

The Latest Korean TV Format Wave on Chinese Television: A Political Economy Analysis

by

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Abstract

Since China's reform and open-up, the political economic structure of Chinese media has experienced a huge transformation. Though still officially controlled by the Chinese state, Chinese media have been increasingly relying on commercial avenues. In order to reach the most lucrative consumer segment, Chinese TV producers have been striving to attract the urban middle class and create entertainment programs that cater to their latest tastes. The theories of audience commodity and digital labor are able to explain how Chinese television programs are oriented to the urban middle class, to the neglect of the voices of more marginal social groups. Although the phenomenon of buying foreign program copyrights is not new for Chinese TV producers, the latest Chinese versions of Korean reality shows, exemplified by *Dad, Where are We Going*, have become a special genre with high audience ratings. However, with their omnipresent inserted ads and product placements, it is also clear that that Chinese television has been commercialized one step further. In doing so, these popular programs have strengthened their class bias in a more obvious way, allowing middle class values and ideologies to become the most prominent mainstream social values. This has further diminished the space for China's working class and farmers to express their voices. As Chinese television is further subordinated to the commercial logic, it has also intensified its role in shaping class relations in Chinese society.

Keywords: Korean TV format; Chinese television; audience commodity; commercialization; middle class values

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

China's media and entertainment industry has developed rapidly since the 1990s. There have been a variety of entertainment programs produced by Chinese TV stations to satisfy the increasing needs of the expanding urban middle class in the last several decades. From imitating western practices and creating self-made programs, to importing foreign formats and localizing them to appeal to Chinese culture, Chinese TV stations have gradually caught up to international television production levels and play an essential role in China's entertainment field.

However, as Chinese media become more commercially oriented we are led to question the class biases, which this commercialization recreates and reinforces. Though China's media and cultural industries are involved in shaping the nation's social structure, the issue of class relations has been stringently avoided by Chinese media commentators and scholars. Also, as television producers focus on catering to middle class tastes, serious social issues are fading from the views of television audiences. Stories about the working class and farmers, as well as other vulnerable social groups have gradually been discarded by Chinese media.

Sadly, this situation is reinforced by the current trend of importing Korean television formats. Unlike before, when a fraction of Chinese audiences were attracted to Korean dramas or Korean pop music, there are now a large amount of Chinese television viewers who are being influenced by the narrative form of Korean reality programs. It seems that the influence of the Korean wave on China reached a new stage when Korean celebrity-docu-reality TV programs began to be remade by Chinese TV producers. Through buying Korean copyrights and coproducing with Korean directors, Chinese producers are desperately learning new techniques from Koreans and several

Chinese versions of Korean reality shows have been broadcast on provincial TV channels receiving high audience ratings.

Much of the work by Chinese scholars regarding the success of Korean formats in China read more like positive reviews than critical scholarship. For instance, Zhong and Liu argue that this new genre of entertainment programs such as *Dad, Where are We Going* are meaningful in spreading social values such as how to educate children in a happy and mutually rewarding way (Zhong & Liu, 2013,17-20). In terms of TV production, Wang's analysis of *Dad, Where are We Going* concludes that the show is very creative in inviting celebrities to attract viewer's attention and expects "more similar programs to be produced in the future" (Wang, 2014, 26). In addition, an editor of *Shangzhoukan*(商周刊), a Chinese business magazine, comments on the success of Korean formats suggesting that the cultural proximity between China and South Korea explains the high acceptance of Korean formats in China. However he points out that this phenomenon could be temporary and Chinese TV producers should consider long-term solutions for making qualified TV programs, rather than continuing to be over-dependent on importing foreign formats (*Shangzhoukan*, 2014, 94-95). In a word, the studies on this phenomenon by Chinese scholars are mostly positive affirmations of the cultural effects of these shows and neglect the larger context entailed in a political economy perspective.

In this paper, I will start with the theory of audience commodity to explore the relationship between commercial media, advertisers and audiences, to see how capitalism tends to commodify everything in society. Then I will discuss the historical background of Chinese media organizations in terms of commercialization since Deng Xiaoping's policy of opening up and reform. Next, I will introduce the phenomenon of Korean format fever and discuss how these Korean TV formats have become popular recently. Then, under the theoretical framework of audience commodity, I will focus on discussing the impacts of the Korean format wave regarding the extreme commercial orientation, as well as the class bias represented by them under capitalist logic.

The analysis of these shows will be based on my own observations of these TV programs, textual interpretations of them, and what these observations has informed my

reading of them. I will discuss the Korean format phenomenon from a political economy perspective to explore their role in a capitalist market society with Chinese characteristics.

Chapter 2. Audience Commodity and Media Commercialization

Before discussing the Korean TV format wave, I believe that a brief summary of the logic behind this phenomenon and historical background should be examined first. Chinese media has undergone progressive commercialization since the 1980's policy of opening up and reform. Through the years of media commercialization, a socialist Chinese media system has been transformed to a capitalist one with Chinese characteristics. In this section I will discuss how Chinese media, especially television broadcasting has developed into commercial-oriented media and its impacts on Chinese society. I will start from a western political economy perspective of the interaction between media corporations, audiences and advertisers.

2.1. Western commercial media and audience commodity

Following Dallas Smythe, Meehan suggests that most critical media research has only focused on the cultural side of culture industries (Meehan, 2007, 162). For a long time scholars neglected the economic and political influences of mass communication, which throws a blind spot over the economic functions of commercial media (Mcguigan, 2012, 289).

In western commercial media, advertisers' support is the primary source of media companies' revenue. By producing TV programs that can attract viewers' attention, TV companies can win advertisers' support and make profits. Specifically: audiences spend their time watching TV programs and commercials; TV corporations produce popular programs that can attract viewers; advertisers will choose those media organizations that can help them effectively reach their potential consumers. This is basically how commercial media interacts with audiences and advertisers in a capitalist market.

In this way, commercial media positions audiences as consumers by exposing audiences to commercial products. By watching their favorite TV programs, people are exposed to commercials on TV and are constantly informed of all the different kinds of commodities that they might buy. “Commercial media reduce humans to the status of consumers of advertisers” (Fuchs, 2012, 697). Secondly, under the logic of the commercial media model, culture is in a large sense connected to capitalism and the commodity form (Fuchs, 2012, 697). Cultural content produced by TV stations has to predictably reach targeted audiences so that TV stations can make good deals with their sponsors. Finally, through making use of media, capitalism presents itself as the best possible system in contemporary society. This logic is reinforced by commercial media and continues to maintain the hegemonic status of its message in society. The goal is that “human thoughts and actions do not go beyond capitalism, do not question and revolt against this system” (Fuchs, 2012, 697).

