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**The Globalization of Chinese Television: The Role of the Party State**

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# **The Globalization of Chinese Television: The Role of the Party State**

**Hong Zhang**

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## **ABSTRACT**

China's television sector has undergone rapid transformations since the country's reform and opening-up period in the late 1970s. As in many other countries, these transformations have meant to availability of globally diffused cultural forms through television. In this paper, the main results of a recently completed PhD project, aiming to understand the role of the Chinese party state in this transformation, are presented. The project challenges both the media imperialism theory that regards global communications as mostly driven by activities between states and the revisionist approach that assumes the end of nation-states under globalization. It supports global transformation theories and develops a three-tier analytical framework in order to assess (1) the transformation of television governance by the party-state; (2) the impact of party-state policies on Chinese television; and (3) the interplay of party-state policies with other power factors. The findings suggest that the globalization of Chinese television has undergone three stages of internationalization, transnationalization and renationalization, in accordance with the changing role of the Chinese party state. They complement global transformation theories with evidence from a transitional Communist country that the (party) state not only remains a key actor in the process of globalization, but has also itself undergone profound changes in response to it.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research project aimed to understand how Chinese television has dealt with the influences of foreign, in particular, Western television cultural forms since 1978 when the country adopted the so-called 'reform and opening-up' policy (Zhang 2009). During the process of working on the project, I have been frequently challenged by the view that China's television development, owing to the Communist party state's control of the Chinese television system, has been primarily a national exercise. Indeed, precisely because of this stereotype, the majority of studies concerning the transformation of Chinese television have ignored dynamics beyond the country's national borders (e.g. Zhao, 1998; Qian, 2002; Lee et al., 2007). A major question emerged: what is the role of the party state in the globalization of Chinese television? Does it, in fact, prevent any globalization of Chinese television?

According to Rantanen (2002: 137; 2007: 166), based on her studies of late Soviet and post-Communist Russian media, every media system has been globalized in one way or another, despite political systems. In China, while the Communist party state still holds power, the manner of its media governance keeps changing and, as Thussu (2007: 65) argues, it has played a central role in China's media globalization. This is exactly why studying the globalization of Chinese television is important, not only because such a study must address how the distinctive political system in China has influenced the television globalization process, but also because this involves the reconceptualization of television globalization.

Dominant theories such as the media imperialism school of thought (e.g. Boyd-Barrett, 1977) and the revisionist approach (e.g. Robertson, 1995; Iwabuchi, 2002) to which it gave rise, either assume the developing countries as defenceless receivers of media flows or the erosion of the nation-state in media globalization. Thus, they could not serve as guides for this project which aimed to address how the party state—the Chinese variant of the nation-state impinges on television globalization in China. I have integrated into this study global transformation theories (e.g. Held et al., 1999; Price, 2002), which regard the nation-state as both a dynamic power for globalization and a transformed entity under globalization, in order to identify the historical trajectory of television globalization in China and examine, simultaneously, in each historical stage: (1) the changing party state television governance; (2) the impacts of party state policies on the transformation of Chinese television; and (3)

the interplay of party state policies with power factors both above and below the national boundaries.

In this paper the key characteristics of Chinese television globalization are compared at different historical stages, namely, internationalization (1978-1991), transnationalization (1992-1996) and renationalization (1997 up to now) in accordance with the changing role of the Chinese party state. It also presents the contribution of the project to theories of media and television globalization.

## **2. REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

Global transformation theories propose the creation of trans-historical criteria for assessing the features and dynamics of the historical forms of globalization (e.g. Held et al. 1999: 21-3; Sassen, 2006: 4-6). Inspired by these theories, I developed criteria (see Table 1) both from the existing literature and the empirical materials of this study for a research design capable of capturing the changes of the Chinese party state's television governance and its impacts on Chinese television across time.

China Central Television (CCTV), Zhejiang Provincial Television (ZJTV) and Wenzhou Municipal Television (WZTV) were withheld as three major sites for the fieldwork of this study. Starting with television stations as the objects of enquiry serves to connect the research questions for the following three reasons. 1) In addressing the impact of party state policies on the key activities of Chinese television, the state-owned television stations, which have the dominant position in program production and transmission in China, are of prime importance. 2) Since the Chinese television regulators - the broadcasting bureaus, used to be highly integrated with Chinese television stations, the transformation of Chinese television, especially their increasing autonomy in micro-operation, is evidence of the changes in the party state television governance. 3) Assessing through recent examples whether party state policies remain as influential on Chinese television given the rise of multilateral power factors.

**Table 1:** Criteria for Assessing the Historical Forms of Television Globalization

<b>Chinese Party State Television Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policy objectives</li> <li>▪ Policy institutions</li> <li>▪ Policy instruments</li> </ul>
<b>Key Transformation in Chinese Television (policy outcomes)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ownership</li> <li>▪ Market structure</li> <li>▪ Management</li> <li>▪ Production values</li> <li>▪ Content (programs and genres/formats)</li> </ul>
<b>Power Factors Interacting with the Chinese Party State to Shape the Transformation of Chinese Television</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Technological forces: technologies for distribution, reception and control of information flows</li> <li>▪ Market forces: (sub-national) television stations and broadcasting bureaus; transnational media corporations</li> <li>▪ Political forces: Western states and international organizations</li> <li>▪ Cultural forces: producers and audience</li> </ul>

The choice of Chinese television stations as the basic units for the study of Chinese television is a continuation of past research. However, it goes against the tradition among Chinese scholars of selecting the three largest television stations in China --CCTV, Shanghai Media Group and Guangdong Provincial Television-- as a sample (e.g. Guo, 1991; Pan and Chan, 2000; Lee et al., 2007). My choice of CCTV, ZJTV and WZTV was based on the consideration that China's television has been structured from its inception according to administrative levels. Thus, comparing the development of television stations at different levels enabled me to examine the whole picture of Chinese television from the national to the provincial and local and to examine how the structure has changed and why.

