Loudspeaker Broadcasting as Community Radio:
A qualitative analysis of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China in the framework of alternative media

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ABSTRACT

Initiated as a political propaganda tool, loudspeaker broadcasting in rural China has experienced a shift towards community radio. Inspired by the lack of empirical research on loudspeaker broadcasting in the context of contemporary rural China, this research project conducts a case study in Liang village, Hebei province, to examine the organizational structure as well as the operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary Chinese villages. Situating loudspeaker broadcasting within the framework of community radio, this study employs three key measurements under the umbrella theory of alternative media: 1) alternative, 2) localized adaptations, and 3) participation, to evaluate loudspeaker broadcasting as a form of community radio. This research project consists of twenty-one semi-structured interviews with villagers in Liang village. In addition, thematic analysis is employed to make sense of the transcribed interviews.

Interview results show that, loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China shares similar features with the existing models of community radio in that it specifically orients towards the need of villagers as well as opens up rooms for villagers' participation. On the other hand, this research project on the development of loudspeaker broadcasting also differs from previous studies in two ways. First, loudspeaker broadcasting challenges the traditional "antagonistic" relationship between alternative media and mainstream media. Second, the vertical organizational structure of loudspeaker broadcasting contributes to a different, hierarchical participation model of alternative media.

INTRODUCTION

> In the early 1960s, 70 million loudspeakers were installed nationwide, serving a rural population of some 400 million. ... Anybody who visited China during those years would find a common sight--large loudspeakers hanging on telephone poles, building roofs and treetops. (Huang & Yu, 1997: 564-565)

The emergence and expansion of loudspeaker broadcasting in rural China cannot be fully understood without being socially, historically, and politically contextualized. Media, as "ideological state apparatuses" (Althusser, 1972), play important roles in reproducing the relations of production, and hence, strengthen the society's "submission to the ruling ideology" (Althusser, 1972: 132-133). Such a function of media largely explains the origins of loudspeaker broadcasting in China. The application of radio broadcasting—both wireless radio and wired radio—towards political ends in China has a rich history during the past century (e.g. Houn, 1957; Huang & Yu, 1997; Jan, 1967; Liu, 1957; Liu, 1964). During that period, loudspeaker broadcasting was perhaps the most innovative development (Huang & Yu, 1997: 564).

When the Chinese Communist Party came into power and established the People's Republic of China in 1949, the government faced double pressures from political uncertainty and economic stagnation (Hong & Cuthbert, 1991: 144). Although loudspeaker broadcasting was primitive in technological terms, it was an efficient solution to the government's dilemma of the need to develop a national network of radio broadcasting on the one hand, and the lack of radio facilities (Jan, 1967: 307) on the other. Loudspeakers — as communication and propaganda tools — are more effective than printed? media due to the large illiterate population in China at that time. At the same time, compared to regular radios, the flexible and low-cost characteristics of loudspeakers allowed the government's media network to penetrate widely and deeply into the vast rural areas (Huang & Yu, 1997: 564; Jan, 1967: 207). The nationwide installation of wired loudspeakers in public places such as "school playground, factories, rice paddies..." (Huang & Yu, 1997: 564) facilitated people's direct reception of the voice from the central Chinese government.

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed rapid development in media and communication technologies worldwide, especially wireless electronic and digital media (e.g. Rantanen, 2005: 26; Lull, 2000: 38). Such evolution in media and communication technologies also penetrated into China. New technologies emerged and upgraded at an unprecedented rate. Consequently, loudspeaker broadcasting was gradually outshone by

more advanced forms of media in the following years. However, Rantanen (2005) suggests a "continuity" between the development of new technologies and previous ones, and different stages of media and communication technologies are not "mutually exclusive" (ibid: 26). Indeed, despite the relatively primitive technology, loudspeaker broadcasting has still been attached with practical significance in the following years, especially in rural China.

In recent years, loudspeaker broadcasting in rural China has been gradually incorporated into the emergency broadcasting system that aims at promoting good governance (Ma, Ding, & Zhuang, 2015). As a result, the orientation of loudspeaker broadcasting started to shift. Increasingly oriented towards specific demographic groups in both content and operation, loudspeaker broadcasting has revealed an array of features that meet the description of "community radio" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001), which is a specific form of medium located under the umbrella theory of "alternative media" (Atton, 2002) in the field of media and communications.

Although research has been devoted to loudspeaker broadcasting in China in previous media and communications studies, the perspective through which loudspeaker broadcasting has been analyzed is limited, typically from the angle of political propaganda. The concept of community radio, as described according to the umbrella theory of alternative media, however, offers a different entry point to study loudspeaker broadcasting. By examining loudspeaker broadcasting under the theoretical framework of community radio, this research project attempts to move beyond the socio-political context in which loudspeaker broadcasting originated. Also, this study could potentially contribute, however modestly, to the existing body of knowledge on community radio or alternative media as a whole, since the empirical experiences of loudspeaker broadcasting may challenge the existing models of community radio, and subsequently help to advance the theorization of alternative media. Therefore, through a case study conducted in Liang Village, Hebei province, China, this dissertation attempts to link loudspeaker broadcasting with the theory of alternative media, emphasizing on its potential towards a form of community radio. Moreover, this research intends to explore loudspeaker broadcasting's organizational structure and operational mechanism in the context of contemporary rural China, using the theories of alternative media.

This dissertation is structured as follows. First, the theoretical chapter will critically discuss literature on alternative media, highlighting the particular form of community radio. Based on existing theoretical approaches, the conceptual framework and the research question of this dissertation will be formulated. The methodology chapter will then explain the

researcher's choice of adopting qualitative semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis. The research design and operationalization will also be outlined. Drawing on the material collected from the interviews, the results and discussion chapter will discuss the following three themes: 1) alternative, 2) localized adaptation, and 3) participation. Finally, the conclusion will consist of the major findings of this research, critical self-reflection, as well as advises for future studies on similar topics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will lay out the theoretical groundwork of this research project systematically. First, loudspeaker broadcasting will be contextualized in contemporary rural China, with a brief review of its history and development. Secondly, this research will be theoretically rationalized by analyzing the changing organizational structure and operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting. Following that, literature on community radio and the umbrella theory of alternative media will be discussed, and an array of theoretical approaches as well as existing issues in the field will be examined. Finally, the conceptual framework for this research will be established basing on existing approaches, and research question will be proposed.