In discussion of audience commodity, Fuchs suggests Dallas Smythe was the first to point out that the main commodity produced by media is commodified audiences. Audiences’ watching behaviors are understood as a form of labor and sold to advertisers according to the values and measurement of audience ratings. Media content is argued to provide a free lunch for audience members in order to establish and maintain viewers’ loyalty to particular TV time slots, allowing audiences to be measured and packaged as commodities to be sold to advertisers. Since “audience power is produced, sold, purchased, and consumed, it commands a price and is a commodity” (Fuchs, 2012,702).

In this process, ratings become a critical figure for both media corporations and advertisers. Audience ratings decide what price TV companies can charge advertisers and also decide whether to cancel a certain program or not. Also, audience ratings guide advertisers to support different kinds of programs which best suit their targeted demographic (Meehan, 2007,163).

The rating system is monopolized by giant companies like Nielsen, who set up standards for measurement. These rating standards have a strong bias towards white, young, heterosexual and English-speaking groups in America (Fuchs, 2012, 702). This indicates that the American commercial rating system is not an objective one. Instead it

discriminates against certain people and provides the kind of data that TV producers and advertisers regard as valuable for their economic interests. Therefore audience ratings data are manufactured by rating companies and they primarily present only the data of viewers who are considered as the most valuable (Fuchs, 2012, 702). By doing this, audiences' consuming habits and behaviors regarding TV programs is exploited and manipulated by giant companies. Audience ratings have become the very commodity manufactured by commercial media and rating companies, and these commodities serve the interests of commercial media and advertisers.

Other than commercial broadcasting, discussion about audience commodification has reached into debates about digital labor in the age of social media networks. Fuchs believes that online platforms are owned by commercial companies that actually sell user-generated-data and space for advertisements and in arguing this point has revealed the myth of self-produced media content and attractive online services as well as entertainment from social networks platforms. Users of Internet platforms are called prosumers and the processes of surfing the Internet and producing contents make Internet users prosumers (Fuchs, 2012,707). Since nowadays TV programs are fully integrated with text messages and social media – whether through voting or social media discussions, audiences are also commodified by new media technologies. We should also update our discussions of television programs under the framework of prosumer, because audiences of television programs are intensely interactive through the platforms of social networks. In the age of Web 2.0, TV audiences are also content producers. Through the platforms of Facebook, twitter, blogs, etc. provided by private corporations, audiences are very creative and active in the process of producing user-generated-content, and this activity and creativity become the source of exploitation (Fuchs, 2012, 711). The identification of audience commodification and digital labor are two main pieces of evidence used to trace the trend of commodification in the contemporary age indicating the progressive colonization of every aspect of life by capitalism.

2.2. The commercialization of Chinese media in the reform era

According to Fuchs, Dallas Smythe was worried about ever increasing commodification and suggests that there should be an alternative order of communication, which is distinct from the commercial media model under consumer capitalist rule. Relating this to China, Smythe had hoped that China should establish a media system that serves public interests rather than private use (Fuchs, 2012, 706). It seems that Smythe's worries were well founded since Chinese media have been increasingly commercialized during the last several decades. Given the context of China's current attempt at balancing capitalist practices and its espoused socialist values, is there a possible path for ending this system of capitalist communication under the leadership of the CCP? The answer to the question of the viability of alternative media models is still up in the air since Chinese media is still undergoing extreme commercialization.

Although Chinese TV stations are still officially controlled and owned by the Chinese state, Chinese broadcasting has become increasingly dependent on commercial revenue from advertisers, sponsors and private corporations since the 1980s policy of opening up and reform (Zhao, 1998, 67). Nowadays inside China, media are increasingly enthusiastic about commercialization and rely on advertisers to further their own economic interests.

There are two main reasons for the commercialization of Chinese media. First, at the beginning of the reform era, there were more demands on media services and content from rich Chinese families. As a result the government was gradually unable to support all of the media organizations and the increase in channels, as they did not have enough funds to invest in these media's daily operations, let alone to support the importing of new technology and expanded services. Under this situation, media organizations, especially broadcasters, had a difficult time in the 1980s as state funding began to dry up and they had to think of new resources for money. At the same time the government began to encourage the commercialization of media organizations, leaving them to their own devices to figure out how to develop (Zhao, 1998, 53).

Secondly, ever since opening up and reform, there has been a huge demand by enterprises for channels of advertisement (Zhao, 1998, 52), making newspapers, and broadcast television their prime mediums for reaching potential consumers. The government's development of the market economy and embrace of neoliberal ideology makes Chinese society more susceptible to consumer capitalism. Over the years there have been increasingly financially capable consumers ready for commercial products, an increasing corporate demand for advertising and rapid development of advertising companies in China. Chinese broadcasters have progressively learned how to satisfy Chinese audiences' needs in culture and entertainment, and media organizations are gradually benefiting from commercial revenue that enables them to improve their technology and working conditions. The whole process has transformed Chinese media organizations and their operations into a format which follows capitalist logic. The main difference from western commercial media lies in that the Chinese state and communist party still officially own Chinese media and the principle of being loyal to the Party is still of great importance. Under this premise, media organizations are allowed to pursue commercial benefits.

In this process of media commercialization, there has been a huge transformation of media content. In terms of television, there are more and more business and entertainment programs and less political and propaganda content. Gradually, serious political news programs have become "less prominent and less pervasive" (Zhao, 1998, 68). In order to conform to the market logic and compete with other domestic TV stations, Chinese television broadcasters in the reform era have been trying to cater to audiences' new tastes with more infotainment programs rather than focusing on serious propaganda as they did in the old days. Media organizations have frequently used the word "*yule*", which means entertainment since the late 1990s and there have been many different varieties of entertainment programs produced by TV stations.

Unlike before, audience ratings have become the critical means by which television channels compete with each other and attract advertisers and sponsors. Like the Nielson Company in the America, the only company that provides ratings data in China is called CSM (央视索福瑞). This ratings company has several types of rating

standards including CSM71 and CSM46. The former can represent the rating situation not only in large cities but also small cities and villages, while the latter mainly focuses on the big affluent cities in China. Advertisers and provincial channels regard CSM46 data as more important since it can better reflect urban middle class consumers taste in TV (Zhao and Wu, 2012, 39). Since most of the time members of the urban middle class are more willing to consume commercial products, TV producers will consider the best possible way to attract this group of people to watch their programs and commercials in order to earn advertisers' and sponsors' economic support. Audiences have become commoditized and are being used as data serving the interests of commercial television channels and enterprises.