One might question my selection of ZJTV out of 33 provincial television stations and of WZTV out of 283 municipal television stations in 2005 (CRTYEC, 2006: 93-138), since they are located in one richest provinces and cities in China. However, largely because of their strong economic capabilities, they are also at the forefront of the transformation of Chinese television under globalization. Both stations are active in adopting foreign television technologies, program formats, managerial skills and production practices over the past three decades. Moreover, many state policies such as the recent 'cultural system reform'

policies have started with these television stations as pilots. In a sense, ZJTV and WZTV are highly representative of the trend of development of Chinese television stations at their respective administrative levels.

The analysis is limited by the fact that the research is highly dependent on documentation from governmental sources. This is because in China, since the party/state controls television, both television regulators such as the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and television stations themselves keep detailed records of the development of Chinese television, originally intended as reference material for the authorities, but also available to researchers able to establish relevant connections. However, for the same reason, this documentation could have a strong bias in the sense that it reflects history from the perspective of the Chinese party state. Thus, triangulation – a strategy of crosschecking, explaining and combining different data sources (Flick, 1990: 176-9) – was implemented. I used 48 semi-structured interviews and fieldwork observations to triangulate the documentary results. I also employed triangulation within these same methods, for example comparing data from government documents with those in existing academic studies, and interviewing academics and professionals as well as policy makers and managers, with overlapping interview topic guides.

### **3. KEY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

In the following section, I present the major empirical findings of this project in accordance with the key analytical criteria, focusing on the similarities and differences between the transformation of Chinese television under each criterion and across different stages.

#### **3.1. *The Transformation of Party State Television Governance***

As discussed, this study prioritizes the role of the Chinese party state in China's television globalization and starts from the transformation of party state television governance since the beginning of the reform era. I approached state television governance as a sub-branch of public policy and examined it in terms of policy objectives, policy institutions and policy instruments.

##### 3.1.1. Policy Objectives

In China as elsewhere, studying policy objectives is important for the analysis of public policy making because, once policy objectives are identified, policy makers may modify policy institutions and choose policy instruments favourable to their policy objectives (e.g. Thatcher, 1999: 314; Keane, 2001: 793-6). During the past three stages of television globalization, the ultimate goal of television policies in China has been to promote the growth of Chinese television as a means of reinforcing the party state's ideological dominance.

However, the justifications and specific policy objectives have kept changing. During the 1980s, the party state made it explicit that China's television reform was to promote the country's economic reform and thus the party state's power. When the party state recognized after the pro-democracy student demonstrations in 1989 how fragile official mainstream ideology could become when reduced to a matter of economic growth, it called in the early 1990s on Chinese television to promote 'spiritual civilization', which emphasized the importance of traditional Confucian values and socialist ethics in China's economic reform, while seeking to discredit the cultural aspects of Westernization (e.g. freedom and democracy). Since the late 1990s, the party state has advocated, as a response to the overwhelming presence of television as entertainment, the 'public interest' function of Chinese television modelled on that in Western democracies. Although the new ideology no



longer overtly demonizes Western cultures, its emphasis remains on evoking Chinese traditional and socialist values in order to construct an harmonious socialist society, rather than enlightening the public in a manner free from political intervention. One could argue that, as the party state strives to find a better justification for its ideological dominance, there has been a gradual divergence of the rhetoric of policy objectives from the substance.

Secondly, the party state's requirement of Chinese television for economic success has accelerated. In the first stage, Chinese television stations were not obliged to earn commercial revenues because the party state subsidy was their major funding. Since the early 1990s, television stations at all levels have been forced to participate in market competition, with the redefinition of the sector as a self-financing industry. During the third stage, the party state has encouraged Chinese television stations to make profits both from domestic market and overseas markets. This relates to a third transformation of policy objectives, that is, the party state has sought to influence the overseas markets in the recent stage. Manifested by the 'go abroad' policy, Chinese television outflows aim to increase not only political influence, the major objectives in previous stages, but also revenues.

### 3.1.2. Policy institutions

Policy institutions are the structural framework within which policy makers take decisions (Thatcher, 1999: 10, 25). In this study, I have chosen the changes in national and sub-national television regulatory bodies and their relationships with the party state and television stations as the main targets for investigation.

Above all, my findings demonstrate that the transformation of television policy institutions in China have not broken away from the system of party state control. Unlike Western independent regulatory bodies such as the UK Office of Communication (OFCOM) and the US Federal Communication Commission (FCC) which are responsible to parliament/congress, the Chinese television regulators, from the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRFT) in the 1980s to current incarnation, the SARFT, and the cultural bureau, newly established at the sub-provincial levels under the cultural system reform, have remained government components. Since the party guides government organizations in China, television regulators are excessively subject to the party leadership, such as the ideological control from Central Propaganda Department (CPD) and their local counterparts.

However, top policy makers within the party state have continually modified policy institutions so as to achieve the policy objective of accelerating the growth of Chinese television within the party state's ideological control. From the early 1980s, the party state has decentralized the main responsibility for managing sub-national level television stations to sub-national broadcasting bureaus. While this decentralization activated sub-national governments to invest in Chinese television, for example, by importing technologies to establish television stations, it also increased the regulatory power of the sub-national broadcasting bureaus, in particular, after 1992 with the party state's recognition of the commercial nature of Chinese television.

During the early and mid-1990s, many sub-national bureaus, reliant heavily on corresponding television stations' revenues for their maintenance, engaged in 'edge-ball' activities in interpreting national policies to maximize local broadcasters' economic interests. These activities challenged the efficacy of national policies and the dominance of the party state. Since the late 1990s, the party state has started to model itself on the experiences of Western regulators, separating Chinese broadcasting bureaus from the daily operation of television stations and their commercial revenues. While the SARFT has focused its work on planning and regulations, the newly merged sub-provincial regulators, such as the Wenzhou Bureau of Culture, Radio and Television, have strengthened their supervision of the implementation of national policies. This recent restructuring of policy institutions has re-centralized party state power over policy distribution and implementation.

