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# Mouthpiece or money-spinner?

## The double life of Chinese television in the late 1990s

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**ABSTRACT** The start of direct retail television in China signalled a new and more liberal stage in the commercialization of Chinese television in the second half of the 1990s. The mass media in China have been going through a steady process of marketization since the mid-1980s. This process has gathered pace since 1992, in a political climate congenial to economic liberalization, which was created by the late Deng Xiaoping touring and blessing the booming cities in south China in January that year. Constantly caught between the market and the state, television in the late 1990s is more than ever living a double life as a mouthpiece and a money-spinner. This article sets out to make sense of the unintended 'cultural pluralism' reflected on the small screen, looking at the most recent changes in television journalism as the last stronghold of party propaganda, and the latest money-spinning business in direct retail programming and in advertising generally. The danger of over-marketization is clearly there to be perceived for those who want to take a look.

**KEYWORDS** advertising • China • commercialization • journalism • television

On 13 September 1998, several major daily newspapers in China printed the story of nine middle-school students in a southern provincial city signing a letter of protest against television shopping (*Beijing Qingnian Bao*, 1998).

They demanded a screen cleansed of 'commercial trash' that exposed the female body to sell beautification and other products. The letter provoked widespread public concern and led to an official notice being issued by the State Industry and Commerce Bureau urging more efficient regulation of the booming television retail market and banning audio-visual materials 'which do damage to the construction of a socialist culture' (*Guangming Ribao*, 1998).[1] Weeks after the notice was issued, however, the banned materials – 'female legs, bellies and bosoms' – were still flaunted on the screen of national and local networks, the distinctions between which are fast disappearing in the new age of satellite broadcasting. It was one more step in the steady retreat of once powerful official stipulations in the face of an ever more aggressive drive for profit. This incident can be seen to mark a new phase in the commercialization of the Chinese television industry as we move towards the end of the millennium.

When television broadcasting first started in China in the late 1950s, it was firmly placed within a tight system of state propaganda, and regarded like all other mass media in theory and practice as the 'throat and tongue' (*hou she*) of the Party. As it happened to be born during the years of the 'Great Leap Forward' – a crash industrialization programme with disastrous economic consequences – it remained poorly funded and underdeveloped for the following two decades, playing a negligible role within the propaganda system until the early 1980s. Its rapid growth since then has coincided with the marketization of the Chinese economy generally. Television, too, embraced the market and went through successive phases of commercialization, starting with the early experiments with commercial advertisement in 1979, at the very beginning of the era of economic reforms under the leadership of the late Deng Xiaoping.[2]

Most television networks – central and local – have thrived in the marketplace over the last two decades, getting returns from advertising and other commercial activities on a scale which is not achievable for most other media. Meanwhile, television's political role as the Party's mouthpiece has been increasingly eroded by ever more powerful pressures for commercial success. As a consequence, the resulting tension between state control and market dynamics has become the defining feature of Chinese television, and indeed of the entire cultural sphere in post-Mao China. At the same time, the terms of state/market relations are continually shifting as the state apparatus struggles to accommodate the new commercial environment. Realizing that popular entertainment made for the cultural market does not necessarily disturb social and political stability, official tactics of ideological control have relaxed and attempted to appropriate new popular forms. As the public institution *cum* commercial enterprise par excellence, television stands at the centre of this now complex process of accommodation. It lives a double life as a mouthpiece and a money-spinner. The Party has learned to deal with the situation with a double-edged policy – it keeps at arm's

length from what it sees as harmless popular entertainment on the one hand, while continuing to maintain a tight grip over what it has identified as key areas, such as television journalism, on the other.

Chinese television in the 1990s is a mixture of many things, including, for lack of better categories, hard propaganda, soft propaganda and pure entertainment, a plethora of programmes with contradictory overt and latent ideological orientations. Documentaries commemorating the Chinese communist revolution have to share the same screen with fashion shows, popular music, various local versions of dating programmes and crudely made home-shopping programmes imported from outside the country. This apparent ideological chaos reflected on the small screen points to the dissolution of master official ideologies by the market, and their displacement by the logics of pragmatism and consumerism, which constitute the core of the zeitgeist of Chinese society after Mao.

Among this mixture of very different things appearing on the small screen, television journalism stands out as a last stronghold of political and ideological propaganda, albeit now under the supervision of a new generation of party ideologues who are more pragmatic and open-minded in outlook. In this paper, I want to take a look at the double life of current Chinese television as mouthpiece and money-spinner, trying to capture the current chaotic but vibrant cultural and ideological pluralism produced, largely unintentionally, by the officially sanctioned marketization of the mass media.