In addition, popular culture has now become intertwined with capital in that there is very little room for cultural production that is not done for profit. Commercial entertainment triumph is happening among Chinese media, even though the administration department has strict rules to regulate media organizations.

Several provincial satellite TV channels including Hunan Satellite TV, Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV and Zhejiang Satellite TV have been leading the entertainment industry in the production of new programs. Among them, Hunan Satellite TV is especially well known for its creativity and innovation in entertainment programs. The channel is comfortable and sophisticated in its adherence to commercial rules and has always been favored by advertisers and sponsors. Because of its commercialization and popular entertainment programs, the channel has attracted a large amount of younger Chinese audiences since the late 1990s, "carrying this entertainment wave into a new high" (Zhao, 2008, 87). The TV show *Happy Camp* was a product of this trend. This talk show was one of the first self-made commercial programs in the Chinese mainland to focus on celebrities and entertainment. It attracted millions of viewers who were born in and after the 1980s and continues to have a powerful impact on newer generations today.

The summer of 2005 marked a turning point in Chinese commercial entertainment programs. Learning from the American reality show *American Idol*, Hunan Satellite TV successfully produced the first season of *Super Girl*, which triggered a huge

pop star wave within the whole country. The show effectively encouraged audience interaction with text message voting for favorite competitors and made huge profits through sponsorship and advertisements. After that, several other TV channels followed this model and produced similar reality talent shows, since they regarded it as a very successful commercial format. However, Zhao says that many critical media scholars raised concerns about the values of individualism and consumerism expressed by this reality show. Also, the idea of democracy that is expressed by the voting round was parasitical upon the market logic, since the democratic form of text message voting contributed to the economic growth of mobile companies. Moreover, parents and educators worried that young people would be led to have unrealistic celebrity dreams that could cause them to follow an impossible path, only chasing quick fame and money (Zhao, 2008, 147-148).

This wave strengthens the bias of Chinese television towards the taste of “affluent urban consumers” (Zhao, 2008, 88), which are the advertisers’ favorite target. From talk shows to singing talent shows, Chinese TV programs gradually have a bias on urban youth who are willing to watch the trendy entertainment content and have the potential to consume commercial products. At the same time this trend further sets up the basic structure that leads media content to neglect workers, farmers and other marginalized social groups (Zhao, 2008, 88). Audiences’ taste is largely shaped by commercial media too, as fashionable entertainment programs are garnishing particularly high ratings amongst urban audiences, while programs directed towards countryside tastes are gradually discarded and become unpopular.

Chapter 3. The Phenomenon of Korean TV Format wave

Dad, Where Are We Going, launched by Hunan Satellite TV in 2013, marks another transformation in the Chinese TV ecology. In this program, celebrity fathers take their children from downtown Beijing to different villages all over China. They arrive in relatively poor villages and have to face the local reality, as well as accomplish harsh challenges and games. Since its stunning market success, several other Chinese TV channels have also taken the opportunity to find their own Korean partner to cooperate with. This has ushered in a new age of Chinese TV producers welcoming Korean celebrity-centered ways of producing entertainment programs. Other examples of this include: *Grandpas Over Flowers* on Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV and *Perhaps Love* on Hubei satellite TV. *Grandpas Over Flowers* tells us the story of four elder celebrities' fancy but challenging trip to France, while *Perhaps Love* pairs handsome and beautiful celebrities together as couples to see how they interact with each other and spend romantic time together. Yet Korean format fever did not spontaneously arise in China and importing foreign TV formats is not a brand new phenomenon in Chinese television. Before reviewing it, we should examine the background of this phenomenon.

3.1. Before the Korean entertainment wave: the rise and fall of western formats

Beginning in 2010, before the Korean format wave, there was a large spike in the importance of western reality TV formats. In the context of cultural globalization, Chinese television producers were trying to learn advanced techniques from western countries. The ultimate goal is to survive and stand out in the fierce competition of Chinese television and to win advertisers' support in accordance with capitalist market logic. Below is a list of major western TV formats that have been imported to China since 2010.

Table 3.1. Major western TV formats that have been imported to China since 2010

Programs	Original version	Copyright owner	Broadcasting platform in China	Premiere in China
China's Got Talent	Britain's Got Talent	ITV	Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV	2010.07.25
The Voice of China	The Voice of Holland	TDPA	Zhejiang Satellite TV	2012.07.13
Chinese Idol	American Idol	FOX	Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV	2013.05.19
The X Factor	The X Factor	FOX	Hunan Satellite TV	2013.04.19

Note. The information in the table comes from BAIDU BAIKE, the Chinese language based encyclopedia run by Chinese search engine Baidu.

There is no doubt that these shows opened another door for Chinese television's future and Chinese audiences' eyes, presenting a new level of Chinese television's entertainment oriented development. First of all, these western format programs brought television and the public much closer, allowing a large number of ordinary people to go on stage to perform and tell their own stories via nationwide channels. Potentially, it allows people from anywhere, any class to appear on stage. Indeed, a considerable number of farmers, workers, housewives and disabled people had a chance to be on TV through these reality show platforms. Secondly, through buying copyrights from western countries, Chinese TV producers had a chance to learn from advanced production teams from around the world, which contributed to the great improvements experienced by provincial channels in terms of producing entertainment programs. For every program, the original team will dispatch their staff from other countries to guide every detail of the Chinese production, ranging from stage settings, stage lights, music, camera positions and audiences seats and so on. In this process, Chinese producers learn from these practices and improve their programs bringing the production value of their productions to another level. Third, these experiences encouraged several channels to create their original programs and export them to other Asian countries, which mark a great progress of Chinese television's overseas expansion (Zhang, 2013, 38-42).

