

Chinese Television in Mao's Era (1958--1976) -- A Historical Survey

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《Abstract》

Although quite a number of research have been done on the development and reform of post-Mao Chinese television in the last decade, very few, if not any, have ever published on the origins and early evolution of Chinese television both in China and the West.[1] In this paper, I have set out to examine systematically the historical development of Chinese television prior to Deng Xiaoping's era (1958-1976), and to provide a comprehensive analysis and descriptive account of important events in the contexts of Chinese society. I have focused on its establishment, policy evolution, the change of programming content, the structure of its political/ideological control, and its operational models. As a result of this examination, I have tried to make two particular contributions to the field of the history of Chinese television studies:

1) Assessing the origins of Chinese television and its performance in Mao's era with particular reference to primary materials and original sources;

2) Producing the argument, based on the above study, that Chinese television was a political creation; that, although media development in communist China (with reference to television) was broadly in line with that of the Soviet Union, the Chinese case presents a unique experience with typically Maoist characteristics in pursuit of its radical ideological goal.

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Early Development of Chinese Broadcasting

Radio broadcasting reached China by the end of 1922, roughly at same time as the original BBC (the British Broadcasting Company) was established in London. It was introduced by westerners as a commercial operation in an attempt to exploit the virgin land of the huge China market. On Jan.23, 1923, an American journalist E.G. Osborn, financially sponsored by an overseas Chinese businessman in Japan for the purpose of selling radio receivers and other wireless equipment to China, set up the first radio station "Radio Corporation of China" from his own Shanghai department store. It was equipped with a 50-watt transmitting set, to broadcast news and music in the Shanghai area. However, the station only lasted three months and, in 1924 the second station "The Kellogg Radio Company" was established by an American firm in Shanghai to provide a regular service. The British, French, Italian and Japanese soon followed suit, setting up their own stations around the urban areas particularly along the eastern coast of China.[2]

In August 1928, the Chinese Nationalist government formally set up its 50-kilowatt national network, "The Central Broadcasting Station" in its capital city, Nanking. Four years later, it installed a German-made, 75-kilowatt short-wave transmitter which was brought the whole China and most of Southeast Asia into its coverage. It was chiefly used for newscasts and was controlled by two state agencies: the Central Broadcasting Administration in charge of policy matters and the Ministry of Communications which administered the system. Prior to the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) Chinese radio broadcasting flourished briefly particularly in the private sector. Between 1932 and 1936, 63 privately owned commercial stations went on the air compared with the 16 non-commercial stations emerging at the same period and controlled by various levels of authorities over the country. The radio sets reached more than 200,000. In 1936, the Ministry of Communications revised the 1932 provisional broadcasting regulations (which set many restrictions on private radio stations) in an attempt to promote the industry. However, the Anti-Japanese War and the following the Civil War (1946-1949) between Jiang's Nationalist government and Mao's communists guerrillas seriously disrupted the process. Before 1949 the number of radio stations in "Nationalist" China was about a hundred (half of them privately run), mostly urban-based, with a

total power capacity of 460-kilowatt. There were just one million radio sets at the time averaging 1.3 for every 1,000 persons, also largely concentrated in big cities such as Shanghai, Peking and Nanking.[3]

Communist Experience

From the beginning, Mao's communists developed radio broadcasting under political and military pressure in order to counteract the influence of the Nationalist authority. Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976) and his colleagues paid high attention to this new medium in an effort to launch their own propaganda campaigns as part of the strategy designed for their 1949 nation-wide victory. In the spring of 1940, when Zhou Enlai, the first prime minister of communist China (1949-1976) brought back a 300 watt transmitting set to Yanan from Moscow, the Communists started preparations for transmitting a radio service. By the end of 1940, the Communists set up their first radio station in the headquarters at Yanan. Under hard conditions, the "Yanan Xinhua (i.e New China) Broadcasting Station", with the call letters XNCR, managed to provide a two-hour daily service, mainly broadcasting news and commentaries about Mao-controlled areas and party policies. It was housed in several cave dwellings halfway up a mountain with its electricity generated from the motor of a used car which was fueled by gas made by burning charcoal. At one point, the station had only an old manual gramophone, but no records. It was reported that Mao made his personal contribution and turned over to the station more than 20 records of his own.[4] Undoubtedly, the Communists drew immediate benefits from using the radio broadcasting. On May 5 1941, Mao gave his directive to the Party's Central Committee in which he remarked that "all liberated areas (i.e the areas under communist control) should regularly regularly receive Yanan's broadcasts. If they haven't got a radio receiver set, they should try every means to get one".[5] However, the station ceased to function two years later due to the technical problem of the transmitting set and it was not until 1945 that the station resumed services.