Loudspeaker Broadcasting as Community Radio

Loudspeaker Broadcasting: Early Development and Incoherent History

As stated in the introduction, loudspeaker broadcasting in China has strong political associations ever since its emergence. The Chinese Communist Party, under Mao Zedong's leadership, was fully aware of the political potential of media and communication technologies (Huang & Yu, 1997: 564). Once a journalist, Mao Zedong paid great attention to ensure that the media served the political goals of the Chinese Communist Party. As a result, the early years of loudspeaker broadcasting embraced several interrelated themes. The regular and repeated patriotic propaganda through loudspeaker broadcasting played an important role in enhancing the Communist ideologies among the public, justifying a series of the CCP's political and economic policies, as well as unifying public opinion (Brady, 2002: 565). Moreover, listening to loudspeaker broadcasting outdoors was a relatively "collective" (Rantanen, 2005: 63) experience that helped to shape individuals' national belongings (Ibid.). Being low-cost, flexible, and most importantly, effective as political propaganda, loudspeaker broadcasting gained its momentum in the country during the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Huang & Yu, 1997; Jan, 1967). As the primary way to strengthen political propaganda in villages, the

importance of loudspeaker broadcasting had been particularly emphasized in rural China. According to the Third National Radio Broadcasting Conference in 1955, 45,000 to 50,000 loudspeakers were planned to be installed in 1956, with 80% of which to be installed in villages (Jan, 1967: 308). The conference also announced that an approximate 1,360,000 loudspeakers would be installed in villages by the end of 1957 (Ibid.). Despite that the actual extension of loudspeaker broadcasting into rural China was slower than the ambitious goals, the development was still rapid (Jan, 1967: 309).

However, the prominence of loudspeaker broadcasting kept diminishing in the following years, which can be explained from two perspectives. Firstly, the worldwide development in media and communication technologies has introduced more advanced electronic and digital media into China. Secondly, beginning form the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the government's focus increasingly shifted from class struggle to economic rejuvenation and the "Four Modernizations" of the country (Shi, 1998: 5 as cited in Szelényi, 2010: 202). Therefore, loudspeaker broadcasting, either as a particular type of medium or as a political propaganda tool, continued to lose its significance. Although not disappearing completely in the following years, empirical research and literature on the development of loudspeaker broadcasting since the late 1970s have been few, which makes it difficult to trace the complete history of loudspeaker broadcasting.

Loudspeaker Broadcasting in Contemporary China: towards Community Radio

During the past decade, loudspeaker broadcasting has been gradually incorporated into the emergency broadcasting system for rural China, contributing to a large-scale reappearance of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary Chinese villages, with new infrastructural networks of loudspeakers built in many places (Wang, Li & Zhang, 2013). Instead of being controlled by the central "Radio Broadcasting Bureau" (Jan, 1967: 308) as it was in the past, loudspeaker broadcasting--as part of the emergency broadcasting system--in contemporary rural China is increasingly localized, in terms of both organizational structure and content. The administration of loudspeaker broadcasting has gradually moved from the central government to the local government, and is usually vertically structured into three levels: county—town—village, in accordance with the three levels of governance in rural China[1]. Based on this three-level administrative structure, a new and more complicated operational mechanism has been developed. Each level of administration has access to broadcast, and

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[1] The administrative division of China consists of several levels of local government, among which county, town, and village are the third, forth, and fifth levels of administrative units respectively (Po, 2011: 2839).

therefore, can produce "more sharply focused" (Ondobo, 2001: iii) content which adapts to the needs of local people. Moreover, this new and more flexible operational mechanism also opens up opportunities for the participation of local people, which further contributes to the shift of loudspeaker broadcasting from political tools towards another form of medium already theorized in the field of media and communications: community radio.

Much attention has been devoted to the theorization and empirical studies of community radio in recent years (Ondobo, 2001: iii). Empirical studies have been conducted worldwide, with a "colossal variety of formats" (Downing et al. 2001: xi) in existing literature. For example, in Latin America, the study of community radio has identified "educational radio", "peasants' radio", and "miners' radio" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 6-8). In Africa, "local rural radio" and "popular free radio" have been analyzed as community radio (Ibid). Furthermore, "development radio" in Asia, "aboriginal radio" and "public radio" in Oceania, have all been incorporated into the framework of community radio (Ibid). Given such a context, an inclusive and sustainable definition of community radio is needed in order to incorporate the wide range of existing studies as well as being able to embrace future developments in the field. According to the working definition of community radio proposed by AMARC-Europe (1994), a "community radio station" is a "nonprofit station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio" (ibid: 4). On the one hand, the trajectory of loudspeaker broadcasting's development in contemporary rural China increasingly converges with this definition. On the other hand, such an inclusive definition also opens up spaces for loudspeaker broadcasting, as a new empirical model to be included in the field, which provides the theoretical backdrop for this dissertation.

It is worth noting that, the specific operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting may vary from place to place. As an exploratory research project, this dissertation does not seek to provide a comprehensive descriptive account of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China. Instead, by specifically focusing on the case of loudspeaker broadcasting in Liang Village, Hebei Province in northern China, this research project aims to provide a nuanced and in-depth exploration and evaluation of loudspeaker broadcasting as community radio under the framework of alternative media.

Community Radio as Alternative Media

A helpful entry point to studying loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China as community radio is to locate it under the umbrella theory of alternative media, and critically

review relevant literature as well as theoretical approaches in the field. As Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2008) argue, alternative media are "characterized by diversity and contingency" (ibid: 5). Indeed, instead of "operate or function in a vacuum", media are economically, politically, and culturally embedded in various settings (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 4). As a result, the nuanced articulations between media and the context have made alternative media a "contingent, fluid and elusive" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 6) field of study, both theoretically and empirically.

The fluidity and elusiveness of alternative media can first be revealed from terminology. Besides alternative media, varied terms have been used in the existing literature, including but not limited to: community media, bottom-up media, citizen's media, grassroots media, and civil society media (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 5). Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) argue that the "semiotic diversity" calls for the selection of one "dominator" (ibid: 7) before moving on to further discussion. This dissertation follows their choice of "alternative media" (ibid: 7) as the umbrella term. Many attempts have been made to define and describe alternative media. However, with different emphasis, there is no single definition or description that has been reached so far (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 4). For example, while Berrigan's (1977) definition of alternative media emphasizes on the themes of "access, participation and self-management", Watson and Hill (2003) define alternative media as: "…essentially counter-hegemonic, that is challenging established, hierarchical, systems of politics, economics, and culture, take many forms' (ibid: 172), focusing more on alternative media's potential in promoting resistance and democracy. As a matter of fact, instead of moving towards a "prescribe definition" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 7) that would include some features and exclude others, the definitions of alternative media keep evolving in diverse directions. Some nuanced developments in the definitions of alternative media includes Fuchs' (2010) notion of "alternative media as critical media" (ibid: 174) and the model of "alternative mainstream media" proposed by Hajek and Carpentier (2015).

The Diversity of Theoretical Approaches

The divergence in terminology and definitions not only reflects an array of "identities and practices" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 7) of alternative media, but also indicates a variety of theoretical approaches adopted in this field. In an attempt to encompass the diverse identities and practices of alternative media, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) have constructed a typology of the theoretical approaches employed by existing studies. They identify four approaches based on the different definitions and research focuses

in previous studies: 1) Alternative media as serving the community, 2) Alternative media as an alternative to mainstream, 3) Alternative media as part of civil society, and 4) Alternative media as rhizome (ibid: 6-33).