Among these western format shows, *The Voice of China* became the most heated topic in the summer of 2012. The show stressed the element of voice instead of looks, which was a brand new concept for most singing reality shows in China then. It

also hired the best live band in China and had access to fancy audio facilities to make it more professional. It was *The Voice of China* that activated a wave of importing western TV formats and production of singing reality programs such as *Chinese Idol* and *The X Factor*. In addition, *The Voice of China* officially allows any person with a dream to succeed musically to appear on stage and come face to face with four judges, however the class bias is obvious. For instance, Zou Hongyu, a farmer from Jilin province, stunned the judges and audiences in the very first episode by singing an English song. The judges and audience were shocked by his performance since a farmer in China was not supposed to sing that way. The judges assumed that only urban people are able to sing pop songs with different styles like jazz, blues or R&B, while farmers or workers can only sing certain kinds of folk songs in the Chinese countryside style. This indicates that even though the show does not have a class bias upon the permission to participate and it wants to show that the program care for normal people, the prejudices towards lower class people are still clearly presented through this platform.

Also, with the support of the main sponsor Jiaduobao (加多宝), an energy drink brand, and other advertisers, the show is a perfect illustration of the tight connection between TV programs and the capitalist market. After broadcasting, the number one sponsor canned drink Jiaduobao (加多宝), ranked the first in sales competing with other Chinese canned drinks (Fenghuanwang business, 2012), which proves that television programs are becoming the most effective way for commercial products to reach to potential consumers in China. *The Voice of China* (*haoshengyin*) finally turned out to be the good business (*haoshengyi*) of China. It marked a tighter bond between Chinese television and market-driven consumerism.

However, this is not the end of the story. Rather, this is only the beginning of a new round of commercial drama of Chinese television. This time it is China's neighbor South Korea who influences Chinese television.

3.2. The current Korean TV format wave

As a result of pursuing high audience ratings, provincial channels are importing similar western reality programs one after another. By October 2013, there has been a tendency of homogenization of Chinese entertainment programs. There were news reports saying that SAPPRFT (the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television) started to ban singing reality shows in order to prevent serious homogenization. It required that provincial channels should make adjustment to diversify their entertainment programs as soon as possible and there cannot be over four imported singing reality shows in total in 2014 (Yangchegnwanbao, 2013).

Facing this harsh situation, Hunan Satellite TV took the chance to jump out of the singing jungle first by exploring another path. Putting aside serious singing competitions, it took the risk to import a new Korean TV concept of outdoor celebrity reality program *Dad, Where are We Going* into China for the first time, trying to bring back cute and fresh elements to Chinese television. However, before the broadcasting of the first episode of *Dad, Where are We Going*, the original sponsors and advertisers were not confident about this new program since it is a brand new genre and some of them even stopped supporting the program at the last moment. In the end the advertisers who left the show earlier were very regretful as the show got the highest ratings during Friday night prime time (Zhong & Liu, 2013, 19). The numbers of Sina Weibo fans for each of the celebrity fathers increased rapidly after the first episode, as well as the number of discussions about the program. For example Lin Zhiying, one of the show's participants gained an average growth of 200,000 new Weibo followers every day after the premiere of the first episode (Zhong & Liu, 2013, 19-20).

The wave of importing Korean reality shows and cooperating with Korean directors came after the success of *Daddy, Where are We Going* on Hunan Satellite TV channel in the fall of 2013. Not surprisingly, it was Hunan Satellite TV station which introduced this new model and then other TV channels followed it. Actually, before this reality show, there was already a program called *I am a Singer* on this channel, which was a celebrity singing reality show imported from South Korea and became popular nationwide. In the wave of variety of singing competition shows back then, it almost

overtook *The Voice of China* in the spring of 2013. Since *I am a Singer* was part of the trend of singing competition shows, it represents more of an alternative model for producing a singing program rather than the initiation of the Korean format battle. However, it began to create a bond between Hunan Satellite TV and Korean partners, marking the foundation of cooperating with Korean media persons.

It seems that this model provided a new strategic idea for Chinese TV producers to get high audience ratings and soon the Korean format wave became an evident phenomenon among provincial channels. Though importing foreign formats is not a new topic, Korean TV formats had never been largely practiced on Chinese TV before. During the time I am writing this article, there are still new Korean formats coming in one after another. Below is a list of the Korean format reality programs that have been imported to China.

Table 3.2. Korean reality TV format programs that have been imported to China.

Program name	Korean version name	Korean Copyright /coproduction team	Broadcasting platforms in China	Premiere in China
I am a Singer	I am a Singer	MBC	Hunan Satellite TV	2013.01.18
Super Star China	Super Star K	CJ E&M	Hubei Satellite TV	2013.07.07
Dad, Where are We Going?	Dad, Where are We Going?	MBC	Hunan Satellite TV	2013.10.11
One Night Two Days	1 박 2 일	KBS	Sichuan Satellite TV	2013.10.27
Dad Came Back	Superman Came Back	KBS	Zhejiang Satellite TV	2014.04.24
Perhaps Love	We Got Married	CJ E&M	Hubei Satellite TV	2014.05.25
Grandpa Over Flowers	Grandpa Over Flowers	tvN	Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV	2014.06.15
Honey! Go!	NA	The Korean production team of <i>Dad, Where are We Going?</i>	Southeast Satellite TV	2014.07.03

Note. the information in the table comes from BAIDU BAIKE.

This indicates that Korean formats have become an essential part of current Chinese TV programs. There is a high chance for Chinese audiences to turn on the television set and come across a Chinese version of Korean reality program nowadays.

There are four major theme categories in these Korean formats' reality programs: the first one is celebrity fathers and children going out for travel and experience village life, such as *Dad, Where are We Going*; then there is celebrities travelling to other countries with limited money like *Grandpas Over Flowers*; celebrity couples going out for romantic dates like *Perhaps Love*; finally there is challenging outdoor games between celebrities such as *One Night Two Days*. They are all aired once a week and the shooting location could be anywhere around the world rather than inside the studios.

3.3. The creativity and production of Korean formats' reality TV programs

Basically there are four conditions to produce a Korean formats reality program. First of all, celebrities who are willing to share personal life in front of dozens of cameras and accept harsh challenges requiring them to be physically fit. Second, there must always be suitable outdoor destinations available for shooting. Third, the media organization's ability to organize and manage a large mobile production team composed of over 100 people at any place or in any country in the world. Fourth, there should be enough economic support from sponsors and advertisers. In the context of China, there are countless celebrities that from Greater Chinese areas and wish to be on TV to become more popular and numerous destinations available to be shooting all over China. Also, there are several provincial TV stations that have enough professional staff members to work together for the programs and the ability to attract advertisers' support. Plus the communication between Chinese and Korean producers regarding program production is convenient due to the geographic and cultural proximity.

However, in order to produce a program according to a Korean format, Chinese producers have also had to learn techniques from the original Korean experiences and localized them into Chinese context.