As Mao's guerrillas were heading to the triumph of seizing state power, a relatively sizable broadcasting system was steadily built up. By the end of 1948, there were 16 radio stations in communist controlled areas of Chang Kiakow, Manchuria, Shnkiang and eastern and northern China, providing news, bulletins on the war and official announcements as well as some entertainment programmes. Meanwhile, in an attempt to make the Red voice heard to people outside China, the communists also managed, starting from 1947, to provide limited English and

Japanese services.[6]

When the Communists took power and founded the People's Republic of China in October 1949, the development of the broadcasting industry, especially the radio network and rural wired broadcasting system, was immediately put on the Party's agenda. On 5 December 1949, the "Yanan Xinhua Broadcasting Station" was formally renamed as the national radio station, the "Central People's Broadcasting Station" (CPBS), and it broadcast about 15.5 hours daily of which roughly 50% was taken up by news and political-related programmes, 25% by entertainment and the rest to educational and cultural programming. In April 1950, the Central Press/Broadcasting Bureau, the state agency which supervised and regulated the media communications at that time, issued an important policy document "The Decisions Regarding the Establishment of Radio-Receiving Networks" in which all levels of authorities, state institutions, factories, schools, Army units and public organizations were asked to do their best to install transmitting stations and wired loudspeakers and to train monitors.[7] As part of the attempt to establish wired broadcasting system in the rural areas, the State Council announced a plan in 1955 to provide receiving stations free of charge; the network, known as point-to-point radio communication, was patterned after the Soviet Union radio-diffusion exchange system. It employed a central receiver, with an amplifier and switchboard housed in a studio, to provide a service using wired loudspeakers connected with each household in the village and installed in any public space -- village squares, school playgrounds, rice paddies, communal mess halls, and even on treetops and telephone poles.

With state promotion, the wired broadcasting system grew rapidly. It reached almost all of the more than 1900 counties in China with about 70 million loudspeakers in the early 1960s to serve a 400 million rural population. Despite the underdeveloped economy at the time, by the end of 1965, however, a giant radio broadcasting system was established in Mao's China. There were 87 radio stations covering most urban areas with about 12 million radio sets; the county re diffusion stations stood at 2,365 accommodating 87 million loudspeakers. In a sense, Chinese broadcasting communication was effectively integrated into the communist state system and used by the Chinese authorities to advance the social engineering program.[8]

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

cal circumstances.

A POLITICAL CREATION: The Origins of Chinese Television

Chronicle Of Events

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

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

After the 1949 victory of Chinese communists, Mao, out of a combination of commitment to constructing so-called "genuine socialism" and his experiences with guerrilla warfare, developed his deep faith in the power of ideas with his solution the called "politics-in-command". He argued that man with proper motivation could

transform his environment significantly and therefore, political considerations must take precedence over everything else in the formulation of policies or in the guidance of action.[9]

In the late 1950s, Mao's idea of politics-in-command began to prevail in the ruling Party as a guiding principle. The first crucial test was the "Great Leap Forward" movement (1958-1960). It was designed by Mao to modernize China in a single mass campaign chiefly by relying on the power of the mass revolutionary spirit to "catch up" with major western industrialized nations. The leadership even set a timetable to enhance the morale of the masses, for instance, to surpass Britain within 15 years.[10] Thus with Mao's logic that the modernization of China and the transformation of the Chinese people's mentality were two sides of the same coin, politics-in-command and mass campaigning became the dominant approach. It was precisely under these social circumstances that Chinese television was born, formed and developed.

The Pioneering Stage of Chinese TV

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

We were planning to set up our TV station in the early 1950s and began some training and preparations. However, only when we got some information that the Nationalists in Taiwan were about to provide a TV service in Oct. 1958, did we become aware of its po-

litical implications and take a swift decision to set up our TV station ahead of the Taiwanese schedule. At that time the Soviet broadcasting adviser Cheranko told us that China lacked the basic expertise and equipment to do so in the short term. We simply ignored his words and made up our minds to show the Taiwanese and the Soviets otherwise.[11]