## Television journalism: the last stronghold of propaganda?

Television's rapid development with the full support and sponsorship of the government since the early 1980s owes less to its artistic or entertainment value than to the new journalistic and propaganda possibilities opened up by its ability to combine radio's instantaneity with film's vivid moving images. In the 1982 National Television Conference attended by directors of central and provincial stations, television was defined as first and foremost an institution of propaganda. News programmes were naturally seen as the most important element of television broadcasting, in spite of the overwhelming popularity of entertainment programmes at the time. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, thirst for popular entertainment pent up throughout the decade of cultural asceticism (1966–76) was partly quenched by the arrival of family television. At the same time, *Xinwen Lianbo* (*News Broadcast*), the 30-minute 7 o'clock prime-time news on CCTV, which is relayed unconditionally by all local stations 'as a political task', is still meant to play a key role in forming public opinions (Zhang and Hu, 1996: 92). Precisely because of its huge popularity and reputed power to influence, television attracts the most attention and supervision from the governing authority. It is for the same reason that this technologically

superior media has been lagging behind the print media generally in conducting social and cultural criticism.

The orthodox theory of journalism in the People's Republic of China, derived directly from a wartime propaganda ethos in the 1940s, defines the mass media as the 'throat and tongue' of the Party and of the people. Since the Party is seen in theory as representing the interests of the people, the latter are often reduced to an abstract and empty category. The media have to speak the Party's language. Recent Chinese history is littered with evidence of the disasters aggravated by a media system without an independent and critical capacity. The worst example has to be the Great Leap Forward Movement in the late 1950s. The media, as the Party's mouthpiece, played a disgraceful role in building up a national fever for rapid and instant industrialization, which would supposedly enable China to 'catch up with America and overtake Britain' (*ganmei chaoying*) within a couple of decades.

The 'throat and tongue' theory has been slowly but steadily outdated by the practice of media commercialization in post-Mao China throughout the 1980s. But its modified version, which shifts the stress from 'the Party' to 'the people', is still mobilized as a ready-made official rhetoric. Faced with the de facto ideological and cultural disorientation of the 1990s, the central authority strategically maintains a tight grip over news release and broadcasting, maintaining television journalism as a stronghold of official propaganda against the flood of commercial popular entertainment churned out for the new epoch, clearly marked by ideological and political apathy. The official view on popular entertainment is pragmatic with an obvious liberal twist. In the eyes of the authority, the best entertainment should still contain an element of cultural, moral and political education. However, pure entertainment is now tolerated if not encouraged as harmless distraction (see Zhao, 1998).

What is broadly known as journalism reform started in the mid-1980s and went through ups and downs with the changing political climate. It has eventually brought about some remarkable changes in television, particularly in the years since 1992. The most important include a dramatic increase in the number of daily news bulletin airings, live news presentation and a considerable improvement in the quantity and quality of news commentaries and investigations. In 1998, the major news channel on China Central Television, CCTV-1, aired daily 14 bulletins between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. However, it was the local stations that tended to take the lead in breaking the conventions of television journalism. Shanghai TV and Guangdong TV were among the first to break the pattern of one single news bulletin every day. They respectively pioneered evening news and midday news as early as 1982. A few years later CCTV launched another two news bulletins in addition to the prime-time, *Xinwen Lianbo*. This situation, of course, has to do with the fact that CCTV is under closer supervision as the only monopoly network nationwide.

News values have also been changing along with the ongoing journalism reform. According to the orthodox Chinese Marxist theory of journalism, the primary responsibility of news is to help to form and cement public opinion in line with official policies. Criticisms are allowed but confined to the exposure of technical problems at the operational level. The policies themselves are not to be questioned. Positive reporting is considered necessary for maintaining social stability whereas the amount of negative or critical reporting is carefully controlled to avoid fuelling social frustration and political upheaval. As a result, the official media in China tend to present the bright side of things while ignoring or hiding the dark side.

In recent years, however, this regime of propaganda has been changing under the impact of more relaxed policies pushed ahead by market competition (see Li, 1998). In the ever more competitive media market, the 'masses to be educated' have become the 'audience to be pleased'. In television broadcasting, this shift has become more pronounced in the last few years with the widespread adoption of satellite and cable technology, which has put networks – central and local – in direct competition with one another. Even the big brother CCTV, enjoying state monopoly status, is under pressure to outperform local stations that are now broadcasting nationwide via satellite and cable. No institutions can afford to stay where they are in the face of this fierce competition. They are more than eager to carry out reforms in order to increase their appeal to the audience and secure a better share of the advertising revenue.