In recent years, South Korean reality TV has created a new model that is different from typical reality TV programming, such as American ones. First of all, while typical reality shows primarily feature ordinary people, the persons who participate in these shows are all popular celebrities. Using celebrities as participants definitely makes a difference. The producers carefully choose those stars that are most suitable for a certain program. For example in *Dad, Where are We Going*, there are five groups of celebrities and their kids who participate in the show for the whole season. The celebrity participants include: a Taiwanese singer, a Chinese fashion model, a famous director, a Chinese actor and a former Olympic champion. Not only are they good looking but their kids are also super adorable, which makes the show attractive to audiences. The producers not only sell the celebrities' looks, but also their personal life. The show is the very event for idols' kids, or the next generation of celebrities to be fully exposed through media so as to satisfy audiences' voyeuristic aspiration. While in some western reality shows like *Big Brother*, there are cameras installed all over the house they live in, Korean reality programs have both numerous cctvs installed inside every single room, and there is at least one cameraman following each celebrity, recording every single detail of his or her actions or emotions during the whole time they are on location. Finally the 48 hours of non-stop shooting materials will be edited into approximately 180 minutes' videos. In these ways, selling celebrities' privacy has become one of the producers' basic techniques to catch audiences' eyes.

Second, there is no elimination round in Korean reality shows and all the participants appear on the show for the whole season; while there are always elimination rules in the games on American reality shows. Unlike the typical reality formats that have an element of contestants being pitted against one another, South Korea's celebrity-docu-reality shows focus on the journey of stars by throwing them into difficult and challenging situations (Ng, 2013). South Korean style reality shows move past this tired format of conflict, as their participants are full of positive energy and love. Chinese TV producers favor positive content because in doing so, the show is more easily approved by censors and receives positive reaction from audiences. For example, in *Where are We Going, Dad*, celebrity fathers use their own ways to educate and guide their kids who in turn befriend one another. They even help each other to win challenges. Even though

sometimes there are conflicts between participants, like kids fighting while playing, they always end up with happy result in a humorous or touching way.

Third, the use of computer graphics technology combined with cute sounds effects makes Korean style shows more energetic and funny. Distinct from most western entertainment programs, most of Korean model subtitles are not necessarily at the bottom of the screen, but displayed with special effects like shining or blow-up characters accompanied by cute sound effects. Those special characters usually appear around the person on the screen, reflecting their psychological status or teasing them, which make audiences laugh loudly. Most of the time the stories in these programs develop slowly, so the funny sounds and graphics add extra effects so as to make the tedious pictures come to life and create more energetic content. These special subtitles appear all the time during the program and they are the very elements that make these shows funny instead of boring. For instance, in *Dad, Where are We Going*, the English name of a girl is “Cindy”, but her Dad always calls her name with an *Sichuna* accent, making it sound like “Sen Die”(森碟) (a phrase without any particular meaning), so the subtitle editing person put “Sen Die” with exaggerated Chinese characters on the screen every time he calls Cindy, which is very humorous and culturally appealing Chinese audiences. Even this celebrity father once said in an interview that the show’s editors are so creative that they were the ones who gave his daughter this new cute and hilarious name (Wang, 2013, 25-26).

The creativity of Korean reality TV formats is largely approved of by Chinese TV producers and these special techniques are practiced by Chinese provincial stations nowadays. The chief director of Chinese version of *Dad, Where are We Going* Xie Dikui once said, “the creativity of Korean entertainment is always strong and the production standard is always in a higher level. Of course there are some similarities regarding what concepts we pursue between the producers from China and South Korea” (*Shangzhoukan*, 2014, 94).

3.4. Audience consumption of Korean reality TV format

There are several ways that Chinese audiences watch and consume Chinese versions of Korean reality shows. Firstly, fan support is the premise for the high audience ratings of these shows. Audience support for the shows is manufactured by cobbling together the preexisting fan bases of the celebrity idols, popular singers or actors from the greater China area. In *Dad, Where are We Going*, the five handsome celebrities fathers already had lots of female fans' support, especially the Taiwanese singer Lin Zhiying, whose music has accompanied the younger generation born in the 1980s. His then four-year-old son Kimi was a mystery until the show was broadcast on TV, and voyeuristic fans were excited to finally see what Lin's son looked like.

Secondly, other than the support of pre-established fan bases, celebrity based reality shows have an advantage over typical form of reality TV because the general public tend to be more attracted by celebrities than by ordinary individuals. Celebrities always become the topic of people's daily conversations. In the era of Weibo, any news about celebrities could stir up heated discussion on social networks. Following this premise, there is no doubt that Korean celebrity reality shows are able to catch the audiences' attention and inspire public discussion about their performance on the shows.

Thirdly, audiences not only watch these reality shows for entertainment but also they are engaged in critical viewing of the attitudes and behaviors of participants in the programs (Hill, 2005, 9). They are involved in debates about the cultural and social values presented by these programs. For instance in *Where are We Going, Dad*, the four-year-old Kimi cannot accomplish challenges independently and he always wants to stay with his father, which leads to the intense debates on Weibo about what is the correct way to teach children to become an independent person. Also, in an episode of season two, two little girls almost became pissed off with each other in the process of accomplishing a mission. This detail raised a heated debate on Weibo about which girl's behavior was right and who had better public manners. Also in *Honey Go*, in which celebrity husbands and wives go to Korea to face a variety of challenging missions, Taojingying, a Taiwanese host and singer, quit right after the second episode claiming that she was experiencing poor health, which led to audience criticism of her bad temper.

A Weibo user called Sunbaby97 wrote a comment admonishing, “she wasted the precious opportunity. All I can see in the first episode is her murmuring” (Weibo, 2014).

Finally, by performing part of their real life, celebrities can also be understood as role models for ordinary people. By watching celebrities travelling, dating or babysitting on reality shows, audience members in China learn celebrities’ lifestyles in great detail with regards to certain manners or the latest fashions. I will discuss this later in the paper.

What are the impacts on Chinese society if there are a large amount of these Korean style celebrity reality programs on TV? What changes might they bring to social ideology, as well as class formation and class relations in Chinese society?

Chapter 4. Korean formats, TV commercialization and Chinese society

Korean TV formats are well suited to serve commercial goals even though the original format itself did not include a large amount of ads. Chinese versions are favored by advertisers and they are intensely implanted with tons of ads. Under the commercial logic, Chinese TV producers have created programs that can attract urban audiences attention, so that the affluent urban consumers can be pushed to watch these ads and purchase commercial products. In this process, Chinese television programs nowadays turn out to be mostly urban taste entertainment programs and that Chinese television has taken part in the formation of new class relations, in which middle class identity is formed and middle class ideology is strengthened.