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

The "Great Leap Forward" of Chinese Television

At the end of 1957, a television delegation was sent to the Soviet Union and East Germany to learn from their experience of running a television station and to ask for technical aid; the following year, China imported 200 Russian TV sets and produced a very small number of Russian models to supply the domestic market by hire purchase. In the meantime, the country brought together top technologists to tackle television technical problems and made some progress. Shortly afterwards, the first 1,000W transmitter together with a few other key items of equipment, were produced on an experimental scale. This was already enough to strengthen the position of the radical line to take further bold action. On April 7th, 1958, the Fifth National Broadcasting Conference, the top policy making instrument taking place every 2-3 years, was held in Beijing. The broadcasting chief Y. Mei proposed a policy report "Politics is the key to the Great Leap Forward in broadcasting work" in which he stressed the importance of putting political needs first and foremost in

developing the broadcasting industry. Y. Zhou, the Party propaganda chief, of the other hand, told the conference that there were two ways to develop the broadcasting industry as well as to conduct propaganda work: one was to wait for material conditions to be met and rely on professionals; the other was to create the condition by the revolutionary spirit and rely on the Party, and the masses. He then demanded that the second path be taken and called for a Great Leap Forward in all aspects of broadcasting to accelerate the pace of development.[12] It was also reported that, as part of the Great leap Forward, the first TV station would soon be established in Beijing followed by a national TV network within a few years. By then, there was every reason to encourage the Chinese broadcasting authority to realize its ambition of providing a TV service before Oct.10.1958 and, in this way, to win a political battle with the Nationalists in Taiwan as well as Western countries.[13]

At 19:00, on May.1.1958, International Labour Day, China's first television station -- Beijing TV Station (later renamed China Central Television) formally went on the air with one channel in the Beijing area only. The major equipment of the station included just four image-orthicon cameras, one Outside Broadcast van, and one 1,000 Watt transmitter (VHF, band 1, channel 2). Despite the inadequate equipment, very poor working conditions, with the staff operating on both transmission and production amounted to no more than 50, and despite there being only about 30 TV receivers mostly owned by governmental bodies at that time, the Beijing authorities chose that day to start a TV service in an effort to pursue their political and ideological goals. It initially broadcast twice, and later increased to four times a week for 2-3 hours per day. It carried news, documentaries, entertainment and educational programmes. The first night's show was rather dull. Here is the list of programmes forming the two-hour broadcast offered on the opening celebration:[14]

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

Even by the standard of that time, the above programmes fell short of being a television service in a real sense. The Chinese ruling Communists, however, were quite satisfied with its political significance. The state news agency, "Xinhua"

immediately announced the news to the world that the first TV station of the People's Republic of China was born in Beijing; others claimed that this was a victory for the politics-in-command strategy, and a demonstration of the advantage of socialism over the system of Taiwan and its American-led allies.[15]

With the atmosphere of the Great Leap forward in the late 1950s, Chinese television entered its initial stage of development. Outside the capital Beijing, provincial people also showed great interest in television. They hurriedly set up one station after another by every conceivable means. Thus many stations were inevitably of a poor standard. Jilin province, for instance, whose TV station was originally scheduled for around the mid-60s; in fact, "after five months utter devotion, the broadcasters of Jilin province successfully established a television station at the incredibly low cost of only 190,000 Chinese Yuan (approx. \$US30,000) as early as 1959".[16] However, after long inauguration period, Jilin province was still suffering from poor quality TV reception as well as other long term technical problems. From 1958 to 1960, at least sixteen out of twenty nine provinces had their own television stations offering two to three hours service for audience, despite the very small number of television receivers available (between a few to over a hundred sets in each province). As far as the program production and transmission were concerned, all stations at that time had to rely on films and tapes being "bicycled" from one to another, a term used to describe sending TV programmes by any transportation means, such as plane and cars, due to the situation of the absence of electronic transmission.[17] Moreover, the 1960 National Broadcasting Conference set forth a timetable for all other provinces to set up their television stations by the end of 1962 with a target of 50 (Y.Me, 1960). Obviously, this excessive target, like most of the Great Leap Forward, was the creation of boastfulness and unrealistic. In fact, during that time of ferment, slogans such as "**Hard working and self-reliant**", "**Getting on with the job with indigenous (Chinese) methods**" and "**Making do with whatever is available**" were so popular that they were almost like magic formulas in establishing television. By 1962, there were 36 Chinese television stations including some relay stations, the maximum number before the mid-1970s.

Setback

With the grand failure of the Great Leap Forward, and the divorce between China and the USSR which resulted in all aid from the Soviet Union being withdrawn in the early 1960s, the development of Chinese television immediately came

to a standstill. Just one year later in 1963, the number of Chinese television stations was heavily axed to a mere eight under the severe austerity policy. A dismal picture indeed! The crisis then deepened when another political storm further hampered the progress in Chinese television. This was the Cultural Revolution (1976). During its early period, the nation wide television service was virtually stopped; and not until the late 1960s did a select number of the stations again move to provide some programmes.

