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No Sex! No Violence! No News!:
Satellite and Cable Television in China

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Introduction.

This paper addresses the issues raised by the documentary *No Sex! No Violence! No News!* made by Susan Lambert and Stefan More for Film Australia and screened on the 9 May 1996 by the ABC, screened as part of its series *The View From Here,. While any program that takes the Chinese mediascape seriously is a welcome addition to Australian television there are elements about the program that I would challenge.

The film was to be one in a series about international television but Film Australia slashed the budget so Lambert and More decided to focus on China because 'its [system] embodied all the trends found in modern television'. While these trends are never explicitly stated within the narrative structure of the film one can deduce from the text they are meant include the decline of public sector television, the inexorable rise of entertainment TV and the headlong rush towards market driven consumerism fuelled by TV. Indeed, one of the recurring themes within the film is displacement of communism by consumerism in modern China. Its arguments are supported with extensive footage of interviews with Robert Chua, a powerful force within Hong Kong media, and expert academic commentary by Leonard Chu (Hong Kong Baptist University) and Geremie Barme (ANU). Nevertheless, the view of Chinese television the program portrays is problematic.

In the first place it is too deterministic. As I read it, the program adopts a view that the technology of modern television is an irresistible force that seduces naive Chinese viewers into rampant consumerism thereby inserting them, albeit unconsciously, into a capitalistic world. Further, the program constantly employs an equation whereby advertising equals propaganda. There seems to be an implicit assumption that Chinese audiences are not only familiar with propaganda but also accept it as a given in the media and that they view advertising in a similar manner. In short the program perpetuates what Sun (1995:40-48) calls the control/submission model of Chinese media analysis. Further, China is equated with what I call the Beijing/Shanghai/Guangzhou axis. Although reference is made to regional China,
clearly little is known of this entity. Finally, the program is unclear as to where it stands in regard to official Chinese media policy. It oscillates between a position that views Chinese policy as monolithic and one that acknowledges that regional forces modify the excesses of bureaucratic centralisation.

In this paper I will focus on four issues - technological determinism, regionalism, centre/margin tensions and centralised control of communication - with reference to recent developments in the Wuhan mediascape in an attempt to suggest another view of the Chinese mediascape; one that avoids the control/submission model\(^1\). To do this, however, it is necessary to contextualise the argument and establish a base in which to ground my analysis. This is provided by a consideration of the development of Wuhan/Hubei cable television within a framework of Chinese media policy. I will then conclude with a discussion of two aspects of cable television: firstly, an early form, the Industrial Community Television (hereafter ICT) and secondly, the new commercial cable enterprises who embody the new dynamic of Chinese television. Further, I will also argue that the introduction of cable television represents a new discursive form, whose power is still to be negotiated within centre/margins relations of the Chinese polity. For the potential of cable to be realised in the Chinese situation it will be necessary to forge new links, what Crowley has called "contingent alliances" (1993), between the new commercial elites and the representatives of the decaying central power and foreign broadcasters. As I will show in my analysis of Wuhan Cable Television Enterprises (hereafter WHCATV) this is underway. Moreover, the introduction of commercial cable systems has created new relationships between local media workers and local power brokers, leading to greater political influence and professionalisation. Finally, these cable companies are staffed and controlled by local people who articulate regional interests that are sometimes at odds with the central political and cultural dictates of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television in Beijing. Cable television presents a serious challenge to the ideological hegemony of the CCP
and its influence, although yet to be fully felt, provides a place for the regional voice. As Harold Innis argues, all technologies have a contradictory potential (Drache, 1995) and cable television's potential to fragment the audience challenges Beijing's cultural dominance.

Theoretical Contexts.

After a careful analysis of the literature relating to the press in China Wanning Sun (1995) identifies a number significant trends which I think apply also to television post-1978. Briefly, they are the tension between economic liberalism and a tendency for centralised political control by government, the emergence of contradictory positions towards the media within the Chinese bureaucracy, the creation of a hybrid broadcasting system shaped by the 'irony of commercialisation' and the professionalisation of the media (43-44).