### 3.1.3 Policy instruments

In the past three stages, policy instruments or the means by which policy makers choose to deliver and implement policies in China (Hills, 2005: 140) have been dominated by administrative measures such as leaders' speeches, conference reports and documentation. Although the MRFT set out to draft a Broadcasting Act in the 1980s, the preparation work was deferred in 1991 after several revisions because top party officials worried such a law would bring up fundamental topics concerning party control of China's television system (Guo, 2003: 10). In 1997, the state council issued a comprehensive legal document, the *Radio and Television Administrative Regulation*, based on the draft broadcasting laws. However, since administrative regulations are issued by government administrations rather than by the people's congress, these are vulnerable to party intervention. As Majone (1989:

117) argues, policy instruments are seldom ideology-free. They depend in large measure on the party-controlled institutional framework in China.

However, despite the lack of a Broadcasting Act, television policy instruments have greatly diversified in the past three stages. First of all, since the 1980s the party state has issued a number of legally binding documents (administrative regulations and departmental rules), most of which concern the cross-boundary flows of audio-visual products and technologies, and the co-production of television programs that need to be standardized in content and form. The party state has also formalized the policy-making process, with the issue of laws on the enactment of regulations and administrative permits. Moreover, inspired by Western exemplars, the party state has started since the third stage in the late 1990s to adopt more voluntary mechanisms, such as multilateral negotiations with transnational corporations and industry self-regulation, in order to achieve its policy objectives.

### ***3.2. The Impact of Party State Policies on Chinese Television***

According to Price (2002: 229), successful theories for the transformation of the media should capture both the relationship between the state and the media, and the interactions between states and other power factors. In this study, I analyzed how specific policy decisions have influenced over time the key activities of Chinese television, i.e. ownership, market structure, management, production and content. In addressing this issue, I also provided insights into whether, with the rise of power factors in the context of globalization, policies have always been implemented in order to achieve the party state's objectives.

#### **3.2.1. Ownership**

Throughout the past three stages, as also before the 'reform and opening up', the party state has banned direct inflows of private or foreign capital into Chinese television, in particular to television broadcasters, so as to ensure its ideological control. During the 1980s, party state ownership, or its proprietary rights over television (Ju, 2006: 21) was ensured because state subsidies remained the main funding source for Chinese television stations which then shouldered all the responsibilities of program production and distribution. Although both domestic and foreign advertising were allowed, in order for television stations at various levels to make up the deficiency of state funding, commercial revenues were

managed by broadcasting bureaus and re-allocated to Chinese television stations as state subsidies.

However, since the early 1990s, the party state has compelled Chinese television stations to be self-financing because it could no longer fund the increasingly expanding television system. As a result, private or foreign capital started to penetrate Chinese television because sub-national broadcasting bureaus which had similar economic interests to sub-national television stations such as ZJTV, WZTV and the newly emerged cable services, welcomed the inflows of non-state capital for the development of the television industry. Indeed, from the early to the mid-1990s, although the party state still claimed ownership of Chinese television, domestic private capital penetrated into the construction of cable networks and there emerged a number of production companies with private or foreign investments.

Since the late 1990s, while the party state revoked the opening to private investment in television distribution networks, it has legitimized the privatization of the television production sector in order to nurture the Chinese television production industry. So far, however, measures have been taken to direct foreign capital to less sensitive areas, such as joint production projects, the provision of technologies and managerial skills, so as to avoid its possible acquisition of television broadcasters and protect infant domestic private production companies. Compared to the mid-1990s, in the third stage the party state has strengthened its dominance over television ownership.

### 3.2.2. Market Structure

In the early 1980s, the party state expanded a rudimentary two-tier (national, provincial) television system into a four-tier (national, provincial, municipal and county) television system, with the aim of harnessing sub-provincial resources in order to develop Chinese television. Under this system, each level of government was entitled to set up and operate one television station within its administrative frontiers. But, as under the two-tier television system before the 1980s, all television stations were obliged to transmit CCTV programs in order to maintain the party state's ideological dominance. Lower level stations were allowed to broadcast programs only to prescribed administrative areas. Thus, the two-tier monopoly television market structure was transformed during the 1980s into a four-tier monopoly structure.

Although the party state did not officially reversed the 'four-tier' television system, the monopoly structure was challenged in the early and the mid-1990s. As in the 1980s, the party state promoted the upgrading of advanced television technologies in order to improve the coverage of CCTV. But these technologies also contributed to the rise of a number of provincial satellite channels and to the reception of a few transnational channels. They also enabled the prevalence of numerous sub-national cable television services, which often illegally recast financially profitable transnational programs. Consequently, the dominant status of CCTV was eroded and the four-tier monopoly structure was breached by competition both within and across administrative areas during the early and the mid-1990s.

Since the late 1990s, the party state has started to restructure the Chinese television market. These policies have not eliminated administrative levels and built up a truly global Chinese media group, but they have largely strengthened the control of the party state because television stations within the same administrative areas have merged into one and a great number of county-level television stations have transformed into relay stations. Moreover, these policies have stimulated television stations to reposition themselves according to the market. While CCTV and several provincial satellite channels have consolidated their resources in order to target the national market, and even on a limited basis expanded into the overseas market, municipal as well as provincial non-satellite channels have focused their resources on local/niche television markets. In a sense, the monopoly television structure has evolved towards a 'dual media structure' based on market competition (Kranenburg and Hogenbirk, 2006: 331). The market share of transnational channels has shrunk owing to the increased competitive ability of domestic channels.

### 3.2.3. Management

Unlike its response to the inflows of foreign capital and the landing of transnational channels, the party state has encouraged the import of advanced managerial skills since the 1980s. In each of the past three stages, Chinese television stations have modelled themselves on Western commercial television in order to improve their micro-management and to increase their commercial revenues. But in none of the past three stages has Chinese television stations absorbed Western influence without adapting its practices to the party-controlled television system. This has generated hybridized operational models.

