

Radio and Social Transformation in China

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Certificate of authorship

I certify that the work presented in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text.

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I want to clarify a couple of matters here to avoid any possible confusion for readers. The photos reproduced in the thesis are accessible online. They are gathered here to save readers the need to go to separate sites and deal with potential language issues. I have tried my best to provide full details of each picture; however, this is extremely difficult in some cases and not all details could be traced before submission of

the thesis. I reproduce details such as the author, time and interpretation associated with the photos wherever that information was available. For all photos with and without an identified author, I will pursue permission to reproduce them from copyright holders if the thesis progresses to publication in the future.

In chapter 5, I was unable to trace the name of one program I refer to due to a program rearrangement on the channel involved. Wherever I have translated quotations and citations from Chinese into English, I include my name. I also completed the translation into English of Chinese references I reviewed. I am more than happy to hear from anyone who can suggest better translations. In this thesis, the names of China-based Chinese authors and other Chinese individuals are in the conventional Chinese order with the family name first, followed by given name. In order to differentiate between Chinese names which share the same family name, I have kept both the Chinese family names and initials in the in-text references and added their locations wherever necessary in the list of references. The online copy of Hu Xiaomei's two books is no longer available and the link address is therefore missing. I will find a hard copy in China to complete the reference whenever I have a chance.

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Abstract

Since the arrival of television, radio has largely been an under-appreciated and understudied medium internationally. Radio in China is no exception. In comparison with Chinese television and the internet, ‘radio in China’ has been a poor cousin, invisible and largely unheard of in English-language scholarship. This thesis aims to fill this gaping hole by providing a systematic, comprehensive and critical study of radio in China. Focusing on the relationship between radio and social change in China in the decades of the economic reforms, the thesis investigates the role of radio in China’s profound social transformation. After a historical account of radio in the pre-reform period (including in both the Republic and Mao eras), the thesis traces the emergence of several new radio genres, formats and practices in the post-Mao decades. In particular, the genres of news, late night talkback, health infomercial and drive radio are critically examined with a view to identifying the key changes and continuities in the radio sector. The thesis identifies important ways in which radio at once derives from, embodies and contributes to China’s compressed transition from a socialist collective nation–state to a nation that, while still state-dominated, has moved a considerable distance towards becoming a privatised, globalised and individualised society.

Chapter 1

Transforming radio in China: an introduction

China's economic reforms that started in the late 1970s and early 1980s have led to rapid and massive transformations, resulting in a constellation of social changes. In this thesis I argue that radio has played a role in each stage of the economic reforms. As an imported communication technology acquired from the West, radio was once viewed as promising the power to promote a universalised modernisation in Third World countries (Lerner, et al., 1958). As one of the most rapidly and dramatically developing countries, China presents a useful case study of the relationship between media and modernisation. In addition, as the largest and fastest growing industrial society in the world, China is a crucial site for understanding the impact of the medium on people's public and individual lives. The objective of this thesis is to explore the interaction between radio and social changes in China. In doing so, the thesis brings the previously under-researched role of radio to the forefront of scholarly attention.

1.1 Why radio? An understudied and underappreciated medium

The comparative lack of research and understanding of the role and status of radio is a global issue. Scholars use terms such as 'television's ancestor', 'invisible medium', 'forgotten medium' and even 'Cinderella medium' to highlight the inferior status of radio in professional practice and academic circles in comparison to print, television, cinema, and the internet (e.g., Hampton, 2007; Guy, 2012; Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002). In his examination of radio's cultural status Peter M. Lewis concludes that radio illustrates

the paradoxical situation of ‘private possession, public neglect’ (Lewis, 2000, p. 160). Similarly, in his review of *Radio Reader: essays in the cultural history of radio* Brian O’Neill points out that ‘radio has long suffered neglect both as a cultural form and as an object of study’ (O’Neill, 2004, p. 62).

But it is Michele Hilmes (2002) who has provided one of the most eloquent analyses and explanations of why radio has found itself a largely understudied and underappreciated medium. She points to four reasons: ‘industrial distraction’, ‘cultural marginality’, ‘historiographical erasure’ and ‘theoretical impossibility’ (Hilmes, 2002, pp. 3-8). According to Hilmes, industrial distraction occurred immediately after World War Two, when television entered the media scene, distracting attention from radio and relegating radio to secondary status. As television’s picture strengthened, radio’s voice began to fade into the background (Hilmes, 2002, pp. 3-4). Radio became the place for those who were culturally excluded from the mainstream (Hilmes, 2002, pp. 4-5). Capitalist economic development was proposed as a universal modernising process with its roots in the West. Modernisation was thus seen as a singular, linear process which would operate in all developing countries regardless of history, geography or culture. This vision of modernisation treated television as an exemplar and a cheerleader of history, whereas radio was viewed as an old, defective technology (Hilmes, 2002, pp. 5-6). In the meantime, although the study of popular culture began to permeate the academy, social science turned its attention to the controversial effects of television on children and other groups. Market research in the television industry captured much of the academic research agenda because it was heavily funded (Hilmes, 2002, pp. 6-7), making it difficult to research radio.