This analysis leads Sun to reject the control/submission model for media analysis in China and argue for 'thick descriptions' of the media, media policy and media events, acknowledging the multicultural, multi-layered and multifunctional nature of the Chinese media. Central to this model is the recognition that the media in China have undergone a significant ideological shift since the mid-1980s. The ties to the propaganda machine remain strong but are no longer determining. Further, the Chinese media, including television, have developed a much more sophisticated conceptualisation of the audience; the audience which is no longer perceived as an undifferentiated mass but in terms of specificities. A close reading of No Sex! No Violence! No News! bears out this view. In reality it is not the audiences that demand the so-called mindless pap of endless games shows but the compliant Western and Hong Kong media companies who seek to protect their investments by not offending the Chinese government. The film, in passing, points out that in Shanghai the highest rating programs are the locally made documentaries that explore social issues
such as the plight of the indigent, wandering peasants.

I would add two other theoretical points to this concept of thick description. Firstly, that all media have either a temporal or spatial bias (Innis, 1952). The preponderance of the bias shapes social, political and cultural relations and institutions. The pronounced spatial bias of satellite broadcasting underpins the concerns of the Chinese authorities who seek to keep their political boundaries secure from transborder broadcasting. This explains their decision to privilege the development of cable television which they perceived as providing much greater control over spatial relations in the early 1990s. However, this decision presented a different set of problems to do with the control of space. Cable television can be used to develop regional biases and tendencies, an anathema to the centralising forces of the CPC. Secondly, the new media have presented the Chinese audiences with new things to think about. As Lull points out (1992) television has permeated the fabric of the new Chinese urban lifestyle presenting unforseen consequences for the central bureaucrats and leading to a demand for more sophisticated television product by the audience.

The Structure of the Chinese Broadcast Media.

Television throughout China is theoretically under the control of the Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television in Beijing who make policy and provide direction and guidance to the regions. Each region and municipality has its own equivalent of the Ministry whose function is to interpret the guidelines provided by the central organisation and generally oversee broadcasting within its jurisdiction. However, there is no direct line of management relationship between the Ministry and the regional bodies. This problem becomes clearer when we look at television. CCTV is the central television organisation and consists of three distinct free-to-air channels and four pay channels (delivered by satellite), each with its own characteristics. All regional broadcasters, at whatever level, are required to carry the main CCTV news
broadcast each day plus the entire output of CCTV 1. The other CCTV channels (Channels 2, and 4) are broadcast by the regional stations after negotiation. Thus the regional broadcasters may be designated as correspondents of CCTV rather than relay stations.

The next major level of political organisation is the province, followed by the municipal and the prefectural centres, organised hierarchically to govern all economic, political and communicative activity in China. Each of these levels has its own infrastructure and broadcast channels. For example, Hubei Provincial Television (hereafter HBTV), based in Wuhan, has two channels. Similarly, Wuhan City has two municipal television channels. Each organisation has its own studios, staff and production schedules. The outcome of this situation is threefold. Firstly, on paper the viewer has a wide choice of programming available. In practice this is not the case as the different levels tend to carry either the same programs or very similar programs. Nevertheless there is competition between the levels. For example Wuhan City Television competes strenuously with the HBTV. On the whole city television is better equipped than its provincial counterpart, is staffed by younger people who view themselves through the lens of professionalism rather than ideological conformity and have access to greater resources. This can be accounted for, in part, by the leadership provided by the municipal Office of Broadcasting, Television and Film and its vigorous pursuit of Hong Kong money to resource local broadcasting.

The third outcome is massive duplication, at all levels of programming, resources, and staffing reflecting the general inefficiencies of the old command economy. However, there is also a political dimension to the duplication. Jenner (1992) argues that the classic Chinese political model is based on the separation of power and responsibility. The centre retains the power but allocates responsibility to the margins. On close scrutiny one can detect the model underpinning Chinese broadcasting. The Ministry maintains control by determining policy, providing guidelines and imposing
strict accounting methods on the regional broadcasters. That is, the provincial, municipal and prefectural broadcast units submit copies of any program they make to the Ministry plus all program schedules. This bureaucratic model is effective when the power relations between the centre and its margins are clear and unambiguous and there is only a limited volume of product to be monitored. However, as the old centre/margin power relations decay in modern China and the amount of television in the country expands exponentially it becomes ineffective.