Besides these similarities, there are remarkable differences in the transformation in micro-management in the three stages. Although the party state approved commercial advertising in Chinese television stations and arranged state-level site visits to see the operation of television organizations in developed countries, during the 1980s only CCTV and a few provincial television stations such as ZJTV started financial reforms with the establishment of second channels. These channels, distinctively as compared to most other television stations/channels, were able to retain part of their commercial revenues for the stations' own operations.

It was not until the early 1990s, when the party state sharply reduced its subsidies to Chinese television, that there emerged a number of television stations which, though in name owned by the party state, had achieved a great deal of autonomy in terms of finance, employment and equipment management. These television stations, including a large number of sub-national cable stations, played an important role in importing Western advanced managerial models, such as the chief-producer-in-charge system. Nevertheless, although these semi-independent television stations greatly expanded television services and made profits, they ignored their role as state-owned public units, instead striving excessively for audience ratings and revenues, for this was tolerated by the sub-national broadcasting bureaus.

Since the late 1990s, with the support of the party state, Chinese television stations have turned to Western channel-based systems. However, most television stations, including those at the sub-national levels such as WZTV, have made significant changes to the Western management structure in order to better carry out the party's ideological control, thanks to the separation of sub-national regulators from television broadcasters' commercial revenues.

#### 3.2.4. Production

Since the early 1980s, the party state has encouraged Chinese television stations to import advanced Western production technologies and skills in order to improve the quality of domestic programming. As happened in other developing countries, in parallel to inflows of technologies and skills, there were inflows of Western production values (Golding, 1977: 292). The findings suggest that none of these Western production values replaced the principle of serving the Communist party, or 'party principle', in Chinese television

programming, but they did challenge the role of Chinese producers as party state propagandists, in particular before the late 1990s. For instance, during the 1980s, international co-productions and professional training led to a fever of 'objective reporting' - reflecting social reality in an objective way- (Polumbaum, 1991: 63) among Chinese television producers, especially those at CCTV, and resourceful provincial television stations which had more exposure to internationally prevalent production process.

Although throughout most of the 1980s 'objective reporting' was subject to 'party principles', the diffusion of Western production values aroused discontent among producers about their lack of programming freedom. In the late 1980s, when the party's propaganda was paralyzed by conflicts between party hardliners and reformists, some liberal television producers made programs critical of the economic reform and covered student demonstrations sympathetically.

The idealist pursuit of media freedom and 'objective reporting' were less common among producers during the early to the mid-1990s. On the one hand, the party state cracked down on the diffusion of Western production values after 1989. On the other hand, it encouraged television producers to consider audience needs in their programming, in accordance with the deepening market economy after 1992. Thus, as in Western commercial television organizations, the imperative of attracting audiences (Hallin, 1996: 223-4) became prevalent among Chinese television producers, especially those at the sub-national level such as WZTV. This undermined not only the vanguard discourse of the 1980s on 'objective reporting', but also Chinese producers' role as party mouthpieces.

Since the late 1990s, the party state has issued anti-corruption policies and licenses in order to strengthen its control over television producers. More importantly, greater efforts have been made by the party state to nurture journalistic excellence in line with its official ideology through more voluntary policy instruments, i.e. self-regulation, journalism awards, subsidies and preferential treatment. As a result, television stations at various levels have imported digital public news platforms and standardized entertainment 'assembly lines', not only in order to improve programming efficiency, but also in order to ensure the ideological direction of their programs. Unlike in the 1980s, the adoption of advanced production technologies has not brought Western production values, but has directed producers to promote official ideology.

### 3.2.5. Content

Ever since the party state launched its 'opening up' policy, it has approved program inflows from foreign countries. Consequently, in the past three stages, Chinese television stations have broadcast programs from a number of countries, with a focus on developed Western countries such as the US and the UK and culturally or geographically proximate areas such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and Korea. Moreover, Chinese television stations have modelled their domestic programming on genres and formats in imported programs, generating a hybridization of content on Chinese television screens. However, while the original goal of the policies for program imports was to enrich Chinese television and reinforce the party state's legitimacy, the inflows of foreign programs and the consequent modelling of domestic programs on foreign imports have often undermined the official ideologies, especially during the first two stages before the late 1990s.

For instance, in the 1980s, although the centralized program importation and censorship system had made it impossible for Chinese television stations to broadcast foreign programs that challenged the party state, some liberal producers at CCTV and provincial television stations applied popular Western themes and genres in their programs in order to address social stratification and corruption. These programs were widely regarded as catalysts for the urban and student demonstrations in 1989 (e.g. Zhao and Guo, 2005: 526). As a response, from the early 1990s, the party state imposed strict import quotas on foreign programs. However, many television stations turned a blind eye to these policies. Sub-national television stations, in particular, cable services often relayed pirate DVDs or programs from transnational channels. Programs in line with official ideology did exist, but were concentrated on CCTV and in limited categories such as news.

Since the late 1990s, on the one hand, the party state has, through multilateral negotiations, extended the targets of its restrictions from domestic distributors and audiences to transnational providers. On the other hand, it has created incentives for promoting programs based on official ideology. Therefore, compared to the mid-1990s, there has been a sharp decrease in the imported programs shown by Chinese television stations at various levels. As for domestic television programs, many of these are indeed localized or nationalized versions of foreign programs or co-productions that promote Chinese official perspectives. Thus, there has been a renationalization of Chinese television content in the third stage.



### **3.3. The Interplay between Party State Policies with Other Power Factors**

The global transformation theories argue that any satisfactory account of globalization must trace historically the causal dynamics of the globalization process (e.g. Thompson, 1995: 173; Held et al., 1999: 19; Price, 2002: 234). In this project, the causal dynamics are derived from four sources of power: technologies, economics, politics and culture. This section will identify the role each of these power factors through the comparison of their influences across the three stages.

#### 3.3.1. Technologies

Since the advent of the reform, the party state has encouraged the import of advanced technologies as a mechanism for modernizing the Chinese television system. So far, the inflows of these technologies have largely improved the efficiency and quality of Chinese program production and transmission, and greatly expanded its coverage to over 96% of the Chinese population (CRTYEC, 2007: 545).

