomic structure on the one hand, and the general poverty (approx \$US 150 per capita GNP at the time of the late '70s) on the other, the paramount question facing Deng was: How could his reform programme be approached, even just in terms of capital accumulation? The choice was very limited and was determined to a large degree by the problem of the existing communist system itself. The market approach was thus rapidly introduced in an attempt to save a ruined economy and recurrent crisis stemming from the praxis of Party-state totalitarianism. Indeed, the new development strategy was now designed to proceed to the long-term assimilation into China's planned economy of such alien forces as private ownership, foreign investment, competition, commercialization etc. Therefore, the process of a prolonged period of quasi-capitalist economic development would certainly have deep influence and overwhelming impact on cultural production as well as communication industries.

With regard to the underdeveloped Chinese TV industry, the option of the new process can be narrowed down to the point of increased reliance on the market mechanism and commercial means in realizing capital accumulation for the growth of media industries. In this sense, the development of the Chinese



advertising industry is essential to this change. What we have witnessed, since 1979, is a new alien force headed by advertising and backed by international capitalism, entering the forbidden domains of Chinese mass media industries with television being seen as primary target, and beginning the process of commercialization.

## **5.2 THE GROWTH OF THE CHINESE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY**

### **5.2.1 Historical Background**

According to recorded materials, the original advertising in ancient China could be traced back to around 1,000 BC when goods displays, highflying banners, and street hawking were employed to promote sales or attract customers in trade fairs and some shop business activities. In a famous Song Dynasty (960 - 1279) painting "**Riverside Scene on Qingming Festival**", we can see shops have signboards of many shapes and colours with the names of the shops or the goods on sale. Before the nineteenth century, however, advertising development throughout Chinese history was slow and remained in its primitive stage. Signboards, highflying banners, shop decorations and brochures were the main forms of Chinese advertising (J.Liu, 1987:20-21).

It was not until the late nineteenth century when the western powers headed by the British and French forcefully entered China accompanied by, among many others, modern communication means such as newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasting, that a significant change in Chinese advertising took place. During the 1920s to the 1930s, an advertising industry started to flourish in China: most of the newspapers, radios, magazines and books carried a lot of commercial advertising with many of them chiefly relying on the income of advertising to run the media. For

instance, Shen Bao (Shanghai Journal) and Dagong Bao (L'impartial), the two most influential private-run newspapers prior to communist China, devoted half of their space (approximately 5-6 pages) to advertisements at that times. As the business grew, the first modern Chinese Advertising agency was set up in 1926. By 1946, there were about 100 advertising agencies, many of them foreign owned, operating in China, and the figure increased gradually reaching nearly 200 before 1949 (X.Zhang, 1990:127, X.Yu, 1991:19-20).

### **5.2.2 The Fate of Advertising in Mao's Era**

Commercial advertising in Mao's era was reduced to a minimum. In fact, the fate of advertising has proved an interesting and distinctive parameter through which a better reading of Communist deviance from and indifference towards capitalism can be reached. By 1956-1957 Chinese Communists accomplished so-called "socialist-ownership transformation" in which all private-owned business and industries were taken over by the state; as a result, Chinese private advertising agencies (e.g there were 108 in Shanghai before 1956) ceased to exist overnight. Moreover, commercial advertising activities were virtually forbidden from 1954 to 1978. In return, street hoardings were converted into "Political Slogan" or "Big Character" boards, and neon lamps, previously used for advertising products, were imprinted with mottoes such as "Long Live Chairman Mao" and "Long Live the Communist Party of China". Probably the activities most equivalent to advertising in Mao's era were promotions for the products of means of production and for cultural performances in libraries, cinemas and theatres which were seen as being harmless to socialism (G.Yu, 1986:2).

As the mediator between production (or, supply) and consumption (or, demand), advertising is always associated with the modern market economy and the mode of capitalist production. Under communism, therefore, abrogating advertising was perfectly



identified with its ideology as well as its centrally planned economy which had supported the former. In conjunction with this praxis, advertising of a commercial nature was made a social and political taboo, labelled as a "parasitic activity" and was firmly rejected in Mao's era. Indeed, when the Soviets in the late 1950s carefully reintroduced advertising on a limited scale, the Chinese not only remained unaffected, but also criticised it as further evidence of the development of Khrushchev-led Soviet revisionism (i.e deviating from Marxism-Leninism) and their the betrayal of socialism (G.Yu, 1986:2; R.Stross, 1990:489).

However, as we discussed above, post-Mao China's new leadership has concluded that the only way to maintain power now lies in taking advantage of whatever capitalism can offer to develop the Chinese economy; thus it is merely a matter of time before we see a revival of the Chinese advertising industry.

### **5.2.3 Rehabilitating Credit of Advertising in Post-Mao China**

The acceptance of advertising in communist China was not only an economic matter, but also, and probably more importantly, a politico-ideological one. As a common communist saying has it: everything is impossible unless it is grounded in the "correct Marxist thinking ". Thus, prior to its practice, restoring the credit of the use of advertising in post-Mao China was very much a political task pertinent to the maintenance of communist power. Needless to say, this had to be done through the re-interpretation campaign employed by the Party's mass media.

The first significant move towards rehabilitation came on January 14, 1979, in a commentator's article of the very influential Shanghai-based newspaper Wenhui Daily, headed "Reinstating the Proper Credit of Advertising". The author, Ding Yunpeng, claimed that advertising in capitalist countries had contributed to their economic successes and deserved study in socialist countries too. As the title already shows, the article argued that advertising



had many positive functions in the service of the current modernization program (cf. R.Stross, 1990:485-486). In supporting this commentary, a major trade journal of the media pointed out that advertising can be used to "promote the production of society, and to meet the material and cultural needs of the people" (Journalism Front, 6/1979:55). In a similar vein, editorials in the Party's People's Daily, barely veiled its enthusiasm for advertising. Boldly enough, it was concluded that commercial advertising should be introduced without delay to bridge gaps "between production and marketing" and to speed up "the flow of commodities". It was also proclaimed that advertising was a very "necessary" requirement for establishing "a prosperous and active market" in modern socialist China (People's Daily, Oct.1.1979). It seemed that the tone which was set to justify the merit of advertising during that period was mainly concerned with its economic advantages in guiding social needs.

1982 saw the complete legitimization of the reintroduction of advertising to China. The State Council, China's Cabinet, issued China's first advertising regulation, the "Provisional Regulation for Advertising Management", on February 6, 1982. It includes nineteen articles in which the aims of advertising are propounded:

- 1) Promote and expand the circulation of goods;
- 2) Guide the consumers;
- 3) Enliven the economy;
- 4) Offer conveniences to the life of the people;
- 5) Develop international economic relations and trade;
- 6) Enhance socialist moral standards.

The regulation also stipulates some codes for conducting the business --- that the truth must be ensured in advertising, that perpetrators of false advertisements will be obliged to bear the losses of users and consumers, that food and medicine can only

be advertised with certified approval from the authorities concerned, and that private citizens are not allowed to engage in the business. It also empowers the authorities to impose penalties on advertisers found violating the rules. These may include revoking licenses and temporarily shutting down the company concerned (cf. Beijing Review, Jan.7.1982:6-7; Central Administration for Industry and Commerce, 1982; S.Seligman, 1984:13-14).

In many respects, the first regulation remained in its premature stage. Nevertheless, China's fledgling advertising industry had at last come out of the politico-ideological shadow and was fully accepted by the Party and society. Since then, the rapidly growing industry has played an increasingly important role in reshaping China's communications structures in general, and the television industry in particular. This will be explored below.

#### **5.2.4 Rapid Development**

As China's economy is gathering momentum towards marketization and monetization, commercial advertising has been strikingly successful. Since 1982, the Chinese advertising business has become one of the top growth industries with overall 30%-50% increase in demand annually. By 1982 the total turnover of the advertising industry had reached 150 million Chinese Yuan; four years later, in 1986, the volume of the business had increased fivefold to 845 million Yuan. In 1992, the total billings further increased to 6,780 million Yuan. This figure roughly accounted for 0.3% of China's GNP. Of course, compared with 1% of the level of industrialized countries, the scale of China's advertising is still very small but the pace of its growth is fast increasing. Today, advertising is becoming ubiquitous in China.

Among the domestic sales, the largest category of advertising business is now from consumer products. In 1990, for example, these accounted for 47% of total advertising spending, increasing



by 9% compared with 38% in 1982; the percentage of nonconsumer goods (e.g machinery, equipment) dropped from 35% in 1982, to 25.8% in 1990, with a speedy growth applied to service areas such as insurance, tourism and banking (cf. China Industry & Commerce Newspaper, 30.11.1991; Y.Xu, 1990:307-309; H.Jin, 1991; Z.Guo, 1988:20-21; S.Seligman, 1984:12-16).

Meanwhile, the establishment of various advertising agencies has also mushroomed throughout China, as the industry has quickly become an important part of the emerging structure of China's new market-oriented economy. The first few advertising firms were set up in Shanghai and Tianjin in 1979 and the business soon spread to other cities with a heavy concentration in the prosperous south-eastern coastal regions. Whereas in 1980 there had been only 10 advertising agencies in China, by 1991 there were over 12,800 agencies in operation employing a total of 132,400 people (People's Daily, 21.8.1992). In 1986, China's first multinational joint venture in advertising was established and the figure increased to 14 in 1991. Today, the industry does business with 1,076 Chinese newspapers, 2,197 magazines, over 500 radio stations and 500 TV stations which are said to reach more than 80% of Chinese population (S.Seligman, 1984:12-17; Y.Zhi, 1990:15, H.Jin, 1991).

The fast development of the Chinese advertising industry in the last decade has been closely linked with the overall progress of China's market-oriented economic reform. The manufacturers now have to market most of their products and therefore, as the new popular saying has it, "Run an advertisement somewhere, and you can expect production to go up in no time" (Beijing Review, No.22, 1987:20). In the booming south-east China, it is reported that spending on advertising accounts for 3-4% of the annual sales values of many enterprises (L.Zhang, 1990:16). During the period of the 1990 Asian Games in Beijing, for example, Jianlibao Drink Co of Guangdong Province spent 15 million yuan advertising its products (ibid). The following table provides the official statistics of the overall growth of China's advertising industry



between 1979 to 1991 except for 1980 when data was unavailable.

**Table 5.1**

**THE GROWTH OF CHINA'S ADVERTISING INDUSTRY (1979 - 1991)**  
(in million of Chinese Yuan\*)

Year	Turnover	% increase	No.of Agencies	Employees
1979	8 (est)		10	N/A
1981	N/A		2,100	16,000
1982	150		N/A	N/A
1983	234		2,500	30,000
1984	365	56%	4,000	50,000
1985	605	65.7%	6,000	60,000
1986	845	39.7%	7,000	81,000
1987	1,112	31.6%	8,000	90,000
1988	1,602	44%	9,000	100,000
1989	2,000	24.8%	10,000	110,000
1990	2,500	25%	10,950	125,000
1991	3,500	40%	12,860	132,400
1992	6,780	94%	16,600	185,000

\* Note: US\$ --- Chinese Yuan exchange rate:

\$1 = 1.9 Yuan in 1982, 3.0 in 1985, 3.7 in 1988 and 4.8 in 1990

Source: Beijing Review, 1987 No.22, pp 20; China Market, 1990 No.12, pp 15-19; China Advertising Association (cf. H.Jin,1991), People's Daily, 9.5.1991; The China Business Review, May-June 1986:9-10; China Times (Weekly), 21.6.1992, No.25, pp64; People's Daily, 21.8.1992; also based on estimates drawn from government agency and academic researches.

As can be seen from Table 5.1, the rapid rise of the Chinese advertising industry in the last decade is following its own logic to achieve autonomy and economic power. Functioning as a bridge between communication media outlets on the one hand and

manufacturers needing to advertise on the other (Leiss et.al, 1990:160), advertising in post-Mao China, has thus created an increasingly reliable alternative base for the economic survival of the mass media, gradually transforming the nomenklatura framework into a more pluralistic structure with the implementation of the market mechanism to serve a commercial interest other than the Party's. In this sense, one man's new power is another's abandonment of old praxis. Meanwhile, with China's door opening ever wider, foreign advertising agencies have quickly stepped in recognising the attraction of a huge potential long-term market. Consequently, the introduction and expansion of overseas advertising, along with its massive hard currency, has increasingly become a business posing irresistible temptations.

#### **5.2.4 Foreign Trade Advertising**

As early as 1979, a group of US advertising experts was invited for the first time to communist China (to Beijing and Shanghai) to offer their know-how to their Chinese counterparts. Delegates included advertising executives from N.W Ayer, ABH International, Compton Ad. Inc, and Doyle Dane Bernbach International, Inc. all large professional firms. Also in the same year, the first foreign advertising agency was set up in Beijing to deal with the business from overseas customs, while a major Japanese advertising firm, Dentsu, reached an agreement with the Shanghai Advertising Corporation to promote the sale of Japanese goods. The largely unexploited and potentially huge Chinese market had caught the eye of the international capitalism. As a result, more and more transnational agencies led by Japan and America, moved in to occupy a place in the newly-born Chinese advertising market. By 1986 many leading international firms including Young & Rubican, Dentsu, Saatchi, Burson Marsteller, Hill and Knowlton, J.W. Thompson and Ogilvy Group, all had their branches in China (cf. S.Seligman, 1984; 1986). Their confidence was apparently grounded on the successful experience of the Japanese, who had



spent a great deal of money and energy in promoting their products in China. For instance, by 1987 over 87% of China's colour televisions, 68% of its refrigerators, and 63% of its vehicles were Japanese imports; and Japan's goods accounted for 37% of the total import products to China (O.Shell, 1988:344; H.Ma, 1991). Others soon followed suit: General Foods successfully introduced its Maxwell House Instant Coffee and the synthetic orange drink, "Tang" to the Chinese masses in the late 1980s. There was even rivalry in advertising between Kodak and Fuji and Nescafe and Maxwell House (O.Shell, 1988:345; P.Dunnett, 1990:185).

In the meantime, the amount of foreign advertising trade increased steadily. It was reported that, in 1979, China's advertising sales to foreign clients was about US\$2 million (Journalism Quarterly Spring/1982:45). By 1982, it grew into a US\$ 7.7 million business, and the figure reached US\$ 20 million in 1985, roughly accounting for 10% of China's total advertising revenue (S.Seligman, 1984; 1986). In 1986, the Beijing Advertising Corporation alone grossed US\$ 5 million from running advertising for foreign companies (Beijing Review, No.22, 1987:19). In recent years it has stood at a volume of US\$ 40 million. However, from mid-1989 immediately after the Tianamen massacre, to mid-1991, the number of foreign advertisements in China substantially decreased with annual business values of only about US\$ 25/30 million. As far as advertising spending on the medium is concerned, television is the most favoured of all media by foreign clients. In 1987, for instance, American advertisers alone put some US\$16 million of commercials on the Chinese television. However, Japan has been the biggest foreign advertising supplier, contributing over 60% of the total foreign business revenues (Data provided by the Advertising Dept. of China Administration for Industry and Commerce, in interview with the author, Beijing, Oct.1990). Table 5.2 gives the 1988 figures of the top eight foreign advertising sales in China, indicating this trend.



**Table 5.2**  
**Top Foreign Spenders on Advertising in China ( 1988 )**  
(in British sterling)

Company	Total ( £ )	TV Out of Total
Toshiba	107,498	72.86%
Hitachi	99,849	63.83%
NEC	90,556	75.72%
Nestle	54,037	100%
Casio	51,003	47.45%
Mitsubishi	45,909	48.05%
Ricoh	45,202	69.51%
Kodak	41,756	100%

Source: Marketing Week March 23, 1989:42.

#### 5.2.5 The "Demonstration Effect"

The growing influence of foreign advertising, together with other western trends ranging from numerous consumer goods, technology, education, cultural productions to the value system itself, has inevitably evoked a general phenomenon called the "demonstration effect" --- a powerful image demonstrating the higher standard of living and consumption in developed western society. This thereby tends to increase the dissatisfaction amongst members of other societies with the way in which they live and with what they are and thus stimulates people's tendency to demand a higher level of consumption in the less developed countries. Within this scenario, transnational advertising is often charged with being a kind of Trojan Horse undermining the social, political and economic developments of the society in question (cf. H. Schiller, 1969; F. Inglis, 1972; Leiss et al., 1990; K. Frith & M. Frith, 1990).

While accepting in some respects the validity of this point, however, it seems to me that this "demonstration effect" in the context of China, contributed to the process of liberating people from totalitarian communist rule. In this way, it has some positive functions. Prior to Deng's open door policy, for nearly three decades (1949-1978), under the Chinese communist governance, the living standard of the Chinese people had been kept at a subsistence level. As wages were frozen and all staples were strictly rationed, people were denied most modern consumer goods. They suffered from both material poverty and political purges. In 1978, for example, when most of the households in Taiwan and Hong Kong owned a colour TV set, only one black-and-white TV was available for every 330 people in mainland China; in 1980, when disposable income reached US\$ 1,161 per capita in Taiwan, the figure in mainland China was about US\$ 150 per capita --- only 13% of that of the Taiwan's (cf. C.Cheng, 1990:21; A.Liu, 1988:23).

Once the "demonstration effect" exercises its converting power by, among many other things, western commercials, it becomes all too clear that the confidence of "the superiority of the socialist system", which the communist regime had consistently inculcated among the Chinese people, has been totally shaken by the consequences of the failure of the one time all-powerful might of the Party's propaganda work. In the first place, however, with the isolation of China, the Party to a large degree successfully convinced the Chinese people that they were living in the best society that mankind could ever have; and that people in the western world, by contrast, suffered from an abyss of misery with the general crisis and imminent collapse of the capitalism. Now, all this propaganda indoctrination has suddenly been exploded by the "demonstration effect" and the subsequent general disenchantment with communist praxis. Indeed, the open door also nailed the Party's ideological lie so that the ruling legitimacy was irremediably damaged. As Chinese people consume more information from the outside world, they become more anxious



to change their own primitive and impoverished conditions. As a result, they start to repudiate past experience and eventually demand a fundamental political reform.

### **5.3 OPENING UP PANDORA'S BOX: Commercials and Chinese TV**

"Commercialization in Chinese television is just like opening up a "Pandora's Box", the negative effects of which, such as growing sex and violence on the screen, you cannot control" (Prof. Cao Lu, Broadcasting researcher, in interview with the author, Beijing, September 1990).

"Our objective is to find effective ways to promote the development of Chinese television and to get the money to do so even if it means to harm or sacrifice some doctrine. We have no time to argue those "-isms" and would rather leave them to the older generation to discuss" (Wang Gongfa, administration officer of Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau, in a conversation with the author, Shanghai, October 1990).

"We all know that many viewers as well as some VIPs dislike commercials on the air. But, if you consider the simple fact that 30% to 70% of television revenue in major stations now comes from advertising and other forms of commercial sponsorship, then the question will be looked at in a different way. In effect, because the state was unable to give enough money to run a television service, the broadcasters have to turn their eyes on the market approach and the choice of introducing commercial



sponsors is largely pre-determined. Anyhow, this is a very necessary step towards the positive change in the nature and function of the Stalinist media model and no other alternative can be practically conceivable in the situation of China (e.g starting from "glasnost"). So, we should be happy with it" (Dr.Guo Zhengzi, broadcasting researcher, in a discussion with the author, Beijing, September 1990).

These are different views of the debate in response to the growing impact of commercialization on the Chinese TV industry. As far as the audience is concerned, the majority are in favour of television advertising, but most of them are dissatisfied with the quality of the advertising product. A 1987 survey conducted in Beijing revealed that 37.4% of the Beijing public relied on TV advertisements as their major access to consumer goods information; while only 11.4% was accounted for by press' advertisements and by 7.1% for radio's (Z.Liu & J.Wang, 1988:230). The results of the following opinion polls conducted on a nation wide scale in 1987, also confirmed this impression.

**Table 5.3**  
**TV Audience's Attitudes to Commercials ( 1987 )**  
Sampling No = 24,893

Attitudes	Overall (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
<b><u>General Preference</u></b>			
very necessary	20	20	20
necessary	55	55	54
unnecessary	25	25	25
<b><u>Ad. Quantity</u></b>			
not enough	2	1	2
just OK	25	24	26
too many	74	75	72
<b><u>Ad. Quality</u></b>			
good	22	20	26
just so-so	42	37	51
poor	36	43	23

Source: 1987 National TV Audience Survey, in A Collection of the Chinese Media Surveys, 1989:367.