Cable television is grafted on to these earlier levels of broadcasting adding to the competition and duplication and generally confusing the model because it adds additional layers to China's television culture. For example, the cable operations have injected more foreign programming into the system.

All of these developments have occurred within a policy framework. Initially Chinese communication policy was geared towards 'achieving the maximum effect with minimal technology' (Barnett, 1982) reflecting the mass political line of the 1950s through to the 1970s. Here it is important to recognise that television was a late addition to the Chinese mediascape, introduced after the establishment of the mass line, occupying something of an ambiguous position within the state propaganda apparatus. As Wang has argued (1996), both the audience and officialdom have tended to perceive television essentially in terms of entertainment rather than propaganda. This is borne out by the massive increase in both the number of television sets purchased within China after 1978 and the number of foreign programs purchased and broadcast in China in the 1980s. At the same time policies were developed in regard to television in China: these were brought into sharp focus by the 1993 decision to ban transborder satellite broadcasting in China.

In October, 1993 it was decreed that foreign satellite television broadcasts in China were banned with three exceptions; senior Party officials, foreign enclaves and three star and above hotels could receive the programs. This has generally been interpreted as an
anti-Murdoch move on the part of the Chinese government who were disturbed by his pronouncement that it had been shown that authoritarian governments could not withstand the forces of satellite technology. However, closer scrutiny of the events cast a different picture. The ordinance banning transborder broadcasting into China was first promulgated in 1991 but never enacted largely because the PAL was making too much money from the manufacture of parabolic dishes, and the Chinese regional broadcasters were unwilling to comply with the directive. By 1993, however, the broadcasters, who were now driven by advertising revenue rather than state subsidy, began to worry about the perceived loss of revenue to Star and other foreign broadcasters. Consequently the industry indicated to the state that it was prepared to comply with the ordinance banning foreign satellite television in China. Thus the 1993 banning was shaped as much by internal factors as external ones. Murdoch's gaffe provided a convenient excuse.

To meet audience expectations, which had been created in the relatively open period of the 1980s and later through satellite broadcasting, the Chinese government decided upon a policy of encouraging the establishment of commercial cable stations. The first began in Shashi (Hubei) in 1991 in an unregulated environment. By 1995 over 2000 cable operations were allegedly in place, ranging from the massive Shanghai Cable Television with 1.2 million subscribers to small municipal operations like that of Yer Yang (Hunan) with a few hundred subscribers. The boom in cable operations has a number of features. Firstly, foreign investment in infrastructure was encouraged (see below). Secondly, China had developed a culture of cable television with the Industrial Community Television (ICTs) developed in the 1970s. Thirdly, this occurred within a relatively uncontrolled environment. That is, until 1993 no specific regulations for cable television existed. Thereafter the 'One Region, One Network' policy was introduced but ignored until 1995. Fourthly, cable television was perceived as more easily controlled by the state than either free-to-air or satellite broadcasting; the plug could be quite literally pulled at source if need be.
The tendency to create regulations and then delay their introduction confuses the industry and suggests that communications/media is a highly contentious matter within the bureaucracy. Between April and October 1995 the situation in Wuhan changed dramatically as a consequence of the policy oscillations. WHCATV was forced to adopt much more conservative programming strategies and pay much greater attention to broadcasting policy. In April the station was negotiating confidently with US program providers and planning massive expansion of its services. By October its plans for development were in jeopardy. Moreover, the commercial station's local hegemony was challenged by the introduction of Hubei Provincial Cable Television (an addition to Hubei Provincial Television) designed to shadow WHCATV but within the provincial broadcasting framework. The policy shaping these forces demanded that the two systems amalgamate but this proved problematic. Firstly, WHCATV was funded by foreign investment actively recruited by the city government which was unprepared to surrender control of its investments to the provincial government. As one informant put it “Personalities are involved”. Disputes at the micro level mirror tensions at the macro level. Another informant declared unequivocally that the delays in the implementation of the various policies represented a serious fissure in the state apparatus. It was alleged that there was a massive struggle between the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television for the control of the airwaves. The dispute was so serious that the State Council had to adjudicate. Thus to see Chinese media policy as homogenous and unproblematic is a mistake. The contradictory potential of the technology combined with its spatial bias means that the state probably has more problems coming to terms with television than the audience portrayed in the No Sex! No Violence! No News!.