However, technologies are always double-edged swords. They also create conditions for inflows of foreign programs that may challenge the interests of the party state. For instance, from the early to the mid-1990s, the party state encouraged the development of domestic satellite television channels and cable television stations as a strategy for expanding the coverage of domestic television. But both technologies also accelerated the reception and recasting of transnational channels. Interestingly, while the same transmission technologies, such as satellite communications, already existed during the 1980s, they had not played a role in transnational flows. The potential of technologies was only opened up in the 1990s when satellite dishes were affordable for ordinary audiences and transnational channels targeting the Chinese market emerged because of the growth of China's economy.

Since the late 1990s, the party state has initiated the transformation from analogue to digital television production, transmission and reception. This is because digital technologies are not only able to create a central portal for the party state to control information flows, but also have the potential to generate huge revenues from value-added services for both domestic and foreign operators. Thus, domestic and transnational broadcasters have turned to cooperating with the party state to develop this technology and produce programs more adaptable to the party state's official ideology. As Straubhaar (2007: 113) finds in the case of

Brazilian television, although technologies tend to enable change, they are limited by the development of political and economic powers. In China's case, technologies alone have not been able to liberate Chinese television from party control. They have sometimes even been used to strengthen the party state's information censorship.

### 3.3.2. Market Forces

Market forces, as this study has identified, are mainly synonymous with the economic interests of domestic television stations and transnational media corporations. Market forces have played a crucial role in the transformation of Chinese television. For instance, as early as the 1980s, CCTV and a few provincial television stations established a second channel, in order to create more commercial revenues. Meanwhile, foreign programs were mostly imported through the provision of advertising time on Chinese television stations.

From the early 1990s, as the party state cut its subsidies to the television industry, domestic television stations, in particular, those at the sub-national levels, started to deal directly with domestic and foreign companies for capital and cheap programs. These, together with direct satellite broadcasting by a few transnational channels to the Chinese audience, breached the party state's monopoly television market structure and ownership. Since the late 1990s, the party state has borrowed, in Chinese television governance, the Western concepts of 'public service', independent regulators, rule of law and more voluntary policy instruments. The ultimate goal is to reinforce the party state's ideological dominance by integrating economic interests rather than by liberalizing its control. In a sense, one could argue that market forces have influenced the party state's manner of television governance.

Secondly, domestic television stations have played a more important role than transnational media corporations. During the 1980s, few transnational corporations had economic stakes in China's television market because of the volatile economic and political environment in the country. From the 1990s, a few transnational media corporations began to create channels targeting the Chinese television market, but they could hardly expand their influence without the recast service of sub-national television stations because of the limited number of households with satellite dishes. Besides, the extent to which transnational capital could penetrate in Chinese television largely depended on the flexibility of sub-national television broadcasting bureaus and television stations in exploiting the leeway in national policies. Since the late 1990s, both domestic television stations and transnational corporations have

cooperated with the party state to promote Chinese perspectives in their programs. However, domestic television stations determine the renationalization process because they shoulder most responsibilities of program broadcasting in China.

Nevertheless, market forces cannot replace the regulatory role of the party state in Chinese television, even if they challenged Chinese party state policies in the mid-1990s. Above all, market forces are in the business of making money, not founding alternative political organizations or identity. Accordingly, without regulation, market forces can easily produce negative externalities, such as a structure of repetition in small stations and ignorance of the interests of the poor and the periphery in society. Since the late 1990s, the party state has resurged as the dominant influence on Chinese television as it has learned to restructure the Chinese television market through a strategy of accommodating the economic interests of sub-national broadcasters and transnational media corporations.

### 3.3.3. Political Forces

Apart from the Chinese party state, other political power factors in this study include Western states and international organizations. The findings demonstrate that a few key Western states and international organizations played an important role during the 1980s, just after China started its 'opening up' policy. As the party state normalized its diplomatic relations with the Western world, Western states such as the US, Japan, West Germany and the UK and international organizations such as the UNESCO, World Telecommunication Union and the Asian Broadcasting Union offered television technologies and production skills to China. However, as with their strategy towards the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, these Western states and international organizations also intended to democratize Chinese society via increased cultural exchanges (e.g. Price, 2002: 211). Therefore, production values such as 'objective reporting' and 'media freedom' flowed to China. But even during the 1980s, these Western states and international organizations did not play a dominant role. Above all, the inflows of television technologies and production skills were initiated by the Chinese party state and largely facilitated China's television modernization. Secondly, these Western states and international organizations did not democratize the Chinese public, nor directly challenge the party state as they had in Eastern Europe (Rantanen, 2002: 26; Thussu, 2007: 21) because of a stricter censorship system adopted by the Chinese party state.

During the 1990s, the influence of these Western states and international organizations faded away. On the one hand, Western countries such as the US had cut back their expenditure on international television cooperation after the fall of the major Communist regimes in the early 1990s. On the other hand, after 1992 Chinese television producers' exposure to the outside world was tremendously increased by training courses and seminars provided by transnational media corporations in China. To some extent, transnational media corporations such as MTV, News Corporation and Sony replaced Western states and international organizations as the major channel for the inflows of foreign television cultural forms to China.

Since the late 1990s, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) seems to demonstrate the resurgence of the impact of the role of international organizations on cross-boundary television flows into the country. In reality, since the Chinese party state did not make any commitment to liberalize its television market within the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) architecture (WTO, 2001), the whole process of television market reforms around China's entry into the WTO has been directed by party state policies. For instance, the party state has reduced the import duties in telecommunications so as to boost inflows of foreign technologies conducive to the modernization of Chinese television. The party state has also adhered to the international copyright treaties, such as Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), not only to increase its power over content censorship, but also to build up its profile of transparent governance in international organizations. Thus, the WTO has become a good vehicle for the party state to achieve its economic and political interests. In short, the impact of Western states and international organizations on Chinese television has been constrained by the party state policies and market forces in China.