The first approach—serving the community—explicitly emphasizes the notion of "community" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 7). Given the notion's significance in the first approach, different theorizations of "community" has been discussed. Traditionally, the concept of community refers to geographical community, with or without a "formal organizing body" (Williams, 1976: 76 as cited in Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 8). The concept, then, keeps expanding and incorporating non-geographical, cultural dimensions. For example, while the notion of "community of interest", "community of practice", and "virtual or online community" have been proposed to complete the concept with non-geographical dimensions, the ideas of "interpretative community" and "imagined community" attempt to supplement the concept with a cultural dimension (e.g. Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008; Castells, 1996: 352; Clark, 1973: 411ff; Anderson, 1983; Fish, 1980). Moreover, in order to balance the uneven flow of information in mainstream media, the first approach highlights the importance of two-way communication (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 15). Therefore, access and participation remain as the two themes of the first approach. However, the downside of this approach is that the emphasis on the notion of community would, to some extent, restrict alternative media to small-scale media and underestimates the greater potential of alternative media on a larger scale (Ibid.).

The second approach stems from the notion of alternative. Alternative media, in this approach, is distinguished from mainstream media in its supplementary or counter-hegemonic characteristics (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 15). More specifically, alternative media has been further described by a set of feathers that opposes the mainstream positions (Lewis, 1993: 12). For example, in terms of organizational structure, alternative media is described as "horizontally structured" with no hierarchy, whereas mainstream media tend to be more "vertically structured" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 18). Because of such alternative features, studies that adopt the second approach focus on a different set of themes from the first approach, with hegemony, representation, as well as resistance often serve as the theoretical grounds (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 15-18). As a result, the second approach strengthens the link between alternative media and small-scale, diversified groups of audience, especially subordinated or disadvantaged groups. However, being positioned in an "antagonistic relationship" with mainstream media, this approach essentially theorizes alternative media from a less advantageous perspective (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 20).

A third approach is to study alternative media as part of the civil society (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 20), that is, to consider alternative media as a "third voice" (Servaes, 1999: 260) besides state and private commercial media. Based on the "minimalist model" of civil society (Gramsci, 1971; Habermas, 1992), which frames the civil society as a third space between state and market to struggle against hegemony, the third theoretical approach emphasizes alternative media's role in promoting democracy. To take a closer look at the specific mechanism, alternative media opens up space for citizens' participation in one or more "(micro-)spheres" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 24), which eventually contribute to the increased level of "macro-participation," or a "participatory society." Such a mechanism has been theorized as "the democratization of media" (Wasko & Mosco, 1992: 7). Themes emerged from the third approach includes but not limited to: freedom of communication, media policies, and the constant struggles between state, market, and alternative media as an inseparable element of the civil society (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 23-25). Nevertheless, the struggles can also indicate a financially and organizationally precarious status of alternative media, a major challenge to alternative media pointed out by this third approach.

The fourth approach—alternative media as rhizome—results from a critical unification of the second and the third approaches discussed previously. By arguing that "everything, at some point, is alternative to something else" (Downing et al., 2000: ix), theorists of the fourth approach points out the relative nature of the notion "alternative", and thus specified their focus on "radical alternative media" among the multiple manifestations of alternative media. Moreover, the rhizome approach emphasizes that the significance of alternative media to democracy lies in their role as the mediators of different social movements and struggles, rather than their role as "part of the public sphere" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 29). To be more specific, emerged from the metaphor of the "rhizome" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), alternative media function as the "crossroads" (Ibid.) where "diverse democratic struggles" (Mouffe, 1997, p, 18) can be linked together. The fourth approach also softens the antagonistic relationship between alternative media and the market and state, which distinguishes the rhizome approach from the second and the third approach. In addition to the problems facing alternative media mentioned in the previous three approaches, the rhizome approach raises a new one— "the lack of a common ground" for the structuration and unification of alternative media (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 30).

Such a typology is based on a division between essentialist and relationist positions within the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) political identity theory (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 30). Indeed, there are other typologies of the approaches to

alternative media. For example, Rauch (2007) divides the existing approaches into four types that focus on "alternative content, alternative channels, alternative sources that are featured, and alternative values," respectively (Rauch, 2007 as cited in Fuchs, 2010: 177). Another way to map the approaches is based on Giddens's dialectical separation of "objectivism and subjectivism" (Giddens, 1984), which allows for a complete categorization of all approaches in a specific field of research (Fuchs, 2010: 177). Applying such distinction to alternative media, the approaches can be divided into process-oriented (subjective) approached and content-oriented (objective) approaches (Ibid.). Process-oriented approaches focus on the self-organized production process of alternative media, and therefore, highlights the significance of participation (Beywl & Brombach, 1982; Curran, 2002; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Dagron, 2004; Weichler, 1987 as cited in Fuchs, 2010: 178). Content-oriented approaches, on the other hand, focus more on "media products" (Fuchs, 2010: 177). It is worth noting that "media products" in this context are not limited to contents, but also include media structures (Ibid.).

The varied theoretical approaches discussed above reflect some of the efforts to capture the "identities" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 30) of alternative media. However, due to the fluidity and elusiveness of alternative media, it is difficult to formulate a comprehensive approach that can be applied to any specific case. On the one hand, approaches based on the same theoretical framework can have varied empirical orientations. As in Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's typology, the approach of "alternative media as an alternative to mainstream" and the "rhizome approach" are both positioned in the general framework of political identity theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The former approach focuses on small-scale alternative media oriented towards specific demographic groups, especially the disadvantaged groups, whereas the latter approach focuses more specifically on "radical alternative media" and their role in social movements (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 6-33). While on the other hand, approaches built on different theories can, to some extent, overlap. For example, the "alternative media as serving the community approach" based on the essentialist-relationalist distinction, and the process-oriented approach based on the subjective-objective distinction both focus on the significance of participation in alternative media. Moreover, mutual understandings in terms of the "ideological position, historical context and definition of object" (Hadl, 2007: 2) between different approaches are not sufficient, which also hinders the development of the field.

In light of these diverse theoretical approaches, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) argue that, instead of applying a single approach independently, a "multi-theoretical approach" based on the specific research is preferred in order to capture the fluid nature of

alternative media (ibid: 30). Therefore, in this dissertation, approaches will be critically integrated and applied to the particular study on loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China. The integration of approaches will be outlined in the next section.

Conceptual Framework and Research Question

The objective of this research project is to explore and evaluate loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China through the lens of community radio. Previous studies on loudspeaker broadcasting tend to adopt "society-centered" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 30) approaches and focus on how the political context in China has shaped loudspeaker broadcasting as a propaganda tool, whereas this dissertation attempts to analyze loudspeaker broadcasting from a "media-centered" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 6) perspective, and focuses on new organizational structure as well as new operational mechanism which are increasingly oriented towards local communities. Having reviewed the major theoretical approaches in the field, a "multi-theoretical approach" is developed by combining the "alternative media as serving the community" approach, and the "alternative media as an alternative to mainstream" approach according to Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's typology (2008).