In this new competitive context, television journalism has altered its approach to news reporting in an effort to get closer to the audience and their demands. Live news presentation has partly displaced the safe practice of recorded broadcasting. 'News of social interest', including stories of an unmistakably light-hearted nature, a category which used to mark the difference between western capitalist commercial news values and Chinese socialist news values, has increased noticeably in proportion to 'political news', though state affairs conducted by the country's top leaders still make the headlines without question, as they often do elsewhere. However, among all the changes brought about by the economic reforms, the most significant is the rise of a kind of critical investigation, which is serious and popular at the same time, with CCTV's *Jiaodian Fangtan* (*Focal Report*) as the best example. This last change has everything to do with the new social conditions of the second half of the 1990s, reflecting, interpreting and, indeed, helping create those conditions.

Towards the end of the last decade of the millennium, the government, under a new premiership, took a series of radical measures of economic marketization. A great number of formerly state-owned enterprises went bankrupt and their workers were laid off. Social security has become the most prominent of all problems. The mass media in general, and television journalists in particular, have increasingly found themselves at the heart of a


**Figure 1** *Xinwen Lianbo*, 7 o'clock prime-time news on CCTV

growing 'public sphere', where they can fulfil their social responsibility, tracking down and exposing problems and organizing debates. Competition in the television industry, which used to be more noticeable in the area of popular entertainment, is now increasingly played out in serious, but no less popular, programmes of news analysis and investigation. It has been noted


**Figure 2** A key presenter of *Jiaodian Fangtan*

that towards the end of the 1990s, the public appetite for entertainment has been waning whereas the demand for valuable information has been on the rise (Luo, 1998).[3] This indicates a sea change in social mood and psychology, in response to the more liberal measures taken by the current government to establish a 'true' market economy.

The late 1990s have seen an increase in programmes that expose social ills, such as official corruption, bad management, violation of consumer rights and labour disputes. Such exposures often lead to quick solutions of long delayed problems. Some programmes have consequently established themselves as a kind of court of conscience, which the public appeals to when desperately seeking justice. CCTV's *Jiaodian Fangtan,* scheduled immediately after the 7 o'clock evening news and the national weather forecast, has become one of the most popular programmes in the country, widely known for its tireless follow-up and exposure of social ills and wrongs. Negative exposure is, of course, not *Jiaodian Fangtan*'s only task. It also has to carry positive propaganda on some occasions such as the National Day. Indeed, *Jiaodian Fangtan* is the example of officially sponsored critical journalism on television par excellence. The more popular it becomes with the audience, the more support and attention it gets from the authorities.[4] Key presenters of the programme have become celebrities, personifying the spirit of investigation and criticism and reaping everything fame, status and prestige can bring.

*Jiaodian Fangtan* is also a huge commercial success behind the screen. It enjoys a most favourable financial policy of self-management within CCTV, funded by a special commercial slot inserted at the beginning of the show. Scheduled right in the middle of the 'golden broadcasting time', this brief commercial slot fetches one of the highest prices in the television industry.[5] *Jiaodian Fangtan* then can be seen as a particularly interesting case of the complex relationships of programme production to the state, the audience, the advertisers and, finally, to its own sense of public mission and social responsibility.

The decision to allow, and even encourage, critical journalism on television demonstrates a new sense of confidence and a better understanding of propaganda on the part of the Party state. Behind this confidence is a realization that critical journalism, carefully managed and directed, does not always do damage to the state's authority and legitimacy. On the contrary, it can provide a good helping-hand that crudely made propaganda cannot match. In this respect, China has everything to learn from the west, to make propaganda a more sophisticated and effective business. As some cultural critics in the west are quick to point out, news and criticisms can be consumed, like food, clothing and popular fiction (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988). When critical journalism has become an institution for its own sake and criticisms eventually cancel each other out, a well developed commercial media market can then do a better service to political stability by dispersing social frustration than a rigidly controlled media regime.

## Money-spinning: the real business?

Marketization has transformed the face of Chinese media beyond recognition over the last 10 years. The media in general can be said to be collective winners in the new marketplace. Jobs in the media have become among the best paid and most sought after in the 1990s. The television industry in particular is considered a rich institution, particularly now, at the end of the 1990s, when an increasing number of workers from state-owned factories have been laid off. The spectacular market success achieved by the television industry as a whole, however, has not come without cost. It goes hand in hand with a ruthless process of over-commercialization.