### 5.3.1 TV Industry: Heading for New Command of Commercial Power

When the first advertisement in Chinese history was shown on the Shanghai TV screen in January 1979, no one could possibly have known what sort of domino effect it would have upon the formulation of commercial television in post-Mao China. In effect, the majority of people at the time were still preoccupied with the thought that commercials belonged to capitalist parasitism, or a kind of "Pandora's Box". Constrained by the contradiction between the state's economic inability and the popular desire to expand the television service, however, the success of the TV development strategy was to put more emphasis on self-reliance with an incentive to generate large financial

resources beyond those of the state. In other words, it is now necessary to reorganise television as an industry incorporating commercial forces. In fact, as China has embarked on reconstructing its economy since 1979, the progress of market involvement in Chinese television has been so fast that commercial sponsors, particularly via advertising, are becoming a major driving force behind the industry. As a result, the performance of Chinese television has moved decisively beyond the original paradigm of politics-in-command and the laws of commodity production have played an increasingly important role in reshaping the industry in response to the need for capital accumulation and the market demand.

Before 1979, Chinese television has never carried a single advertisement and revenue necessary to run the service came entirely from the state budget. Now a large proportion of television programming revenue ranging from 30% to 70% for hundreds of Chinese TV stations is being funded by advertising and other trade activities (Z.Guo, 1988:20-22). China's state TV station -- China Central Television (CCTV), for instance, requires at least 75/80 millions Chinese yuan (approx US\$ 20 mil in 1988 exchange rate) to run two major channels each year; and only receives one quarter of this, about 20/22 million yuan, from the central government annually; it has to, and is also able to, obtain up to 65/70 million yuan from advertising alone (data provided by Hong Minsheng, the deputy director of CCTV, in interview with the author, Beijing, October 1990). This presents a striking contrast to (the former USSR and now) Russia. In 1991, the advertising revenue only comprised 4% of the state television company's annual budget. Even more commercial-oriented media, until recently have been getting no more than 10% of their revenue from advertising (A.Izyumov, 1992:33).

The following table provides figures for ten top central and regional stations with the volume of advertising business against the revenue from the governmental budget. The tendency is now for the development of Chinese television to become increasingly



dependent on commercial involvement backed by advertising. The changing economic position of the Chinese TV structure indicates that the market now has increasing power to regulate the industry. In this way, commercialization of Chinese television is well underway.

**Table 5.4**  
**Top Ten Stations: Advertising and State Revenue ( 1989 )**  
(in million of Chinese yuan)

Station	Ad.Income	Government Income
Central TV Station (CCTV)	62	22
Guandong Provincial TV Station	32.5	15 (est)
Shanghai Municipal TV Station	28	18
Beijing Municipal TV Station	12.6	7 (est)
Zhejiang Provincial TV Station	10.4	6.5
Tianjin Municipal TV Station	10.2	8
Fujian Provincial TV Station	7.8	8 (est)
Shandong Provincial TV Station	7.5	10
Sichuan Provincial TV Station	7.3	10 (est)
Liaoning Provincial TV Station	6.4	6

Sources: China Market, 12/1990:15; The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting (1991); Cultural Economy and Cultural Management: A survey on Shanghai cultural economy and administrative policy (1989); also draw from personal communications with the authorities concerned.

In retrospect, the brevity of the pioneering phase and its achievements are quite remarkable. The first TV ads. was produced and appeared on the screen at 17:05 on the Day of the Chinese New Year, January 28 1979. It was an advertisement for a famous Chinese medicinal liquor and lasted one minute and thirty seconds. Nearly seven weeks later, the Shanghai TV Station took another brave step in broadcasting the first foreign commercials.

At 18:51, on March 15, a one-minute advertisement for the Swiss-made wrist watch "Rado" was put out (cf. Shanghai Cultural Yearbook, 1987:133; F.Lin, 1988:54).

The first two advertisements, however, inevitably caused a sensation and controversy at that time. Zhou Fanyang, the man in charge of the Shanghai broadcasting service then, and the major advocate of TV advertising in China, was under heavy pressure from some orthodox people. He was accused of going a bit too far and possibly undermining the political nature of the mass media in China and the Party's control over them. At the same time, he also got some strong support both from within and without the Shanghai TV Station, and his Party boss even guaranteed that if anything went wrong, the station Party secretary himself rather than Mr.Zhou, would take full responsibility (interview with Mr.Zhou by the author, Shanghai, Oct.1990). Of course, this concern was understandable at that time, but later proved to be unnecessary. On the contrary, the new pragmatic ruling group was actually in favour of introducing the market approach to accumulate capital and deal with the long term stagnation of the industry. Besides, the choice was acceptable only because the leadership believed, at least then, that the approach required neither alterations in the role of the Party concerning the mass media nor demanded political changes. All in all they saw it as a useful method which could serve the modernization programme. In November 1979, therefore, the Party Propaganda Bureau which is in ultimate charge of media affairs, formally issued a document to approve this policy and permit commercial activities (mainly referred to as advertising here) in media operations (cf. The textbook: An Introduction to Journalism Theories, 1985:127).

In effect, TV advertising revenue was soon regarded and officially endorsed as the crucial financial resource for maintaining and developing the industry as a whole. By the mid-1980s CCTV, the provincial network and most of grassroots stations had established their advertisement departments (or sectors) dealing with the task of generating capital. Meanwhile,



there were many innovations in an attempt to work out a new financial framework to run television. In October 1984, for instance, CCTV was endorsed to conduct a pilot scheme on how financial arrangement with state funding and commercial revenue should be settled. As a result, CCTV signed a contract with the state treasury, claiming full financial responsibility for either loss or profit provided a three-year fixed state budget (cf. The Advancement of Chinese Television, 1991:106-107; Hong Minsheng also provided information about the issue, in interview with the author, Beijing, October 1990). However, it should be pointed out that technological investment and construction of a Chinese station's infrastructure still relies on government appropriation.

The officially-endorsed policy "to get money from the marketplace, not from the state" has, in fact, not only pushed the industry into the commercial battlefield, but also inspired the initiative of many stations and broadcasters. Shanghai TV network may prove to be typical and one of the most successful among them. Its advertising revenues increased to a great degree from 0.49 million yuan in 1979 to 170 million in 1992 (see table 5.5). It has also been reported very recently that the Shanghai Broadcasting Authority has been blueprinting a new fully commercialized television service; this proposal suggests the creation of a "share-financed" television station (Gu-fen-tai), named "The Oriental Television Station". Its setting up and operation are to be entirely funded by the selling of shares and generating advertising profits, virtually stripping away all state financial support. By the end of 1992, the initial shares of the Oriental TV Station were issued and the station began to offer some services (information provided by a staff reporter from Shanghai TV, who is currently visiting the UK; also China Times Weekly, No.55, 17.1.-23.1.1993:74-75).



Table 5.5

**Advertising Revenues in Shanghai TV Network ( 1979 -- 1992 )**  
(in million of Chinese Yuan)

Year	Domestic Ad.	Foreign Ad.
1979	0.49	
1980	1.39	
1981	1.63	
1982	2.32	
1983	3.20	
1984	5.10	
1985	6.48	0.957
1986	12.27	2.24
1987	15.01	1.89
1988	18.51	2.59
1989	26.60	3.13
1990	30.00	4.50
1992*	170 (including foreign Ad. income)	

\* 1992 figure is cited from China Times Weekly, No.55, 17.1-23.1, 1993:74.

Source: Collection of Reference Materials on Shanghai Radio & TV, for the figure of 1979 to 1983; the rest data are provided by the Shanghai Broadcasting Authority.

As commercials have become an indispensable condition for running a television service, the trading volume has grown rapidly. In 1979, only 3.25 million Chinese yuan of advertising business went into the TV industry. In the next decade, the business increased at an annual rate of 50-60 percent, and reached 561 million yuan in 1990. With the volume of another 91 million yuan of commercials on the radio broadcasting included, advertising sales in Chinese broadcasting accounted for more than 26% of the total China advertising turnover in 1990. The figure is roughly equal to that of the press (27% of the total). Table 5.6 gives

the annual figures of the successive growth of commercials in Chinese broadcasting from 1979 to 1990. As can be seen from the Table 5.6, in recent years, television has become the top medium in attracting advertising investment from both domestic and foreign clients (see for example, Table 5.2), and its increase rate of advertising sales has been accelerating with the highest speed compared with that of all other major media.

**Table 5.6**  
**Growth of Advertising Sales in Broadcasting ( 1979 - 1990 )**  
(in million of Chinese Yuan)

Year	TV	% of total	Radio	% of total
1979	3.25		N/A	
1982	10	6.5%	N/A	
1983	16.2	6.9%	18.1	7.7%
1984	34	9.3%	23.2	6.4%
1985	68.7	11.4%	26.7	4.4%
1986	115.1	13.6%	35.6	4.2%
1987	169.3	15.3%	47.2	4.2%
1988	271.8	17%	70.3	4.4%
1989	361.2	18.1%	74.6	3.7%
1990	561	22.4%	91.4	3.7%

Source: same as table 5.1.

In order to protect the domestic advertising market and earn more hard foreign currency, China opted for a "dual price" policy in which the cost of foreign commercials on Chinese television is usually five to eight times dearer than that of domestic ones, based on the different scales of audience penetration. The ratio of one slot in a national peak-time TV show, for instance costs just around US\$ 2 cent for 1,000 viewers but could cover more than 700 million audience in China. Table 5.7 summarizes the category of the spot advertising price in Chinese television. In

recent years, the price has seen some changes because of inflation and the devaluation of the Chinese currency, but the basic charge scale and the rate system remain the same.

**Table 5.7**  
**Advertising Charges in Chinese Television ( 1988 )**  
(in US dollar)

Channel Level	To Foreign Client	To Domestic Client
	A 30-second spot	A 30-second spot
<u>National (CCTV) *</u>		
non-peak time	\$4,000	\$700/\$900
peak time	\$6,000/\$7,000	\$1,200/\$1,500
<u>Regional Channel</u>		
non-peak time	\$2,500/\$3,000	\$500
peak time	\$3,500/\$4,500	\$800/\$1,000
<u>Local Channel</u>		
all the time	various/negotiable	\$100/\$400

\* According to the latest report, from January 1993, CCTV increased the advertising rate by 100%, especially its 19:35-19:40 "best golden time of advertising" from \$US1,750 **per second** to \$US4,400 **per second** applied both to foreign and domestic clients (Sing Tao Daily, 13.1.1993).

Source: mainly based on interview materials from Hong Minsheng, deputy director of CCTV, in Beijing, October 1990; Dr Guo Zhengzi, broadcasting researcher, in Beijing, September 1990.

So far we have mainly examined the central role of a flourishing advertising business in the process of reorganizing the Chinese TV industry. At the same time, it should be noted that there are many other forms of commercial sponsors and business engaged in the TV industry. Because of the difficulty of collecting information, it has not been possible to analyze the performance



of the non-advertising business in detail. In general, however, the development of these commercial activities has become more vigorous as the structure of the national economy has been directed towards commodity production. Chief among them are the business of audio-visual products run by stations, and bargains with foreign companies (a subject to be covered later on). There are clear signs that the volume of non-advertising transactions in the TV industry is steadily growing with an estimated proportion of 20% to 50% of overall business turnover. In Shanghai, for instance, between 1984 to 1988, about 48 million yuan of non-advertising commercial income went to Shanghai radio and television stations. This figure accounted for 36.4% of the total commercial billings. Another conspicuous example comes from Jilin province where, in 1987, the non-advertising commercial income reached over 10 million yuan, accounting for 64% of the total business turnover (cf. The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991:397; also interview with Wang Gongfa, Shinahai, October 1990).

### **5.3.2 The Current Situation of Chinese TV Financing**

Since we cannot obtain the data for the state budget or local authorities spending on Chinese television (since the 1983 decentralization policy, the disposal of money for local stations has been referred to the local authorities), we are not in a position to show, by employing the necessary break-down statistics, how far the on-going commercialization of the Chinese TV industry has progressed now, or, to what extent the industry is dominated by commercial forces. According to one figure released in an official publication, the overall broadcasting revenue (they include wire and wireless broadcasting, external broadcasting and television) from central and local governments reached about 2,200 million yuan in 1989 (The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991:7). To the best of my knowledge, around 50% of the total revenue for Chinese broadcasting would be spent on television development and nearly

one-third of the total TV revenue (i.e 1,100 mil) actually went to the construction of station infrastructure which normally belongs to investment projects separated on the budget spending list. The cost of the remainder would be mainly divided into four parts: 1) service maintenance, 2) staff wages, 3) technology investment and equipment renewal, and 4) programming production. According to recent experiences of major stations, the state revenue could barely meet the needs of the first two parts, while in the case of the third and the fourth part spending largely came from various forms of commercial income, particularly advertising sales, which stood at 361 million yuan in 1989 and 561 million yuan in 1990. In this sense, we can reasonably conclude that commercial revenue plays a crucial role in Chinese TV production and its impact will have long term effect in changing the nature of the media model in communist China. As a result, we would argue that the introduction of the market mechanism has not only redistributed the resources of the TV industry, but also drastically altered the medium from a non-economic entity -- the Party's political instrument -- towards a new business-like industry.

#### **5.4 IMPACT ON PROGRAMME TRADE AND PROGRAMME STRUCTURE**

It has become evident that, with the on-going media commercialization and rapid change in cultural consumption, the TV industry has also switched on its programming production and structure in response to the emerging market formation. In that process, there are two main market factors at work, which have demonstrated a viable commercial nature: Firstly, with China joining the world cultural market, foreign advertisers and other businesses concerned have become involved as the main suppliers of large amounts of foreign programmes; secondly, domestic commercial sponsorship has become a major form



in TV production with particular reference to entertainment-related programming.

#### **5.4.1 Joining the World Cultural Market**

With the global cross-industry expansion movement, market forces tend to produce two economic consequences with respect to cultural production: (1) Cultural production is bound to integrate into capitalist industry; (2) The surplus of capital flux in the world cultural market is constantly seeking to expand its power globally with a special interest in exploiting those untapped or potential markets. In the contemporary world, television is of particular importance in facilitating the targeting goals set by the transnational media organizations to pursue their global marketing interests. Because of the medium's high technology concentration and high spending on production with the unique nature of its cultural commodity in terms of its immateriality and public good characteristics, there is a general tendency within the national TV industry towards the process of integration of the world cultural market led by the western industrialized nations. The growing transactions of international TV products flowing from the West to the East, the North to the South, and the English speaking countries to the non-English speaking world, reflect this trend (cf. J.Tustall, 1977; H.Schiller, 1984; R.Collins, 1989; R.Collins, N.Garnham and G.Locksley, 1988).

As for the case of China, two important considerations further impelled the industry to join the world cultural market: one is the conflict between the enormous pressure from the public for increasing the service and the decreasing TV revenue from the state with the demand of the resulting programme deficit being met; the other is the extremely popular appeal of western audio-visual products with the relatively cheap price (e.g just about US\$ 500 for a 50 min TV drama, at about 20% of the domestic production cost) and flexible purchase methods (e.g on a barter



basis). According to a pro-official explanation, there are four purposes for importing foreign programming. The priority in practice is to fill the increasingly expanded airtime on television, and the remaining three to promote cultural exchange, to improve the quality of domestic-made programming, and to diversify TV programmes (X.Lu, 1990:8-9). Thus, since 1979, a gathering momentum towards active transaction within the world cultural market has been clearly perceived in the outlets of the Chinese television service.

#### **5.4.2 Foreign Programme Trade**

In 1980, China Central Television (CCTV) started to broadcast a series of Japanese cartoons with programme-length commercials targeted at children. It was based on the barter agreement between Chinese stations and foreign agencies. Under such an arrangement Chinese stations are allowed to sell their advertising time to certain foreign companies in return for the free copyright of foreign programmes. The innovation of this barter system proved attractive and flexible with a transmission being provided ready-made to a television channel by an advertiser (or advertising agency) in exchange for advertising screentime instead of a cash deal (cf. A.Mattelart, 1991). This system is particularly favoured by the developing nations and now practised world wide. In the early 1980s, the strategy was also successfully used by western advertisers to enter the Chinese market.

Between 1982 and 1984, six American television companies made such contracts with CCTV. Cooperative deals of this type have, since then, been encouraged as the Chinese side obtained free foreign programmes without spending hard currency or even earning foreign money through selling air time to the foreign advertisers (S.Seligman, 1984:16-17). The success of the 1984 deal between CCTV and American's CBS Inc. further highlighted this promising business. According to the contract, CBS agreed to provide 64

hours of "off-the-shelf" programming from "60 Minutes", Dr. Seuss cartoons to NFL football to CCTV's network in exchange for 320 minutes of advertising time. CBS managed to sell 10 packages of 32 minutes advertising per annum at a flat rate of US\$ 300,000 to 9 foreign sponsors including several Fortune 500 firms; while CCTV took responsibility for marketing the air time and shared half of the revenue paid by the foreign advertisers. A dozen other foreign companies, mainly American, soon followed suit. Disney, for instance, contributed its universally acclaimed "Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck", RCA and Paramount Pictures with "Star Trek", 20 Century Fox with "To Be or Not to Be" (c/f Beijing Review, No.45, 1986:58; O.Schell, 1987; C.Schmuck, 1987).

Local stations also caught on to the idea. Guangdong, Shanghai, Tianjin, Sichuan and many others made deals with their freshly-discovered programme traders and advertisers. In 1986, for example, Lorimar-Telepictures, producers of "Dallas" and "Falcon Crest", signed an agreement with Shanghai trading 500 hours of American TV programming to Shanghai television in return for commercial time which it was entitled to sell to its clients (O.Schell, 1988:343). The Shanghai International TV Programming Trade, coincidentally with The Shanghai International TV Festival, has been held regularly every two years since 1986. The total of transactions often reached over US\$ 1 million (L.Xia, 1989:54). Between 1985 to 1986, national and local stations got 650 to 750 TV dramas or telefilms annually from overseas, and the number was reported to reach 1800 in 1988 (H.Cao, 1990:57). In the 1991 Sichuan international TV program trade fair, China bought over 1,900 foreign TV programmes ranging from TV dramas, soap series, documentaries to children's cartoons (People's Daily, 22.10.1991). These developments had a significant impact on the Chinese TV industry, pushing it to integrate with the world cultural market. As a result, the existing production relations dominated by the Party's monopoly power were sharply weakened, and the influence of "the demonstration effect" became very pervasive.



5.4.3 Orientation of Domestic Programme Production

As the Chinese TV industry opened up to the cultural market and commercial practices, it came into collision with the existing production structure of the former political and ideological mandate. Yet, with Party political power over the mass media still unchallengeable, it becomes all too clear that to develop an information-oriented service is more inconceivable than to develop an entertainment-oriented service. Thus the target of TV production is more likely to put emphasis on the entertainment side. In the last decade, Chinese television viewers have experienced the booms of the game show, the soap drama, the quiz-show and the audience-involvement contest. There has been a growing tendency towards commercially-backed entertainment. The trend is reflected in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

Comparison of TV Programming Structure in China in the 1980s

Nature of Program	8/9/10. 1981	1987	1988
News	6.8%	9.93%	8.9%
Entertainment	22.8%	64.25%	69.7%
Special Topic	12%	9.42%	8.5%
Education	29.2%	10.48%	6.5%
Public Service	N/A	5.56%	6.4%
Others	25% (est)	/	/

Source: For 8/9/10.1981, mainly from Zhuang, Introduction of Chinese Television, 1985:123. The statistics here mainly refer to national network, other data being unavailable. Programmes categorized as "other" include teaching courses. Statistics for 1987 provided by the Chinese Broadcasting Association, cf. InterMedia, Autumn 1988; for 1988, from the Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook (1989), pp 490.