Cable Television in China.

Cable television takes two forms in China; the ICT, which is community based, and
commercial cable operations which began in the urban centres in the 1990s. The ICTs, introduced in the 1970s, were a response to changing political and cultural conditions at a time when the centre seemed to be devolving ideological power. Television relay stations in the work units appeared to fulfil two functions: provide an effective means of saturating the country with CCTV and at the same time meeting the growing demand for television programs. By contrast the commercial cable stations are a product of the 1990s and represent the increasing commodification of culture in China, thereby challenging the propaganda function of communication that has been at the heart of China's ideological enterprise. In this section I will contrast and compare these two forms of cable television arguing that each form represents a significant development in the emerging Chinese mediascape.

Industrial Community Television

The Industrial Community Television (ICT) are attached to factories, manufacturing plants and other institutions in the 1970s. The size of the television station, the range of services it offered and its staffing profile reflected the size of the community it was located in. For example the Wuhan Iron and Steel Mill (hereafter WISCO) television station services a population in excess of 130,000 and offers a greater range of services than the ICT at Pu Chi (Hubei Province) which services a community of some 30,000. ICTs became an important, but largely ignored, component of the Chinese communication system throughout the 1980s as the television industry generally expanded, eventually constituting an indispensable intermediary between the state and Chinese industrial workers because they catered for local community needs and tastes.

Before discussing the role of ICTs it is important to establish that the term

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"community" is not a common term in Chinese discourse for complex reasons arising out of the negative attitude of Party officials towards the concepts embodied in the word in the 1960s; for the CCP it carries connotations of an essentially bourgeois world view. Consequently other terms were applied to the work unit that formed the ‘iron rice bowl’ social organisation favoured by the CCP (Wang, 1996). Further, the frequent and unlimited use of the term "community" in Western scholarship, when applied to China, leads to confusion. Therefore it is necessary to define the concept "industrial community" at this point.

After 1949, many new types of factories and industrial companies were established in China and consisted of two zones; the factory or production zone (sheng-chan-qu) and the living zone (sheng-huo-qu). The two areas together constitute the industrial community with managers and workers of the production zone allocated housing in the sheng-huo-qu according to seniority. Their families were provided with everyday services commensurate with their position. A factory in China then is similar in its composition and activities to a "small society" and may possess a school, a department store, a hospital, and even a police station. Because the present Chinese employment system is immobile, a Chinese worker, like most of his/her neighbours, may be born, educated, married, pleasured and buried within a sheng-huo-qu, and the road from the sheng-huo-qu to sheng-chan-qu becomes a metaphor for his/her life. Even more, the factory or company is not only a business unit but also a grass-roots political unit within Chinese political organisation and plays an important role in modern Chinese political structure. The Industrial Community is both the combination and the intersection of the two distinct entities, the production area and the residential area found in all Chinese manufacturing units and forms the basis of social organisation of pre-1990s China: hence the significance of the ICT.

In the Chinese pre-television era, the major communication media in the Chinese industrial communities were public gatherings, notice boards, broadsheets (chang-bao),
loudspeakers and, we should add, the small group discussions that constituted the 'pervasiveness, penetration, and intensity with minimum technology' (Barnett, 1982) or 'mass line' communication system in China between 1949 and the mid-1970s. These old media, regarded as the organs for grass-root unity by the Party and government, functioned in an essentially univocal manner. The 'voice' from the top spread downwards to individuals through public gatherings and loudspeaker announcements. After small group discussion information then tended to percolate upwards through the broadsheets that were a feature of the system. The vertical and horizontal axes of this communication model amplified the pervasiveness of the system. However, with the introduction of television and its location in the industrial communities the propaganda function of the old media has gradually weakened. This had the effect of creating a new sense of pervasiveness that is at odds with the original, reflecting the impact of the social reforms begun in the late 1980s.