THE EVOLUTION OF PROGRAMMING POLICY AND CONTENT

Two Approaches to Policy Making

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

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

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

Thus, in theory, Mao's doctrine appeared to provide an alternative to that of conventional Stalinism and attracted much attention in the outside world; in reality, however, the radical approach was built on an extraordinary emotional appeal of that wishful thinking and a tendency to go to extremes. As H. Harding remarked, the Maoist approach in general was "radical and populist and tended therefore to

undermine political stability".[18] Therefore, the practice of this approach often exalted the cult of Mao himself and created a chaotic situation (e.g the Great Leap Forward), or, even social turmoil (e.g the Cultural Revolution). In the historical context, this approach gained the upper hand in the initial period of Chinese television and dominated the activities of television during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

In contrast to Mao's approach, the second approach, that of state paternalism, gave priority to the role of the state apparatus in national integration and its adjustment to the requirements for modernization. According to this approach, broadcasting was chiefly defined to develop national culture and education. Though it also paid attention to political/ideological propaganda in order to control the public mind, it placed much stress on the idea of the obligation to edify the audience within the frame of reference of authority-defined values. In this respect, this model tended to accord priority to institutionalization, modernization and professionalism. Supported by Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969, then the State President) and Deng Xiaoping (then the Party General Secretary) state paternalism gained some progress in developing television, particularly in the early 1960s and the early 1970s when the infant Chinese television industry suffered severely from the policy failure of Mao's radical approach.

Three Periods of Policy Change and Content Analysis

As understood, the Chinese communists cemented the mass media into a rigidly Leninist framework. To discuss the programming content in Mao's era is largely to deal with the Party-state politics. In fact, it was the swinging of the unfathomable pendulum of domestic and international forces that shaped media policy in Mao's China. General speaking, the evolution of television programmes and the change of the policy can be divided into three periods: (1) from 1958 to 1960; (2) from 1961 to 1965; (3) from 1966 to 1976.

Initial Period (1958-1960)

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

of propaganda and cultural work including television remained in the ascendancy.

Since it had always been held that television tends towards entertainment, some of the decision makers of Chinese television in the early days practiced a programming policy with a large entertainment dimension. This position was justified and strengthened by the fact that few television stations had the ability to produce their own quality programmes, particularly in the area of news and current affairs which they could only broadcast irregularly with simple techniques and limited sources. The first news item was produced by the Beijing station on 15 May 1958. It was a report, chiefly using photographs, about the successful production of a Chinese-made car. Two weeks later, Beijing TV station broadcast its first black and white news film concerning the content of the publication of the Party's theoretical journal Red Flag. News programmes using talking heads together with stills and film became the main forms of presentation at this early stage.[19]

Meanwhile, China also tried to produce TV dramas. The first of its kind was "A Bite of Cabbage Cake" a story reminding people of the past miserable life under the Nationalist regime and of the present happiness under the Communists. The drama was broadcast live by the Beijing Television Station on June 15 1958, because China did not have recording facilities at the time (in fact, this situation remained little changed until the mid-70s).

In general, about 70% of all Chinese TV shows were devoted to films, dramas and various fine art performances. They should be imbued, according to Mao, with revolutionary spirit. The following is a list of the programme schedule taken from the Beijing Station in 1960:[20]

1960 Beijing TV Programme Schedule

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

However, two themes -- the Great Leap Forward and the "Cold War" between the Soviet-led bloc and the American-led bloc in which China was at the time firmly on the Moscow's side -- dominated China's political concerns at that time. As a newly-born mass communication medium, television was, without delay, employed for serving these political objectives, although its influence was quite limited compared with that of radio broadcasting at this stage. In 1958 the Department of Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party issued a directive laying down the principle for conducting and planning broadcasting (including television) programmes. It stated: "At present broadcasting should promote the propaganda of the Great Leap Forward. ... Broadcasting should put more emphasis on implementation of the goals rather than on goals themselves, more on previous experiences, on model workers and on masses' creativeness".[21] The policy issued here indicated the authorities' intention to implement its priorities in programming content. Whether this should be fulfilled through sophisticated cultural entertainment, or through straightforward ideological propaganda was not always clearly defined, and often a matter of political struggle between the Mao's approach and the state paternalism.

In response to some doubts about television's function in the implementation of the Party propaganda tasks, the Broadcasting Authority, at the time of the dominance of the Mao's approach, firmly defended its stance that television should serve the Party as a propaganda tool, rather than an entertainment tool. Lou Dong, first director of the Beijing TV Station (1958-1962?), clearly made this point in a working report in Dec. 1958:[22]

Someone thinks the function of television is merely to broadcast entertainment programmes such as movies, drama and art performances. We must point out this view is wrong.....

Television, like radio broadcasting, is the Party propaganda tools well as the Party news medium.

Within that framework, television in this period was used as an adjunct to the massive propaganda campaigns of the Great Leap Forward, although within a limited scale compared with other media. Programme priorities were also dominated by a basic formula of "us v.s them", namely, the great achievements of the Chinese communists as well as those of other Soviet bloc countries on the one hand, and the deepening general crisis of the capitalist world on the other. Therefore, topics such

as working harder, accomplishing wonders, loving the Party, hating American imperialism, giving thanks for Soviet aid and overtaking Britain within 15 years frequently appeared on the Chinese screen.