The Chinese TV industry gradually came to appreciate the television programme as a kind of commodity (F.Zhong, 1988:22). Commercially-sponsored entertainment programmes, including the game show, soap drama and quiz show, have played a very important role in shaping the outlook of the network as a whole. In order to increase production capacity and diversify means of programmes, many commercial innovations were introduced. Take Shanghai television, for example: In 1984, the Shanghai Broadcasting Authority initiated a programming policy of what is called "using commercial means to support the production of quality programming". This included: (1) paid programme services, that is, for certain programmes, such as educational programme, the TV station is encouraged to co-sponsor productions with outside institutions related to the nature of programme, such as universities, scientific research institutions and some government agencies; (2) seeking financial sponsorship, both domestic and foreign, to assist entertainment programmes. In that case, the sponsoring bodies usually either donate an agreed sum of money or, in competition-oriented programmes such as game show and quiz show, provide products they manufacture as prize reward to the network. The sponsors, in return, receive publicity promoting not only their goods but also their public image, as programmes of this sort are mostly named after their sponsors; (3) setting up its own business company to sell audio-visual products (L.Xia, 1989:47-49; Shanghai Culture Yearbook, 1987:133).

Since 1984, most (entertainment-related) production has been largely funded either by enterprises' advertising revenue or other forms of commercial sponsorship. In TV drama production, for instance, China produced 2,700 TV dramas in 1989, 90% of them directly or indirectly sponsored by commercial or manufacturing sector. In 1992 Coca-Cola Corporation sponsored a Chinese television soap "Seahorse Bar", and the condition for signing that contract was that the Coca-Cola became the only soft drink available in the drama. Every time, according to the contract,

a character has a Coca-Cola, s/he must say "what a wonderful flavour it has", and this cost the Coca-Cola company \$US 80,000 in return (The Guardian, 19.2.1993:22). Since 1984, Shanghai TV Station has conducted many audience-participating competition shows, including "Casio Family Singing Contest", sponsored by the Casio Electric Organ Co., "Popular Singing Competition" by the Nescafe Company Ltd., and "Foreigners Singing Chinese Songs" sponsored by the local commercial sector (F.Lin, 1988:55-56).

In recent years, there has been some new development in programming production. Some television soap operas were produced by a group of independent screenwriters and producers. They have to make their soap operas popular in order to cover the entire production cost as well as to make profits. They now can directly sell their products to the TV station which bid highest price for that soap opera (personal communication with Professor Tong Bing, February, 1993).

## **5.5 A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: THE PROBLEMS OF COMMERCIALIZATION**

It would be unwise to assume that the market approach (and its accompanying commercialization) is a panacea. It has its own limitations and problems as many people, critical scholars in particular, have rightly analyzed. One of the consequences in Chinese television has been the growing and excessive power of commercialization without proper public regulation. As a result, the success of the process also tends to undermine itself. It has thus become a double-edged sword combining both the merit and vice of the market operation. On the one hand, it has shaken and reformed the Party dominance media model and produced a more dynamic structure largely subject to the "invisible" market hand rather than the Party's mandatory rule; on the other hand, sooner or later, it is bound to be dominated by the commercial principle



at the expense of social responsibility. China is no exception to the rule. Moreover, there is a potential conflict of cultural and economic interests between the national development and global capitalist expansion.

The growing commercial involvement in Chinese television within the framework of command institutions has made coexistence between the two extremely difficult. Their institutional incompatibility subverts further reform by either producing problems of runaway corruption or an effort to return to the past, both of which resolve nothing and cause serious social consequences. In addition, matters are easily aggravated by China's inefficiency and, compared to the West, a near-absence of a legal system to control commercial activity in the TV industry.

The emerging commercialism has created problems. The make-quick-money-or-quit approach, now widely spread throughout the industry, has contributed to a large degree to the deterioration of programming quality. In 1986, for instance, more than 500 TV dramas among 1,500 produced and submitted to CCTV that year were not passed for showing, most of them due to their inferior quality rather than the political and ideological concerns (China Film Weekly, 13.6.1987). As far as advertising concerned, it is not unusual now for fraudulent commercials to appear on the screen. Through their agents, many broadcasters and manufactures often co-operate closely with each other for the sake of their own profits. It is also not surprising to see that some TV dramas as well as many other TV products are now designed according to the sponsors' needs. Money has become the only thing that matters to some stations. Sex and violence are beginning to emerge on the screen in the battle to maximize the return on advertising sales; commercials continue sometimes for over 30 minutes non-stop (in some occasions even 40 minutes) in contravention of programming schedules in prime viewing time, regardless of numerous complaints from the audience. Currently the price for the domestic market has jumped from US\$100 to over US\$500 per minute



just for allowing a sponsor's self-made programme on the air. In order to find more money, many stations' authorities turn a blind eye to the question of corruption such as bribery, or granting a relatively high commission by Chinese standards to anyone who is able to make a deal. In many cases running the business all depends on how much money or how large a "gift" the clients have to bribe the broadcaster regardless of how the audience might suffer, provided those who profit from it keep quiet (the information provided by the broadcasters and researchers interviewed by the author in China September-October 1990).

As a matter of fact, the abuse of media power is happening not only in the broadcasting industry, but also in other mass media. However, these negative effects and limitations of the market approach are evident particularly in the context of a society where resource distribution is determined by the bizarre combination of the emerging market mechanism and the old nomenklatura apparatus. Indeed, the danger in undigested adoption of the market mechanism without instituting the essential political reform lies in its creating social injustice and building up social tension. It is, therefore, perfectly justified that, while the importance of the wealth-creating potential of the market approach in boosting the Chinese TV industry should not be underestimated, one must also bear in mind that a proper system to regulate the commercial performance in line with media democratization is urgently needed.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

Throughout the chapter, we have analyzed how the commercialization in Chinese television industry has changed the communist media structure and performance in an evolutionary way. We argue that the process of commercialization in the development

of Chinese television has had a profound effect in reshaping the resources distribution, programming production, financial expenditure and economic relations of communist media institutions. For such a purpose, we try to answer the question: What is the impetus to the reform movement of the Chinese TV industry in general, and to the changing media economic relations in particular? This is a question which is seldom addressed, but has significant implications in understanding (1) the unique nature of the Stalinist media model; (2) the validity of different approaches adopted by the different societies to develop the communication industries. We have illustrated and stressed the positive role of the market approach in the process of the breakdown of communist totalitarianism.

Meanwhile, we provide an alternative analysis with reference to the television case study in an attempt to demonstrate that, under the circumstances of Deng's particular style of reform and the context of Chinese society, China has created its own pattern of social structural transformation that is distinctive from that of other communist or pre-communist states. We also address the problems and flaws of commercialization, and by no means do we regard the market mechanism as the only solution to solve the problems. Commercialism has indeed created certain serious consequences, but it may be the only feasible way, under the present conditions, to successfully transform a communist society to a more open and liberal one through "peaceful evolution", not "bloody revolution". In this way, it is a price we may have to pay in order to achieve such an objective. Therefore, accusations of any kind concerning this matter will not justify turning the clock back to the Mao's era. While the issue of regulating media performances and overcoming the problems brought about by the commercialization, in both legal and professional terms, needs to be addressed, the underlying tendency of current media commercialization is likely to lead to the emergence of less ideological control and a more dynamic media system in China.



## CHAPTER SIX

### TELEVISION: THE CULTURAL FORUM AND SOCIAL CHANGES

#### --- The case of the TV series "River Elegy"

The coming of television in China has had a profound impact on social changes within society. As a potent cultural forum, television is the electronic amplification of social contradiction. Its rapid development has fostered cultural pluralism and contributed to the decline of the Party cultural monopoly in a way that is related to the nature of cultural production and the television medium itself. While television reflects social changes, television in China also facilitates social changes in a direction that is beyond the control of the dictatorship and towards the process of democratization. The case of the TV series "River Elegy" in the late 1980s of China, illustrates this trend to a great extent, and thus highlights the plight of the Party media institution.

But, how can television do so? What is the relationship between television performance and culture? To some extent, if we see television programmes (as well as other media offered services and messages) as a cultural performance, then, what is the nature of cultural production and its materialized cultural products? In an abstract sense, any human product possesses value. From the political economy point of view, under the condition of the commodity production system, specifically, the modern capitalism system, a cultural product is also a commodity, and as such, it has use-value and exchange-value. Within that given system, the importance of the dichotomy of use-value and exchange-value reflects the existing social relations of the capital and labour



division that to a large degree determines the formation of cultural performance, and the form of cultural management. By contrast, in a non-commodity production environment, in this case, the Soviet model system, the commodity nature of cultural performance is absent, and its cultural production is thus determined by Party monopoly power. So, what is the nature of cultural products concerned with that society? How is the phenomenon of Soviet cultural production formed and maintained? And what is its material base? What, coupled with the operation of the social system, is the relationship between cultural production and the Party's political management (i.e the Party cultural hegemony)? and finally, and probably more relevantly, how, after a decade of Deng's reform program, to what extent the cultural performance has been changed in the post-Mao China?

Crucially, these questions are embedded in questions concerning the structure of social relations and attached to some key development of the social formation. In this chapter, therefore, I devote my attention to discussing these issues. In part One, I attempt to establish my theoretical framework by examining some key lineaments of the nature of cultural production on the one hand, and the role of the mass media (i.e in this case, mainly television) on the other. Within that framework, part Two is the case study of the TV series "River Elegy" that focuses on television performance in the context of social transformation in post-Mao China. Finally, I explore the underlying contradiction of media behaviour within the reforming structure of Chinese commercial communism in the Deng's era by making an inquiry into the institutional change in part Three.

## 6.1 MEDIA PERFORMANCE AND CULTURE PRODUCTION

### 6.1.1 Problematic Cultural Identification

In a Party dominated, established communist state, the role of culture and cultural management are primarily identified with instrumental utility in the service of the Party's needs, and essentially regarded as a political and ideological matter. Accordingly, official culture with its sanctioned forms is the one and only legitimized culture that is exclusively elaborated and developed by the authorities. In the light of this cognition, "the purpose of cultural activities," declared by the Chinese Communist Party when deciding on the culture programme, "is to enhance the people's socialist consciousness and foster communist ethics and love for the motherland so as to work for the cause of socialism and help bring up a new generation" (Beijing Review, Oct.12. 1981:9).

However, the nature of culture and the complicated relationship between cultural activities and the institutional means of the cultural management suggest that the above mentioned cultural identification in the Party-state is fraught with problems and more likely to produce counter-effects. The fallacy of this understanding and approach is obvious. Culture is not singular, unified and univocal. On the contrary, it is multiple, divergent, creative and various. "Culture is above all the sphere for the expression of difference " (N.Garnham:1990:161). Therefore, it can never be managed by mandatory power or authority. Moreover, the validation of this point is reinforced by the material forms that culture takes, the communication that culture performs and the messages that culture transmits.



### 6.1.2 Television As Cultural Medium

Culture is a process of communication which can be hardly one-sidedly determined and interpreted. To some extent, modern culture is also a mediated culture which is intimately related to the performance of the mass media; whereas the media are the means to materialize cultural development through the creative activities of human beings in its broadest sense. The message owner, the message producer, the message sender and the message receiver are all involved in the interlocking dialectic process of construction, cooperation, conflict and confrontation. It is through these institutional practices and contradictory development that the ultimate outcome is achieved. In this way, the relationship between the cultural performance and the media conduct has become ever more sophisticated and multidimensional (cf. D.McQuail, 1992).

The television medium, for instance, is embodied in a process of "an electronic amplification of contradiction" (a term cited from J.Lull, 1991). On the one hand, the programmes that the medium provides would certainly be influenced, benefited and fostered to a large degree by the dominant powers, social elites and economic sponsors. It thus tends to produce intended effects to confirm the existing social order as already concluded by many western critical scholars. On the other hand, even in the most controlled society, it is not possible for television to deliver programmes that can only be defined, perceived or identified in one way to serve the designed purpose. As J.Lull pointed out, how people interpret television's messages do not simply reflect the aims of the producers and the apparent implications of programs do not necessarily reveal the meanings that audience take away from viewing (J.Lull, 1991:214). Therefore, such targeting effects can never be approached without facing constant challenges or potential subversive consequences. In the long-term, therefore, the effectiveness of strict control employed by the coercive methods (e.g censorship, decree) on television is fatefully fraught with troubles and inclined to be unworkable.



One of the pivotal facts which contribute to this phenomenon is that the broadcasters, while they control the discourse, are unable to control the context. In addition, they cannot control the way that audiences will react on their programmes (P.Scannell, 1989:149; J.Lull, 1991). Because of these intrinsic restrictions, there is a tendency for communicators to affiliate to the situation of their audience; and adjust media performance with those circumstances (P.Scannell, *ibid.*). Thus the practice of the television medium, whilst generally influenced by the macro social and cultural movements and largely determined by the particular pattern of the socio-economic system, tends to be diverse, provocative and contradictory. This is the case even under highly-controlled circumstances. As Newcomb and Hirsch perceptively put it:

In its role of central cultural medium (television) presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic dominate view. It often focuses on our most prevalent concerns, our deepest dilemmas. Our most traditional views, those that are repressive and reactionary, as well as those that are subversive and emancipatory, are upheld, examined, maintained, and transformed. The emphasis is on process rather than product, on discussion rather than indoctrination, on contradiction and confusion rather than coherence (1986:62).

To sum up, I suggest that television can act as a two-edged sword to produce both intended-and-unintended and desired-and-undesired effects; that, with the characteristics of being multipolar, lightning-fast and polysemic, the cultural identification of electrical media performance is closely associated with the diversity of human sentiments as well as reflects more fundamental social and economic changes. Thus a pluralistic culture tends to be, in the long run, fostered, among many others, within the practice of the television medium and the

process of widely-ranging social communication.

### **6.1.3 The Phenomenon of Cultural Monopoly and the Nature of Cultural Production in the Party-State**

In this section, I regard television performance (also applied to other media) as a kind of cultural production and television (and other media) offering service or messages as a type of cultural product; in this way, I extend my study into the issues of a widely-ranging cultural realm by focusing on the relationship between cultural production and cultural management. On that base, an effort will be made to contribute to an analysis of the phenomenon of the Party cultural monopoly.

In order to understand why and how the Party cultural monopoly can be formed and maintained for a certain period of time in the established communist society, and to what extent and under what conditions it tends to decline, I think it is important to understand the nature of cultural products and cultural production in the Party-state and their logical evolution. This requires further analysis of the base of cultural performance and the materiality of cultural management. In doing so, I believe that a political economy of cultural studies is essential to approach that goal, as it provides an adequate framework and a starting point to observe the complex of cultural practice and its relationship with material production in modern societies.

Throughout human history, the very existence of culture and cultural performance has involved a dual process: On the one hand, it centres on human beings' spiritual activities, thus remains in the realm of human beings' mentality characterized by creativeness, uniqueness, ingenuity and diversity in its abstract sense. On the other hand, it entails a real sense of material realization, thus involving human production with material resources for its manifestation. It is through the development of such an intertwined process that the nature of culture and its



material forms (i.e cultural products) are ultimately determined.

Under modern capitalism, that is in essence attached to the condition of commodity production, there are two ways in which culture and its production are cultivated. According to Garnham, first, culture remains a superstructural phenomenon in relation to non-cultural modes of material production; second, culture becomes a part of material production itself by generating surplus through pursuing the exchange-value that "directly subordinate to or at least in a closely determined articulation with the laws of development of capital" (N.Garrham, 1990:32). Moreover, the means of cultural production in capitalist society may be provided either in direct commodity form as part of the accumulation process; or as part of the realization process of other sectors of the capitalist economy; or directly out of capitalist revenue: or through the State (Ibid., 1990:42). Thus, in further examining the role of exchange value in relation with the cultural production, Garnham argues:

We need to remember that a system of commodity exchange is itself based upon an institutionalized system of cultural production with a symbolic form, **money** (emphasis added). Indeed Habermas, following Talcott Parsons, identifies money along with power as one of the two basic media of communication which have historically ensured the development of what he calls the system-world and the associated rationality of modernity (ibid., 1990:10).

Garnham's theoretical elaboration on the subject helps us to shed light on understanding the abstract sense of cultural commodity in general and its presence and management under the condition of modern capitalism in particular. Thus we may draw the following conclusion: Like any other commodity, cultural products in modern capitalist society has its use-value and exchange-value. Crucially, the relationship of a cultural product between its use-value (i.e mainly through symbolic message or service to be used) and its exchange-value (i.e worth based on the abstract



form of money), involves a process of dialectical movement. Whilst the use-value tends to exercise its power to influence, affect or even dictate the exchange-value and has an irreplaceable and important role in the process of commodity value realization; the underlying tendency is that the exchange-value tends to subordinate the use-value, though it needs to be understood in the historical and specific contexts.

But, what about the situation in the Party-state (i.e the classical Soviet Model) where the mode of commodity production was abolished and replaced by the command economy with the absence of the market mechanism? Of course, we cannot easily draw a similar consideration to the matter under a social production system that is fundamentally different from the commodity production system. However, what we can say is that the basic understanding of the nature of the culture and cultural production in modern commodity production does provide a foundation for us to examine the state and logical evolution of cultural production and its management under the condition of communist totalitarian society.

It is known to all that an established communist society is determinedly ruled by the political power and communist ideology [cf. 1.4.1]. Culture and cultural performance are thus seen as an essential part of the party's framework, and as such, culture is produced first and foremost for the purpose of the Party's totalitarian control over the mind of the general public. This is the case applicable to all Soviet model societies. But, given its concerns of scale, degree and thoroughness, the Chinese experience seems to be more persistent, more penetrating and more extraordinary than any of those of its counterparts. Since I have already discussed political and social aspects of this at some length in previous chapters, I want to look, briefly, at the economic aspect of cultural production and distribution in the Party-state.

A command (or planned) economy is a logical extension of the Party's totalitarian rule. This economic solution to feed her people is implemented on the ground of the non-market environment and bureaucratic resource allocation. In theory, however, the planned economy was often, if not always, defined by the communist regime in the rather philosophical way of economic thinking. The argument employed by orthodox economic discourse was fairly sophisticated and, according to Cheung, it is normally elaborated in this way: because of defects in the market, or the phenomenon of market failure in a capitalist production system, it assumes that a less costly economic performance would be attainable if each owner of a resource gives up his rights in exchange for an acceptable deal with certain beneficial security, while delegating the making of decisions to a centralized firm style of management. Moreover, since all means of production return to the public, it is natural that all decisions about production and income distribution should be vested in the hands of one authority where different industries, institutes and other agencies can be treated as different divisions, sections, departments, sub-departments, and so forth of that entire society. Correspondingly, this new solution of a centrally planned economy, as believed and accepted to a varying degree in the communist world before the 1980s, would deliver both social equality and rational use of material resources (S.Cheung, 1982:39-40).

In the classical model of the centrally planned economy, it takes the form of direct state mandatory arrangement through, in its best sense, projected short and long-range "planning" and through the operation of a giant bureaucratic machine to dictate everyone's economic activity on the scale of the whole society. Under such a system, therefore, all means of production belong to the Party (N.B. in communist theory, however, the Party is unquestionably assumed to represent the general will of people, thus it is always asserted that the means of production also belong to people); this is a crucial point of the political legitimacy whereby the Party through its subordinating state



institutions, directly conducts the process of all production including cultural and media production; then the Party in turn works out how to distribute all produced goods to its members of society. It is important to note that it is the Party's power that determines the whole process and absorbs the entire result; and in this way, the Party also takes sole responsibility for losses and gains. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to leave room for a real movement of commodity production to be engaged in; it is also hardly surprising that the conception of making profits, the incentive to efficiency and the enterprises initiatives etc. are so alien to that of the system even in terms of producing pure consumer goods (e.g. clothes, shoes etc.). To be sure, these norms which are taken for granted in the modern economy are virtually irrelevant to the practice of communist-run economy.

In the same way, but to a greater extent, the cultural products are produced, distributed and used chiefly for the purpose of political and ideological education, to borrow the communist term, "to mould people's outlook of the world according to Marxism and Leninism". In addition, cultural consumption is largely seen as a collective "welfare" activity offered by the state in the line with the Party's overall strategy to advance the communist course [cf. 3.4.1]. The motivation of pursuing exchange-value, if one is so permitted, is too weak to be taken into account. In China's film industry, for instance, during the Mao's era; the box office took little part in deciding what kind of films and in how many should be produced. The film producers and studios could neither take initiatives nor had the right to protect their interests, if they were allowed to have any. When the authority issued the directive in 1961 saying TV stations should have access to airing every new film two weeks before that film was premiered, the film industry had no way to complain but was forced to obey it. Meanwhile, no film producers and studio needed to worry about cost and finance, since the government absorbed all gains and losses in the production and distribution process. Obviously, the film industry was cut off from the



audience in the first place, and therefore, filmmaking as well as its consumption was disassociated from a market performance (L.Zhang & Y.Huang, 1992).