The selection of these two approaches is based on their proximity to this research. First, with a clear emphasis on the notion of "community", the "serving the community" approach is especially suitable for the analysis of loudspeaker broadcasting, because the target group of loudspeaker broadcasting are usually villagers who constitute a relatively closed and stable community in both geographical and cultural sense. Also, the themes of "access" and "participation" (Berrigan, 1977) are in the foreground in this approach, which converge with the changing developmental trajectory of loudspeaker broadcasting. While the "serving the community" approach focuses more on the internal structure and operation of loudspeaker, the adoption of the "alternative to mainstream approach" provides a framework to examine loudspeaker broadcasting's dialectical relation with mainstream media. Thus, loudspeaker broadcasting can be better understood and situated in the wider field of media and communications.

Strongly framed by these two media-centered approaches, the research question (RQ) has been formulated, with three sub-questions (SQs) that assist the exploration and evaluation:

RQ: To what extent, if any, does loudspeaker broadcasting serves as community radio in contemporary rural China?

SQ1: In which way(s), if any, does loudspeaker broadcasting serve as an alternative to mainstream media?

SQ2: In which way(s), if any, has loudspeaker broadcasting adapted to the use of the community?

SQ3: To what extent, if any, are local people participating agents in loudspeaker broadcasting?

The three sub-questions reflect the three interrelated steps of this research project. The first sup-question emerges from the "alternative to mainstream" approaches and attempts to define loudspeaker broadcasting by distinguishing it from mainstream media. The second and third sub-questions, which are based on the "serving the community" approach, will further explore and evaluate loudspeaker broadcasting with an emphasis on the themes of "access" and "participation." This research does not exclusively depend on Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's (2008) work, other relevant theoretical approaches may be used as supplementary framework for this study.

METHODOLOGY

To study loudspeaker broadcasting as community radio, voices from the community members are important. Therefore, a qualitative research method is required to address the research questions proposed in the previous chapter. Semi-structured interviews, among various qualitative research methods, were identified as the most appropriate method. In addition, thematic analysis is applied to analyze the interview results, in order to "identify and examine themes from textual data" (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012: 20). This chapter will first explain the researcher's selection of methodology by evaluating both its advantages and limitations. Then, the research design and operationalization will be presented, together with a discussion of ethical considerations and the researcher's self-reflexivity.

Semi-structured Interviews

Due to different research focuses, previous studies on loudspeaker broadcasting in China tend to adopt society-centered approaches that are driven by a focus on the socio-political context in China. As a result, much attention has been devoted to examining how loudspeaker broadcasting was influenced by the government's policies and control, yet voices from the other side—the audiences—are lacking. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, this dissertation aims to depart from loudspeaker broadcasting itself, and to adopt a

more media-centered approach that focuses on the organizational model, operational mechanism, and the content of loudspeaker broadcasting, as well as on the audiences' access to participation. Moreover, by positioning loudspeaker broadcasting in the framework of community radio, voices from villagers are of even more importance because they possibly play multiple roles as broadcasters, content producers, administrators besides their common role as audience.

In order to incorporate the opinions and perceptions from the villagers into this research project, in-depth interview has been selected as the most appropriate method after evaluation. The purpose of interviewing is to "understand the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2006: 9). Furthermore, among various qualitative research methodologies, interviewing, as Cottle, Negrine, Newbold, and Halloran (1998) argue, enable the researcher to collect "potentially richer and more sensitive type of data" (ibid: 258). Survey questionnaire and participant observation have also been considered at the early stages of this study. However, one disadvantage of adopting survey questionnaire in this particular study is that, even in today's China, the population of illiteracy is still considerable. As a result, although surveys are efficient tools in learning people's opinions and behaviors (Dillman, 2014: 1), it also sets entry barriers for some participants, and thus, impacts the validity of the research. In addition, the "conversation[al]" nature (Gubrium, & Holstein, 2002: 83) of interviewing enables the researcher to clarify on unclear issues and elaborate on intriguing information spontaneously during the interview, which is hard to achieve in surveys. As for participant observation, despite the fact that it captures people's ordinary activities in their "naturally occurring settings" (Brewer, 2000: 6), and contributes to more valid results, participants' opinions and perceptions on loudspeaker broadcasting cannot be obtained directly through observations. Therefore, in-depth interviewing was selected as the appropriate research method.

Following Berger's typology (2011), interviewing can be divided into four types—informal interviews, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews (ibid: 136). With different focuses and purposes, the four types of interviews are distinguished by varied degrees of flexibility. "Planned and prescribed" (Bryman, 2004: 319), structured interview is an efficient way to formulate interpretive frameworks to understand the respondents' accounts (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 39). However, structured interviewing does not open up spaces for "spontaneity and flexibility" (Bryman, 2004: 320), which are often the entry points to follow up on important information. Conversely, although informal interviewing and unstructured interviewing allow "spontaneous and free-flowing conversation" (Esterberg, 2002), they may generate a colossal amount of information that

distracts from the focus of this study. Semi-structured interview, to some extent, balances flexibility and structure. On the one hand, based on the conceptual framework, an interview topic guide will help the researcher to stay focused. While on the other hand, the flexibility to probe newly emerged issues remains. Therefore, semi-structured interviewing was used in this explorative yet specifically-oriented study on loudspeaker broadcasting as community radio.

Research Design and Operationalization

Despite the developments in communication technologies and the increased degree of mobility, villages in rural China are still relatively closed—if not isolated—communities. Hence, it is difficult for a researcher without any "social network" (Berger, 1998: 97) to access potential interviewees. Therefore, snowball sampling was employed in this study since it is particularly useful in locating hard-to-reach population (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997: 790). The researcher started the interviews with three participants reached through social network. The initial participants, then, served as informants to nominate other interviewees (Morgan, 1998: 2). Such a method is particularly suitable in this study for several reasons. First, through snowball sampling, a wider and more comprehensive range of interviewees can be accessed. For example, villagers who do not use digital communication tools or social media are hard to reach directly by the researcher. Through snowball sampling, those villagers can be included, and therefore, enhance the validity of the results of this study. Second, snowball sampling helps the researcher to locate "information-rich" (Patton, 1990: 180) participants who "meet the eligibility criteria for a study" (Morgan, 1998: 2) more efficiently. Also, based on social network, it is easier to "establish a relationship of trust and confidence" (Gaskell, 2000: 45) between the researcher and the participants. Twenty-one interviewees with diverse social and intellectual backgrounds were recruited for this research project. The profile of the interviewees can be found in Appendix I.

All of the interviews were conducted face to face. Being aware that the environment of interview can also impact on the quality of conversation, the researcher tried to create a relaxing and comfortable atmosphere which is "conducive to open and undistorted communication between interviewer and respondent" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001: 14). Finally, a common room, where different activities in the village are frequently held, was selected as the location to conduct the interviews. Consent forms were provided to the participants prior to each interview to inform them of the purpose of this study, participants' rights during the interviews, as well as the benefits and potential risks. In the cases of illiterate participants, the researcher read and explained the consent form to the interviewees.

With the permission from interviewees, all of the interviews were recorded for later transcription.

Based on the conceptual framework, a topic guide was formulated to help the researcher to stay focused on the research questions. The use of open-ended questions aims to maintain the "flexibility in probing" (Patton, 2015: 807), and hence, enables the researcher to elaborate or follow up when necessary. Topics were initially designed according to each of the sub-questions, and then, reorganized in a more logical order. The topic guide includes two umbrella topics: 1) individual's general experience and perceptions on mainstream media, and 2) individual's experiences and perceptions on loudspeaker broadcasting.