The Soviet television format began to be adopted in China and the labour division among reporters, editors and anchors also modeled the "big brother". TV reporters often followed techniques and practices of shooting documentary film to cover their story, but they normally could not be seen and heard in their own programmes. This work was done in voice-overs, mostly by TV presenters.[23]

In general, the content of television reporting at this stage was to a large degree subject to the Party priority of mass mobilization. The tone was dogmatic, the style artless, the quality poor and the skill primitive. Therefore, the audience response was unfavorable. According to an informal survey conducted by the Beijing TV Station in the early 1960s (with 2,150 questionnaires representing about 120,000 viewers), one of the audience's major demands was to have more programmes with better quality. Even the television authority had no desire to deny this. In 1960, the Beijing TV Station made a self-criticism admitting that its reporting was "dull", "monotonous" and "insipid"[24]

International Exchanges

In contrast to its domestic performance, Chinese television made considerable headway in international exchanges. The most important development at this time was the establishment of a business-like relationship with the Soviet bloc, which enabled the newly-born Chinese television industry to enjoy immediate benefit. In July 1956, the Soviet Union first signed a bilateral agreement with China on broadcasting (including television) cooperation. After China inaugurated a television service in 1958, a dozen countries mainly from the eastern European states, soon followed suit. The agreements were: Sino-Romanian (Oct. 1958), Sino-Hungarian (April 1959), Sino-Polish (April 1959), Sino-German (GDR)(April 1959), Sino-Czechoslovak (April 1959), Sino-Bulgarian (Aug, 1959); and Egypt, Cuba, North Korea, Albania and Viet Nam also joined in later on.[25]

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

countries that had signed a cooperation agreement. In 1959, China received about 1,000 foreign TV programmes including news, current affairs, features and TV dramas. The principal contributors were Hungary (459 items) and Soviet Union (349 items). At the same time, China sent out 61 television programmes in return. From then on programme exchanges steadily increased. Programmes provided by these countries also comprised a considerable proportion of air time in the underdeveloped Chinese television service. The Beijing TV Station, for instance, devoted a regular amount of airtime to foreign programmes from late 1959. In addition, about 30% of the movies on Chinese television at this period came from Soviet Russia and its socialist allies.[26]

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

The Rise of State Paternalism(1961-1965)

The fiasco of the Great Leap Forward and the break between China and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s drastically changed the balance of Chinese politics. As the country was precipitated into a devastating crisis, the first priority faced by the authorities was to ensure the public quiescence and to unite the nation to deal with the abysmal situation. Thus, the political pendulum was bound to swing and the adoption of the new pragmatic policy became a necessary act of historic adjustment. So far as the policy towards the mass media and cultural work was concerned in this period, Mao's radical approach was declining, whereas state paternalism, led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping was rising and eventually gained the upper hand.

The significant policy shift took place in July 1961, when the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party formally issued an important document on propaganda and cultural work known as the "The Articles on Art and Literature." In several important ways, the document discarded Mao's approach, with the emphasis now on the quality of cultural activities and professionalism. To counter Mao's political penetration of people's everyday life, the new policy now called for the re-

duction of political-ideological indoctrination. Some advocates of state paternalism even, indirectly and bravely, criticized Mao's idea and his radical approach. Y.Zhou, for instance, concurrent deputy director of the Party Propaganda Bureau and minister of Culture, argued: "Politics will lose its meaning if we keep talking about it at every breath"[27] He also warned in June 1961 that radio and television should not always be used to propagate support for Mao.[28] It is interesting to see that, under the new policy, artists and cultural workers were encouraged to provide non-political, educational, classical and entertainment items to meet the diverse needs of audience and readers. As a result, more attention was now paid to the media's education function (in terms of disseminating various kinds of knowledge) with more fine art works and performances, both traditional and contemporary, appearing, and more comedy films being shown. Popular taste was now acknowledged, and a certain degree of freedom in cultural activities was "guaranteed" by the Party again. As far as the journalistic work was concerned, the state president Liu Shaoqi issued a document in 1960, calling for a "professionally oriented broadcasting policy" with emphasis on using broadcasting to serve all kinds of audience and to cater to popular interest.[29] It was within that atmosphere that programming policy in Chinese television changed course.