In short, therefore, I would argue that, under the condition of the command economy, given the fact that cultural and media products in the Party-state have a predominantly political and ideological utility, and non-commodity nature, the element of the exchange-value of the products is virtually excluded. Therefore, the pressure for realizing the exchange value of the cultural products through providing the satisfactory use-value for the users (i.e through commodity exchange behaviors of producers and consumers via the monetary system as it happens in the market economy), is reduced to a minimum. Thus, in a given period of time, the ruling section of the society can directly materialize cultural production, in a maximal scale and absolute sense, to be devoted to monopoly power and cultural hegemony. This is one of the major reasons and material base that have largely explained how the Party cultural monopoly is maintained and how it is operated through the process of material production.

As I see it, the phenomenon of cultural monopoly in the Party-state is closely linked with its exclusion of the exchange-value of its cultural products. The scope of this exclusion, however, is in turn largely determined by the capacity of the Soviet model communist system itself. However, party monopoly power, single ideology dominance and the command economy of the Soviet system was capable of functioning adequately only for a short period [cf. 1.4; 2.2; 5.1]. In other words, this is a self-paralysis system and tends to exhaust itself by its excessive cost it required for maintaining its existence. As a result, the spontaneous popular resistance movement followed by growing pressure for the change is bound to occur. In response to the increasing challenge, the ruling authority headed by the reform elites is ready to take the initiative either by introducing a market reform programme, or by partially opening up access to political participation and tolerating a degree of freedom of

expression. Both of these inevitably lead to a considerable retreat of Party totalitarian control from society; this in turn leads to the decline of an official Party-led culture. In the first place, country like Poland as well as some other eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union, mainly adopted the political solution where the public developed their own political and cultural spheres outside official control (Jakubowicz, 1989). By contrast, Chinese authorities started by introducing market mechanism to manage the cultural activities, thus the economic concerns (i.e the pressure to realize the exchange-value) has been playing a more and more important role in the process of the cultural production [cf. 5.3; 5.4].

#### **6.1.4 TV as an Agent of Cultural Changes in Post-Mao China**

The application of the above theoretical discussion to the Chinese case is that, although Party cultural hegemony and its sanctioned forms imposed by the ruling power can be maintained for some of the time, some aspects of the public life and in some dominant ways, the ultimately uncontrollable cultural activities made the decline of the official culture and the rise of the alternative inevitable and predictable. Clashes and the crisis of party cultural identification are the background to the process of the post-Mao reform movement, within the political and economic contexts that surround and shape its development. In effect, Chinese television, as J.Lull observed, has deeply affected all aspects of life -- highlighted, legitimated, and popularized -- that have stimulated alternative, competing visions of China's future and the personal dreams of millions of Chinese people (1991:209). Thus the television medium has played a crucial role and made a giant contribution towards that process of changes.

The decline of the official culture and the rise of alternative culture have taken place in post-Mao China in the light of circumstances where 1) the economic reform remained relatively



successful; 2) the idea of democracy and pluralism increasingly became a spiritual resource and started to appeal to the Chinese people; 3) the process of commercialization of cultural products commenced; and 4) the television industry grew rapidly with widespread TV set ownership in ordinary households. In my view, the first and second are the necessary conditions; the third is the sufficient condition and the fourth is what I would like to call a "special condition" -- a condition materialized by the mass media in general and television in particular to facilitate the cultural and social transformation.

In effect, television in China has become the focus for, and the foremost means of, catalyzing new cultural freedom. The impact of the emergence of pluralistic culture in Chinese television are thus twofold: firstly, it tends to drive television programming into a popular orientation in an effort to attract and please mass audiences for varying purposes and commercial interests as discussed previously. However, such a trend has objectively promoted a degree of cultural diversity. Various TV dramas, plays, music, operas, traditional Chinese "Crosstalk"(i.e an animated comical debate performed by two persons), sports, cartoons and game shows etc. have now all entered tens of thousands of ordinary households and become to some extent an indispensable part of public life. This could hardly have been imagined ten-odd years ago. Entertainment programmes from foreign countries, from the region of non-communist China -- Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, are also getting popular among Chinese viewers.

The impact of popular culture and television on the life style of Chinese people is thus very significant. It stimulates the Chinese people's awareness of the outside world, enlarges their activities of cultural participation and alters the way they spend their personal leisure time. In the work of a study of British broadcasting and the public life, Scannell and Cardiff discovered that, with the widely-ranging programmes offered by radio broadcasting, the general public were brought into a new kind of social life. "The fundamentally democratic thrust of



broadcasting... lay in the new access to virtually the whole spectrum of public life that radio opened up for everyone. Broadcasting equalized public life through the principle of common access for all" (P.Scannell & D.Cardiff, 1991:14). Although this was the observation from the British experience, Scannell and Cardiff's remark, by and large, also applies to the situation of today's China. It is through these new cultural practice and routines that has imperceptible yet profound influence in transforming the mentality of Chinese people. The "demonstration effect" is at work which tends to make people diverge from the official thinking irreversibly. Wei Bing, a young Chinese broadcaster, has this observation: "the bringing of television itself is a counter-(Party)cultural phenomenon because it's against the dominant ideology which is without entertainment and pleasure. It (television) gives people pleasure and tries to focus on what individual people are really interested instead of just following the propaganda rule: it implies that leisure and pleasure are worth attention" (in J.Connon, 1991:27).

Secondly, television, among others, itself has gradually developed as a potent cultural forum for independent intellectuals (many of them are dissidents) to criticise reality and disseminate their pro-democracy ideas (which are now labelled by the authorities as "bourgeois liberalism") through documentary programmes, objective reporting and various forms of fine art on the airwaves. I suggest that this dimension constituted a direct and fundamental challenge to the very existing framework of the ruling power and was thus bound to be the focus of the clashes engaged by the different social forces. In this way, television has become a powerful and handy medium to enlighten the Chinese people, a major resource for an alternative culture, and a momentous import for the expression of heterodox views. Therefore, to the Party-led culture, television can have a potentially huge subversive influence. This was the case most remarkably in the controversial airing of an inspiring six-part TV series entitled "River Elegy" (He Shang). The programme was

extremely popular with its audiences. It ran twice on CCTV network in the mid-1988, and was rebroadcast by numerous local stations afterwards. The series at once became a hit-show attracting extensive coverage of the mass media and fermenting intense and unprecedented debates concerning China's democratization and political reform throughout the country. Moreover, it stirred up public reactions from all walks of life, including overseas Chinese communities around the world. During the course of development, the means of television is absolutely crucial. "If this had been written into a novel or served as the subject of scholarly research", a well-known Chinese journalist remarked, one would doubt that "it would have caused such an uproar among government authorities" (B.Liu, 1990:84). This is understandable, however, as R. Williams indicated, the power of television as a medium of social communication was so great that it altered many of our institutions and forms of social relationships; and as such, it affected some of the central processes of family, cultural and social life (R.Williams, 1990:11). As a matter of fact, these kinds of political and cultural shock caused by certain broadcasting programme or, newspapers' articles frequently occurred in the early 1980s; and have intensified in recent years.

In the following part, I attempt to review the programme of "River Elegy" at some length and provide an analysis of its social impact which only television can create on such a popular scale. Apart from my personal account and study, some of the information presented in the following discussion also comes from journals and books which devoted to the debate on the subject. Chief among them are: Hong Kong's Asia Weekly (29.1.1989); mainland China's China Reconstructs (Jan.1989); He Shang (1989) Taiwan: Jinfeng Press & Fengyun Shidai Press.



## 6.2 THE "RIVER ELEGY" ( HE SHANG ) SHOCK

### 6.2.1 Background

"River Elegy "was produced by several young intellectuals. The River of the title refers to the Yellow River, a major river which has long been regarded as the "cradle" of Chinese civilization. The principle scriptwriter are Su Xiaokang, a 39 year-old former teacher at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute and Wang Luxiang, 32, an instructor at Beijing Teachers College. The director was Xia Jun, 26, a CCTV reporter. The series appeared on television at a time when the society was approaching a stage of crises. Notably, the economic reform was blocked by wide spread corruption and run-away inflation, whilst the appeal to democracy was gathering strong momentum as well as facing increasing resistance. The aim of the programme was thus to explore China's fundamental problems in the process of modernization within the context of Chinese society and culture. According to Su, it attempts to take a critical and historical point of views so as to stimulate conscious self-examination throughout the country in this time of social transformation (X.Su, 1989).

In fact, River Elegy is a milestone of innovative ambition and intellectual scope for the television medium. Even its opponents could not speak against the level of achievement this production signifies as an imaginatively crafted synthesis of studies across a wide range of disciplines with each of the six episodes presenting its comparative analysis of civilizations, at the same time reaching into the historical past to identify or imply its relation to the present (E.Gunn, 1990:218, W.Cui, 1988:123).



### 6.2.2 The Theme of "River Elegy"

The programme, constructed around the central image of the Yellow River, was an intellectual attempt to clarify the problems facing China's modernization and reform. It made use of impressive visual imagery to mount a systematic attack on traditional Chinese culture through which the reality of the Chinese communist system was implicated and repudiated. The Yellow River, the Great Wall and the sacred dragon, all three key items of symbolism of Chinese civilization which were always identified with the pride of the country's heritage, are deeply questioned and challenged. "Who are we?", "Why did we become so backward in the modern times?" "Why democracy and rule by the law failed to arrive in modern China?" "What is the fate of China's future?" These fundamental questions were first addressed by China's pioneers of the modernization movement more than one century ago when Qing Empire (1644 - 1911) was defeated and humiliated by the western Powers. From the Chinese Communist Party's point of view, they had long since been settled. The authors of the programmes, however, indicated that it was under the current Party's rule that these questions had been deliberately avoided and become ever more acute. "We can no longer avoid a reappraisal of the fateful factors that shaped our civilisation", Su states in the introduction. It is painful, as Nathan remarks, for the Chinese still to have to be discussing it after so many decades of modernization efforts pursued at such great cost. The authors of the programme clearly feel that communism performance has failed and say so almost in so many words (A.Nathan, 1990:123). In this way, the TV series argues that every Chinese must sincerely tackle them again in order to search for a better China. More than that, however, the programme attempted to re-discover and re-examine the root of the Chinese and Chinese civilization. Employing the theory of Marx's Asiatic mode of production and Toynbee's rise and fall of civilization, the programme further argues that the dynamics of Chinese civilization, which was developed from its agricultural based economy, geographic and environmental conditions, and the long history of centralized

empire unity, had already exhausted itself. Therefore, the conclusion is quite alarming: China could face the very danger to be "expelled" from the modern world unless it undertakes fundamental reform and adopts a new value system (cf. E.Gunn, 1990:217-219; L.White, 1990:107).

In the symbolism of the series, the Yellow River, with its yellow, silt-laden water, represents the traditional culture and the Chinese identity which was, according to the narration, preoccupied with the worship of the land, inward-orientation and isolationism. The broad, tempestuous blue sea and ocean, on the other hand, symbolizes the outside world, openness and the spirit of enterprise. To a great extent, it argues that "this Yellow land cannot teach us the true spirit of science, nor can the fierce Yellow River reveal the true consciousness of democracy".

The fate of the four great inventions (paper, printing, gunpowder and the compass) in Chinese history, for instance, highlighted the insularity of China. While gunpowder helped to destroy feudalism in Europe, while the compass helped European nations to build up world markets and overseas colonies, while paper and printing helped break through the knowledge monopoly and capitalize the enlightenment movement, however, in China--the home of these inventions, as remarked by the narrator, gunpowder was used only for firecrackers to frighten away ghosts and evil spirits. The compass failed to promote China's maritime and trading activities; whereas the use of paper and printing also did little to bring modern knowledge or foster science and technology innovations in China. Why was that? An academic in the series made two points to explain this failure: firstly, as for technology, the Chinese were mainly interested in its application to the monumental problems of a centralised empire, such as flood control and irrigation; secondly, as for "pure science", the Chinese world-view which did not start from the distinction between subject and object, cause and effect, spirit and matter, did not encourage the development of empirical science (cf. China Reconstructs, January 1989).



At the time when Magellan's ships were making global adventure and da Vinci was inventing the helicopter, what did the Chinese do? The series reminds us that the emperors of Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644) started to close China's door to foreign countries particularly those that came from the sea. The founder of the dynasty issued a degree saying that "not a single ship, not even a plank must be launched into the sea" to contact and trade with the outside world.

As for the Great Wall, says the series, "it has been recognized as the only man-made structure visible from the moon. One even uses it as China's symbol of strength and grandeur. Yet, if the Great Wall were able to speak for itself, it would honestly tell China's sons and grandsons that it is a grand tragic memorial created by historical destiny. It by no means stands for power, enterprise, glory, but rather isolation, conservatism and cowardice. So it asks: what is there to be proud of? "Because it is so colossal and ancient, it has branded deeply into our national soul its boastfulness, its deceitfulness and conceit".

The series regards traditional official ideology -- Confucianism -- as a mechanism for maintaining autocratic rule, hindering China from social progress. The fondness for dragons reflected a kind of worship of an idol which embodies ancestral nightmares. It called upon the Chinese people to let go the intoxicating dream of history and open their eyes to the real situation of China on this planet at this very moment.

Throughout the programme, the authors persistently present the main argument that the only hope of a better future China is to undertake fundamental change towards democratization and modernization. The series ends with a lyric poem using metaphorical words (to escape censorship) to express the thematic idea:

The characteristics of despotism are mysteriousness, autocracy, and willful nature.



The characteristics of democracy should be its transparency, its stress on the people's will, and scientific orientation. We are just now stepping out of muddiness into transparency.

We already have stepped from being sealed off into openness.

The Yellow River must pierce the highlands of yellow earth. The Yellow River must empty, finally, into the azure ocean. The sorrows of the Yellow River, the hopes of the Yellow River, constitute its greatness.

The greatness of the Yellow River may exist in building new land between the ocean and the highlands.

When the Yellow River reaches the estuary, a great and suffering juncture.

Here, and churned for one thousand miles will be deposited to make new land.

Roaring, surging ocean waves will crash into the Yellow River here.

The Yellow River must allay its dread of the ocean.

The Yellow River must maintain its course, and with it the will and vigour it brings from the highlands.

The waters of life come from the ocean and flow back to the ocean.

The Yellow River, after a thousand years of solitude, finally can see the azure ocean.

Thus the television programme successfully touched the other side of China and made a passionate appeal to the idea of democracy. In my view, the fierce attack on Chinese autocratic history and Confucian culture served to criticise the reality in which the Chinese communists attempted to retain their one-party system in the guise of nationalism in the era of a global democratization movement. The metaphorical critique here was implied to demand an urgent and thorough cultural, political and social reform in China.

### 6.2.3 Public Reactions to "River Elegy"

The programme was much more than a television series; it left every Chinese to answer these crucial questions. As one critic remarks: "For the Chinese the programmes were a potentially liberating attempt at self-criticism, without recrimination, that tried to explain the underlying cause of China's present dilemma" (J.Burrows, 1989:35). It thus had a significant social impact on how people's response to the series reflected their profound concerns about the prospect of the on-going reform program and the very future of China. Immediately after the show on CCTV, popular reaction to the "River Elegy" came from everywhere. Within just a week of the show, the CCTV received over 3,000 letters from the audience -- to praise, support, argue, defend and criticize -- about the programme. The series was so popular as well as so controversial that a special term "River Elegy Re" (in Chinese, "Re" means craze, fad, shock) was employed to describe the phenomenon. In the city of Guangdong, for instance, half million people took part in debate over the programme, often buying tickets to enter the debate room (M.Wang & A.Singhal, 1992:183). The media both inside and outside China gave it immense coverage. Exclusive columns in newspapers and magazines were dedicated to the discussion of the series; and, radio and television organized a series of public debate. In short, the intellectuals, students, workers, farmers, soldiers, grassroots cadres, the general public and even some party leaders -- all sections of society were stimulated to become involved in the heated political debate that was created by the "River Elegy" phenomenon; this debate provided the focus for a challenge to the existing Party culture. What is a striking point is that the series could widely disseminate ideas so disliked by the communist authority (or, to use the official term "poisoned bourgeois ideas") neither underground, nor overseas, but on the still officially controlled national television network; it influenced so many people in a way that thousands of hours of official "brain-washing" projects (or to use the official term



"political education") could never do. One American professor was even reported to say that the very appearance of the "River Elegy" on Chinese national television indicated the awakening of Chinese nation, and thus the realization of China's modernization would not be far off (cf. G.Qia, 1990:118). Another one pointed out that "the production and broadcasting of River Elegy was an act of social leadership by intellectuals that contributed momentum to the growth of new social organization among students and workers", to which the 1989 Chinese pro-democracy movement to some extent could be attributed (E.Gunn, 1990:225).

Positive and negative reaction to the show also caused an enormous political storm in China's ruling sector. For instance, Wang Zhen, the vice president of the state, was totally outraged after watching the programme, saying "I have never been so angry in my life" and made every effort to "disinfect" this polluted programme and suppress the authors. He then ordered his secretary to write an denunciatory article titled "What did the River Elegy advocate?" attacking the program for "national nihilism", "distorting the history of modern Chinese revolution, "challenging the Party leadership" etc. In the meantime, however, Zhao Ziyang, the Party general Secretary at the time, presented the videotape of the programme as a state gift to the visiting prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew (L.Wu, 1990:121). No wonder the "River Elegy" shock greatly frightened the ruling hardliners and compelled a response from a portion of the state apparatus that felt threatened by it. After the 1989 Beijing tragedy, the series was banned immediately and became a major target for official attack being accused of "giving theoretical and emotional preparation" for the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China. "To broadcast the River Elegy", said the broadcasting minister Z.Ai in a national meeting, "was the biggest error we made in broadcasting work in 1988" (Z.Ai, 1990:17). Moreover, the series's producer and scriptwriter were denigrated. Because of this, the chief writer X.Su became the authority's most wanted man. He managed to escape to Hong Kong and now exiles himself in the USA; his collaborator L.Wang was arrested and apparently



released without trial in the later part of 1990. As for the Party boss Zhao Ziyang, after he lost his post for his sympathy with students in the middle 1989, the "gift affair" became one of the major charges against him (People's Daily, 17.7.1989; L.Wu, 1990).

Meanwhile, as the hardliners regained the upper hand after the 1989 Beijing tragedy, the authorities wasted no time in launching an all-round campaign in an attempt to quench the popular response to the series, and the political consciousness of the Chinese people that has been rapidly aroused by, among many other factors, the programme of "River Elegy". In the first place, the propaganda authorities quickly launched a "disinfection" campaign. They hurriedly produced a series of short programme titled "One Hundred Mistakes of River Elegy" to denounce the original series. On another occasion, in a cartoon carried in the People's Daily a young man says haughtily to the dragon "I am not your son, and to the Yellow River in the image of a country woman "Your are not my mother", and he dashes towards a foreigner driving a car yelling "Daddy!" (People's Daily, 20.12.1989; China Now, Autumn 1989:5). After mounting attacks, and after one-year of preparation and hard-work, they broadcast on the national network their equivalent version of "River Elegy" called "On the Road: A Century of Communist Party and Socialist Movement in China". When I was in China in late 1990, I watched this programme. It is a four-part documentary which attempted to justify one Party rule in China. However, in my observation, audience resistance was quite evident. I asked many people what they thought about the programme, they seemed to show little interest in the series. Someone said this was simply an officially repeated discourse on the correct leadership of the communist Party. The audience research staff from CCTV also indirectly confirmed this. They told me that many audience sent letters to CCTV saying the programme was full of cliché. It is not surprising that the counter-"River Elegy" programme sponsored by the authorities has worked little upon audience, and the enormous impact of the series "River Elegy" has since

reverberated across mainland China as well as the overseas Chinese community ever more.