#### 3.3.4. Cultural Forces

In this study, I identified television producers and audiences as two major factors of cultural power. During the past three stages, cultural factors in China have been bounded by the influence of party state policies and market forces. For instance, in the 1980s, there emerged a number of liberal producers nurtured by the reformist fraction in the party. Before the defeat of the reformists in 1989, liberal producers in CCTV and a few provincial stations adopted Western production values such as 'objective reporting' in order to depict the economic reform process.

With advertising revenues becoming the major funding for Chinese television stations in the 1990s, producers, in particular those at sub-national television stations, started to relay Western entertainments or copy Western formats under severe competition for audiences. But even audience preferences were constrained by the economic power. Driven by short-term economic interests, few television stations or companies were willing to cultivate programs reflecting Chinese culture. Thus, high quality domestic programs were largely unavailable in the early and mid-1990s. Since the late 1990s, the party state has strengthened its control of imported television programs. It also created economic incentives for producers to churn out programs in tandem with its official ideology. As the quality of mainstream ideology programs improves, audiences have switched back to these domestic programs, which in turn has enhanced producers' enthusiasm for such programming.

However, cultural factors are neither determined by political economy nor always reinforce the dominant political economy, because producers and audiences do enjoy a certain degree of autonomy. For instance, during the 1980s, while Chinese producers were required by the party state to promote the Chinese economic reform, inspired by the Western ideal of objective reporting, they went beyond their role as propagandists to disclose official corruption and social stratification as a result of the economic reform. Since the late 1990s, the phenomenon of 'cultural proximity' (Straubhaar, 1991: 51), or audience preference for programs depicting environments similar to their own culture, has occurred in China. This is largely because the party state has successfully motivated producers to improve their skills in programming relevant with official mainstream ideologies, which, through redefinitions, have absorbed many cultural elements such as Confucianism deeply rooted in Chinese audiences. As Straubhaar (2001: 153) argues, when the state works intelligently within the boundaries of national culture, it can better achieve its policy objectives such as ideological dominance. Thus, culture should be regarded as a source of power that also bounds and enables other power factors such as the party state policies.

In sum, during the past three stages, internal power factors have taken a leading role in the transformation of Chinese television. In terms of politics, party state policies have overwhelmed Western states and international organizations. As for market forces, domestic television stations are more dominant than transnational media corporations. Moreover, unlike in the former Soviet Union and the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, the transformation of Chinese television has not been accompanied by the terminal decline of

the party state, largely because the Chinese party state has kept updating its policy strategies in order to balance economic growth and ideological control.

#### **4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS TO GLOBALIZATION THEORIES**

The empirical findings of this study both complement and contradict theories of media and cultural globalization and the role of states within the process. In this section, I consider how the empirical findings contribute to our understanding of media imperialism theory, revisionist orthodoxy and global transformation theories.

##### **4.1. *Media Imperialism Theory***

First, although China opened up its television market after the heyday of Anglo-American media dominance during the 1960s, my findings support the studies of media imperialism (e.g. Varis, 1985) that there have been uneven television flows from the West to developing countries. This was especially evident from the early to the mid-1990s, when Chinese television stations broadcast a great number of foreign programs with few 'counter-flows' (Thussu, 2006: 185). Since the late 1990s the party state has achieved a resurgence of domestic television program dominance and increased the outflows of Chinese programs, but program imports still far overwhelm exports, especially those to Western markets. Moreover, China has remained a recipient of Western technologies, production skills and managerial experience, whose import is supported by the party state in order to modernize Chinese television.

Secondly, my findings reinforce the media imperialism argument that communication systems are interwoven in fundamental ways with the exercise of economic and political power (e.g. Schiller, 1976, 1998). This is evident if we compare the penetration of foreign television in different countries. For instance, in China's case, because of the party state control, television ownership has been least touched by foreign influence, while imports have mostly been of Western television content and technologies. Meanwhile, foreign television has influenced Chinese television step by step, from program genres to macro market structure and then ideas of television governance. In Latin America, by contrast, there was a wholesale importation of television system, ownership style and content from the US in the 1950s owing to the region's economic and political dependence on the US (e.g. Lee, 1980).

Similarly, all aspects of Soviet television experienced transformation simultaneously because of the collapse of Communist party control in the early 1990s (Rantanen, 2002).

However, my findings contradict the media imperialism argument that the forces for television globalization in developing countries are mainly exogenous and imposed (e.g. Schiller, 1976: 9; Lee, 1980: 91). In China's case, internal factors, either party state policies or domestic television stations' economic interests, have been the main influence on the transformation of television since the late 1970s. Accordingly, the inflows of Western television have not led to the homogenization or Americanization of Chinese television because foreign cultural forms have been 'glocalized' by these important internal power factors.

Moreover, these findings challenge the media imperialism argument that global communications are all about media activities between nation-states (Boyd-Barrett, 1998: 167). Indeed, even during the Cold War in the 1980s, when party state policies and international relations with Western states took the lead, domestic television producers and transnational corporations started to play a role. From the early to the mid-1990s, sub-national television stations and transnational media corporations even bypassed party state policies to interact with each other. Since the late 1990s, party state policies have resurged as the most important power factor, but this has been achieved through the integration of power factors both above and below national boundaries. Thus, although the party state remains an important factor, it should not be taken as the only analytic unit for the transformation of Chinese television.

#### **4.2. *Revisionist Orthodoxy***

First of all, my findings confirmed the assumption of the revisionist approach that Western television cultural forms have not penetrated into other societies as if passing through into a cultural vacuum, but have always been hybridized or 'glocalized' within existing cultures (e.g. Robertson, 1995). The transformation of Chinese television demonstrates that not only have Western content, production values and managerial skills often been adapted to national Chinese television culture, but also Western market oriented television ownership and structure have been hybridized with Chinese party controlled administrative levels. Even Western ideas in television governance such as the 'public interest' and 'independent regulators' have been granted new implications when transplanted into Chinese television.