Even though interviewing is the most appropriate method for this study, limitations should still be acknowledged. For example, interviewing is not a form of conversation familiar to villagers. Although conducted in a relatively natural atmosphere, many of the participants still tend to be nervous and shy during the interview. In one extreme case, Interviewee X kept giving very short answers to the questions and the interview lasted only 15 minutes. Also, most of the participants spoke local dialect, which sometimes hindered the mutual understanding between the researcher and the interviewees.

Thematic Analysis

After the twenty-one interviews were completed, thematic analysis was applied in order to make sense of the interview material. Thematic analysis is useful in "identify[ing] and emphasis[ing] themes from textual data", and emphasizes supporting interpretations with data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012: 20). The flexible and inductive nature of thematic analysis also meets the objective of this explorative research. In order to locate the inductive themes generated from the interview results more efficiently, three umbrella themes based on each of the sub-questions were employed—1) alternative, 2) localized adaptations, and 3) participation. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytical phases, the researcher first read the transcribed the texts of the interviews several times and marked down "initial ideas" (ibid: 87) which have been repeated in the interviews. Then, based on the initial ideas, the researcher generated several "initial codes" (Ibid.). Next, the entire transcripts were coded based on the initial coding framework. Following that, the researcher examined the coded transcripts again to ensure that there were no important ideas left un-coded. In the next step, the researcher collated the codes into potential sub-themes, and situated the sub themes under the three umbrella themes for later discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will critically analyze the interview results under the conceptual framework formulated previously. This chapter consists of two interrelated sections. First, three deductive themes—alternative, localized adaptations, and participation—that emerged from the conceptual framework and research question will be discussed respectively. Each deductive theme is further divided into several sub-themes identified in the interview results. Then, different themes will be pulled together in a concluding discussion. While the analysis of the three deductive themes aims to provide an overview of the organizational structure as well as the operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China, the concluding discussion aims at answering the research question systematically, and providing a more holistic evaluation of loudspeaker broadcasting as community radio.
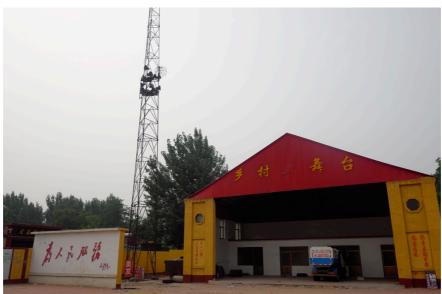
Figure 1. A set of loudspeakers at the center of Liang village

The Theme of Alternative

By defining alternative media, including community radio, as "alternatives to and supplementing" mainstream media (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 18), the distinctions between alternative media and mainstream media is foregrounded. A wide range of distinctions has been summarized in previous studies from many dimensions, such as motive or purpose, organizational structure, and message content (Lewis, 1993: 12). In order to map all the existing and potential distinctions, Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) further categorized them into two levels—content and organizational. Before conducting the

interviews, the original sub-question 1 focused on national and regional radio broadcasting as the object to compare with loudspeaker broadcasting due to their similarities in technological term. However, results from the first few interviews indicated that national and regional radio broadcasting was no longer a major form of medium in villagers' daily lives. Therefore, the first Sub-question was adjusted to the current one in order to situate loudspeaker broadcasting in a wider context. Consequently, a new set of interview topics was added to capture the general media usage experiences of the interviewees. According to the interview results, villagers' frequently used channels of communications include television, mobile phone, computer, and loudspeaker broadcasting. Several sub-themes emerged from the interviews can fall into the two levels of distinctions between loudspeaker broadcasting and other forms of media which they frequently use.

Specifically-oriented Content

Because of their orientations towards relatively small-scale populations, the content of community radio tends to be geared towards specific groups of audience, significantly distinguishing them from mainstream media (Berrigan, 1979: 8). Indeed, during the interviews, one of the most frequently repeated ideas is that, the content of loudspeaker broadcasting is closer to villagers' lives compared to other media.

> I think the major difference between loudspeaker broadcasting and other types of media is that, while other media focus on a wider range of issues, loudspeaker broadcasting are more sharply focused. It is more about our local issues. Loudspeaker broadcasting and other types of media function on different levels. (Interviewee 13)

> Loudspeaker broadcasting is closer to our lives. Compared to international news, sometimes we care more about things happen in our village or in the county. (Interviewee 2)

While most interviewees acknowledge the distinction between loudspeaker broadcasting and other types of media, one interviewee gives an opposite answer.

> Higher levels (national and regional) TV or radio broadcasting use more complicated language, and thus, sounds more educated and cultured, whereas loudspeaker broadcasting uses simple language. But basically, they are all the same because loudspeaker broadcasting shares the same values with higher levels of broadcasting. (Interviewee 6)

This answer unveils a deeper level of discussion. Studies on alternative media are increasingly inseparable from "ideology, domination and hegemony" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 20), and in many cases, alternative media represent "challenges to hegemony" which contradict dominant discourse on mainstream media (Atton, 2002: 15). As a result, the gap between alternative media and mainstream media has been further deepened by this "negative relationship" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 20). Underlying this negative relationship is the presupposition that the relatively small-scale audience groups of alternative media are likely to have alternative ideologies which are "marginalized, misrepresented" in mainstream media. However, such a presupposition is, to some extent, arbitrary. As reflected in the case of loudspeaker broadcasting, community radio can serve as air spaces for "local cultural manifestations" or "issues in the neighbourhood or locality" (Jankowski, 1994: 3), without contradicting mainstream media in terms of ideology and value.

Vertical Structure with access for participation

On the level of organizational structure, while mainstream media are usually described as "vertical, uni-directional and non-participatory" (Butalia, 1993: 50), alternative media, in contrast, tend to be horizontally structured. However, the organizational model of loudspeaker broadcasting shows another possibility. As stated in the literature review chapter, loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural china shares a general three-level structure of administration: county-town-village, which is in coherent with the three levels of government in rural China. The interview results further substantiate this vertical structure. Although each level of administration has access to broadcasting, their ways of engagement and degrees of control over loudspeaker broadcasting varied significantly. Loudspeakers are funded, installed and maintained by the county government, however, there is no content produced at this level. Most of the scheduled programmes are produced at the town level, with a group of voluntary editors and broadcasters who work at the town government operating the broadcasting station. However, the editors and broadcasters at town level are relatively fixed, with some basic knowledge of Adobe Audition (the software used to edit programmes) and the broadcasting facilities. Consequently, such entry barriers, to some extent, hinders a wider range of villagers' participation.
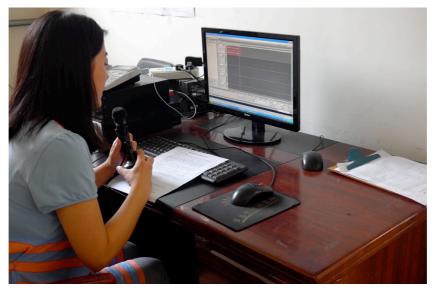
Figure 2. A broadcaster recording a programme at the town broadcasting station

It is the broadcasting at the village level that creates more room for villagers' participation. Simply by turning on the microphone installed in the common room of the village, villagers' can broadcast live through loudspeakers. The content of broadcasting is flexible.