### **6.3 BEYOND THE SHOCK**

#### **6.3.1 Why and How Did This Happen?**

Further sociological analysis or literary critique of this programme are beyond our work. In our immediate concern, however, the importance of the "River Elegy" phenomenon and many other similar cases appearing in Chinese television in the last decade, seems to lie in the self-contradiction of the performance of the television medium, namely, its institutional practice is apparently often opposite, or, at least, at odds with its institutional task which is based on communist ideology, and its institutional formulation which is designed only to serve the Party's interest. Why and how did this take place?

The question can be approached in many ways. However, several important factors should be taken into account: the increasingly feeble ability of the ruling elite to maintain the cultural hegemony; the intrinsic nature of cultural diversity; the growing autonomous role of media professionals in dealing with non-news and current affairs programming; the complicated relationship between culture and the media (as discussed previously), the impact of commercialization and decentralization on the Chinese mass media and audience's pressure etc. In this study, however, I would like to stress further two points: 1) the institutional characteristics of the mass media; and 2) the dialectical process of sweeping changes in media performance and cultural production in the last decade within the existing institution of party political dominance: a contradiction of underlying tension between continuity and changes, between an old set of social



relations and the newly emerging social relations. "Institution" may be defined here as a set of regulation, procedures and organizations within the framework of the overall social system and particular cultural heritage to perform the tasks and roles involved in governance (R.Macridis, 1986:2); and, according to A.Smith, "the interest of the relationship between cultural issues and the creation of institutions lies in the manner in which the latter help to resolve the former" (A.Smith, 1976:52).

The mass media are important social institutions in modern society, and as such, they follow their internal logic to develop within particularly social settings. Meanwhile, as Garnham pointed out: a media institution "takes on specific characteristics within and between nation states, determined, among other things, by the structure and state of development of the economy, by the form of the state, by the state of class relations, and by the relationship with dominant and/or subordinate state" (Garnham, 1983:323). In the following analysis, I attempt to make an inquiry into institutions and offer my observation on the subject. In doing so, I limit my discussion to the framework of institutions itself and draw a theoretical model by starting to focus on the issues of institutional choice on the general and abstract level. For the various reasons, I only extract some key elements of the issue to analyze, while neglecting some other elements which may be important and relevant to the change of institutions. Therefore, its limitation should not be underestimated.

### **6.3.2 The Inquiry into Institutions**

To some extent, the power and function of institutions lie in their capacity of control on the one hand, and their capacity of developing the undertakings on the other hand. It thus involves the choice for priority to achieve the goal. Moreover, the arrangement for such a choice is essential to the proper operation of institutions, and as such, it involves human cost



as targeting resources should be delivered and certain means should be employed in an effort to produce or pursue the desirable result. Thus the cost constraint in the process of the defined choices both in the kind and in the level is constant and permanent.

It seems to me that there are two problems concerning making the choice. In the first place, making choice is subject to the situation of the cost constraint. In a given condition, it is tempting to argue that the cost constraint is crucial to determine what kind of resources and means, in what level and what way, should be deployed. Therefore, the relationship between the choice and the cost constraint is often problematic; and the level of the choice is in inverse proportion to that of the cost constraint, namely, the level of choice will increase as the level of constraint reduces. If the choice is settled, the change of the cost constraint will then, 1) only affect the level of the choice, but not the kind, if this change is confined to the normative paradigm; 2) alter the kind of the choice, if this change is beyond the normative paradigm.

In the second place, the difficulty of making the choice lies in the choice itself, a state which can be expressed in a formulation of "either A or B ". The problem is that, while making either choice A or choice B may benefit from each other or complement each other, on more occasions, however, making such a choice tends to oppose or unbalance each other. Thus the institutional choice can not only contain the contradictory factors, but also tends to negate each other. In a fundamental sense, the priority for an institutional control and the priority for an institutional development are contradictory at heart. Thus the choice between either of them will have large effects on institutional performance and formation, but the degree of such effects in determining the change of institutional model is subject to the conditions discussed above. Now let me look at the situation of Chinese media institution.

For a society such as China, that is characterized by a fully-fledged communist authority plus a backward economy with the framework of pre-industrial dominance, the choices of media institution, i.e a priority for control or, a priority for development is problematic. While the implementation of control is strengthened (i.e. the choice is made on the control side, implying that the level of the choice itself is reduced; the costs constraint is increased by a lump of resources placed for policing, monitoring and punishing; the constraint is also rising; in this way ), the dynamics of development is undermined; and vice verse. In my view, the nature of the plight concerning the institutional choice, helps to shed light on understanding the above mentioned contradictory phenomenon in the performance of Chinese television.

### **6.3.3 The "Chicken-and-eggshell" Phenomenon**

As noted, the institutional emphasis of Chinese television (as well as the other mass media) in Deng's era is set on the development side within the context of economic pragmatism of the leadership to realize modernization ambitions. In so doing, the new realistic communist authority initiated a series of policy shifts giving priority to media modernization and institutionalization. These ultimately required the establishing of a new and dynamic system to replace the old one. By adopting a decentralization strategy and market mechanism in Chinese broadcasting, the medium performance virtually departed from its rigid centralized model. A movement that contained the tendency towards reforming the existing media structure thus occurred. The institution of Chinese television is undertaking profound transformation. It created new forces and a new flexible paradigm which further contributed to the decline of the Party's political control power. The fate of the "River Elegy" is obviously the case reflecting this trend. Originally, CCTV invested some 1.3 million yuan (approx US\$ 350,000 in 1988 exchange rate) to



produce a kind of a tourist documentary about the Yellow River. Like the similar programmes shown previously, the authorities in general would expect the theme of the documentary be devoted to the attractive and positive side of Chinese history and the prosperity of the country under the Party leadership. In a word, it ought to be eulogistic rather than critical.

However, the increasing instability of the Party's ideological control, the desire of TV producers to ensure the viewers' satisfaction and the cost-effectiveness consideration (i.e the pressure for realizing the exchange-value), the operational and management changes of CCTV and other television stations [cf. 4; 5; 7], objectively, have created the institutional condition of flexibility, and given an impetus to the practice of diversity and pluralism. When the programme was about to be made, the man in overall charge of the programme who is the deputy director of CCTV, gave this instruction to the authors of the "River Elegy":

You can write and produce the programme at your will, there is no problem to pass (censorship) from my side. But, the sole criterion I require to this programme is that it should ensure the satisfaction of the general public as well as the older cadres [note: here the phrase normally referring to those people who used to possess the high position and now semi-retired communists] (cited in X.Su, 1991:63).

In a delicate context, this instruction implied a balanced double-meaning: on the one hand, the programme should break with official conventions concerning cultural performance and reflect the authors' creativeness and the true feelings of the general public in an attempt to show CCTV's innovation and competition; on the other hand, it should also be cautious not to go too far to challenge **directly** the existing authority, otherwise, it would be impossible to get the pass from the Party media watchdogs. In reality, the effectiveness of the practice is, however, largely



determined by the situation of the day and the balance among the different social forces concerned.

As a result of reform progress in post-Mao China, the media institutions now have to take audience preference and advertisers' interests into account, and more and more rely on popular appeal and controversy to compete with each other. In other words, they have to abide by certain basic rules in order to realize the exchange-value of their products. Thus the institution becomes the centre of the conflict between the old forces and the new ones. CCTV has actually played the dual role of the old Party's instrument and the pioneer of cultural pluralism, often the later overcoming the former. Meanwhile, one also should note that, at least up till the 1989 Beijing tragedy, the post-Mao political environment in China had steadily improved: Maoism had been discarded, the circulation of information and ideas had been greatly increased, the Party's penetration of society had been substantially reduced and many areas of life had been depoliticized etc. (A. Barnett, 1986). As a result, there is growing new a "public space" for cultural diversity along with the increasing media autonomy, allowing more opportunities for the expression of heterodox views within the fast changing public communication environment. In short, the communist totalitarian control over the society in the last decade has been on shifting sands. It was under such circumstances that such a series which to a large degree expressed the dissident view and pro-democracy ideas, which entirely at odds with the Party ideology and official doctrine, came out and got sanction to be aired on the national television network. Through these complicated interacting practices, I notice that a kind of the public sphere and the spirit of freedom of expression have gradually developed and cumulatively grown within the existing institution. To borrow an old Chinese metaphor, the situation is a bit like an eggshell with a chicken growing inside it: outwardly, the formulation of the old institution appears undisturbed; but inwardly the alien social forces and new formulation are progressing. A very recent

report from Beijing in the Guardian vividly illustrated this on-going trend:

The current hit (of TV soap), *I Love You Definitely*, written by Wang Shuo, China's most popular novelist and screenwriter, was sold to the national station, CCTV, for 3.5 million yuan. Scarcely a day goes by without the official media accusing Wang Shuo of cynicism, opportunism, degeneracy or bad language. "I just thumb my nose at these people", he says. "If they had the power to put me in jail, then I might listen to them, but they're just a bunch of dusty, out-of-touch old bores and they can't hurt me. If they don't like what I write, they can just turn their television off" (The Guardian, 19.2.1993:22).

In fact, as J.Lull pointed out, many ideological twists and turns that have come from the authority itself for the past several years in China have been influenced by nuances originating with workers in television and the other mass media who have dared to produce unofficial ideas, accounts and explanations. By invoking the government's own rhetoric and rationale of openness and reform, China's change agents in the media often have actually been able to do their oppositional work in the guise of the official line (J.Lull, 1991). In my observation, the existence of insufficient, or even the absence of institutional arrangements for social communication in the Party-state greatly increases the prospects for cultural clashes and civic discontentment. Thus the effort in the search for alternative channels and the impulse to express the dissident voice can never be eliminated. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the self-contradiction of media performance in post-Mao China, through the illustration of the "River Elegy" and many other cases, displayed a degree of non-conformity of the Party media institution and, in this way, it prompted an institutional crisis.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND MEDIA DEMOCRATIZATION

If the evolution of the decentralization policy, market-oriented performance and cultural pluralism brought about profound changes in the development of Chinese television after Mao, then the movement towards institutional reform became an essential step for any further substantial progress, and was bound to follow in the late 1980s. It was viewed with hostility by those who wanted to continue the Party monopoly control over broadcasting, and was treated cautiously by those who wished to change some aspects of the Stalinist media model piecemeal while maintaining the Party's prestigious leading role. But those who wanted to undertake a fundamental reform of the existing institution were enthusiastic about the new development. Thus the process of China's media democratization became a see-saw battle involving a series of confrontations, challenges and progress as well as resistance and repression. The dance between reform and reaction has been an unceasing one since 1978. Indeed, the irreconcilable, cumulative and intensifying conflicts between the state and society, between the Party existing media institutions and dynamics of media democratization, have created the foundations of antagonistic contradiction which in time cannot but entirely, from deep within China's social formations, undermine the communist system and push the mass media as well as the society towards fundamental changes.



## 7.1 THE PARTY-STATE AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Achilles was invulnerable from weapons as he had been dipped by his mother Thesis in the River Styx at birth, except for the heel by which he was held. At Troy, he was the most fearless warrior, but was eventually killed by Paris with an arrow which struck his only vulnerable spot, his heel.

-- Greek Legend

Give me a fulcrum, I can move the Earth.

-- Archimedes

### 7.1.1 Communism's "Achilles' Heel"

Given the entrenched nature of the mass media in the communist state, it is not surprising that the Party has made every effort to maintain broadcasting (and other mass media) as the Party mouthpiece. Therefore, the practice of media democratization remains pivotal in the battle field between the ruling Party on the one side, and the media corps and the general public on the other. The Party's fear of the people, of free expression, of a free press is a product of the communist system, a function of the system as long as it deprives people of their basic political rights with respect to the relationship between public authority and popular power. Indeed, unlike its counterparts Fascism and national socialism (as defined by Radel, 1975), the very existence of communist totalitarianism and the whole secret of its power foundation are based upon the maintenance of, what I would like to call "the dictatorship of the consciousness" backed by coercion. The paradoxical praxis of 20th century communism is its political unreformability. One has every reason to argue that media freedom and media democratization are the "Achilles' Heel" of continued communist power.

According to the logic of communism, those who control the means of the use of the symbolic system virtually control human thought in general. This indicates that an established communist regime has to have two "barrels" firmly in hand -- the barrel of the gun and the barrel of the pen -- if it is to seize and consolidate totalitarian state power successfully. This was put bluntly by Lin Biao (1908 - 1971) [who was once designated as Mao's heir (1969), later was accused of plotting a revolt and was said to have died in mysterious plane crash in Mongolia].

Carrying out a revolution is inseparable from two barrels. One is the barrel of a gun and the other, the barrel of a pen. To establish a political power, we must depend on these two barrels (Lin Biao, cited in K. Lu, 1979/1980).

Crucially, the communist authority, whilst ultimately resorting to the barrel of the gun as its final solution, must pivotally employ the barrel of the pen to undertake its fundamental task: ensuring "unified thinking" to make people believe in the Party, love the Party and support the Party. But, the key question is, is it really possible to control human consciousness in the long term? No. That is the fatal misunderstanding of communist social engineering in the twentieth century.

Moreover, there is a legitimacy problem constantly confronted by the regime -- its commitment to Marx's doctrine -- on the issue of freedom of the press and media democratization. For one thing, while the Party defended monopoly control of the media on the grounds that it was for the good of the people as laid down by the officially interpreted Marxism, Marx himself fervently advocated media freedom. As a result, the Party destroyed a facet of its own credibility and constructed for itself a hypocritical image, purporting to follow Marxist theory while at the same time suppressing all forms of freedom of expression. Thus freedom of



the press to some extent is seen as the most vulnerable point for the survival of the communist system.

#### **7.1.2 The Battle For Press Freedom**

On the other hand, to the media corps and the general public, freedom of the press is in every sense the fulcrum of Archimedes' lever for breaking through totalitarian control and for the realization of democracy. Of course, to have the right to free speech would not mean to have everything, or guarantee a satisfactory outcome (according to the present human condition, it is impossible to achieve this), but if this vital right is taken away on whatsoever pretexts, it is bound to jeopardize all of one's human rights and put people on the road to serfdom. Hayek, in his book On The Road To Serfdom, argues that without the freedom of private property, people lose every other freedom (F.Heyek, 1944). However, in my experience of the communist state, deprivation of the citizen's right to free speech and a free press, that is, deprivation of political rights rather than the Heyek's economic rights, is the foremost step towards the road to serfdom and the creation of a communist totalitarian state.

The struggle for media freedom in the communist state is vital to create a democracy and the process of transformation of communist media institutions. The communist authority is very much conscious of this point. The new General Secretary of Chinese Communist Party Jiang Zemin (1989 -- ) has remarked:

In recent years, "freedom of the press" has become a crucial slogan that has been used by a tiny number of stubborn bourgeois liberalists [note: a label equivalent to "class enemy" in Mao's era] to battle against the Party and the people (People's Daily, 2.3.1990).



This clearly indicates that the ruling Party elite realized, particularly in the wake of the 1989 Beijing pro-democracy movement, that freedom of the press could cost the Party -- its monopolistic power. This was explicitly put by the broadcasting minister Ai Zhisheng:

In every country, those who are engaged in social upheaval must first take the control of the mass media as well as advocate the slogan of freedom of the press. It is clear now that the essence of addressing this slogan in our country during that period (of the 1989 upheaval) is to attempt to seize the leadership power of the Party and government on the media work (1990:123).

Because of this sensitivity, in the early 1980s when the reform programme had just been initiated in the economic sector, the battle for press freedom in the Chinese mass media was carefully termed as "journalism reform" as the word "reform" was so fashionable everywhere at the time. In reality, however, this was a catch-all phrase which included anything from improvements in writing, editing, programming production and service quality to structural reform, management innovations and functional media changes. However, the post-Mao media evolution has revealed that through tug-of-war practice, the progress of freedom of the press in the Chinese media has been underway with the underlying trend gradually heading for democratization. In the following section, I provide a descriptive account and a sociological interpretation of such changes in post-Mao era with special reference to broadcasting.

## 7.2 THE EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN POST-MAO CHINA

### 7.2.1 Breakdown of Reporting Taboos and Improvement of the News Service

The increased volume of information available through Chinese radio and television, and diversified news reporting both in terms of quality and quantity was perhaps the first and most important step in the direction of a media institution exercising freedom of the press. The last decade has seen an unprecedented expansion in news service broadcasts.

In the early 1980s, following the Party's shift towards economic reform, the foci of news programming began to diverge from the original model of politico-ideological dominance towards (relatively) audience-oriented programmes with the emphasis on economic reporting. During that period, China was also affected by the western trend of thought of "Information Society", an idea rapidly spreading in Chinese society through the translation of Toffler's popular book The Third Wave, which had some impact on policy-makers' thinking about the function of the news media. In November 1982, Wu Lengxi, the reform-minded broadcasting minister, spoke about the news programme at the national conference for directors of television stations. He asked that all stations should take measures to improve news services in response to the increasing need for information in the drive towards national modernization. He stressed that such an improvement could offer a "breakthrough point" for the overall reform of television (L.Wu 1982:226-232). Journalism reform in the broadcasting field, according to the official vision, was said to mean an emphasis on "freshness, speed, brevity, scope, and loudness" (People's Daily, 21.11.1983). In that sense, newsmen were given impetus to establish a climate that seemed to encourage innovations and (towards) open expression of public opinions in their reporting.



With the efforts of hundreds of thousands of professionals, many taboos have been broken since then. A prominent case was the emergence of critical reporting on television. According to Shi's study, critical reporting particularly in respect of exposing the seamy side of society, used to be forbidden on radio and television. This followed important advice taken from the Soviet experience in the mid 1950s, mainly for fear that the airwaves could be easily intercepted by outsiders and used to benefit enemy propaganda. There were even specific rules as to how to deal with bad news such as natural disasters, accidents, and economic setbacks (T.Shi, 1987:166). For example, accidents could be released on the media when their causes had been found out and when they would not damage the good image of the Party and the socialist system.

However, there was a breakthrough in this no-criticism rule on the airwaves in post-Mao China. On September 8, 1979, for example, the CCTV national network broadcast the news story that some high ranking bureaucrats and their family members used government cars for private shopping and sightseeing. This became a target for criticism because there were no private cars in China at that time and the number of government cars was also extremely limited. The news triggered enormous public response. Within just a few days, CCTV received more than 1,500 letters from its audience most of which praised this reporting as a good job done in the people's interest. (T.Shi, 1987:166-167). After that, more TV stations were encouraged by the move and engaged in exposes. The government, facing increasing public pressure, felt that it must take some tough action to tackle the problem of official corruption as well as other public concerns in order to stabilize and maintain the social order. However, there remained two important restrictions governing criticism in media reporting: first, the Party's leadership would not be challenged; second, media criticism was not allowed to offend top leaders or the institutions at the same level as the media organization. In other words, a provincial television station could not broadcast



a criticism of central authorities or of fellow provincial authorities. For these two levels (central and provincial) only CCTV had the authority to do so, provided it has managed to obtain permission.

Despite these restrictions (which are still in place officially), the post-Mao reform progress has gradually created favourable conditions for media criticism. Some conventional practices have been broken and some forbidden areas have been entered. For instance, the southern Fujing station managed to report serious environmental pollution in the city of Xiamin which aroused immediate concern and drew support both from the public and the authorities; the northern Heilongjing station attacked a local council maintenance team for its deliberate refusal to repair a broken residential water supply system for over 20 days, simply because the people there had not given the staff in charge the extra "wine and cigarettes" (Z.Zhang, 1987:40; T.Shi, 1987:167). In 1987, the unrest in Tibet was fully reported on the television. Even if the reporting was distorted to some degree and was for the propaganda need of the Chinese government, unpleasant incidents of this kind would never have appeared on national television in the past. Michael Berlin, a former Washington Post reporter teaching journalism in China, said he was "amazed to see a Chinese television reporter, mike in hand, standing outside the private home that a provincial official had allegedly built with government funds and trying to question a family member about the allegation as he emerged, stunned and enraged by the live report" (M.Berlin, 1989:32).