4.1. Korean formats and media commercialization

The phenomenon of an intense concentration of advertisement in the show's content is one of the unexpected outcomes of localizing Korean formats to fit the Chinese context. The Korean original versions are far less commercialized. The sponsors of the Korean versions are not obviously shown on TV most of the time and the video editors carefully cover any brand name or logo using mosaics. For example they will cover the convenient store logos like 7-11 which appear on the screen. The audiences are almost fully involved in the plots of programs rather than distracted by large amounts of ads.

In contrast, the Chinese versions seem to fully present the eagerness of Chinese producers and sponsors to reach to urban consumers. Ever since Chinese media were allowed to gain their financial support from advertisers and sponsors since the late 1970s, Chinese television has become increasingly dependent on commercial revenues. Also, as China joined the global capitalist game and the Chinese market is expanding

rapidly, there are increasing needs from entrepreneurs for advertising platforms like television. Unlike before, Chinese television programs and advertising are more closely connected with each other nowadays. Since 2013, the Korean model of producing reality programs has opened a new window for them. Considering that Korean formats are very suitable for inserting whatever ads they want, advertisers compete with each other for the most suitable platform in this commercial battle, in order to reach potential urban consumers more efficiently. Below is a list of the title sponsors and ads of these programs.

Table 4.1. Title sponsors and ads in Chinese versions of Korean TV format

Name of Programs	Title Sponsor	Other sponsors and ads
Dad, Where are We Going?	Season one: 999 Ganmaoling Season two: Yili QQ Star Milk	Infinity, Blue Moon Detergent
One Night Two days	999 Cough syrup	Wahaha Gewasi drink, Haobashi Tofu
Dad came back	Xiaoyang Yogurt	SAIC-General motors-Wuling
Perhaps Love	Dream Gold Garden	Dongfeng Peugeot 2008 Zizhu Medicine Company Lafang Personal Care Daqiaoju Real Estate
Grandpas Over Flowers	Hanshu White BB Scream	
Honey! Go!	Xiaoyang Yogurt	Emma Electric Bicycle

Note. Not all the implanted ads are listed in this table, since there are many different sponsors according to the different contexts in each episode and location. All the information comes from my observations to the programs.

Korean formats are overwhelmingly welcomed by TV producers and sponsors. First of all, distinct from traditional reality programs, the Korean TV format makes it possible to mix advertising and program content effectively. They are very conducive for inserting advertisements, since the participants always use certain products during their travel, such as cars, cooking utensils, snacks, drinks, detergent and so on. Unlike the ways that ads are implanted into singing competitions shows like *the Voice of China*, advertisements can be directly inserted into every single detail of the storylines of the Korean reality programs. Second, naturalized celebrity use make ads convincing and real. Audiences can watch how their favorite stars really use these products as if they have been using them for a long time and that they truly love them. Third, after the

success of *Dad, Where are We Going*, sponsors and advertisers began to discover the commercial potential and advantages of this kind of program, so they are confident about this new genre and willing to invest money in it.

In these programs, ads are strategically inserted into the plot of the stories. For example in season one, episode three of *Dad, Where are We Going*, in which celebrity fathers and kids go to a desert in China's western province of Ningxia, in the beginning the background host clearly reads out loud the advertising lines for the number one sponsor "999 Ganmaoling" claiming that the program is sponsored by this medicine company. Then, when they arrive at the airport of the destination, there is a line of Infiniti cars coming to pick them up from the airport to the desert, where they are going to spend two days. At this moment there is a flying camera up in the sky to capture the picture of the whole car team moving along the road, when the logo of the car brand "Infiniti" and a line appear at the bottom of the screen for eight seconds saying that "all the cars in this program are provided by our sponsor Infiniti". As fathers and kids are happily chatting and sitting in the cars, cameras from every angle capture the best scene for the cars and present "Infiniti" as a very fancy, safe and comfortable brand for consumers to choose. Then, they arrive at a vegetable market and must accomplish a mission of buying food materials for two days of activities in the desert. When they exit their cars, a camera gives a close-up to a logo sticking outside of the car saying "Meidi IH Smart Rice Steamer" above the program logo. This company provides all the cooking utensils for fathers. Finally they arrive at the "Shapotou" desert, which is actually a tourist destination. Not surprisingly, the designed logo of "Shapotou" appears beside the program logo on every tent they build. Not only are the logos everywhere on tents and houses, the celebrities and children are arranged to go to the most famous tourist spots in the desert. The professional cameramen try to make every scene look beautiful in these two days in order to present to potential consumers that "Shapotou" is the most beautiful desert destination for fun in western China. In every other episode, as the production team goes to different destinations and celebrities challenge different missions, there will be different ads shown in different episodes except for the title sponsor company "999 Ganmaoling".

The sponsors usually want to find the most suitable programs to cooperate with in order to match with the theme. For instance in *Perhaps Love*, which is the Chinese version of *We Got Married*, the sponsor is “Mengjinyuan”, literally means Dream Gold Garden. This is company manufactures golden jewellery for lovers or family members. In each episode when celebrity couples win a challenge, they will be gifted a piece of golden jewellery by this company for free. Since golden jewellery have countless potential consumers in China, this company wants to show off their products being used by celebrity couples and want to prove that their golden jewellery is the best gift for love and marriage. The products from this company appear in every single episode and the Korean idol singer Hwang Changsung who participated in this program was shocked by it and saying that gold is everywhere in episode three. Not to mention the luxurious house setting and cars appearing in programs, *Perhaps Love* has almost become the advertising platform for gold jewellery company, the Real Estate Corporation and car companies.

The “direct ads”, or product placements, make both TV producers and sponsors satisfied and more willing to cooperate with each other. On one hand, TV stations could bring more economic support from advertisers to produce such large-scale outdoor reality shows. To produce Korean reality shows, the whole crew including directors, cameramen, celebrity participants, cosmeticians, etc. have to be mobile to successfully move from the TV stations to any other location all over China or world and stay there for a period of time. The crew must be able to take consideration of every staff member’s accommodation during the shooting at the location. As a result, there is a very urgent need for advertisers and sponsors’ financial support. The more economic support there is from sponsors the more mobile the crew can be to add to the adventure and drama of the show and meet the technical requirements of advertisers who want their brands shown and audiences who need more qualified entertainment contents.