> I've lost my phone three times. I broadcasted, and found the phone back twice because of the broadcast. When people heard the broadcast, if they picked up the phone, they would bring it to me. (Interviewee 3)

> Last time I broadcast a piece of announcement to inform young people who are just over sixteen years old to go to the local police station to apply for ID cards. (Interviewee 15)

Admittedly, this vertical structure is not as "balanced" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 18) as the horizontal structures proposed in existing literature, and more bottom-up channels of communication are needed. As one interviewee said that

> I've only used the loudspeakers in our village. […] I think people who run the broadcasting station at the town broadcasting station or at the county level should come and communicate more frequently with us about our opinions on loudspeaker broadcasting, like every three months or so. They should come regularly. […] I have no idea how can I reach those people and tell them my advices on loudspeaker broadcasting. I just listen to whatever they broadcast. (interviewee 4)

Figure 3. A villager trying to find his missing dog by broadcasting at the broadcasting station in Liang village

As indicated in this reply, the flow of information between different levels of broadcasting tends to be uneven, with more top-down flows of information than bottom-up flows, which is a problem the villagers are also aware of.

The Theme of Localized Adaptations

Although specific orientation has been a conspicuous feature of alternative media, Berrigan (1979) argues that, alternative communications should mean more than "deliberate orientation" (ibid: 7). Moreover, alternative media should be "adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides" (ibid: 8). Therefore, localized adaptions to the community are also considered as key elements of alternative media. In the case of loudspeaker broadcasting, the adaptions towards villagers need can be reflected in the following sub-themes.

Primitive but Effective Medium

To start with, the selection of loudspeakers as the community communication tools is a localized adaptation based on the socio-economic context of the village. Rantanen (2005) argues that the establishment of (the social use of) a new type of communication may cause a decline of the previous form (ibid: 29). However, in the context of rural China, loudspeaker broadcasting is highly irreplaceable even in the contemporary digital era.

When the interviewer asked interviewees whether do they think loudspeakers are, to some extent, primitive in the digital era in terms of technology, even young interviewees justified the existence of loudspeaker broadcasting.

> Loudspeaker broadcasting will never be outdated in our village. We all come out to listen to the broadcasting. Even illiterate villagers won't miss important information. (interviewee 20, age 25-29)

> When all the other communication tools couldn't work, loudspeaker broadcasting, perhaps, would be the most effective way of communication, I think. For example, when floods, or other natural disasters come, it is possible that many advanced communication technologies can't work in case of emergency. Whereas loudspeakers would be the only way to guide people. (interviewee 13)

Indeed, the selection of loudspeakers as the medium for local communication has inherent advantages. Traditionally, bulletin boards were used for news and announcements in Chinese villages. However, in rural areas, a considerable population of the illiterate are excluded from receiving information on bulletin boards. On the other hand, far from the centers of technology (Rodriguez, 2003: 184), "low-end digital technologies" and "inexpensive ICT services" (Cartier, Castells & Qiu, 2005: 9) adopted in the vast rural area tend to be technologically unstable. Therefore, loudspeaker broadcasting is more suitable because it incorporates a wider range of audience as well as being "robust and easy to maintain" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 2).

Nevertheless, one way that loudspeaker broadcasting hinders community communication is the lack of equipment.

> Loudspeakers in our village are not sufficient. Our village is not a small village. Villagers who live far away from the loudspeakers have to come outside to listen to the broadcasting. So I think more loudspeakers should be installed in our village. (interviewee 19)

As a result of the lack of equipment, the quality of broadcasting is not stable. Interviewees who live relatively far away from the loudspeakers pointed out that they cannot always hear the broadcasting clearly, and one interviewee indicated that even the wind direction can affect the quality of the broadcasting.

Figure 4. & Figure 5. Two sets of loudspeakers in Liang village

Broadcasting Time and Duration

The time of broadcasting has also been adjusted to the common schedule of villagers. The majority of villagers are farmers who have to go to the fields during the day. However, due to limited budget, there are no loudspeakers installed in the fields outside the village. In order to enable more villagers to listen to the broadcast, recorded programmes are usually broadcasted three times a day at 9 a.m., 11a.m., and 17 p.m. respectively, and three days a week, when villagers come back to the village from the field. The broadcasting time also allows for a certain degree of flexibility, if there is urgent information to be broadcasted.

Since villagers have no individual control over the loudspeakers, and thus, cannot turn off the broadcasting or turn down the volume, the duration of the recorded programmes are approximately thirty minutes to avoid disturbing the villagers' lives. In fact, interview results suggest that, instead of feeling disturbed by loudspeaker broadcasting, villagers do not want to miss the broadcasting.

According to my experience, when my friends are visiting me at my home, they would ask me to turn off the TV and listen to the loudspeakers when there's loudspeaker broadcasting. (Interviewer: So villagers think loudspeaker broadcasting is more

important than TV content?) Yes. Because loudspeaker broadcasting is timely. For example, new local policies are not likely to be broadcasted in national or regional radio or TV stations, but we can know such policies from loudspeaker broadcasting. (interviewee 7)

Figure 6. A group of villagers listening to loudspeaker broadcasting outdoors

This reply from the interviewee also pinpoints another, and perhaps the most important, localized adaptation of loudspeaker broadcasting—localized and supplementary content.

Localized and Supplementary Content

Community media focus on the needs and interests of audience (Berrigan, 1979: 8). Traditional approaches have highlighted community media's support to "agriculture, health, and education" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 2) by providing specifically-oriented information to audience. Summarized from the interview results, scheduled programmes of loudspeaker broadcasting contain four types of information: 1) national and regional news that are relevant to the villagers, 2) policies that are relevant to the villagers, 3) local news and stories among the villagers, and 4) agricultural education. In addition, villagers also use loudspeaker broadcasting to broadcast a wide range of information that will be discussed in detail in the next section on participation.

Interviewee 21 is an editor as well as broadcaster of loudspeaker broadcasting at the town level. During the interview, she pointed out that the standard of content selection is its relevance to the villagers' lives.

> We collect material and write local news ourselves. When there is few local news, we also select news which are relevant to the villagers from newspapers and websites. The most important standard of our selection is that the content is close to the villagers' lives. (Interviewer: So national or regional news that are not relevant to villagers' lives would not be included?) Yes, because we only broadcast three or four pieces of news each time, so we basically focus on local events. (Interviewee 21)

Also, loudspeaker broadcasting contains unique content that supplements other types of media.