ICTs were introduced, then, as an extension of, and supplement to, the national television network in the 1970s when the Chinese government set up microwave relay trunks to broadcast CCTV (Chinese Central Television Station) nationwide. Many industrial communities, especially those in marginal urban areas, opened TV relay stations that provided an amplified TV signal for domestic consumption. By the beginning of the 1980s, following the social reform process, the relay system broke down in the face of competition from the cable, or closed circuit TV, which the industrial communities set up to provide programming for their communities, virtually in opposition the state broadcaster. This service was frequently little more than extended video movie programming, used to 'season' the CCTV's single channel broadcasts with some form of entertainment. In 1984, which is an important year in Chinese television history, the central Chinese government prompted local government to establish television stations using their own funds. Many industrial communities joined this wave of activity in the belief they would gain either more
financial support for their activities (from the government or their audiences) or technical advantages in relation to their competitors. The communities expanded their television capacity installing complex cable systems and in some cases their own broadcast standard studios.

The slogan "Own Channel and Own Program", introduced in 1984 represents the changing status of the ICTs within the Chinese system. In the mid-1980s the system matured to include satellite TV reception in its programming repertoire. Increasingly CCTV and the larger provincial broadcasters distribute their programs via domestic satellite services. Consequently, for example, Shandong Provincial Television is now available throughout most of central and southern China. Thus most ICTs now relay at least two channels of CCTV, provincial television and locally produced programs into the homes of the Chinese worker. Until October 1993, when the new rules relating to access to satellite broadcasting were introduced, they also programmed Star television into their repertoire of programs. Further, these services were augmented by the introduction of the four channel CCTV pay television service in November, 1995. Thus the ICT system has grown in importance in the past twenty year of television in China to the extent that they have become the target of the commercial takeovers by the large cable operators.

An ICT is operated by staff members who are employees of the industrial community. Their number varies according to the size of the industrial complex. In most cases the ICT is either an independent department within the community or it is attached to another section of the complex such as professional education, information department, propaganda section or the trade union of the factory. Further the name may vary from community to community. They may be described as "factory zone TV station", "electronic education labour unit" or "video office". In essence each of these units, irrespective of its nomenclature, fulfils a similar function within the industrial community.
The property of the ICT, including facilities and plant, belong to the industrial community. The manager of the host institution has ultimate power over the ICT's operations. Whether this model will persist as the economic reforms take hold is difficult to predict. Nevertheless it is clear that the transition from state ownership of the means of production to modified system of worker control of these means within the Chinese industrial system will affect the economic organisation and functioning of the ICTs. For example, at the Hubei General Textile Mill, Pu Chi, the ICT had its subsidy withdrawn by the management of the factory. To survive the station became a what the Americans call a 'mom & pop' cable operation offering its community a mix of CCTV, provincial programs and, significantly, request programs provided to members of the community for a small fee.

ICTs often work under the direction of CCTV and/or local TV stations especially in the areas of professional training, technology provision and program production. The Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and the local provincial bureaux effectively control ICTs through policy implementation. Thus, despite the capacity to provide Star TV no ICT dare screen it because of the new policy on satellite television. Moreover, as the ICTs have grown they have organised themselves into provincial networks supported by professional organisations. Hubei Province has led the way in this area with a Hubei Industrial Television Association located in Wuhan. The Association organises seminars on program production, policy formation and relations to and with the provincial bureaux and the Ministry and also publishes a monthly newsletter. As the commercial stations seek to 'purchase' the well established ICT the Association also plays a crucial role in negotiating the conditions of the takeovers.

Theoretically, all the communication media in China work under the guidance of the Propaganda Department of the CCP. In recent years, however, this control has
weakened. There is an assumption on the part of many ICT operatives that grass-root issues should be the principal determinant of control. Consequently ICTs like WISCO have begun to place greater emphasis on their own news production programs despite the obligation to broadcast CCTV 1 news bulletins every evening. Moreover, ICTs like WISCO have systematically upgraded their equipment to the extent where they can think seriously about producing their own variety programs as well as news factory propaganda.