Secondly, these findings support the revisionist view that culture is not always a tool for reinforcing commercial and political imperialist control, but may function as an independent power because of the active choices of local agents (Fiske, 1987; Hoskin and Mirus, 1988; Straubhaar, 1991). For instance, the influx of foreign television cultural forms neither reflected nor resulted in Chinese television's economic and political dependence on Western countries, but was largely chosen by the party state as its tool for television modernization. Since the late 1990s, both transnational and domestic producers have taken the advice of the party state to nurture Chinese television culture, because they have realized that working with audience preferences for culturally proximate programs is in their long-term economic interests.

However, my findings reveal that, although cultural forces have played a role, they are still bounded and limited by economic and political power in the process of television globalization. The revisionist approach has emphasized the peripheral flows around the world. But the case of Chinese television indicates that even a country's television flows toward culturally and geographically proximate areas depend on that country's economic and political power. When the economy grows in China, the party state has started to encourage Chinese television to export more programs to overseas markets. This also explains why China, like Latin American exporters, has far fewer program flows to Western countries than vice versa, and this is even more the case for the export of technologies and skills.

Furthermore, these findings challenge the revisionist theory that state power is in terminal decline with the emergence of sub-national and transnational power factors. In China's case, the party state has kept on reinventing its manner of television governance in order to balance economic benefits and ideological control. In the mid-1990s, it seemed that domestic and transnational economic interests have challenged party state policies. But its dominant influence on Chinese television has resurged since the late 1990s as the party state has borrowed Western regulatory concepts to accommodate sub-national and transnational economic interests.



### **4.3. Global Transformation Theories**

Above all, the global transformation theories point out the importance of developing trans-historical criteria for capturing changes in the key features of globalization, and more importantly, of investigating the dynamics of change (e.g. Held et al., 1999; Sassen, 2006). Comparing the key transformation of Chinese television on the basis of several trans-historical criteria, this study demonstrates not only that the penetrations and reinventions of foreign television forms in Chinese television have varied at different stages, but also that the dominant power factors differ, largely because of the policy strategies that the party state has sought to impose. Thus, the results of this study seem to suggest that the concept of television globalization should be redefined as follows:

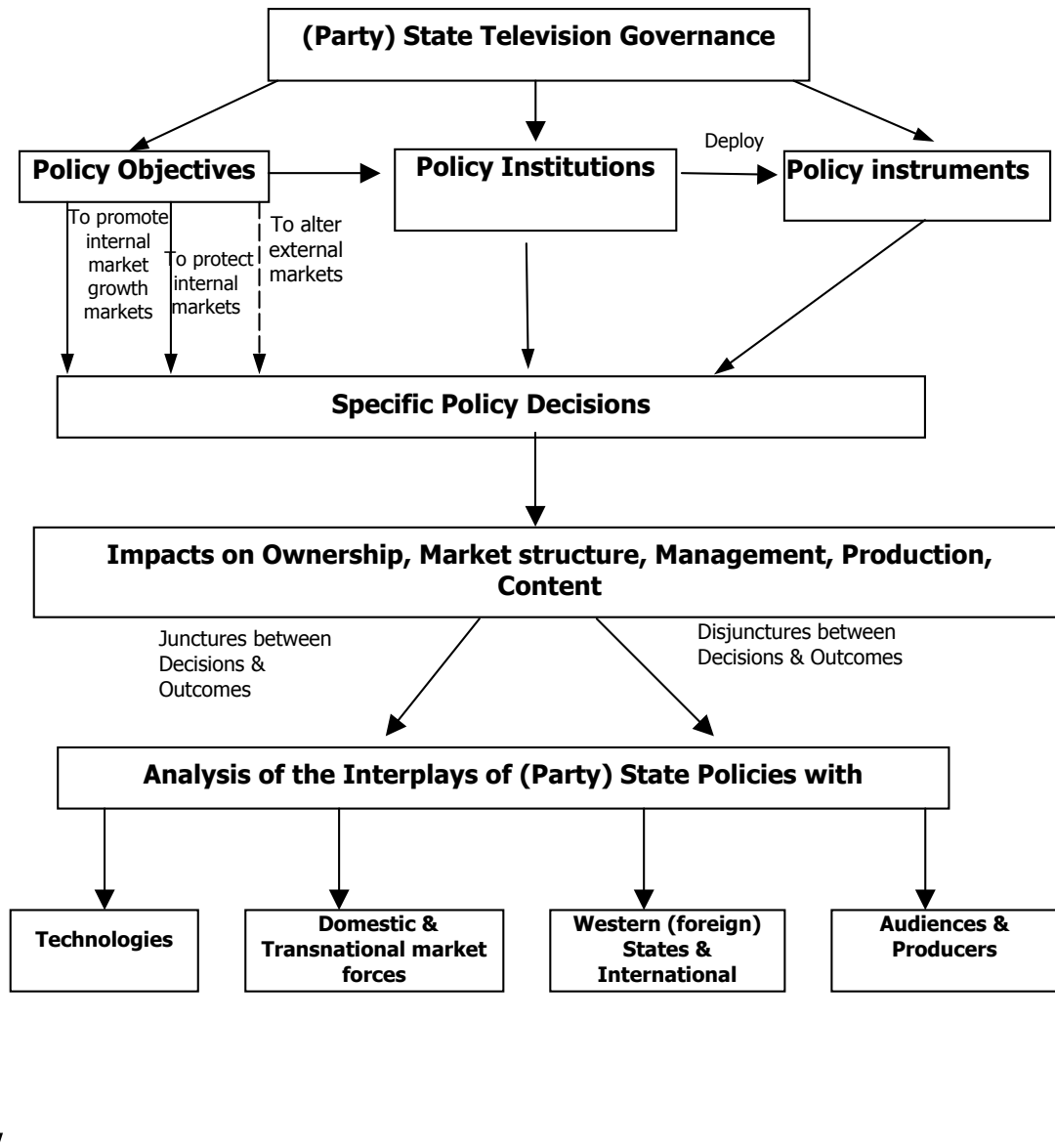
The process embodies the national or local appropriation of the globally diffused television cultural forms, assessed by the transformation of a (party) state's television policies, the policies' impact on the global transformation of television ownership, market structure, management, production or content and the policies' interactions with other power factors both above and below the national borders.