> While other media focus on national and international news, loudspeaker broadcasting is more about local life, that's the reason why I like it. For example, on smoggy days, the broadcaster would tell us to wear masks when going out and drive carefully. Or when some road sections are under construction, it would also be broadcasted to let us know. (Interviewee 7)

> Many of the policies and information can't reach villagers effectively without loudspeaker broadcasting, and it is also an important tool for villagers. So it would be very inconvenient if loudspeaker broadcasting stops. (Interviewee 17)

At the center of community radio is the "community will" for communication (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 1). Therefore, the primordial condition for community radio to serve communities is to identify the "communication needs" (Ibid.) among community members. Loudspeaker broadcasting has adapted to the socio-economic context of the village as well as to the needs of the villagers, and hence, suits well in the framework of community radio.

The Theme of Participation

The greater potential of alternative media to advance communities lies in their role in facilitating participation (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 20). By participating as "planners, producers, performers," individuals may shape their own "socio-political, cultural and economic environment" (Berrigan, 1979: 7). Furthermore, communicative process has

been emphasized as the "right to freedom of opinion and expression" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 2), instead of a set of practices restricted to professionals (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 11). Therefore, the theme of participation has remained as a defining feature of alternative media. Based on the distinction between "democratization *in* and *through* the media" proposed by Wasko and Mosco (1992: 7), Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) further differentiate between "participation *in* the media" and "participation *through* the media" (ibid: 11), which are two interconnected stages of participation. "Participation *in* the media" refers to the production of media content by non-professionals (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 11). Such individual, "micro-participation" in the media not only contributes to a balanced relationship between media and audience, but more importantly, expanding to the "macro-participation" which eventually leads to the "civic culture" (Ibid.). The following sub-themes can be positioned in and evaluated from this division.

Hierarchical Participation

Interview results show that, while most of the interviewees have participative experiences in loudspeaker broadcasting, their participation tends to be hierarchical. The hierarchy of participation results, in part, from the vertical organizational structure of loudspeaker broadcasting. Because of the division of work between different administrative levels as discussed in the first theme, villagers' degrees of involvement also vary. As the broadcaster and editor at the town level explained:

> I spend most of my spare time in collecting material for the programmes of loudspeaker broadcasting. We plan to prepare two or three episodes in advance, but later we realized that the news we broadcast has to be timely. So now I basically spend all the spare time on the preparation of programmes. I do feel a bit overwhelmed recently. (Interviewee 21)

While the voluntary editors and broadcasters demonstrate the most intensive form of participation, the majority of participants are involved with a higher degree of flexibility. Participants do not need much preparation in advance, and the language they use is the local dialect instead of standard Mandarin, which is used by broadcaster at the town level. Moreover, villager participants can broadcast a wider range of information, for example:

> If a child goes out for a long time and doesn't go home, the parents can use loudspeaker broadcasting to find their child. (Interviewee 2)
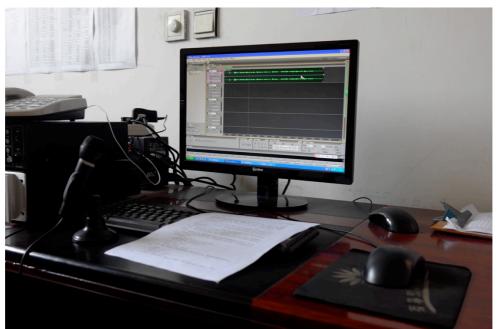
> When my daughter and I sell vegetables in front of this common room, I will

broadcast through loudspeakers to let others know. (Interviewee 3)

I once broadcasted in order to find my sheep. (Interviewee 8)

I sometimes remind villagers to pay the electricity bill through loudspeaker broadcasting. (Interviewee 13)

The different degrees of involvement are also result of varied technological affordance (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014: 1154) of equipment at different levels of broadcasting stations. It can be generally summarized that programmes produced at the town level are recorded in advance whereas participants in the village usually conduct live broadcast through loudspeakers. The equipment at the loudspeaker broadcasting station in the village is a bare minimum for broadcasting. As a result, no recorded programme is produced in advance at the village level, a gap that requires future improvements. Interviewees have also expressed their willingness to produce programmes for their own village if funding and technological problems could be solved.
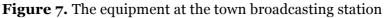
Figure 7. The equipment at the town broadcasting station

Figure 8. The equipment at the village broadcasting station

> I've thought about producing a programme but I'm not good at computers, and I don't know how to record. But if there's anyone in our village who can produce a programme about stories or anecdotes happened in our village, or successful agricultural experiences, that would be great. (Interviewee 10)

Moreover, the interview results also indicate that age and education level are two factors that influence villagers' willingness of participation. Paradoxically, compared to young interviewees, senior interviewees expressed more passion in participating in loudspeaker broadcasting, but at the same time, they also use age as an excuse.

> If I were younger, I would definitely have been willing to produce programmes. But I'm too old now. In fact, I used to be in charge of updating the bulletin boards in our village. Now loudspeakers are used instead. I no longer have enough time and energy to spend on loudspeaker broadcasting. (Interviewee 10, 65 years old)

In addition, the willingness to participate also positively relates to education level. Interviewees with higher education levels hold more optimistic attitudes towards participation in loudspeaker broadcasting. On the contrary, interviewees with relatively lower literacy levels tend to feel more like passive audience. One interviewee who only finished elementary school revealed an obedient attitude towards loudspeaker broadcasting.

> I'm just a farmer, what brilliant opinions can I have? Whatever loudspeaker broadcasts, it must be for the common good. People who produce the programmes are

more brilliant than me, so I just listen to whatever content they provide. (Interviewee 9)

Another intriguing finding is that, while hierarchy is usually seen as a hinder of participation, and thus, the democratization of media (e.g. Kletter, Hirschhorn & Hudson, 1997; Berrigan, 1979; Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008), loudspeaker broadcasting offers a different possibility. Due to varied reasons, such as limited literacy or simply being introverted, some villagers indicated that they do not want to participate in loudspeaker broadcasting directly by themselves. As a result, when there are other people—either the fixed broadcasters or other villagers—who are willing to broadcast the information for them, it actually helps to increase participation.

I am a doctor, and I frequently need to broadcast. But I usually ask the person who is in charge of the equipment to broadcast for me. I don't think I can express clearly through loudspeakers. There used to be villagers who were so nervous that they stammered when they were broadcasting. (Interviewee 5)

I ask others to broadcast for me because I'm not used to speaking through microphone. (Interviewee 15)

While traditional models of alternative media see horizontal organizational structure as well as "lateral flow of information" (Kletter, Hirschhorn and Hudson, 1997: 78) as a prerequisite for participation, loudspeaker broadcasting indicates another possibility. In the social, economic, and cultural context of contemporary rural China, the vertical organizational structure of loudspeaker broadcasting and the hierarchy of participation facilitated the incorporation of a wider range of voices from villagers.

Concluding Discussion

Previous discussions on the three specific themes have demonstrated an overview of the organizational structure and the operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China. While loudspeaker broadcasting has been measured by the standards of community radio, the analysis shows that, in a nuanced model, loudspeaker broadcasting also challenges existing models and reveals other possibilities for future development of the theorization of alternative media. That is, loudspeaker broadcasting and alternative media can mutually inspire each other.