In 1961, in line with the new pragmatic Party policy, the Beijing Television Station was quick to make a proposal on programming and reporting. For the first time, it was devoted to diversity and quality without so much as mentioning politics. It also stressed that programmes should cater to audience enjoyment. The response from the top policy makers to this initiative was very positive. The broadcasting chief Y.Meì praised this proposal and recommended it to all other stations. He pointed out that television programmes should be more associated with the daily life of the ordinary people than radio's. The content should be not only meaningful, but also attractive, with more entertainment elements.[30]

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

In the meantime, there was another important development in that a great deal of effort was expended on using television for teaching-and-learning activities. Despite very limited numbers of TV sets then (around 50,000, but they were mainly publicly owned with the "collective watch"), educational TV programming provided wider access to higher education. In his pioneering book of "Mass Communication in China", Howkins even credits China as "the first country in the world to have a television university". Starting in 1960, he remarks that the Chinese "Television University" was "a full decade before the UK's Open University".[31] Of course this comment should be understood in a narrow sense, since educational TV service in the US, the UK, the USSR and Japan already existed at that time.

In March 1960, the "Television University" was initiated in Beijing and its example was soon followed in Shanghai and several other provinces which owned TV stations. In general, the educational service offered basic courses ranging from science, technology, literature to foreign languages. Between 1960 and 1965, these "Television Universities" enrolled about 40,000 students and more people benefited from the service.[32] By any standard, the newly-born Chinese television industry made a considerable contribution to China's educational development.

As far as international news coverage was concerned, there was some progress during this period. Because of the Sino-Soviet split, Pro-Soviet stories suddenly disappeared from Chinese screen and Chinese television virtually stopped broadcasting TV programmes provided by its Soviet counterpart. Consequently, international reporting was now very limited and low-key. However, the situation improved somewhat later on, as Chinese television stations started to make contact with a few Western commercial TV companies. In 1963, China formally signed a contract with VISNEWS Ltd (UK) for the exchange and purchase of TV programmes. From then on China used more and more VISNEWS materials to cover international affairs though they were re-edited to serve propaganda and ideological needs.[33]

The Cultural Revolution(1966-1976)

The so-called "The Cultural Revolution" was Mao's fantasy to solve the problems, as Mao seen it, of Soviet Model socialism. Yet, this mass campaign turned out to be a nightmare and a total disaster which is now often referred as "the ten-year turmoil".

During this period, Chinese television experienced two phases. Generally speak-

ing, the first three years (1966-1969) can be identified as the first phase, with the remaining years the second phase.

In the first phase, the nation-wide television service virtually stopped as a result of the popular practice at that time called "Stop working (or studying), make revolution". This chaotic and absurd situation was revealed by the announcement for the suspension of service issued by the Beijing TV Station shortly before the station ceased to operate. Here is the solemn statement:[34]

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

By contrast, radio broadcasting was extensively used by Mao and his radical supporters. Every one of Mao's "supreme instruction" and the Party's new decision firstly reached the masses through radio broadcasting, usually a day ahead of the newspapers. To some extent, broadcasting messages was regarded as authoritative instructions to conduct the masses carrying out the Cultural Revolution.[35]

In the second phase, the resumed television service was very limited and it was under the stifling control of Maoists. Television, as in other mass media during that period, was fully engaged in totally one-sided and blatant propaganda which was characterized by falsification, exaggeration and paranoia. Many types of television programs, mostly cultural and entertainment-related, ceased to exist. Not a single TV drama or TV series, for instance, was made and broadcast between 1967 and 1976. A visiting British broadcaster was incredulous when, in 1970, he found that 18 out of a total of 26 minutes of the main evening news bulletin one night in Beijing consisted of rolling captions of Mao's words with Mao's paeon music in the background.[36] Another foreign observation was made by an NBC news team in Hong Kong by monitoring Guandong provincial TV output for three weeks in January 1970: "The TV schedule commenced at 7p.m. with the appearance of Mao's portrait and the singing of "The East Is Red", China's unofficial national anthem. The opening program was a newscast consisting of several film stories on topics such as the commemoration of a hero, the work of an educated youth in a remote village, the reception of foreign visitors by the Chinese leadership, and the "heroic struggle" of

the North Vietnamese. Next came revolutionary ballet and films, usually old Chinese movies about the anti-Japanese war or the war against the Nationalist Chinese..... Sign-off on Canton (i.e Guangdong) TV came at 10:30 P.M.".[37]

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

MAO'S PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL AND MEDIA CONTROLS

It has been acknowledged that cultural activities and media performance under Mao had been designed primarily to maintain and reinforce political authority and the ideological homogeneity of the Party; not surprisingly, the development of Chinese broadcasting in that era was, to a large extent, politically overpowering, aesthetically weak and socially malfunctional. This was made possible by adopting the following measures.[38]

"Welfare" Model

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

duction was highly and evenly, in the service of the communist state, distributed and consumed by the public.