According to this concept, the study has identified three forms of television globalization: internationalization, transnationalization and renationalization, in accordance with the changing influence of the party state on Chinese television.

The findings reinforce the argument of global transformation theories that the nation-state remains not only a key dynamic for globalization, but also a profoundly changed entity itself in response to globalization (Held et al., 1999). This study has shown that, since the reform and opening up, the party state has initiated and accelerated the adoption of Western technologies and skills in order to modernize Chinese television. But the same process has also contributed to the influx of foreign values and programs which has undermined the party state's ideological dominance. As a result, the party state has transformed its manner of television governance, in order either to raise entry barriers, as in the early 1990s, or to accommodate new players, as in the late 1990s. In a sense, the challenges of globalization have not led to the end of the party state, but mobilized the party state to reinvent its policies in order to achieve a balance between growth and control in Chinese television.

However, global transformation theories have so far been illustrated by few empirical studies, in particular of cases from non-Western countries. Indeed, scholars within this paradigm often generalize their arguments with little evidence. For instance, Held et al. (1999: 371-2), on the basis of their studies of a few developed countries, argue that states transform their policies initially because of the external pressures. Likewise, Price (2002: 32, 230-1) argues that states transform their media policies primary in order to protect domestic markets. But, in China, the party state has welcomed Western television cultural forms in order to modernize the television system. This has also happened in many other countries, such as Singapore (Keane, 2002). As shown in Figure 1, states are active in far more than protecting their television space from external influences. They have also engaged with globalization processes in order to promote the growth of domestic markets.

Moreover, global transformation theories are largely underdeveloped in media and cultural studies. The few studies that integrate these theories into media studies (e.g. Price, 2002; Chan, 2005) have focused on the analysis of state media policy responses to globalization. For Price (2002: 230), who proposes the concept of 'market for loyalties', describing a state's response is just the first step. This is because any satisfactory analysis must point out the impacts of state policies on the media which are crucial in order to account for why a state transforms its policies at certain times. I have therefore developed the analytical model used in this study. As indicated in Figure 1, after analyzing the state television regulatory system, I compared the specific state television policy decisions and the transformation that have actually taken place in the key activities of Chinese television. I thus discovered that the party state is no longer the only influence on the transformation of Chinese television. These findings also illuminate the fact that the party state has transformed its policy strategies when it has not been able to achieve its policy objectives because of the challenges from other power factors. With modifications, this analytical model could be applied to many countries to illustrate the relationship between states and the media, especially in post-Communist and authoritarian countries where party state control used to be regarded as the primary influence on television.

**Figure 1:** The Relationship of (Party) State and Television under Globalization

indicates that the policy objective of the Chinese party state to influence external markets is not as strong as the other two objectives.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The Chinese case demonstrates that a country is able to absorb Western television cultural forms in order to modernize its television system while retaining Communist party state control. Indeed, despite China's political system, the country's television globalization has shared a number of similarities with many other countries, for instance, with post-Communist Russia and a 'Third World' country like Brazil. First of all, in all these countries, there has been a glocalization of foreign television forms into the national context (Rantanen, 2002; Straubhaar, 2007). Secondly, when foreign television flows reach saturation point in each country, national programs and values resurge (Straubhaar, 1984: 229–34; Rantanen, 2007: 175). Thirdly, an increasing interpenetration of political and economic interests is found in the shaping of these countries' television systems in the context of globalization (Rantanen, 2002: 135; Straubhaar, 2001: 139; Chan and Qiu, 2002: 43).

However, because of Communist party control, the globalization of Chinese television has experienced a distinctive historical trajectory. Above all, Chinese television participated in globalization processes much later than most developing countries in Asia and Latin America (e.g. Straubhaar, 2007: 262). When it eventually opened up in the late 1970s, the party state's policies and its international relations largely determined the scope and shape of foreign television inflows and reinventions. This contrasted sharply with the experience of other developing countries, for instance Brazil, whose initial process of cross-boundary television flows was more driven by external, especially American, economic and political interests (Lee, 1980: 84, 93). Although Soviet *perestroika* functioned similarly to China's reform and opening up, it fundamentally weakened the Soviet Communist party's control of the media (Rantanen, 2002: 26, 132). As a result, transnationalization or the illegal use of small media to receive foreign programs arrived almost simultaneously with internationalization in the late Soviet and post-Communist Russia.

In recent years, there has been a trend of returning to national content in both program production and audience consumption. This process has been supported by many national governments in order either to nurture the domestic programming industry or to construct national identity (e.g. Straubhaar, 2001: 139; Rantanen, 2007: 175). In China, because of the Communist party's long tradition of propaganda work, the renationalization is so overwhelming that not only have program imports been reduced to the level of before the

reform, but also foreign companies targeting China have started to make programs fitting Chinese ideology.

China is one of the few countries that have borrowed the techniques of Western television governance without democratizing its regulatory system, for instance by granting media freedom through legislation. Indeed, the party state has nowadays proposed Confucian values, such as that of a 'harmonious society', as an alternative ideology to that of Western democracy, as manifested in the opening ceremony of the 29<sup>th</sup> Olympic Games. The globalization of Chinese television, like its economic reform, seems to suggest that there are different paths to achieving development.

What will the next stage be? Will China be able to provide significant contra-flows to the West, as many have aspired to see? (e.g. Fung, 2006: 85; Curtin, 2007: 289) Could the Chinese party state maintain its current television system while expanding its television culture to foreign markets? So far, what we have seen is that, while the party state has increased its power in the domestic television space, its influence on the overseas market is limited. CCTV, China's biggest television station, has a small number of overseas audiences compared with truly global channels such as CNN and the BBC. China's program export industry lags far behind that of the US, and also behind those of East Asian countries such as Japan or Korea. It is important for future research to understand why Chinese television has limited impact outside its borders as the globalization process unfolds.

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