Loudspeaker Broadcasting in the Existing Framework of Community Radio

Loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China parallels the orientations of community radio in many ways. First, loudspeaker broadcasting is an alternative to mainstream media in terms of its specific orientation towards the village. To elaborate further, such specific orientation towards the village includes three major localized adaptations— 1) the selection of loudspeaker broadcasting as the medium for community communication, 2) the time and duration of broadcasting, and more importantly, 3) the localized content. Second, loudspeaker broadcasting also resembles community radio in terms of the features of "access and participation" (Berrigan, 1979: 6). The interview results show that despite that loudspeaker broadcasting is vertically organized instead of horizontally linked (Atton, 2002: 27), it still incorporates villagers' voices and opens up opportunities for villagers' participation. However, one problem that could potentially hinder the development of loudspeaker broadcasting towards a community radio is the unequal flow of information, which is an unavoidable consequence of the vertical organizational structure. In contemporary rural China, it is not possible to have a completely horizontally linked media organization. A more workable solution is to increase channels for bottom-up communications such as regularly collecting opinions from villagers as some of the interviewees have suggested. Another problem with great potential for future improvement, identified in the existing operational model of loudspeaker broadcasting, is the lack of programme produced at the village level. However, issues such as funding and technology have to be resolved to bridge the gap between a wider range of villagers' willingness to participate and the actual production process.

Inspirations to Existing Models of Community Radio

Initially developed as part of the emergency broadcasting system in contemporary rural China, loudspeaker broadcasting has experienced a gradual shift towards community radio as new functions were incorporated. The shifting process is the continuous negotiations with and adaptions to the socio-political context of contemporary rural China. The development trajectory of loudspeaker broadcasting deviates from the existing body of knowledge of alternative media mainly in two aspects. First, initiated as part of the emergency broadcasting system, the cultural orientation of loudspeaker broadcasting is not as strong as that in other cases of alternative media. One persisting theme in the studies of alternative media is their "counter-hegemonic power" (Atton, 2002: 15) that creates "spaces for alternative voices that provide the focus […] for the contrary and the subversive" (Silverstone, 1999: 103). As a result, alternative media tend to be situated in an antagonistic relationship

with the mainstream discourse and ideologies. Loudspeaker broadcasting, however, has demonstrated another possibility. By providing relevant news and policies to villagers in time, and offering "integral fundamental education" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001: 6) to villagers, loudspeaker broadcasting serves more as a supplement, instead of a challenge, to mainstream media. Such relationship leads to a comparatively amicable relationship between loudspeaker broadcasting--as a form of alternative media--and mainstream media. Second, while it has been affirmed in the existing literature that the horizontal organizational structure of alternative media facilitates participation, this study indicates that the vertical organizational structure of loudspeaker broadcasting can also facilitate participation under certain circumstances. Previous studies have focused on the opportunities alternative media have created for participation. However, audience's will and their abilities to participate should also be considered. In the case of loudspeaker broadcasting, the audience group is villagers in rural China with relatively low literacy levels, which to some extent, hinders their direct participation. In such a context, the hierarchical participation model of loudspeaker broadcasting discussed in the previous section plays an important role in turning villagers' participatory wills in to actual participation, directly or indirectly, which provides a different model of participation to the field of alternative media.

CONCLUSION

Once served as an effective political propaganda tool, the orientation of loudspeaker broadcasting has gradually shifted during the past years. This research project has employed the framework of community radio, as defined in the umbrella theory of alternative media, to examine loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China. Having reviewed relevant literature and major approaches in the field, a media-centered conceptual framework that critically combines the approaches of "alternative media as serving the community" and "alternative media as an alternative to mainstream media" (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008: 6-33) has been formulated for this study. In order to further sharpen the focus of this research project, three interrelated themes--alternative, localized adaptation, and participation--have been selected as three key measurements of loudspeaker broadcasting as community radio. Through the case study of loudspeaker broadcasting in Liang village, Hebei province, China, the organizational structure and operational mechanism of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China have been outlined.

Twenty-one semi-structured interviews with villagers were conducted, with thematic analysis employed to analyze the material collected. The interview results indicate that, while

loudspeaker broadcasting parallels the orientations of community radio in many ways, it also deviates from the dominant development trajectory of alternative media, and challenges previous models. In today's rural China, loudspeaker broadcasting is specifically oriented towards villagers in terms of the choice of medium, the time and duration of broadcasting, and the localization of content. Moreover, loudspeaker broadcasting also created space for villagers' participation, which further mirrors the features of community radio. While on the other hand, as part of the emergency broadcasting system in rural China developed by the government, loudspeaker broadcasting is somewhat determined to stay in an amicable relationship with the mainstream discourse and dominant ideologies. As a result, the counter-hegemonic feature of alternative media is not clearly reflected in the case of loudspeaker broadcasting, challenging the "antagonism" between alternative media and mainstream media as pointed out in previous studies. Interview results also show that, instead of being a barrier of participation, the vertical organizational structure of loudspeaker broadcasting helps to incorporate a wider range of villagers' participations in the actual operationalization process.

Stereotyped as a political propaganda tool, the strong potential of loudspeaker broadcasting as a channel of communication has long been underestimated. This research project is an attempt to go beyond the context when loudspeaker broadcasting was initiated and to re-examine it from an alternative perspective—community radio. Nevertheless, as a result of the localized administration of loudspeaker broadcasting, the specific structure and operationalization may vary significantly from case to case, and the result of this research project only reflects one model among an array of possibilities. Therefore, further studies are needed in order to capture a more holistic overview of loudspeaker broadcasting in contemporary rural China. More attention could be focused on how economic, historical, geographical, and environmental factors have shaped loudspeaker broadcasting. In addition, voices from each level of participation can be examined in order to conduct an in-depth study of the hierarchical participation. In terms of methodology, participant observation could also be employed as a supplementary research method. Hopefully, loudspeaker broadcasting could be better understood through future studies, and its great potential as community radio will continue to be recognized.

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APPENDIX I

Table 1. Profile of Interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Profession	Education	age
1	Female	Secretary	Junior high school	45-49
2	Male	Store owner	Senior high school	54-59
3	Female	Farmer	Senior high school	50-54
4	Male	Head of the district	Junior high school	55-59
5	Male	Doctor	Primary school	65-69
6	Male	Businessman	Junior high school	45-49
7	Male	Accountant	Senior high school	55-59
8	Male	Doctor	College for professional training	40-44
9	Male	Farmer	Primary school	60-64
10	Male	Farmer	Senior high school	65-69
11	Male	Carpenter	Primary school	65-69
12	Female	Farmer	Senior high school	55-59
13	Female	Secretary at the village government	College for professional training	40-44
14	Male	Farmer	Junior high school	40-44
15	Male	Unknown	Unknown	40-44
16	Female	Tailor	Junior high school	25-59
17	Male	Farmer	Junior high school	50-54
18	Male	Farmer	Junior high school	30-34
19	Male	Farmer	Junior high school	65-69
20	Female	Businesswoman	Junior high school	25-29
21	Female	Town government secretary (broadcaster at the town broadcasting station)	College	25-29

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