Control of Entertainment

The broadcasting medium in Mao's era was not only seen as the most powerful political tool of the Party, but also as an influential and accessible means of entertainment. It was due in part to the short supply of entertainment and, consequently, the absence of a popular culture. The scarcity of cultural resources at the time was striking. Between 1958 to 1965, China produced and sold only 26,000 TV sets. Even in 1978, there were only about 3 million TV sets in China, a tiny figure against a population of 800 millions then. With minimal technology and resources available, the mass communication system in Mao's China remained its indigenous and pre-modernization stage with the strong characteristics of communist totalitarianism -- pervasive, penetrating and intense. The worst came in the period of the Cultural Revolution when most entertainment activities such as western dancing, literature, music and even fishing or gardening were labeled as "bourgeois life styles" to be banned forthwith; moreover, almost all Chinese tradition and cultural heritage was attacked and censored. In such a repressive political context, broadcasting entertainment programming was employed to serve the Party's political and ideological needs and, as a result, to provide the audience with a cultural life within the framework of Mao's class struggle.

Centrally-Planned Economic Control

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

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

A Preliminary Assessment: Financing Chinese TV in Mao's Era

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

According to some statistics now available, I shall try to make a preliminary reckoning of financing hardware (i.e the labour and capital costs) in Chinese television industry. For the Beijing TV Station and others provincial stations such as Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangzhou, the state spent about \$US 250,000 each on capital expenditure in the initial stage. Meanwhile, with the average number of 50-70 staff in each station at the time, for each TV stations the state paid costs of labour maintenance and renewal of equipment ranging from \$US 400,000 to 500,000 annually from 1958 to 1976.[39] During that period, the annual national expenditure on the broadcasting industry including radio, wired, external and television was estimated

between \$US 35 to 40 millions. Television expenditure could account for around 20%.[40]

On the other side, it is important to note that the high cost of filling air time in other social systems did not exist here. All the TV stations at that time enjoyed almost unlimited access to cultural material for broadcasting. These included virtually free live transmission of various theatre dramas, sports and arts performances as well as lots of new movies. It was common practice then that every new film would be shown on the television screen a few weeks ahead of the premiere. In 1961, for instance, the Beijing TV Station showed 244 film, 51 of which were premieres. As early as January 1960, the Ministry of Culture and the Beijing Municipal Party Committee even made a joint decision that all new movies should be sent to the Beijing TV Station at least two weeks in advance of the premiere.[41] These practices reflect an important financial feature in the Party-state system that the profit motive has played virtually no role in running the mass media. It is impossible, therefore, to find out the real cost of providing a television service at that time, though some inferences may be drawn.

STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

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

(1) Politically, it constructed a copy of the Soviet vertical control system which was highly compartmentalized, enabling the Party to exercise pre-determined power over broadcasting. So, a dual hierarchy of party and government organs was employed for conducting and supervising television operations. In practice, the Party side, through its functional Propaganda and Personnel Bureaus, provided the political line, issued directives and placed officials in the key posts. On the government side, the Broadcasting Authority executed the Party's policies and dealt with the television business ranging from programming performance to technological development. Thus the Party effectively cemented the television structure into an authoritative consistent whole.

(2) Technically and administratively, Chinese television at the time was far from

having a pyramid functioning structure in terms of the relations between respective stations. This was mainly due to the inherent deficiencies in the establishment of Chinese television as examined previously. As China's de facto state station, the Beijing TV Station could only play a regional role in the nation wide operation with little influence and authority on others. In addition, a dozen of the established regional stations were quite separate from one another. Each station (including Beijing) usually communicated with authorities above, and not with one another, though they sometimes exchanged programmes under the arrangement of the Party Propaganda Bureau, or the Broadcasting Authority, but not initiated by themselves.

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

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

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Many of the broadcasting experiences of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were not applicable to mainland China. While the Eastern Bloc mainly relied on state paternalism to develop its broadcasting industry, the Chinese communist leadership, by contrast, benefited much from Mao's charisma and built up broadcasting in general and television in particular by using the similar method employed for mass political campaign. In view of the development of Chinese television, I want to

argue that the decision to launch television broadcasting at that time was both immature and ill conceived. Motivated by political and ideological needs, and impelled by the Great Leap Forward, the whole foundation of the Chinese television industry was thus dictated more by will power (so-called "revolutionary spirits") than by the social reality, particularly regarding the underdeveloped economic capability and the general poverty in society at that time (approx. \$150 per capita GNP). As a matter of fact, the given Chinese context plus the impact of the "Cold War" in the 1950s led the Chinese Communists to create television broadcasting for political ends. Chinese television, with its inherent deficiencies, was inevitably condemned to a difficult, erratic and frustrating future in the short to medium term.