In some industrial communities, ICTs may work in conjunction with the trade union. Basically trade unions in China are not political organisations but social institutions that provide welfare and entertainment for the workers. There is a tendency for the unions and the ICTs to conspire on programming issues where ICTs operate as part of the union's cultural work alongside dance parties, shows, games, movies and art exhibitions. In many respects an ICT has a captive audience that is fixed, known and relatively homogenous. This audience can provide quick and substantial feedback to ICT management on programming issues, something the unions have sought to exploit because the voice of the audience increasingly has great effect on an ICT's operations. This can be observed in two ways: firstly, through request programs that have become a feature of many ICT operations. Ostensibly a form of revenue raising, the request program is also an effective way of monitoring audiences. Secondly, ICTs have become an effective means of mobilising public opinion on issues specific to a community. One example occurred in Pu Chi where management sought to raise rents. The union, members of the community used the ICT to articulate their discontent and force management to compromise on the rise in rents.

All of this suggests that the ICTs have acquired a set of characteristics that make them a significant force in community affairs. To understand the function of ICTs it should be borne in mind that in most Chinese industrial communities, if not all, there are no
churches, no nightclubs, no casinos, or even theatres. To some extent it can be argued that television has assumed the functions of all of these other institutions within the shen-huo-qu. Further, economic factors come in to play around television: it is a cheaper form of entertainment and leisure than tourism, sport, or going to the cinema, and now well within the grasp of the average Chinese worker. Consequently the enthusiastic audience for television within China constitute the cornerstone of the ICT.

Unlike other mass media, such as radio and newspapers, television in China has been regarded historically by both officials and the audience as an education and leisure medium rather than a propaganda tool. This view presents Chinese leadership with a dilemma: on one hand ethical behaviour is the foremost concern for authority according to Confucianism and Maoism, but on the other hand the Party has promoted modernisation which appeals to the people. The appeal to the people and the drive to modernism and consumerism are amoral pursuits according to traditional doctrine which provide television with an ambiguous position within Chinese orthodoxy. The entertainment role of television within the ICT accentuates this problem. When the Party seeks to use the ICT system to proclaim and initiate new policies (at whatever level), difficulties may arise. In the first place popular opinion assigns propaganda activity to the older forms of communication, now largely delegitimised. Secondly, officials find they have to change their conventions of address to accommodate the by-choice, family-based, leisure-oriented medium. Thus all the amusing programs flashed on to the screen of the family's television have acquired deep political meanings.

This shift to leisure consumption and video exhibition from community based distribution systems poses serious questions about the role of ICTs in the sheng-huo-qu. Their traditional role as public broadcaster (in a narrow sense) providing and producing community news, talk shows, documentaries and discussion programs
must be questioned. ICTs, like their commercial counterparts, appear to be little more than conduits for the commodification of Chinese culture. However, ICTs retain the potential to fulfil a public function. Because of their size ICTs can be a real interactive medium that encourages a participatory communication processes. The contradiction between the leisure/entertainment nexus on one hand, and the public/participatory on the other remains to be solved. The audience and its desires will be the key to this issue.

Another crucial function of the ICT is its mediating role, between the central system and the community. CCTV, as the only national network, now has four channels that depend on local TV stations and/or ICTs to relay programs. As a correspondent of CCTV (and the local station) the ICT plays a major distribution role. It also supplements the CCTV and provincial television with its own programs. As Pasteka (1979) observes "what is especially important about this form of communication is that those smaller units have their own media by which they can express themselves and also impart information. Those smaller units are small enough to be able to preserve the individual role of their members and they are big [social] enough to have official status and financial means to realise the right to co-create and impart information to their members" (p.??).

However, despite their significant local role the ICTs may succumb to the new economic order as the Pu Chi experience attests. They cannot command the same resources as the new commercial cable operators. In fact they have become attractive acquisitions for the cable operators in the larger urban centres. They have proved effective intermediaries between the central organisers and the local audiences which they nurtured over the past decade. In April, 1995 WHCATV made overtures to WISCO ICT to assume broadcasting to the mill community. As costs to the consumer were involved it became a union issue and was unresolved. Nevertheless it is indicative of future trends, suggesting that in fact ICTs constructed a cable culture in
China that is now to be exploited by both the commercial operators and the government.