On the other hand, for advertisers and sponsors, their ambition to find the most effective platform to purchase their desired audience commodity also contributes to this trend. In an age when audience ratings have become the critical standard for judging between good and bad programs, advertisers will consider cooperation with provincial stations like Hunan Satellite TV, Zhejiang Satellite TV, Shanghai Oriental Satellite TV

and the like, since these stations have done and continue to do an excellent job in producing entertainment programs that get relatively high audience ratings and can attract urban viewers. Not surprisingly, in this round of Korean TV format wave when these stations are competing to produce Korean style reality programs, sponsors trust these stations again. Korean reality programs have become their new platforms for promoting commercial products, since these platforms have great potential of attracting their urban consumers.

In terms of audiences, their aspiration to watch celebrities' private lives and relax on Friday evenings at prime time contributes to the audience ratings data, which in turn is the driving force behind media organizations' motivation to produce these shows. Audiences' curiosity about the celebrities' scandals and gossips, as well as their loyalty towards these shows drive them to eagerly watch these programs. Audiences' work in watching these programs is sold to advertisers as a commodity, helping advertising companies decide which program to invest and which TV station to cooperate with. For example, the season two of *Dad, Where are We Going* became the popular one for sponsors to compete for because of its high audience ratings in the first season. What is more, not only does their work of watching TV help to generate the ratings data for advertisers, but also their intense and active participation about the shows on social media contributes to online data for Internet companies, which are largely supported by advertising. In this process, viewers have transformed into online prosumers, with their self-produced content regarding these popular programs. For instance, with season two of *Dad, Where are We Going* now being broadcasted, the number of Weibo discussions on this topic has reached over 25,000,000 discussions since the show first premiered ("GVU's 10th WWW User Survey," n.d.).

The impacts of these commercialized programs are huge. Audiences are fed with concentrated ads while watching the programs and are getting more used to those ads and commercials on TV and may be unconsciously becoming adherents of capitalist logic. Some audiences may complain about the intense ads, but still concentrate on enjoying the programs, considering it to be no big deal to watch some ads. As a result, by watching ads inserted into the programs, they are finally pushed to spend money

buying commercial products. Audiences gradually get used to this normalized commercial logic and also become part of it.

Yet, the theories of audience commodity explain why Chinese entertainment programs are gradually oriented to a particular group of audiences. Since the rising urban middle class has strong potential and capability to consume commercial products, they have always been the favourite target group for both Chinese TV producers and advertisers. When commercial logic and audience ratings become the prioritized, Chinese TV producers must create programs that could attract urban audiences, in order to help advertisers reach their target consumers. Most provincial stations have set the urban middle class as their target audience and concentrate on producing entertainment programs which appeal to urban tastes. By watching TV programs that satisfy their taste and entertainment needs, the Chinese urban middle class are unconsciously involved in tons of commercial entertainment programs that contain countless commercials and ads in them, contributing to ratings and consumer behavior data. This commercial logic not only helps advertisers and producers make profits, but also allow programs that cater to the urban middle class taste to become the mainstream entertainment styles on Chinese television.

Korean format reality programs are the latest event but are still just a fraction of the tons of urban taste programs in China. Korean format reality TV, in which celebrities perform part of their “real” life and show off their lifestyles and values, can better cater to the middle class taste than other program genres and becomes one of Chinese TV producers’ new choices to satisfy urban people’s entertainment needs. Korean format fever is just another phase of Chinese television producers attempting to appeal to the rising middle class in China. Targeting a particular group of audiences can lead to the normalization of middle class values and cultivate a class bias that neglects marginal groups and other social issues like social inequality and class exploitation. This matters because it is the most trendy reality shows that further stress middle class values and ideologies which are popular among the public. This could further lead to the limited public space for marginal groups to express their voices compared to urban middle class.

4.2. Korean reality TV format and class relations

In order to get high audience ratings and to encourage an aspiration of private wealth accumulation and commercial product consumption amongst its audiences, Chinese entertainment programs are increasingly orientated to urban tastes in recent years and have focused on catering to affluent urban middle class people. Provincial stations like Hunan Satellite TV have taken the lead to do so for years. A growing number of provincial TV stations have “devoted themselves into the practice of shaping middle class” (Zhao & Wu, 2014, 41). In this process, middle class ideology is reinforced and even becomes hegemonic. With the current wave of imported Korean reality TV formats, this tendency is more obvious. Other than reviewing positive effects, we should re-examine this Korean TV format phenomenon to see how entertainment content on television has become increasingly class biased in China.

In China, class relations have been seldom discussed in the reform era, even though class relations have been undergoing reconstruction ever since the opening up policy in political, economic and cultural aspects of life. First of all, the city-village gap has become a serious social problem in China. The city-village dual social structure is still the core structure in Chinese society (Zhao & Wu, 2014, 38). The gap between the cities and villages has become even larger as the Chinese government has courted neoliberal practices. The most visible of China’s new rich are the owner operators, private entrepreneurs who have developed their own businesses and those who are fashion-conscious and set the standard for urban middle class to follow (Robison & Goodman, 1996, 231,238). Although there are a few people from villages who get rich because of success in business, the farmers who compose a large part of Chinese population are pretty much left behind by the affluent urban population, not only in terms of personal economics, but also in terms of their social status and their cultural life. Second, the corruption of government officials and their relationships with the private sector stimulates the formation of a wealthy group, which has a strong ability to consume commercial products and accumulate wealth (Zhao & Wu, 2014, 38). This indicates a gap between officials profiteering from market relations and ordinary people.

In the Chinese context, the middle class is very a complicated term. Some middle class people are very well off, while there are also increasing white collar middle class people who are struggling with housing issues but adhere to urban tastes and consumption practices. The rising urban middle class people are proud of their social status, while the marginal group of people such as working class and farmers are endangered to be left out by the fast pace neoliberal society. Though most celebrities belong to upper class and enjoy luxurious life in real life, most of the time they present middle class lifestyles in the shows and show off their lifestyles to Chinese audiences through displaying part of their personal lives on television. The celebrities are proud of their social status and become more popular among the public after participating in these programs.