This can be well illustrated by the example of CCTV. The eight channels of CCTV could easily afford to be the least commercialized network in the country, protected as they are by their unique status and their possession of the best facilities. However, the organization has taken a distinctively and thoroughly commercial route in programming and broadcasting. All of its channels, without exception, carry commercial advertisements. Both the number and the length of TV commercials seem to be on a constant rise. Overall advertising revenue in 1997 reached a historical high level of 4.1 billion RMB yuan, an impressive figure by any standard.[6] CCTV-1, the major news channel, fetches the highest prices for TV commercials in the country, followed by CCTV-2 (the main economic channel), CCTV-5 (the sports channel), CCTV-8 (the arts channel), CCTV-3 (the music and Chinese opera channel), CCTV-4 (the international channel), and CCTV-7 (the miscellaneous channel for children, the army, science/technology and agriculture).[7]

In addition to the standard short-form television commercials inserted within and between programmes, CCTV-2 has three special programmes, which are more or less devoted to long extended commercial promotions. They are *Gongqiu Rexian* (*Market Place*), *Shangwu Dianshi* (*Business Television*) and *Shang Qiao* (*Business Bridge*), lasting respectively half an hour, 20 minutes and five minutes. In autumn 1998, *Gongqiu Rexian* was on air four times a day. The other two were shown twice daily. The price for getting a commercial on any of these three programmes was 20,000 RMB yuan per 60 seconds in 1998. Apart from these programmes of overt commercial promotion, many 'non-commercial' programmes carry concealed advertising, as a result of deals struck between the producer and commercial sponsors behind the scenes. Some would say that the rule of the game nowadays has become 'you pay to get on TV'. This rule is certainly not confined to the economic channel alone.

*Dianshi Gouwu* (*TV Shopping*) – a direct retail programme on CCTV-2 – was launched in June 1998, aired three times a day, lasting for 130 minutes in total. Together, the four long-form selling programmes – *Gongqiu Rexian*, *Shangwu Dianshi*, *Shang Qiao* and *Dianshi Gouwu* – take up about

five hours. That is to say, commercial promotion accounts for 30 percent of the total airtime of the economic channel, not taking into account standard commercials inserted between and within other programmes. This has helped CCTV-2 to become the broadcasting channel on China Central Television with the longest transmission day, starting at 6 a.m. and finishing at 1.40 a.m. (apart from CCTV-4 which repeats programmes for different time zones in the world). This can of course be easily justified and understood in the good name of economic development.

In fact, CCTV is a relative latecomer in direct retail broadcasting, lagging behind many local stations, which are much bolder in their experiment with commercialization.[8] As public complaints against the practice of direct sales on television gained momentum in the summer and autumn of 1998, CCTV took a cautious approach to this poorly regulated market, trying to justify the intention behind its move 'to develop a better approach to consumption and to explore a better form of television [shopping] programme' (*Shenghuo Shibao*, 1998). Indeed, CCTV is more careful in picking its business partners, only willing to deal with more established companies, and ready to take a retail programme off the screen when it attracts complaints from the public. As few local stations can afford to follow the good example of CCTV, the market of direct retail television remains as chaotic and unregulated as when it first started a few years ago.

It was Beijing TV (BTV) that first experimented with television shopping in November 1995, establishing a direct retail television company under its rubric. This company remains one of the most competitive in the market to date. In 1996, Shanghai TVS Ltd, a joint venture, started business as an independent television sales company unattached to any television network. By August 1997, TVS had established a sales network in 23 major cities over the country. BTV and TVS rapidly established themselves as models of direct retailing on television that many were quick to follow. By 1998, 150 provincial and municipal TV stations – including cable stations – were already in the business. The figure becomes 600 when smaller stations at the lower level of counties are taken into account. In Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong province bordering Hong Kong, a 24-hour direct retail channel was already in place. With satellite broadcasting fully installed, the audience can see several off-peak television shopping programmes shown on different channels on a daily basis.

A great number of independent television shopping companies have sprung up in the last two years, many of which are joint ventures between Chinese and foreign capital. China Shopping Network (CSN), based in San Francisco, has established its Chinese office in Shanghai, providing major North American companies in business with research and information for tapping the Chinese market.[9] Imported American products are sold in television shopping programmes, targeting a small number of the new affluent class. Among the best-selling imported goods are the so-called lifestyle


**Figure 3** TV shopping on CCTV-2, selling beautification products

products, home exercise facilities and self-improvement items. The high price tags will certainly bestow a sense of prestige and status on the nouveau riche purchasers.