**Commercial Cable Television.**

The claim that there are now over 2000 cable television operations in China must include the ICTs. The claim also indicates a massive shift in Chinese television provision suggesting a new discourse of television is emerging, because cable provides a wider range of texts, both local and imported, to the viewer. In effect the cabling of China represents the next step in the commodification of Chinese culture, a distinct shift away from the public broadcasting ethos that prevailed until the introduction of advertising to television in 1984. To understand the impact of cable television it is necessary to look briefly at Chinese television in the 1980s.

Television was a late addition to the Chinese mediascape, its scope and range severely circumscribed by economic and ideological factors. In comparison to the other media television's status as a propaganda medium was somewhat ambiguous. Both the audience and the Party perceived it mainly in terms of entertainment rather than ideologically, which is not to say it fulfilled no propaganda functions (Wang, 1996). Significantly, the view of television-as-entertainment created a set of expectations among audiences (Lull, ??). In the 1980s the urban populations in particular achieved a degree of prosperity that permitted expenditure on consumer goods. Televisions and VCRs were high on this new consumerist agenda. Paralleling these developments on the domestic front was a decision of the Government to allow television equipment to be imported free of tax by the television stations (Wang, 1996). Two major consequences arose from this decision: the number of television stations in China increased from 49 in 1982 to 593 in 1993, and by the same year it was claimed 80% of China received a television signal (Wang, 1996). In some quarters this has been referred to as "TV's Great Leap Forward" - a code term for disaster.
The expansion outlined above proved problematic on two fronts. Chinese television production was unable to cope with demand, leading to a massive influx of foreign programming. Again the 'patriots' took a dim view of the situation, referring to it as the 'Eight-power allied forces fight back' - a clear reference to the pre-revolutionary period of Chinese cultural history. Moreover, much of the imported programming appeared trivial, challenging the Confucian and Maoist views that entertainment should be serious and worthy. Nevertheless it proved a seductive model and in turn has influenced Chinese television production which has adapted the melodrama, variety show and karaoke genres to local conditions.

Adding to these problems was the introduction of satellite broadcasting from the mid-1980s to April, 1993. Any television station with an antennae, including the ICTs, could pick up the Star TV signal and relay programs to the audience. The Government was always uneasy about this 'invasion' of their sovereignty but did little about it until Rupert Murdoch's takeover of Star. In April, 1993 new laws relating to satellite broadcasting were promulgated, limiting access to foreign satellite broadcasting to three star hotels and above, foreign enclaves and official institutions. This decision made cable television a much more attractive prospect to both investors and the Government. In the first place, the Chinese had developed considerable expertise in cable television, albeit at a modest level, with the ICTs. Secondly, cable appears to be more easily controlled than satellite broadcasting, a view shared by other Asian governments, because it remains under the control of local professionals who had been enculturated within Chinese television practices. Thirdly, developments within telecommunications meant that other services could be developed in connection with television. However, to achieve the necessary infrastructure meant massive infusions of money which opened the doors to Hong Kong and Taiwanese media entrepreneurs thereby creating another set of problems.
Wuhan Cable Television Enterprise was established in 1991 as a joint venture between Wuhan City Foreign Relations Department and Chinese Television Network (hereafter CTN) in Hong Kong and began broadcasting in 1992.\(^3\) CTN is a subsidiary of ATM Media Holdings, Hong Kong and closely associated with the Ming Bao group of newspapers (Zha, 1995:154). It is the first international Chinese language satellite broadcaster providing Mandarin language services to North America and Europe. Its incursion into Wuhan represents a significant development for the company and probably signifies its intentions in the post-1997 era. CTN provided the start-up capital, equipment and technical advice and in accordance with government policy, plays no part in the day-to-day running of the station.

WHCATV is technologically sophisticated, capable of audio and visual transmission, videotext transmission with the potential to develop interactive multi-media. Its distribution system consists of 250 kilometres of cable composed of a mix of 840 and 565 coaxial and fibre optic cable. It currently provides a twenty-two program service made up of eighteen piggybacked channels (CCTV, HBTV, Shandong Provincial Television, ESPN etc) and four channels of its own. It now claims a 350,000 client base, up from 240,000 in 1994/95, who pay a Y280 (US$22) joining fee and Y90 ($7) annual fee. Installation is free. However, the increase in subscribers seems to come from the take over of existing ICT,s such as Wuhan University, rather than new subscribers.