In developing such a process, quite a number of stations set up special programmes to conduct critical reporting (how critical depends on the political climate of the day). Amongst the most popular programmes of this type have been Guangdong Television's "Take It as Evidence", Shanghai's "From Our Viewers", Shandong's "Seen on the Street", and Beijing's "Voice of the Audience" (cf. T.Shi, 1987:167-170). The audience's response has been very positive since the emergence of this kind of reporting. As a

result, letters and phone calls from the viewers have increased substantially almost in every television stations (J.Hong, 1992:17-18)

A number of "firsts" were tried and recorded in the television medium, such as market information programmes, sensitive topics of political debate, direct satellites supplying international news, live telecasts of the Party's congress and the national people's congress, VIP interviews, news on the frustration of economic reform, reports from audiences, disaster coverage, criminal reports and human interest stories. These programmes, unimaginable in Mao's era, are now daily practice. Some have become conventional, others remain more or less acceptable to the authority, others controversial (e.g critical reports, political debate). However, it is clear that the underlying trend has been generally characterised by an enlarging space for the media to occupy and the implicit evolution of freedom of the press.

#### **7.2.2 Changes in the News Supply**

In the meantime, the structure of domestic news supply has more and more departed from merely relying on unified and centralized news production (usually from CCTV), and moved towards an exchange basis of local and regional cooperation. In November 1983, for instance, with the initiative of the Shanghai TV Station, the "Yangzi River Delta TV Co-op Network" was established. This regional network is based on the Yangzi River Delta which includes Shanghai and six other provinces in Eastern China. By the end of the 1980s, around 40 stations ranking from provincial level, city level to local county's joined the network. Using microwave transmission, stations within the region now exchange their news programmes daily and thus have greatly improved their local news coverage as well as content (J.Yu, 1986:21; X.Zhou, 1986:14; The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, 1991 ).



In accordance with these changes, the quantity of the news service has also steadily increased. Due to the problem of nation-wide data availability, we only have the data of CCTV and Shanghai TV Station (STV) concerning this issue. Nevertheless, the facts provided in the following tables still, to some extent, speak for themselves and more or less represent the trend of the state of news service in a national level.

Table 7.1  
Increase of TV News Items

Increase of CCTV News Items		Increase of STV News Items	
Year	Items	Year	Items
1980	3,700	1979	1,000
1981	4,200	1981	4,800
1983	11,000	1983	4,900
1985	20,400	1985	9,900
1988	25,000	1988	15,000

Source: For CCTV data, for 1980, 1981, 1983 figures, see China TV Stations ( 1987 ), Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, pp 39; for 1985 figure, see The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting ( 1991 ), Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, pp 86; for 1988 figure, see China Broadcasting Yearbook ( 1989 ), Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, pp 30. For STV data, for 1979, 1981, 1983 figures, see China TV Stations ( 1987 ), *ibid.* pp 155; for 1985 figure, see China Broadcasting Yearbook ( 1986 ), *ibid.* pp 765; for 1988 figure, see Shanghai TV Information, No.6,1989,pp16.



**Table 7.2**

**CCTV News Schedule ( 1988 )**

<b>Time</b>	<b>News Programme</b>	<b>Duration</b>
8:30	Morning News	30 m
9:20	Morning Brief	5 m
12:00	Noon News	15 m
14:20	International News	5 m
19:00	Network News	30 m
21:00	Economic News	30 m
22:00	Night News	15 m

Sources: CCTV Thirty Years ( 1958 -- 1988 ), pp 695 - 699;  
Shanghai Radio & TV Weekly, No.9, 29.2.1992.

**Table 7.3**

**STV Local News Schedule ( 1992 )**

<b>Time</b>	<b>News Programme</b>	<b>Duration</b>
9:00	Morning News	10 m
12:30	Noon News	15 m
14:00	News Brief	5 m
18:30	Evening News	30 m
20:00	Information	30 m
21:30	Night News	15 m
23:00	Late Night News	15 m

Sources: CCTV Thirty Years ( 1958 -- 1988 ), pp 695 - 699;  
Shanghai Radio & TV Weekly, No.9, 29.2.1992.

### **7.2.3 Seeking Greater Editorial Independence**

An important focus of media reform efforts was to seek greater editorial autonomy. This is always the goal of media professionals in the world, but in the Chinese context, it chiefly had two meanings. Firstly, the media attempted to be free

from the day-to-day minutiae of interference from above (the Party, government and various authorities); secondly, the media attempted to provide a sort of role of the fourth estate in terms of the checks and balances of power. As the reform movement went on, the Party also felt strong pressure to change its media management style. Thus during the last decade, the communist authority began to evolve its media control method from a direct and merely administrative dimension to somewhat indirect and multifold concerns. This can be seen as an attempt towards forming a sort of arms' length control pattern which is widely practised in other types of societies. In the mid-1980s, major radio and television stations started to adopt the "editor in charge of journalistic affairs" system in which reporters and editors gained relative autonomy to deal with their business. Accordingly, most of the programmes, including news and documentaries, did not need to be pre-broadcast-reviewed by the administrative authorities (before, there had been a pre-broadcast-review system by which high ranking officials in charge of propaganda affairs previewed the programmes and had the power to decide whether they should be shown ). After the 1989 Beijing tragedy, this situation was reversed to some degree, but it is reported recently that the preview control has been loosened again except on some politically sensitive topics (X.Sun and B.Tong, in interviews with the author, Beijing, September 1990).

Meanwhile, the desire for the media to be the fourth estate was growing after the death of Mao. This gathering momentum culminated in the 13th Party Congress (October 1987) when the reform-minded Party leaders showed some support for the media playing the role of power check. In Chinese, it was termed as "media supervisional role". In the main congress document, it formally endorsed the principle of media supervision and proposed three ways to conduct it: that the mass media should oversee the Party and government work and performance; that the mass media should inform the public of important events; and that the mass media should report openly debate on important policy issues (Zhao Ziyang: The 13th Party Congress Report, 25.10.1987). Some



top leaders even suggested that political issues could now be discussed publicly, a reference that was applied to the role of the media as the public forum of debate. Wan Li, Chairman of the National Congress, made this point quite clear in a national symposium on soft sciences in 1986:

All the political and policy matters should be studied. They can be debated publicly before decisions are made. Dissenting views must not be attacked from the higher plain of principle and in the context of a class struggle, as was done in the past... (People's Daily, 15.8.1986).

Thus strong impetus was given to the mass media in seeking greater editorial autonomy. Television, with its vivid visual appeal, played a very active role in providing access to public information, covering political debates and giving greater attention to many sensitive issues such as inflation, corruption, policy formulations, political reform, the development of legislation and "bad news" stories like the 1986 student demonstration and the 1987 forest conflagration in northeast China (Z.Wang, 1988).

#### **7.2.4 Structural Changes in Broadcasting Personnel**

There has been a steady improvement in the professionalism of Chinese broadcasting. In the last decade, media education has expanded rapidly. The number of journalism schools and departments proliferated from a dozen in the early 1980s to 76 in the late 1980s. Now more than one thousand journalism graduates and postgraduates are recruited by the mass media every year. In broadcasting, for instance, nearly four thousands graduates from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute entered various radio and television stations to work after 1979. As a result, the proportion of broadcasting personnel with higher education and special training has steadily increased, now reaching over



50% as compared with 20% ten years ago. In the early days, Chinese broadcast corps were largely staffed by ex-military personnel; college graduates particularly those receiving formal training in journalism and communication programme were very few in the field (L.White, 1990:93-95). However, this situation has greatly changed. In 1986, for instance, the News Department of the Shanghai TV Station had 39 reporters and editors among whom 50% graduated from media training programme in universities (J.Yu, 1986:21)

To some extent, this generation of younger, more energetic, more independent, more innovative and better-educated professionals are the driving force in changing the status quo of media institutions. Their presence has not only affected the dynamics of the broadcasting industry, but also greatly advanced the cause of the media reform programme. In the same vein, the composition of broadcasting personnel has also experienced a structural change towards the process of professionalism which has had a profound impact on the performance of broadcasting. This change has been virtually completed in regional stations where the proportion of professionals has reached more than 50% (which is similar to that of developed countries) of the total number of staff. The following tables provide statistics showing this trend.

Table 7.4

Staffing Structure of Chinese Broadcasting (1984 - 1989)

Year	Total No.of Staff	Prof(%)*	Admin(%)	Techni(%)	Other**
1984	204,941	18.2%	17.5%	13.7%	50.6%
1985	220,469	18.8%	18.2%	13.8%	49.2%
1986	248,535	21.1%	17.5%	13.5%	47.9%
1987	221,625	23.3%	18.9%	16.4%	41.4%
1988	234,071	24.4%	17.5%	18.4%	39.7%
1989	244,320	24.4%	17.8%	18.9%	38.9%

Note: \*Professionals include editors, producers, announcers, presenters, arts personnel etc.

\*\* Others also include wire broadcasting maintenance workers which make up about 11% of the total staff.

Source: China Broadcasting Yearbook 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990.

**Table 7.5**  
**Staffing Structure of Regional TV Stations (1982 - 1987)**  
( in % )

Year	Professional	Admin	Technical	Other
1982	40.2%	/	/	
1984	45.8%	10%	25.3%	18.9%
1986	45%	10%	22.3%	22.7%
1987	52.4%	9%	21.8%	16.8%

Source: The 1982 figure is taken from An Introduction of Chinese Television ( Zhuang, 1985:246 ); the rest from The Advancement of Chinese Broadcasting, Ibid. pp 151.

**7.2.4 The 1989 Beijing Spring**

The struggle for press freedom reached a decisive break in the 1989 Beijing pro-democracy movement. For several weeks leading up to the declaration of martial law on May 20, the Chinese mass media, for the first time in the People's Republic of China, refused to obey the Party's instructions unconditionally. This act of defiance as well as the aftermath of the tragedy itself has been much written about, so what follows below is merely a brief account with the focus on broadcasting journalism.

In the middle of May 1989 when the students' hunger strike at Tiananmen Square rapidly approached a crisis point, a large number of journalists began to take action, strongly showing



their solidarity with the students and the general public. They publicly demanded political reform in general and media freedom in particular, a widely held view, and one reflecting the deep frustration with the failure of Deng's reform to match economic liberalization with parallel political democratization. This view was, among many others, strongly expressed by a group of CCTV's reporters, editors, producers and directors in an emotional statement of support of the students pro-democracy movement:

... When the party makes a mistake, we have the obligation to tell the party so and to ask it to listen to the people. ... Therefore, we can no longer keep quiet. We firmly cast our lot with the students. ... We sympathize with and support the students' hunger strike and petition. The government should not be afraid of losing **face**; it should agree to a frank dialogue. It should not douse the fervent patriotism of the students with cold water. ... If the TV station could air the dialogues (between students and leaders) live, it would also be a feat in media history. If transmitting van are available, we can rent them from the local stations. ...What has happened to the media under the bureaucratic system? Editors, directors, reporters no longer have brains in their heads. Their throats are cut. They have become robots who only obey the commands of their superiors (Mimeographed flyer, cited from Chinese Sociology and Anthropology. Fall 1990:47-48).

Meanwhile, several large journalists demonstrations, involving around ten thousand people led by CCTV, People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency -- all the Party's top media institutions, were successfully organized at the peak of the movement, supporting the students and protesting against media censorship. On May 18, for instance, about 1,000 CCTV staff took to the street shouting slogans "Don't force us to lie", "We must speak the truth". What



was striking about these actions during that period was the fact that these journalists from various media bodies publicly marched under banners of the media organizations to which they belonged. Moreover, many famous journalists openly defied the authorities' warnings and used their professional skills to tell the truth to the world. For example, Wei Hua, the anchorwoman for the English service for the CCTV gave several interviews to foreign reporters expressing the determination of the Chinese journalists to struggle for media freedom. A comment by the editor of Beijing Review states that "the outburst of discontent among Chinese journalists is expected to hasten the pace of press reform which, when fully realized, is likely to be the first breakthrough in the reform of China's political structure" (Beijing Review, 15.5.1989).

During those few weeks the Chinese media enjoyed their greatest freedom in history: the CCTV network boldly reported, with fairly extensive detail and objectivity, every development of the movement such as students demands, public debates, millions people's demonstrations and dialogue proposals. (cf. S.Mark, 1991:259-282; B.Liu, 1990; Y.Mu & M.Thompson, 1989:109-143; J.Lull, 1991). M.Hopkins, among many others, vividly described the role that television played during that period: "The audience, accustomed to unimaginative footage of factory workers turning out machine tools and peasants harvesting grain, tuned into something startlingly different in May; moving scenes of young students on a hunger strike in Tiananmen Square. There they lay in make-shift tents, ministered to by fellow students, taken away in ambulances through crowds when their condition weakened to the point of death -- their only demand being a hearing from their leaders. It would have been television at it's most powerful anywhere; in China the impact was unimaginable" (M.Hopkins, 1989:35-36).

In short, the images and symbols which were conveyed through television as well as other mass media in the 1989 Beijing Spring

had a tremendous impact in advancing the course of media freedom and social democratization in China.

#### **7.2.5 Resistance and Repression: The other side of the story**

However, there is the other side of the story: a story of hard-line communist resistance and repression of the movement for media freedom. As the pressure for media freedom grew, so did the intensity of hard-line reaction. Because of the authority's failure to make a commitment to genuine political reform and the establishment of a democratic system, the politics of post-Mao China has had an erratic and unstable pattern. A tug-of-war scenario has thus characterised the reform decade, as periods of retreat were followed by periods of advance, and periods of rapid momentum was replaced by those of a more suppressive policy (Harding, 1987). This has had a great impact on the institutional reform of the Chinese media, largely dictated by the changes of the political climate during the 1980s. Broadly speaking, then, the practice of press freedom gained ground when economic and political transformation movements were relatively successful, but it suffered from frustration as the result of setbacks to these reform programmes. The communist authorities as a whole, however, have every reason to view the institutional development of press freedom is the worst thing they wish to see. Therefore, many efforts have been made to maintain the Party's dominant position over the media, and when the political situation was reversed in favour of communist hard-liners, suppression campaigns -- usually coined "Anti-bourgeois Liberalization" -- were launched in an attempt to crush the press freedom movement. Prior to the 1989 Tiananmen killings, such major campaigns were, notably, the crackdown on the Democracy Wall movement (1979), "anti-bourgeois spiritual pollution" (1983) and "anti-bourgeois liberalization" (early 1987).

In broadcasting, however, the Secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee passed a resolution as early



as in 1981 to ensure a firm stance. It reads: "Radio and television are the most powerful modern tool for the purpose of educating and inspiring the Party, the army, and the people of all nationalities to build a socialist material and spiritual civilization. This is the fundamental nature and task of radio and television." In doing so, "broadcasting must keep in line with the Party voluntarily, and serve the main Party objectives of the time"(Selected Broadcasting Working Documents, Vol.1, 1988:100-101). Whatever the reform movement in progress, the ruling officialdom remains determined to hang on to the bottom line. This was clearly revealed in a confidential speech made by the current broadcasting Minister, Ai Zhisheng with the stress on the official version of the broadcasting reform on October 5, 1988. He stated that "the purpose (of broadcasting reform) is by no means to change the essential role of broadcasting as the Party mouthpiece, but, rather, to strengthen it."

In order to achieve this requirement, the Party demands that all media reporting work, broadcasting in particular, must be conducted in line with the principle of so-called "positive propaganda". That is "about 80% of the reporting should be devoted to achievements, good things, while 20% to shortcomings, the negative side of society etc." (Y.Hu, 1985:18). According to Li Rui Huan -- the newly appointed Party's chief ideologue (1989 - ), "This is the key guide line that socialist media work must observe"(R.Li, 1990). But what does this principle mean in the practice of media reporting? The textbook of the Beijing Broadcasting Institute gives an explanation:

"Positive propaganda" means news that deals with models of people and good situations which can be used to mobilize and inspire the general public. ... In this way, news that can be catalogued in this respect should be reported. Bad news such as disasters also can be reported, but, emphasis should be placed on the activities and brave endeavours that serve to recover from the disaster. ... Positive propaganda does not mean



the exclusion of critical reporting, but, such a reporting should be: 1) truthful; 2) typical; and 3) constructive. The purpose of reporting such a critical story is, therefore, to enhance people's confidence and give them inspiration and strength rather than make them depressed and pessimistic. Stories solely designed to expose the seamy side of society should be banned (X.Lu, 1982:570).

In reality, the operation of media control mechanisms regarding reporting comes in varying forms. Some are in the form of formal Party documents, others are in the form of internal bulletins (e.g. Propaganda Trend issued by the Party Propaganda Department on a weekly basis), some are just a short notice or even an oral message from leading Party figures. In the broadcasting field, the most important directive concerning radio and television reporting is the bulletin of the Broadcasting Editors' Daily circulating only to the persons who reach certain higher rank positions within the field of broadcasting. It usually gives very specific directives on issues of reporting, plainly telling broadcasters what they should and shouldn't do. In the issue of 19 February 1985, for example, it read: "Recently, there have been some reports devoted to "beauty contests". At present these kinds of activities should not be reported too much" (cf. W.Chang, 1989:169). In another interesting case, the broadcasting minister Ai Zhisheng gave his directive on reporting Christmas celebrations in Chinese campuses and the popularity of Karaoke. This is what he said:

I think radio and television had better not advocate the phenomenon of the Christmas celebration which is now getting increasingly "popular" in university campuses, because such a western life style is not suitable to our nation. ...

The other day, Fujing Province TV Station received a news programme about the popularity of Karaoke entertainment. This also should not be advocated, and particularly should not be broadcast on the national network news service (Z.Ai, 1989).

In another important development with regard to the further strengthening of the struggle against the institutional practice of media democratization, the communist authority devised a new censorship institution in an attempt to maintain its absolute control. In January 1987, at the height of another "Anti-bourgeois Liberalization" campaign, an administrative censorship bureau -- the State Media and Publication Office (SMPO) was formally established and a conservative ideologue Du Dao-Zheng was appointed as the general director. The purpose of this new organization, according to Du, is 1) to ensure the Party's effective leadership on media and publication work; 2) to maintain the administrative order of the media and publication work. Specifically, the SMPO is designed to carry out the following major tasks with regard to the media and publication:

1. to handle drafting and implementing laws and regulations in this area;
2. to provide guidance on principles and policies;
3. to examine all publications;
4. to exercise unified planning and management (D.Du, 1987).

In brief then, the whole issue of what you can or cannot say in the mass media is framed in the Party's interest. This is seen by the authorities as the ultimate criterion for conducting media reporting. It is no secret, therefore, that the ruling power is attempting to employ all necessary means through the existing control mechanisms to resist and repress the progress of institutional progress in media freedom.



However, the media reform programme is an important part of the evolution of overall social change and political democratization in post-Mao China. As a result, the tendency to enlarge the practice of media freedom, such as favouring greater informational openness, better representation of public opinion, increased media oversight over the policy-making and seeking greater editorial autonomy, has been growing. Thus, on the one hand, the more the media reform is pushed forward, the more the whole media institution diverges from the original Stalinist state-control model, and the more it requires sweeping democratic change; on the other hand, despite considerable progress achieved throughout the 1980s, the core of the Party media system remains largely unchallenged. Indeed, any further progress that may lead to a fundamental institutional change will face well-entrenched opposition and strong resistance. Frustration and conflict are inevitable, particularly after the 1989 Beijing tragedy. It is an inherent phenomenon that will largely dictate the future course of media reform.

### **7.3 THE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF MEDIA REFORM**

In this section, I want to discuss the political consciousness of media reform during the last decade. In doing so, I intend to choose the heated debate on the Media Law (which may also be translated as the Press Law) as the focal point to examine how political consciousness over media reform has developed. The issue became a touchstone in the development of the post-Mao Chinese media legislation as well as democratization which involved the process of media institutional reform. Meanwhile, if we assume, through the analysis of the media law debate, that the political consciousness of the Chinese media circles was in some way to show a wide-degree of support for press freedom and the institutional reform on the one hand, and the dissatisfaction



with the status quo on the other, then it is necessary to measure the scope and scale of this existing consciousness and find some tangible materials to confirm or disconfirm it; if so, how far? It is worth examining four important opinion polls about media reform conducted in 1988 and 1989 in China, in which I was also partly involved.