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

NOTES

[1] Up till now very little research has been done on the subject of Chinese television history particularly in Mao's era. To undertake this study, I have relied mainly on two principal sources: the first is documentary, largely in Chinese, both published and internally circulated; the second important source comes from my intensive interview with some key figures involved in early development of Chinese television in Beijing, in Sept.-Oct.1990.

[2] For a more detailed account of early events of Chinese broadcasting history, see Lai, G.(1978) The History of Chinese News Media (in Chinese)(Taipei: Sanmin Publishing House, pp 155-156); Zhao, Y.(1987) "The Development of Chinese Broadcasting Prior to the People's Republic of China", in The Contemporary Chinese Broadcasting (in Chinese)(Beijing: China's Social Sciences Press, Vol.I, pp 7-14); Liu, Z.(1988) Electronic News Media --- Radio and

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Professor N. Carnham, Dr. C. Sparks and Professor L. Chu for their valuable comments and criticism.

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- [4] The anecdotes were reported in People's Daily, 15.9.1977.
- [5] Liu, Z. op.cit., p36.
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- [7] Kang, Y. "History of the New Chinese People's Broadcasting Undertaking", in China Journalism Yearbook 1982 (in Chinese)(in Chinese)(Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1982, p19)
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- [12] The speech was reported in News Front, No.5, 1958.
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- [14] The list is from CCTV Files see, Zhuang, C. (1985) Introduction of Chinese Television (in Chinese)(Beijing: China Broadcasting Press, pp.3-4)

- [15] Mei, Y. (1960) "Speech on the Seventh National Broadcasting Conference", in Mei's Collections on Broadcasting Work (in Chinese)(Beijing: China Broadcasting Press, 1987, pp.160-168)
- [16] Materials are from various interviews conducted by the author during my field research period in Beijing, in Sept. -Oct. 1990; some of them also can be found in China's TV Stations (1987) (Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press, p116)
- [17] Ibid.
- [18] Harding, H. (1987) China's Second Revolution (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, p15).
- [19] Also see Howkins, J. (1982) Mass Communication in China (New York: Langman, pp 26-28); Li, X.(1991) "The Chinese Television System and Television News" in China Quarterly, June 1991, pp.340-354.
- [20] Zhuang, C. op.cit., pp.5-6.
- [21] It was reported in New China Fortnightly, No.11, 1958, pp.118-119.
- [22] From China Central TV (CCTV) Files, 1957-1958, No.9.
- [23] Guo, Z. op.cit.,.
- [24] CCTV Files, 1960, No.10.
- [25] Chronicle of Chinese Broadcasting (1987) (in Chinese) Beijing: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press.
- [26] CCTV Files, 1965, No.12; also Zhuang, C. op.cit., p217.
- [27] See People's Daily 15.7.1966 in an article of the Maoists attack on Zhou's argument.
- [28] Yu, F. (1978) "China's Mass Communication in Historical Perspective", in Chu & Hsu (eds) Moving A Mountain -- Cultural Change in China (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
- [29] Also see Chu, J. op. cit.
- [30] see Note[25].
- [31] Howkins, J.op.cit., p44.
- [32] See The Contemporary Chinese Broadcasting (1987) (in Chinese) Beijing: China's Social Science Press, Vol.II, pp.123-131.

- [33] Ibid.
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- [36] Howkins, J. op.cit., p28.
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- [40] Information is from interviews with various officials including Mrs. Zhao, Deputy Director of Policy & Regulation Dept. Ministry of Broadcasting, P.R. C, Mr. F. Zhou, vice president of Chinese Broadcasting Association by the author in Sept.-Oct. 1990.
- [41] CCTV Files No. 12; Chronicle of Chinese Broadcasting, op. cit.

毛澤東時代的中國大陸電視業起源 與發展（1958～1976） ——一個歷史個案的研究

黃 煜

《本文節要》

雖然學術界近年出版了不少鄧小平時代中國大陸電視業的發展與改革論文，但有關中國大陸電視業在毛澤東時代的起源與演進的研究則幾乎付諸闕如。本文運用大量資料較有系統且詳盡地探討了大陸電視業產生與早期歷史的發展(1958-1976)。本文重點研究了毛時代中國大陸電視業的產生與建立，節目內容的演進，機構運行的模式，中共電視政策的制定實施，以及對電視業的政治／意識形態剛性控制，填補了中國大陸早期電視業研究的空白。

本文的主要發現與結論：中國大陸電視的產生與早期發展主要是中共領導集團出于政治目的的需要而匆忙興辦的，因而使中國電視發展具有先天性的“結構缺陷”。研究表明，中國大陸電視發展的案例即使在蘇俄共產主義陣營中也是獨一無二的。