The fact that Wuhan City Foreign Relations Department was instrumental in establishing the service is highly significant. It permits the station to negotiate cross-cultural and foreign broadcasting rights in its own right, bypassing Beijing who have agreed to allow stations to import directly children's programs, scientific and educational programs without reference to the central bureau. As from 1 May, 1995 TNT supplies one new release movie via satellite per day. The station can then

\(^3\) The following is based on interviews conducted in Wuhan in April, 1995. I would like to thank Wang Handong who translated during the interviews, and the interviewees who gave freely of their time and knowledge. I have decided not to specify names for complicated reasons.
decides whether to screen the movie or not, depending on whether it conforms to Chinese cultural norms. ABC (USA) is also supplying two hours of children's television per day free of charge so long as WHCATV carries the American advertising. While this cannot be interpreted as a return to the era of 'foreign worship' of the early eighties it does signal a radical shift in responsibility and, I would argue, a significant diminution in central control of television in China. It is also logical to assume that the large cable operations in the major cities, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, have also grasped the opportunity to assume greater responsibility for their programming strategies.

Finally in regard to Wuhan, it is important to look at the location and staffing policies of WHCATV. It now occupies the old provincial film studios which have ceased to operate. This in itself signifies a dramatic shift in the Chinese mediascape. Film attendance in China plummeted from a high of 22 billion attendances per annum in 1990 to one billion in 1993 (Wang, 1996). The cable station operates an Open Employment Policy. That is, it hires and fires its own staff and determines its own salary levels without reference to the Ministry. This is significant on two accounts. State control is effectively disarmed because relationship between the employer and employee no longer assumes that the state has the right to assign workers to an occupation as it has in most areas including the other media. It also means the 'iron rice bowl' concept, the Chinese social security system outlined in the section on ICTs where the state through its institutions provides for its citizens from birth to death is effectively removed. Consequently WHCATV is staffed by a team of young people (average age of 28 years) who have readily exchanged one ideology for another insofar as media workers are no longer the 'eyes and ears' of the party.

Conclusion.

The tendency to view the Chinese mediascape as a unified and homogenous entity must be challenged. Increasingly China is becoming economically and socially
fragmented. However, the unity of Chinese culture, where many languages, ethnicities and regions have been bound together through a script and centralising ideologies appears to remain intact. I would argue that this condition arises from the fact that no technology has hitherto proved sufficiently powerful to challenge the hegemony of the Chinese script until the widespread introduction of television in the last decade. The challenge of television is implicitly recognised by the central government, hence their 1993 implementation of an existing ordinance on satellite broadcasting. However, changing economic patterns and demographics coupled with personal expectations has meant that television has become a social and cultural fact in China. Consequently the state has been compelled to satisfy demand, albeit with a medium that is in most respects antithetical to classical tenets of Confucianism and Maoism. As Lull (1995) correctly points out television has fundamentally altered the fabric of Chinese urban life and attempts to return to a Confucian model of communication will be difficult to achieve, something No Sex! No Violence! No News! illustrates powerfully.

Nevertheless, the culture of control decays slowly. The Chinese Government's decision to emphasise cable over satellite broadcasting represents an attempt to retain both national sovereignty and political and cultural hegemony. However, built into cable is an inherent regionalism that suggests increasing cultural fragmentation and contradicts the essentialist policies of a command economy. Satellite communication lends itself much more readily to spatial and cultural hegemony but the unacceptable aspects of satellites for the Chinese are manifold. Chinese culture and polity would be in direct competition with other world views, that are uncontrollable and offensive to the present regime. The decision to encourage cable, within guidelines, is an attempt to resolve this dilemma. However, as I suggest in relation to Wuhan, cable television has a dynamic of its own that runs counter to the demands of centralising state policy. Unwittingly the Chinese authorities, with their policy to encourage the widespread cabling of China, have set in place a communication infrastructure that both
encourages regionalism and provides the space for the articulation of difference.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS:
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