### **7.3.1 The Debate on Media Legislation**

The issue of media legislation in the context of Deng's era is mainly concerned with the rights of the media corps and certain regulatory matters dealing with how the mass media should function and how media freedom can be fulfilled (the communist authorities dare not deny freedom of the press, in theory). In many ways, it can be seen as a momentous effort to shift the existing media institution from the rule of man (i.e the Party, in this context) to the rule of law. After a ten-year "dark age" of poor performance with the media being virtually a slave girl of Maoism during the cultural revolution, a whole generation started to realize that it was time to make efforts towards media institutional reform.

Among the prominent advocates of media reform is Hu Jiwei, an influential media figure who used to be the editor-in-chief of the Party's organ, People's Daily, and was forced to resign in 1983 as a victim of the Campaign against "bourgeois liberalism". He also held the post of the president of the Chinese journalist's national trade union organization and vice-chair of the Education, Science, Culture and Public Health sub-Committee of the National People Congress up till the mid-1989 when he was purged by the hardliners for his "bourgeois journalism ideas" and for "provoking the Beijing counter-revolutionary riot".

As early as the late 1970s, he had articulated a controversial argument which initiated the debate over media legislation. Being a chief editor of the People's Daily, he carefully pointed out

that the public interest should be superior to the Party's and, according to historical experience, that the Party was more liable to error than the people. Therefore, he argued that the mass media should be loyal to the people's interest and to guarantee this obligation. For that purpose, a media law was needed. It must be noted that Hu's argument was nothing but common sense to the non-communist world, but it did offend the orthodox communist media theory at the time, and made the Party conservatives feel deeply uneasy. Meanwhile it was understood that the argument could cause controversy mainly because it devalued the Party's supremacy by articulating the dissident view which was somewhat on the margin of the official line (e.g. loyalty to the people). In other words, Hu actually employed the officially accepted tone to challenge the Party media status quo. Thus both pro and con sides could find legitimate bases of their own on which to stand. During the debate, a recurring theme among those arguing for a relaxation of Party control was the need to replace Party supervision of the media with public opinion (K.Starck & X.Yu, 1988). As Sun Xupei, a senior media researcher in China's Social Science Academy pointed out, the existing Chinese media institutions tend to breed uniformity; as a result, all the media say similar things with a similar tone, creating virtually a single voice in society. Therefore, it was necessary to reform such a media institution replacing it with a multi-tier, multi-type, pluralistic media system. For that purpose, Sun believed that enacting a media law based on the freedom of the press was a crucial step in that direction (X.Sun, 1989).

In the same vein, another influential figure Zhong Peizhang, former director of the Media Bureau of the Party's Propaganda Department, lists three glaring defects of the Chinese media system: 1) the uniform nature of the media performance which is divorced from the needs of an audience from all walks of life; 2) sheer propaganda which results in ignoring the basic function of the mass media -- to inform people; and 3) state budget or subscription at public expense. Thus he argues that the goal of media reform and media legislation is to "achieve press freedom.



Otherwise, it would be no use for us to talk about more open and democratic mass media" (P.Zhong, 1988).

Xie Wenqing, who used to be the vice minister of Chinese Broadcasting in the early 1980s and is now vice president of the Chinese Broadcasting Association, sharply criticised the lack of media freedom in China saying: " I was told that our media were even unable to report the truth of the summer's highest temperature, therefore, how can (we expect) people believe us? As a result, readers and audience turn to the foreign media, (try to) listen to the Voice of America, and read Hong Kong newspapers"(W.Xie, 1988). Li Senhua, deputy director of the Shanghai Radio Station, urged to pass the media legislation to improve the situation (S.Li, 1987).

The ideological conservatives, on the other hand, viewed the issue of media legislation as an important opportunity to legalize its current administrative intervention in media work. As such, they wanted control and order to be emphasized in the media law, and the Party's interest not to be undermined. For that reason, Du Dao-Zheng, general director of the State Media and Publication Office, reminded people that the media law should give a proper restriction to the practice of media freedom; otherwise, he warned, such freedom would damage the national interest and the just rights of other people (D.Du, 1988).

In responding to Du's view, Hu argues that "the aim of media legislation is to protect freedom of the press. Should there be restrictions? There should. But such restrictions should not be put first. ... The aim of restrictions is not to interfere with freedom of the press, but to allow the improved exercise of press freedom. Protection and restrictions cannot vary with people. Action should not be based on an official's will. ... Everything should be done according to law. There should be a transition from rule by men to rule by law" (J.Hu, 1989).



In practice, however, the prolonged debate about the media law did not materialize until 1985 when Hu Jiwei was put in charge of drafting the law and became the sponsor of the Research Office for Media Law. However, as the result of a conservative backlash, establishing the State Media and Publication Office (SMPO) in 1987, the responsibility for drafting the media law had been partly transferred from Hu Jiwei and his research group to Du's SMPO between 1987 and the mid-1989. Nevertheless, the process of drafting the media law during that period was generally directed towards the media reform led by Hu Jiwen. Li Zuxin, a member of the media law drafting committee, outlined the five main points of the proposed drafting media in 1986: 1) no administrative interference; 2) freedom of publication to ensure the ability of citizens to do whatever is within the boundary of the law; 3) supervision by public opinion to allow full participation of the public in political affairs; 4) openness; and 5) abolition of censorship prior to publication and enforcement of penalties for libel, slander, bribery, leaking state secrets and treason (Z.Li, 1986:11-12).

By early 1989, it was reported that the draft of the media law had been almost completed and was about to be submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress -- China's legislative institution -- for examination and approval in June 1989. Because of the failure of the Beijing pro-democracy movement and the subsequent victory of hardliner communists in the power struggle, the agenda was entirely changed. Instead of passing the media legislation, the Congress deputies hurried to implement the Party's emergency order to approve a Public Demonstration Law which means any kind of oppositional demonstration was virtually banned. Moreover, only four months later in October 1989, the law forbidding demonstrations took effect, whilst the draft media law, with the purging of Hu Jiwen, was made a target for hardliner attack on the grounds that the proposed law was influenced too much by Hu's idea of bourgeois press freedom and would undermine the Party's leadership over the mass media. Thus the on-going process of media legislation since

1989 has been set back, and, not surprisingly, the pace of institutional change in aspects of legality can only proceed at a glacial rate, at least for the time being.

### 7.3.2 Opinion Polls Regarding the Media Reform Programme

Now I want to extend my analysis to opinion polls over the issue of Chinese media reform. These polls, one way or another, reflected: 1) the underlying problems and crises within existing media institutions; 2) the increasing repudiation of the Stalinist media model; and 3) the desire for future change. In this study, I rely mainly to the data of four influential surveys conducted in recent years by two media and opinion study groups. One is the Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI) of the Chinese People's University, a prestige Gallup Poll in China, and the other is the polls carried out by the Journalism Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). This is not only because they are important, but also because they are the only kind of surveys conducted so far in China. The four are:

- (1) A Survey on Celebrities Perspectives on the 1988 Reform (Media Section), February 1988 by PORI;
- (2) A Survey on Celebrities' Perspectives on the 1989 Reform (Media Section), February 1989 by PORI;
- (3) The National Media Survey on Media Reform, March-April 1988 by PORI;
- (4) Attitude and Opinion on Media Reform (National Congress Deputies Section), December 1988 by the Journalism Institute of the CASS.

"Celebrities" here refer to a certain section of the Chinese political elite, most of whom are academically accomplished, advanced in age and hold high official positions (many are at ministerial level or above); the number of selected, valid and completed anonymous questionnaires were 200 (1988) and 172



(1989). The national media here refer to Chinese mass media circles, those leading persons directly involved in television, radio and newspaper in all national, regional and local city & county levels plus media researchers and policy makers; the number of valid and completed anonymous questionnaires was 1,884. The deputies of the National People's Congress are to some degree equivalent to MPs in the UK (but they are not elected) and come from all walks of life; the number of valid and completed anonymous questionnaires was 1,542 (the total number of deputies is nearly 3,000). The references of the four surveys original reports are collected in the book entitled: A Collection of the Chinese Media Surveys (published in Chinese, Shenyang Press, 1989). The figures I quote below, unless otherwise indicated, are all from the above-mentioned surveys.

#### **7.3.2.1 General Assessment of the Status Quo of Chinese Media**

To some extent, the findings of the four surveys often provided surprising insight into people's thinking. In the national media survey, more than 87% of Chinese media VIPs clearly expressed their dissatisfaction or strong negative attitudes towards the existing media institution as a whole; 78.7% admitted that the mass media were increasingly losing credibility among audiences and readers in terms of providing information, propagating the Party's policies and convincing people to identify with Communist ideology; 78.7% thought that the situation had already made a bad or very bad impact; and 76.3% acknowledged that Chinese people were in no way satisfied with media performance. Asked about the pace of media institutional reform, the 94% said that it was too slow and too little; some radicals even said that there had been no real progress at all (as far as the system itself is concerned). Interestingly, similar assessments can be seen in the two successive celebrities surveys. 62% of those celebrities questioned in the 1988 survey severely criticized the status quo of the Chinese mass media and expressed their desire to reform the existing model. One year later that figure had increased to



75%. That is to say, instead of defending the mass media performance under the current communist authority, many key members of the nomenklatura did not conform to the Party's position. In the poll of Congress deputies, the assessment of the media performance seemed to be better than the above three; however, 62% of deputies questioned still criticised the media's role of reflecting public opinion and other duties of social communication. The evidence employed here has two major implications: firstly, it suggests that a large part of the social elite are well aware of the media legitimacy crisis and no longer identify themselves with the existing media institution; secondly, it reflects the current consensus on media reform with an emphasis on urgent substantial democratic changes. Therefore, the demand for fundamental institutional reform is gaining momentum.

#### **7.3.2.2 Major Criticisms and Problems**

According to the four surveys, criticisms concentrated on two areas: media performance and the media's role in society. In the National Media Survey, 78.8% said that there were too many restrictions on critical programmes/reporting (i.e. the authorities' acceptable version of the media "Fourth Estate" practice); 67.6% acknowledged that there was little truth in the coverage of certain sensitive topics. A senior media professional in the survey pointed out that the current problems of Chinese media performance include "poor information, low credibility, one-sided opinions and evasion of public concerns". These descriptions generally reflected the majority view in the surveys. In the Celebrities survey, the feelings of dissatisfaction were even stronger: 91.5% criticized the media for rarely providing a chance for people to express their views and providing little popular access to the debate over important issues; 87% said the media were not open enough in their reporting of political affairs and the process of policy-making. As the demand for the media to play a supervisory role was

growing, 75% in the survey thought the media did not actively criticize or supervise the Party and government work, and 60.5% wished to abolish censorship.

It should be noted here that the language used in the questionnaires for these surveys was neutral and, therefore, acceptable to the authorities in order to avoid unnecessary troubles. Even so, however, the surveys' findings still exposed a blatant contradiction between the declared "people's media" on the one hand, and the actual media as the Party's servant-girl on the other. In a word, ordinary Chinese have virtually been denied the right of access to the media in the name of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship. As a matter of fact, more and more people both inside and outside media circles have begun to realize the point and these surveys, one way or another, confirmed this recognition. As one senior figure in these surveys remarked, the key to media reform is to introduce democratic mechanisms to reconstruct the whole system.

#### **7.3.2.3 On Issues of Media Legislation**

The surveys revealed widespread support for enactment of the media law in order to protect freedom of the press. But as to how to understand and materialize this, those questioned seemed to fail to reach consensus. The key issue was the attitude towards non-public ownership media (presumably, the ownership is a kind of "public" control through the state in communist society). If freedom of the press also means the right of people to set up and run non-official media in China, then a kind of ambivalence was quite evident in these surveys. On the one hand, most people in the surveys were perfectly aware that the purpose of media legislation was to protect freedom of the press; on the other hand, a considerable number of people feared that the situation would get out of control, if non-government media including private ones were allowed. The following table shows the attitude of Congress deputies which, by and large, also represented the



other three groups.

Table 7.6

The Attitude of Congress Deputies towards Media Freedom

N = 1,542

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Question 1:

The purpose of media legislation is to protect media freedom

Agree	Disagree	No Answer
82.2%	13.9%	3.9%

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Question 2:

Citizen's freedom of the press means that citizens can run their own press

Agree	Disagree	No Answer
35.3%	60.1%	4.7%

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7.3.2.4 Directions and Priorities of Reform

How can the institutional reform of the Chinese media succeed within the context of a national modernization movement? The majority of the elites (ranging from 80% to 95% depending on different priorities they chose) in the surveys believed that the first crucial step to be taken involves separating the Party's power from media management with some form of constitutional guarantee. In other words, each TV/radio station, as well as newspaper, should become autonomous with adequate decision-making power; unless absolutely necessary, any outside interference should be kept to a minimum. The media should be subject to the law based on a regulatory framework. In the survey of Congress deputies, 77% viewed media institutional reform as the priority agenda; and for that purpose, the majority of deputies questioned agreed that media reform should follow the principles of openness ( 93.5% ), rule of law (93.2%) and autonomy (58.4%).



Within that framework of reform intentions, they also addressed short term priorities and long term targets. The short term (within five years) tasks include: giving the media greater freedom; drafting a media law to implement the transition from the current rule of man to rule of law; bringing into full play the media's supervisory role and expanding its coverage of all public concerns. The long term (five to ten year) tasks are: establishing a pluralistic structure which should allow open access to the public and allow non-official media existence and development; financial independence and full introduction of market mechanisms.

It is clear that these polls suggest that political consciousness over Chinese media reform was firmly established during the 1980s and the consensus was heading for overall institutional change. The main intention was to diminish and eventually dismiss Party dominance in the mass media and replace it with a democratic and pluralistic media systems.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Before concluding this thesis, it is worth considering the possible future construction of the Chinese broadcasting model and the directions it might take in this seminal period of the late twentieth century. Of course there are enough uncertain variables surrounding the issue to forbid confident speculation. In general, however, several contingencies will shape the course of the Chinese broadcasting system. Among them, three broad determining factors -- economic marketization, cultural pluralization and social transformation -- may lead the new Chinese broadcasting system towards three possible orientations: **public service broadcasting (PSB)**, or **commercial**, or **two-tier broadcasting** (the last with PSB state regulation on the central level and commercial broadcasting locally).

In Britain and much of the Western European countries where public service broadcasting (PSB) was prevalent, the PSB model was traditionally regarded as a major forum for national cultural development. The (adopted) regulation approach and its relevant policies were justified on the grounds of public interest along with technical constraints of spectrum allocation. In an historical development within contexts of the Western European democracy, the praxis of PSB has experienced many changes with varying versions and features. However, the PSB model essentially possesses four factors: 1) primacy of cultural and political consideration over the pursuit of economic (i.e profit) interest; 2) universal access to the service with a range of quality program; 3) public regulation of ownership and funding sources; and 4) a form of management which places a barrier between

political power and the economic control of broadcasting medium (known in Britain as the "arms' length" principle).

This type of public service broadcasting model is favoured by some policy makers at ministry-level in China. Wang Feng, the section head of Broadcasting Policy & Regulation Department, Ministry of Broadcasting told the author in an interview that in his opinion, while already unwelcome signs of commercialization are evident, the existing Chinese broadcasting system bears similarities to PSB and this is the direction which policy and regulation should take. He said:

China should and can develop a broadcasting system based on the PSB model. I say it should be, because the ethos of PSB and its approach are fit for China and will much benefit to the general public in terms of spiritual enlightenment and national development. I say it can be, because the existing Chinese broadcasting system has some similarities in aspects of its understanding of the objectives of the broadcasting media, ownership, organizational solutions, some program performance etc. Of course, our social system is very different from Britain's and that of other Western countries. That difference makes the emulation of the PSB model problematic, but I still believe that such transformation is feasible in the long term. Nowadays, many broadcasters particularly in local stations only consider how to make more money for themselves rather than to provide a good service to audience. Of course they are not entirely to blame: they have practical problems. But if we can set a clear goal to pursue a PSB approach with consistent and appropriate policy and regulation, the current uncertainty will be removed and the danger of commercialization in broadcasting which now seems to prevail, can diminish (24.10.1990).



Zhao Suifu, deputy director of the same department shares these views:

I've been abroad several times, including to Britain, on tours seeing foreign broadcasting systems. I found there is a lot to learn from the British system. The advertising on television and radio is well regulated; the programming in general is serious and of a high quality, not like some countries' which show sex and violence to seduce the audience; the relationship among the government, broadcasters, general public is also properly balanced. ... Since the 1980s, our broadcasting system has evolved enormously. So where shall we go? The question of future development becomes more and more important. Of course, there is no point in copying another country's system or a particular model. We have already had the painful experience of copying the Soviet's. But I would like to stress that we should not let broadcasting media become a ready source of money. I think a sense of social responsibility is crucial in constructing the system. Thus the British model has a lot more to offer than others (interview with the author, 24.10.1990).

From an historical point of the view, a form of the PSB model with some authoritarian aspects is likely to be appreciated by the Chinese public. As Stavis notices, the Confucian tradition always demands a good government rather than a limited government or a government which can be controlled by the people through constitutional means. Adam Smith's idea of the "invisible hand" to create an optimal society would not go down well with the Chinese (B.Stavis, 1988:138). However, the possibility that China will construct a PSB-oriented model nowadays is fraught with problems and is challenged by many others. For instance, Zhou Fanyang, the man who first put advertising on Chinese television

in 1979, disagreed outright with the views expressed above. He told the author:

Personally, while I appreciate the PSB model, I believe it would be problematic to implement it now. To be frank, under the current condition of Chinese society, I am very sceptical at that a model based on the idea of public interest can be established. After many years of abuse by propaganda of sacrifice and selflessness, people simply do not believe there still exists something called the public interest. I think this is the biggest obstacle to the development of a PSB model today (13.10.1990).

Another critic of the PSB model, media researcher Fa Dongsheng, questions from another viewpoint the viability of its use in China:

I know the BBC model or PSB has won a shower of praise in the past as a model opposing the commercialised American one. This view is still very popular among the cultural elite in many other countries. However, as far as I have known, PSB in western European countries have been in deep crisis. To put it bluntly, it is dying. The new communication technology revolution and the world-wide changed political, economic and cultural circumstances have made this model unfashionable. In Britain, for instance, The Peacock Report and the government White Paper on broadcasting all suggest that a profound change toward a market-oriented and post-PSB model is inevitable. It would be blind not to acknowledge these trends. So I don't think that some of our policy-makers can revive this model in China although I do not deny its virtues (22.10.1990).

In their view, therefore, a commercial model is the future

solution.

Since 1983 the basis for a two-tier broadcasting system has been already structured in the organization and operation of Chinese broadcasting and it is in this direction, in the author's view, that the most likely future scenario lies. At present, the basic formations are there, and could be refined: a balance between market mechanism and state regulation, cultural diversity and an interest in national development. Therefore, the result of a two-tier television system emerging in post-Mao China tends to evolve into a powerful network of confederative institutions that more likely further sap the strength of the party's hegemony.

To sum up, a mixed solution comprising a two-tier system stemming from the 1983 decentralization, can more dynamically serve the public interest and incline post-Mao China's economic and social changes. In the long term this situation will most likely move towards political pluralism and media democratization. However, it will remain to be seen whether such a new formulation of the Chinese television system can in fact develop and eventually prevail against the background of the increasingly weakening of the party-state.



\* \* \* \* \*

Napoleon is supposed to have advised that China be allowed to sleep, for "when China wakes, it will shake the world". He could not have anticipated that two hundred years later China's population would constitute one fifth of the planet's. A late 20th century conundrum of the capitalist world concerns the effect of China finally entering and competing in the world market (The Economist, November 28th 1992).

Since before this force is unleashed upon the West, the party-state has to be transformed, a prior question concerns the process by which the probable opening of China's market will occur. By what means, in what way, and with what concomitant effects, will a Stalinist society, dominated by ideology and rigidly controlled through force, coercion, and organization, transform itself into a post-communist society and, furthermore, a democratic one? This thesis, using the material of media institutions and television in particular, has attempted to provide a tentative outline of the contemporary changing picture of China awakening to the international community.

The Hungarian political economist Janos Kornai has remarked on the inability of classic Soviet communist system to renew itself internally and so remain viable in the long run. He accounts for this in terms of the system's combination of repression, inefficiency and - notably - coherence. When it starts reforming itself, its coherence slackens and its internal contradictions strengthen (Kornai, 1992:xxv).