This spread of television shopping has led to public complaints. Apart from the protest against the perceived obscenity of exposing female bodies


**Figure 4** An ordinary TV commercial for a hand cream

mentioned earlier, there are other problems, including false claims made in the programme, counterfeit products sold in the market and unreasonable prices charged. The authority, however, has made its stance quite clear, regarding television shopping as a 'new practice' in need of improvement. It also tries hard to keep some control over its rapid and erratic spread. Developmentalism, the dominant mode of thinking for the 20th century in China, and indeed in most non-western countries, finds its expression yet again in television shopping. According to this line of thinking, television shopping is just another advanced way of doing things invented by the developed world, which China must master in order to catch up.

The challenge presented to the authorities by the rapid growth of television shopping is, however, not only regulatory, but also ideological. It raises questions about the very nature of television broadcasting itself. The contradiction between commercial advertising and political propaganda is often assumed to be obvious in this case.[10] However, under the current 'socialist market economy' in China, they seem to be living as perfectly happy bedfellows. Propaganda can be sponsored by commercial profit. In this new social formation, which is increasingly oriented towards money and material life, orthodox propaganda is both sustained and paralysed by media marketization. It is still there, but no longer as effective as in the old days. This is one of the many paradoxical situations in contemporary China caught up in rapid transformations in all aspects of life.

The rampant growth of home-shopping shows marks a new stage in the commercialization of television. TV commercials in China, which first appeared in 1979, have made several breakthroughs to reach the current robust stage, appearing literally everywhere possible within and between programmes. Advertising has not only overcome the initial public resistance to breaking programmes into fragments, but has become the very lifeline of television broadcasting. The audience is left with no other choice but to live with it. Commercial interruptions to viewing become ever more frequent and last longer, prompting many to wonder where the limit lies and how much more commercial television can become.

As market profits predominate over ideological values, to be popular has become the sole principle for many local networks, which are bolder and freer to experiment with new commercial forms. Fierce competition for better ratings has led to a tendency among different networks to make more of the same kind of programme. Inferior imitation of a successful show is commonplace. When Hunan TV's *Meigui Zhiyue* (*Dating of the Roses*) became a hit nationwide in the summer of 1998, several other provincial stations started making and airing their own local version of dating programmes, hoping to take a slice of the proven market success. The audience ends up with several dating programmes to choose from, until they get tired of them all.

When the popular happens to coincide with the serious, it is even more

rewarding. What has happened in the more serious area of critical journalism in the last few years illustrates this well. Inspired by CCTV's top-rated programme *Jiaodian Fangtan*, many provincial networks have launched their own local version of critical investigation under various names. These local versions, however, tend to follow a similar formula in conducting investigations and seeking solutions. Innovation, which is a rare quality in the television industry, has become even more difficult within the current system of over-commercialization, both in popular entertainment and in serious journalism.

## Where does the future lie?

The television industry in China at this moment is characterized by an interesting mix of many different things, which can contradict one another in terms of ideological orientation. The spirit of consumerism and hedonism promoted in most media commercials, for instance, goes against the long-standing party ethic of hard work and plain living, still promoted in many officially sponsored cultural products, as in the most recent wave of films of positive education. The serious and the light, the high and the low, the Chinese and the foreign, appear to be all mixed up on the same small screen. This rather messy situation, which I have referred to as 'unintended cultural pluralism', can be rather confusing to commentators in the west, especially when they try to make sense of it with binary categories such as liberal versus authoritarian, market regulation versus state control, or public opinion versus propaganda. Handy as these binaries may seem at times, they are grossly simplistic at their best and dangerously misleading and ideological at their worst.

One typical strand of analysis of the Chinese media in the new era of economic reforms tends to emphasize the so-called liberating effects of the market. It has been rightly argued that the market has to a certain extent freed the mass media from tight state control. But it ceases to hold water when marketization is equated with democratization, no matter how implicitly. This line of argument is blind to the basic fact that it was the state that actually started the whole process of marketization under the name of economic reforms in the late 1970s. State control is always easier to identify with its iron fist striking out from concrete institutions and governing bodies, but the market can exert far more effective control, even though its guiding hands remain invisible. Arguably, the problem for the media industry in China towards the end of the 1990s is no longer excessive state control but over-marketization.