If we look into the details of how these Korean style reality TV shows are made and analyze the content of these cultural products, these shows are teaching audience members how to live a middle class lifestyle most of the time, though sometimes audiences can learn from celebrities in these programs in terms of certain knowledge like travel tips, as celebrities are argued to be the role models for audience members (Singhal, 2004, 99). In the first episode of the celebrity dating reality show called *Perhaps Love* where celebrities go out for a romantic date, the way they dress up according to different occasions, how they enjoy romantic western buffet parties along the beach and how they date in unique coffee shops serve as lessons to be imitated by more rising urban middle class consumers. In *Grandpas Over Flowers*, where celebrities travel to Europe with an inadequate amount of money provided by the production team, celebrities set an example for Chinese ordinary people on how to arrange their traveling abroad with a limited ability to consume. Also, in *Dad Came Back*, on which celebrity fathers babysit their children in the absence of mothers, celebrities are presented as role models encouraging Chinese fathers to spend more time with children, challenging the Chinese traditional values that fathers are supposed to go out to make money and keep at a distance from their babies. In a word, all of the celebrities on the latest Chinese versions of Korean shows carry out trendy models of middle class life for the growing urban middle class group in China to be aware of and imitate.

Moreover, if western formats of singing reality programs allow farmers, workers and other marginal groups to stand on the stage showing their talents, then all we can see in Korean format programs is celebrities performing their “real” life and showing off their tastes. On the very first episode of season one *Dad, Where are We Going*, the production team heads out to each celebrities’ house in Beijing to pick them up. With the cameramen’s capture of the houses’ images, audiences discover that the designs and decoration of their big houses are very fancy and stylish compared to ordinary people’s houses. Then, right after they arrived at the village one hour away from downtown Beijing, one of the kids called Cindy starts crying complaining about the shabby environment in the small village by asking her father, “why does a village look like this?” The fact is that the editors could have cut this scene out before broadcasting, while on the contrary they used the conversation as a potential laughing point for audiences. This is insulting to the farmers who have been living in the village for years. The message they send out is that Chinese villages are so incredibly poor and the urban middle class should feel lucky and proud to not to have to live in them. Also, in episode five of *Grandpas over Flowers*, on which the stars fly all the way to Europe as tourists, when the whole team is visiting one of the actor’s house in France, his luxurious mansion, as well as his French wife and two adorable kids are revealed to millions of Chinese audience members. In the whole episode, he is mostly showing off his fancy living environment and lifestyle to his fellow friends.

However, the fact is that not everyone in China is able to practice these middle class lifestyles. Through celebrity demonstrations, middle class values are presented as common values for the whole of society, negating the huge gap between the rich and poor, the rich urban people and those poor farmers. An average white collar worker in Beijing might not be able to afford to purchase his own house. An ordinary farmer in China is not able to take their kids on a plane for a vacation to experience brand new lifestyles. A normal migrant worker in a Foxconn factory is unable to stop working in order to travel for leisure since he has to work continually to support his children’s education fees. Avoiding the serious issue of social inequality and unequal class relations, Chinese television producers have allowed middle class identity and discourse take over Chinese entertainment programs like a tornado.

From the spread of consumerist values to the cultivation of middle class identity, Chinese media and culture industries have taken part in the reconstruction of Chinese class and power relations (Zhao & Wu, 2014, 38). Chinese media has not only become a part of production and economic exchange, but also the place for the formation of class discourse and relations. For example in these practices of remaking Korean reality TV, Chinese producers have been progressively putting effort into the practice of shaping the middle class. The eagerness of provincial channels to spread consumerist values and stress the urban middle class identity is clearly presented in the current Korean TV format fever. Gradually, Chinese television programming has helped to form a strong urban middle class identity, while working class and farmers' interests and the serious issue of social inequality are further ignored and discarded. These social problems are not treated as structural problems or as class issues to be addressed on television. Rather, they are depoliticized and described as cultural differences between different people within a single country (Zhao & Wu, 2014, 41). Unlike South Korea, where the city-village gap and social inequality issue are not as obvious as they are in China, the situation of ignoring lower class groups by the media might cause a lot more social problems and deepen these gaps.

With that being discussed, we should reconsider the Korean format fever phenomenon seriously and raise our concerns about it. After the Korean fever then what is next? It is possible that Chinese TV producers might search for new producers from Japan, or Thailand to cooperate with to start another round of commercial and ratings competition, unceasingly portraying positive urban middle class images. If this trend is continually practiced by Chinese television in the future, then the public will be further inducted into commercial capitalist logic and middle class ideology. The issue of social inequality will again be overlooked and avoided, which may make Chinese television content increasingly unable to represent China's complex social reality and address serious social problems.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Research into the popularity of Korean celebrity reality TV formats in China which currently only investigates their entertainment value should be tempered with a political economy perspective. The uniqueness of Korean reality formats, such as only casting celebrities and emphasising computer graphics in comparison to their western counterparts, plus Chinese TV producers' increasing ability to produce qualified programs make these programs popular among Chinese audience members and produce high ratings. However, the intense implanted ads in these programs reflect the undergoing extreme commercialization among Chinese television. Under the commercial logic, in order to reach affluent urban consumers and sell audience commodity to advertisers, Chinese TV producers have been focusing on catering to urban middle class tastes and that Chinese television programs are gradually oriented to a particular group of people. By depicting middle class lifestyles these shows help to normalize capitalist logic, displaying it as part of mainstream daily life. Also, with shows like these Korean reality TV programs, Chinese television has taken a lead in shaping a middle class culture and identity, playing a critical part in reconstruction of class relations and power relations in Chinese society, in which middle class discourse is taking over, while issues of inequality are neglected and the voices of farmers, workers as well as other marginal groups are lost through these entertainment programs.

Fuchs has renewed Dallas Smythe's urge that China should create an alternative media structure that favors public goods and services rather than privilege individual and private use (Fuchs, 2012, 706). These scholars' concerns are justified because even though Chinese media are officially controlled by the state, Chinese television outlets are progressively adopting and promoting a commercial logic, under which ratings become the critical figure and program production is largely connected to the economic benefits of media organizations and advertising companies. Avoiding addressing serious social issues like the deepening city-village gap and class inequality, the practices of media

commercialization in China make television today mostly cater to certain urban tastes and serve the interests of profit-making groups, rather than public interests. The structural issues of class relations and class inequality would be further avoided and neglected. In an age when Chinese media eagerly welcomes capitalist practices, to change this situation right now is not easy and probably unrealistic. It takes time to make a difference. Chinese television should also address these concerns by producing programs that could tackle the issues of marginal groups. For example, there could be reality TV programming about villagers and workers, telling us their stories, showing us their lifestyles, and let audience members realize the serious social problems and begin to consider the pitfalls of capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

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