The Gorbachev-style reform programme led to the drastic disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the painful task of effecting an economic transition from a state command economy to

a market economy. At present, it seems possible that, in the short-to-medium term, the sudden demise of communism in the former Soviet Union may not guarantee its replacement with pluralism and democracy.

The transformations in communist China suggest, in contrast, that rapid self-destruction is not inevitable. In post-Mao China the changes have taken a different course and promise a different outcome. This thesis has sought to track the particularity of the Chinese process of sweeping change by examining the structure, performance, production, organization and institutions in the media, especially television. The domain of the media lends itself to fruitful exploration because it provides both an example of differences between the Soviet and Chinese styles of state transformation, while being itself, in China at least, a major factor contributing to that transformation.

However, any further understanding of the future China's development needs to answer a crucial question: where is China headed next? Will the current change necessarily find China becoming a society of economic prosperity, of cultural pluralism and of a political democracy? In the short-to-medium term, however, it is difficult to give clearly defined answers which provide support for such an optimistic outlook.

The (post-) communist experience of transition has been described by scholars in terms of several models, each of which can be used to throw some light on the present and possible future prospects for change in China (e.g R.Blackburn, 1991; A.Callinicos, 1991; R.Dahrendorf, 1990; J.Kornai, 1992; S.Huntington, 1991; T.Whipple, 1991).

The Romanian model of 1989 - a radical armed revolution - overthrew a communist regime under the Ceaucescu government. The main feature of the Romanian change is that the society suddenly leapt, in an extraordinary circumstance, from one extreme - of classic totalitarianism - to post-communist uncertainty. However,



few would predict a similar process occurring in China, even given the immediate aftermath of Tiananmen Square with the deep frustration and feelings of failure amongst members of the pro-democracy movement. The nature of the regime of Ceaucescu's Romania as against Deng's China suggests little possibility of parallel outcomes. In the first place, the tension between the party-state and the people in Romanian led to all-out war, but in Deng's China tension has been on a much-reduced scale with state power progressively weakening owing to the far-reaching social transformation since the late 1970s. The unpopularity of these two regimes is also not comparable: Deng's regime is hardly as unpopular as was Ceaucescu's, partly because the living standard of Chinese people has gradually improved, thanks to the economic reforms.

In the second place, the Romanian model involved a civil war. This solution seems highly unlikely in the case of post-Mao China: the horrors of the period of the war-lords (1920s - 1930s) and of the civil war (1946 - 1949) are still fresh in the memories of the Chinese people. They would not easily resort to these solutions to the current socio-political circumstances. In addition, at a more fundamental level, the change of the nature of the post-Mao Chinese society, particularly bearing in mind the economic sector's deepening integration into the world market, suggests that the present situation is not at all conducive to producing conditions for a large-scale civil war.

The Soviet model, which has been called a kind of the "implosive" model, is also unlikely to be repeated in post-Mao China for reasons which were examined in chapter two of the thesis. In effect, a combination of political tension, economic deterioration, arms race exhaustion, and multi-national and ethnic conflict in Soviet Union, imploded simultaneously to bring down the Soviet empire virtually overnight. In China, by contrast, not only do none of these conditions prevail to the point of total crisis, but the collapse of the Soviet empire and the consequences of that collapse seems to have had a severe



impact on the outlook of the Chinese society both at the levels of government and ordinary people.

The negative effects of the result of Soviet sudden disintegration can be condensed into three aspects. The first was the emergence of military nationalism, and in some regions it ran rampant into destructive semi-civil war and endless local fighting. The second was the uneven disappearance of the old state administrative structure before an effective democratic alternative had time to replace it. Thus, it had little hope of securing, relative speaking, an orderly and smooth transition. The third was a hurried great push towards an immediate free market of price and privatization - a kind of shock therapy causing a sharp economic fall and hyper-inflation. This drastically lowered the general standard of living there. Thus, even setting aside differences of China's history and culture, or its large and homogeneous population, or the level of economic development, the government and people of China are unlikely to ignore the lessons learnt by proxy from Russia.

A third possibility for China is the relatively attractive evolution model of Hungary (the resource of mass discontent and the legacy of the 1956 popular uprising being transferred to a cautious reform programme initiated by the local communist authority), Czechoslovakia (the velvet revolution), and Poland (the solidarity campaign and the round table achievement). While different in a number of key respects, these three countries have it in common that they all managed to build up a tangible civil base outside the space of the party-state control and created the dynamics for further system transformation either by semi-market economic experiment (e.g Hungary), or by a strong trade union movement supported by the Catholic Church (Poland), or by culmination of decades of efforts of intellectuals championing civil rights (Czechoslovakia). It was through these developments that the communist state powers were gradually eroded in the context of the later era of the Cold War. While it is possible

to argue that Hungary's transitional pattern appears to have many similarities to post-Mao China, the differences are more striking. From the geo-political point of view, communist China has always been independent of the domination of another world-power, whereas (pre-1989) Hungary was always under the thumb of the Soviet empire. Without the processes that ended with Gorbachev's liberalization policy towards Eastern Europe, there would have been no chance of Hungary becoming an independent post-communist state. This was the case even though its economic reform was progressively stronger and more open, Hungary had to remain as a satellite of the Soviet empire. Also, the two countries were too unlike each other to institute the reform programme. The Hungarian economic reform was, in a sense, the result of the failure of the massive rebellion of 1956. The Chinese reform, on the other hand, was the result of the failure of the cultural revolution and indeed the whole radical version of Maoist communism (cf. 2.2). Apart from different cultural, historical and geographic concerns, these distinguishing characteristics had major discrepant effects on the two countries' transitional courses.

Fourthly, there is the post-Mao Chinese transitional model which this thesis examines in detail through the case-study of television development. In this model, Deng adopted an open-door policy and the market discipline which planted the seeds of party-state destruction, albeit unintended. Thus communist power steadily, but substantially retreats from society as a consequence of this radical socio-economic reform movement. Social pressure for further fundamental changes gains momentum. However, since this transition is still in the process of being shaped, questions surrounding China's future remain.

One may isolate three future scenarios as a base for prospective analysis: (1) a return to Maoism; (2) the prescriptive view of neo-authoritarian rule; and (3) the long-term evolutionary democratization. The first one - a return to Maoism - is very unlikely: as was analysed in chapters one and two, the conditions



for restoring Maoist communism no longer exist. Therefore, it is worth concentrating on the remaining two possible scenarios, which are at the heart of current scholarly debate on China.

Through its post-Mao economic reform drive, the Chinese communist party wants to hold on to political power and communication channels, while encouraging people to pursue economic interests and cultural diversity. Deng's intention is clear: to create, ultimately, a neo-authoritarian model or corporatism solution which South-East Asia's "Four Little Dragons - Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong - have experienced. According to this prescriptive version, China is already in the midst of the neo-authoritarian scenario and it will continue well into the next century (e.g H.Harding, 1987; D.Goodman, 1991; B.Sautman, 1992; V.Shue, 1992). To some extent, the pro-neoauthoritarian argument regards democracy as a kind of by-product of economic development. From that prescriptive point of view, the urgent task for China is not democracy but modernization. In order to pursue such a course there must be some political authoritarian arrangement and a strong-man government to maintain the social order, so the argument goes. This would supposedly lead to developmental takeoff of the national economy and the competitive performance in the world market. Obviously, this is the scenario apparently successful in the Little Dragons in the 70s and 80s which Deng is most vigorously pursuing. In a sense, Deng's thesis seems to combine his nationalist ambitions with pragmatic means by which he hopes that China can secure a powerful position in the world, and that the communist party can secure its political continuity in China. In sum, the pro-neoauthoritarian argument suggests that democratization is not a better solution for Chinese society, but instead, that economic prosperity with neo-authoritarian rule is the most "promising" direction for China to follow.

However, as post-Mao experience illuminated, there are serious difficulties in justifying and undertaking this neo-authoritarian



approach under the existing party-state institutions. These difficulties, which are increasingly intensified, include the conflicts and contradictions between communist rhetoric and de-communist reality, between old fashion formations and newly growing social forces, between arbitrary rule and rule of law, between an open economy and closed politics. The political-economic relationship, as pointed out by B.Stavis, is somewhat like a giant machine: "If one gear is changed with a new, improved design, then complementary changes must be made in the gears that mesh. Otherwise, the new, improved gear simply breaks the other parts, rendering the entire machine inoperative" (Stavis, 1988:18). In effect, it is an old theme which applies to the contemporary human experiment in China, whether "man can live by bread alone". From a democratic perspective, we already have some answers from the failure of Soviet communism and the tide of global democratization in the last decade.

Meanwhile, several flaws in this neoauthoritarian projected scenario must be mentioned. One lies in its inappropriate comparison with Little Dragons model (which, strictly speaking, excludes Hong Kong which still remains under British sovereignty until 1997). As we know, the Little Dragons were all constructed on the ground of market economy and non-communist paternalistic-style government. Under such social and political conditions, economic and personal autonomy were encouraged, political freedom and participation were restricted, but not entirely illegitimated and extirpated -- rather, it was merely delayed. In other words, the so-called neo-authoritarian social structure is convertible to liberal democracy at some future stage when the authorities' perspective sees fit (X.Ding, 1990). The basic argument for this approach is that a stable order requiring strong leadership is a prerequisite for rapid economic growth and improved living standards. In contrast, mainland China's one party-state legitimacy is entirely based on the communist ideology. Its political institutions and social structure are still ruled by such an ideology, although increasingly undermined by the reform movement. Unless this ideologically-oriented political system is

broken down, the fundamental differences between an authoritarian state and a communist state remain distinct. Therefore, the institutional crisis and political tension will more frequently occur in the 90s' China if the current trend of social change continues.

Another flaw in the pro-neoauthoritarian argument is that it fails to understand that the success of the Little Dragons depended on special conditions in terms of size of country, population and the international environment. To a certain degree, strongman politics may be a recipe for rapid economic development in small and homogeneous countries, but mainland China is neither. The Little Dragons' economic take-off also occurred on the back of an inherited colonial political quiescence accompanied by well-formed infrastructures, as well as, during the later phases of the Cold War, a huge gap in the world market which America, for the sake of the Cold War strategy, assisted the Little Dragons in filling (E.Perry, 93:20-21).

A third flaw is that this scenario does not take into account the Chinese people's growing demand for pluralization and democratization, including cultural and political freedom, as was overwhelmingly expressed in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. In fact, social development throughout the post-Mao period has been characterised by an underlying tendency on the part of the Chinese majority to demand for their democratic rights and change the structure of the party-state politics. This trend has further increased with the widening of the communication access of the mass media, especially the television medium and, most recently, the growing satellite TV, fax machines, and VCRs with massive information flows in and from the outside world, all of which the authorities find extremely difficult to control. As a result, Chinese people have increasingly been aware of their rights and interests and prepared to fight for them.

In the debate regarding the pros and cons of the neo-



authoritarian model, this author finds that the scenario may prove economically successful, but only for a certain stage and may last only for a brief period. In effect, the model itself is a temporary phenomenon. Taiwan and South Korea, for instance, have almost fully implemented a democratic constitution and the other members of Little Dragons follow close behind. Therefore, we may need to consider an alternative scenario: the long-term evolutionary democratization model.

The reason for advocating this possible scenario, very briefly, is that the steady weakening of party-state power and the gradual expansion of individual freedom and economic autonomy have created space for the new pluralistic social formations to grow. Within that set of frameworks the different forces develop their own bases, being insensitive to their own interests, and thereby give rise to an expectation and a momentum for political reform and further social democratization. Thus, in conjunction with the institutionalization and rationalization movements which have been driven by the post-Mao modernization programme, an evolutionary political change, slowly but cumulatively and irreversibly, will most likely lay the foundations for Chinese democracy. This process instituted from post-Mao socio-economic reforms and demonstrated so explicitly in the 1989 Tiananmen events, can be understood only in terms of the profound but still incomplete process of changes in the politics of the party-state's retreat and social pluralization. The growing strength of such a change, in my view, lies in the society and awakening consciousness of democracy of the Chinese people rather than in the party, or by virtue of the particular individual leader.

However, recent experiences in other (post-) communist country's transition suggest that the transformation and democratization of the party-state have been a momentous challenge as well as generating problems that should never be underestimated. Therefore, the argument of a long-term evolution toward Chinese democracy must not assume that the current development could bring a full democratic political institution in the short-to-



medium term. If "Rome was not built in a day", nor will Chinese democracy. But it is important to point out that such an effort towards building up a democratic society in the last decade has gradually been strengthened and crystalised in China. Thus, it gives one reason to raise ones hope for this perspective.

It remains to discuss how these possible scenarios link with the future development of Chinese television. If the neo-authoritarian scenario prevails it will have a major effect on the current reconstruction of the Chinese media system in general and the television system in particular. The media might move towards corporatism in which the state licenses the media organization and grants a degree of autonomy in exchange for the media observing certain controls. So the party would remain, ultimately, hegemonic, especially in the political and ideological sector; while at the same time it would relax a measure of control in the areas of media administration, management, financial resources, and to some extent (programming) editorial policies. Applied to television, this might entail central and local stations working together to preserve the party-state's basic interests rendering obedience to the party's will, and in return, they could concentrate on pursuing market interests and would become more and more commercialised.

From one point of the view, it seems that in such a scenario the new television system would develop into one that would be consumer-oriented rather than citizen-oriented. In that case, the choice and freedom of the media organization and the audience would be constrained by such consumerism which regards individual rights as identical with consumer rights (also see 1.2.4 for the critical analysis). While this process would support economic modernization, it would not necessarily lead to constructing a media system based on democratic principles and citizen's rights.

While acknowledging the threats to democracy posed by consumerism, this thesis argues that it would still not eliminate the process of the current media institutional contradictions

engendered by Deng's reform programme. The four major contradictions, examined in detail in the appropriate chapters, may be summarised as follows: the party-state versus the market; secondly, the old structure versus the new formations; thirdly, central power versus local autonomy; and, lastly, party political hegemony versus the democratic challenge and cultural pluralism. The clash of these four contradictions will whittle away the existent framework of the party-state, weakening the pro-neoauthoritarian order - if such an order survives for a sufficient length of time. Thus this weakening process will strengthen the long-term evolutionary media democratization in China.

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In summary, social reform in the communist state entails a simultaneous, dialectical process reviving socio-economic dynamism on the one hand, and abandoning party-state praxes on the other. As a result, the Party-controlled media system is bound to proceed to organic transformation. However, by using the medium of television as a key example, this thesis has shown that, under the conditions of Deng Xiaoping's particular and contradictory reform programme, and in the context of Chinese society, Chinese mass media have created their own pattern of transition that has no parallel in other communist states, least of all the Gorbachev-style ones.

The main characteristic of the Chinese case is that the reform of the media institutions and also the growth of the industry have together created a two-fold framework which governs the post-Mao media development. This dual framework contains and constrains the media institutions' policies and strategies, and transactions, their performance and structural changes and their ways of delivering resources and increasing productivity. The outcome is that media transition in post-Mao China is not radically revolutionary, but evolutionary. The growth of these media institutions incrementally redefines reality, producing its own dynamics and conflicts.

Chinese television, after over a decade of substantial reform and rapid expansion since 1978, has achieved remarkable results and brought profound changes in many of its essentials. The Chinese Communist leadership has retained monopoly power over the television medium, but it no longer monopolizes television activities or exercises effective control over the pace and



direction of television development.

The reform movement which brought the new forces of commercial involvement, market mechanism, structural de-centralization and pluralistic culture into Chinese television, has led to a substantial divergence from the Stalinist model. This evolution, therefore, contains an underlying tendency with twofold implications. On the one hand, these new forces have undoubtedly become the locomotive of the rapid development of Chinese television, and considerable progress has been made in the practice of freedom of the press; on the other hand, they have increasingly intensified the clashes between the new social formations and the well-entrenched orthodoxy, and greatly exacerbated the crises within the existing system. Thus a fundamental institutional change is not only necessary, but also inevitable if any further democratic progress is to be made.

However, as already noted, the question of media freedom and institutional reform in the communist regime is essentially a matter of political struggles for the survival of the party nomenklatura and its whole social system. A long term see-saw battle rife with conflict and frustration, with periodical advance and retrogress, is the likely near-future scenario.

The 1989 Beijing tragedy, the most momentous setback yet suffered by the Chinese democracy movement in the post-Mao era, has had a major adverse impact on the progress of Chinese television reform. The leadership of the regime is now fully aware of the vital importance of controlling the mass media, especially television. The tension is thus running high on the political and ideological front. In October 1989, in the wake of the Beijing tragedy, the broadcasting minister, Ai Zhisheng demanded tighter Party control of broadcasting. Later, the new Party general secretary, Jiang Zemin, called for all broadcasters to serve as absolutely loyal voices of the Party (People's Daily, 2.3.1990). As present, in the aspect of institutional reform of Chinese television, the signs are of stagnation, even regression.

Meanwhile, as we have discussed throughout the thesis, Deng's reform programme -- balancing a contradictory course -- has been initiated as a desperate resort to save the party-state system and to prevent the advent of democracy. However, a set of different social forces combined to open the flood-gates which Deng and his party have no longer the ability to control. In the words of a Chinese proverb, they have the heart, but have no means to do so. As a result, far from preserving the party-state, Deng's programme turned out instead to be the midwife of far-reaching societal transformation and democratization in China.

There is thus a fatal dilemma facing the Chinese communist authority: its continuation can be ensured only through further sweeping reform, but the reform will inevitably bring about changes which challenge the continued existence of the system.

Given this insoluble contradiction, the ruling officials cannot and dare not actively resurrect the old model. In the domain of television, the growing momentum of reform continues irresistibly. In effect, whatever happens after the 1989 Tianenmen tragedy, the underlying structural reasons for sweeping reform of the media system, which have been so evident in the last fourteen years, can only become stronger and stronger as years go by. From a long-term perspective, the on-going process will, one way or another, further undermine the existing media institution and lead to another wave of demands for a fundamental institutional change.

The hope for China's future, therefore, must be that the transition from the party-state to a more pluralistic and democratic society can work through peaceful evolution rather than radical revolution. With luck its demise can be largely bloodless -- despite what looked like a tragic omen in the events surrounding Tianenmen Square.

--- END ---



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### List of Names of Interviewees

**Professor Cao Lu**, Director of the Journalism Department, Beijing Broadcasting Institute, Beijing.

**Ms Chen Royu**, Director of Audience Research, CCTV, Beijing.

**Dr. Guo Zhengzi**, broadcasting researcher, Journalism Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Science, Beijing.

**Mr Fa Dongsheng**, media officer, the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party, Beijing.

**Mr Fa Songxian**, lecture of broadcasting study, Fudan University, Shanghai.

**Mr Hong Minsheng**, Deputy Director & Editor-in-chief of CCTV, Beijing.

**Mr Jin Wenxiong**, broadcasting researcher, the Ministry of Broadcasting, Beijing.

**Professor Liu Zhijun**, broadcasting study, People's University of China, Beijing.

**Mr Sun Xupei**, Director of Media Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.

**Professor Tong Bing**, media study, People's University of China, Beijing.

**Mr Wanf Gongfa**, administration officer, Shanghai Broadcasting Bureau, Shanghai.

**Mr Wang Feng**, section head of Policy & Regulation Department, Ministry of Broadcasting, Beijing.

**Mr Wang Jiangang**, lecture of broadcasting study, People's University of China, Beijing.

**Mr Yu Dawei**, manager of China International TV Corp, Beijing.

**Dr. Yu Guoming**, survey conductor of the Public Opinion Research Institute, People's University of China, Beijing.

**Professor Zhang Longdong**, media history, People's University of China, Beijing.

**Mr Zhao Suifu**, Deputy Director of Policy & Regulation Department, Ministry of Broadcasting, Beijing.

**Mr Zhou Fanyang**, vice president of Chinese Broadcasting Association, Shanghai.

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Journalism Front (monthly trade journal)

Media & Publication Weekly

New China Fortnightly

News Front (monthly)

Red Flag (monthly)

The People's Daily

Radio & Television Studies (bimonthly)



Sing Tao Daily (published in the UK)

Shanghai TV Information (bimonthly)

World Economic Herald