The collapse of the once dominant grand theory of throat-and-tongue journalism in the face of aggressive marketization has left the media and cultural institutions in a deep identity crisis. As politics and ideology are either

subdued or made irrelevant to economics in actuality if not in name, the role of journalists and media practitioners, a socially privileged and well regarded profession in the People's Republic, is in need of some redefinition. Being caught between two masters – the state and the market – which are by no means clear-cut binaries but intricately interrelated with each other, is indeed the defining feature of China's television industry in the 1990s. The state and the market are in a constantly changing relationship of contradiction and identity. To capture the complexity and dialectics of this relationship, one needs to examine concretely situated practices as well as structural and historical elements in media institutions.

What is at stake now is not unquestioned resistance to state control, as some liberal-minded academics in the west might assume when writing in their comfortable home milieux. Rather, the problems facing the current media industry are multi-faceted. They include the aforementioned journalistic identity crisis; the lack of a sound guiding principle for state regulation; the ruthless pursuit of self-interest at both the collective and individual levels created by a system thriving on material reward and punishment; and, above all, an over-reliance on commercial sponsorship which has its own ups and downs according to the changing economic climate.

Television shares most of the problems and difficulties faced by the media industry in general. However, its most formidable task for the future is to coordinate the double life of 'mouthpiece' and 'money-spinner' into an organic whole based on a more coherent principle of public responsibility on the one hand and a more mature and better regulated market economy on the other. Programmes such as *Jiaodian Fangtan* have proved that television can play a role in being the people's and not just the Party's mouthpiece while remaining commercially successful. The recent public criticisms of direct retail television on the other hand testify to the dangers of an unregulated television market which puts commercial interests above public welfare. At this moment, at the turn of the millennium, the future of Chinese television is difficult to predict. But what one can argue safely is that it certainly does not lie in unlimited liberalization, as is often assumed by western neo-liberal analysts looking at the Chinese media from afar. Not least because the future forces reshaping the Chinese media are more likely to be found in the interaction between the Chinese state and international media moguls, who are already trying every possible way to get into the biggest market in the world.

## Notes

1 The Notice stipulates that direct retail television should abide by the Advertising Law. It should not make unwarranted claims to mislead the consumer, present unacceptable images or use obscene language, which will damage

the construction of a socialist culture. In addition, all direct retail television should be clearly marked as commercial promotion to avoid any confusion by the audience.

2 The first television commercial, featuring an herbal alcoholic drink, appeared on the evening of 28 January 1979, broadcast by Shanghai TV. Guangdong TV followed suit on 15 April airing commercials promoting imported products including a Swiss-made watch. CCTV started its 'Commercial Information' programme in December the same year.

3 A survey jointly conducted by 16 television networks in September 1998 confirms this tendency, showing that the primary motive for watching television is 'to know about current affairs inside and outside China', followed by 'to know about the lines and policies of the state'. The first six out of the eleven primary motivations listed in the questionnaire are related to 'obtaining information'. In contrast, the main purpose for television viewing, according to a survey conducted in 1992, was 'to be entertained'. See Luo, 1998.

4 The new Prime Minister paid the working group a special visit in October 1998 to acknowledge the righteousness of their efforts, commending the programme as the people's throat-and-tongue. He surprised his audience by making a remark about the long-standing official position on positive and critical news reporting. For him, the acceptable proportion is no longer 98 to 2 percent, nor 80 to 20 percent, it is 51 to 49 percent. This gesture is seen by many as a desirable sign of media liberalization by a political decision, as contrasted with the de facto liberalization as a result of market competition.

5 The 1998 figure for a 30-second commercial on the *Jiaodian Fangtan* weekday slot is 128,000 RMB yuan and for the weekend including Friday it is 134,000 RMB yuan (8.3 RMB yuan = US$1).

6 This figure is roughly equivalent to yearly financial revenues of 40 well-to-do medium-sized counties of half a million people.

7 The commercials on CCTV-6, the movie channel, are managed by the Film Bureau under the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

8 Direct retail sales on television are estimated to make up less than 2 percent of CCTV's advertising revenue in 1998.

9 These include the better known American HSN (Home Shopping Network), QVC (Quality, Value, Convenience) and Canadian Northern Response among others.

10 To distinguish television's new function of home shopping from the more serious business of propaganda, it has been proposed that in the future the home shopping should be restricted to cable TV alone, taking the form of dedicated home-shopping channels.

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