Among the globally limited attention on radio in media and communication research, 'radio in China' is discussed even less in English-language scholarship. As is the case with elsewhere, scholarship on Chinese media suffers from a technological, urban and class-based bias (Zhao, 2008). In addition, scholars outside China face two further difficulties in studying radio. Firstly, radio as a sound medium poses language barriers for international scholars studying radio in China. Non-Chinese speakers can deduce possible messages by reading the images on Chinese television. However, it is virtually impossible to decode Chinese radio without Chinese language skills. As a result, making sense of radio in China is more challenging than making sense of television in China. The second issue is the fact that radio itself is 'a difficult medium to study' (Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002, p. xv), even for scholars with Chinese language skills. Its own inherent features of invisibility and evanescence contribute to making it difficult to study (Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002, p. xv).

The constellation of professional, social and cultural biases in different nations makes studying radio even more difficult. In the Chinese radio landscape, radio is still in a similar state of marginalisation as its American counterpart, although the growth in private car ownership has contributed to a resurgence in radio in contemporary China. Borrowing the words of Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio, radio is 'pushed to the margins of mainstream media, rarely talked about and easily overlooked' (Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002, p. xv).

Against this backdrop, one significant aim of this thesis is to bring radio onto researchers' agenda. Unless we address the inherent urban, technological, and class-based bias in media studies, we cannot construct a comprehensive picture of how social equity and media access impact on the public and private lives of ordinary Chinese

individuals. Continuing to allow such a bias also risks neglecting important questions about the media, economic stratification and social formation. My intention in this thesis is not to separate radio from other mediums, but rather to initiate a discussion of radio alongside other mediums in the media and communication sector. By focusing on radio and its interaction with social change, I seek to make radio visible, elaborate on its role and function in economic, social and cultural life, and restore it to its rightful place in the field of media and communication research. Furthermore, the focus on ‘radio in China’ in this thesis is also a move to broaden the scope of radio studies, the discussion of which have largely focused on either the public service radio or private commercial radio.

1.2 A global perspective: radio studies in general

Although limited in its scope for the reasons discussed above, existing scholarly work on radio provides theoretical, conceptual, and methodological insights relevant to my discussion of radio in China. My research is informed by three related perspectives. The first perspective draws attention to the role of radio in shaping citizen–subjects, society and culture, particularly in the 20th century. This perspective has generated a sizable volume of studies mapping and reviewing the history of radio in western countries (e.g. Goodman, 2011; Guy, 2012; Hendy, 2000, 2007, 2008; Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002; Lacey, 1996, 2008, 2013, 2014; Lewis, 2000). Drawing on the American case, Jason Loviglio (2005) examines how radio in the United States blurred the boundary between the public and the private in the first half of the 20th century. He describes how traditional gender roles, and ‘racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies and distinctions’ (Loviglio, 2005, p. 26) were challenged and negotiated through this intimate public site. Susan Douglas (2004) focuses on the practice of radio listening from the 1920s in the

United States to find out how the modes of listening shaped individual and collective identities in the United States and what she calls ‘the contours of American cultural and political history’ (Douglas, 2004, p. 7). By complicating the dominant understanding of the American commercial radio system as devoted to offering entertainment to produce consumer–citizens, David Goodman (2011) examines the inclusion of what he calls a ‘civic paradigm’ in the American radio industry in the 1930s. American radio ‘had to incorporate national and public service functions within a commercial and entertainment structure’ (Goodman, 2011, p. 32), serving as a ‘civic instrument’ (Goodman, 2011, p. 72) to produce ‘active and opinion-forming citizens’ (Goodman, 2011, p. 71).

In the southern hemisphere, Lesley Johnson (1988) examines assumptions and conventions of radio programming and its significance in daily life in the first two decades of Australian broadcasting. From this perspective of radio as a sociocultural site, my research faces such questions as: How does radio respond to class reformation and identity reconstitution in China, which has been transformed from the most equalitarian country in the socialist time to one of the most unequal countries in the post-Mao time? How do various social groups in contemporary China negotiate and relocate themselves in this sociocultural site?

The second perspective views radio as a democratic platform, through which democracy is exercised and regulated in liberal democratic nations and regions. The association between radio and democracy can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century when radio arrived, the first electronic medium in the pre-television age. Betraying belief in technological determinism, the earliest traceable study on radio expresses excitement about the potential capacity of radio to achieve democracy in the United States (Cantril & Allport, 1935). In the 1990s, the rise of listener participation

through phone-in radio formats was another significant moment to revisit the relationship between radio and democracy in the United States based on the critique of the concept of the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas, 1989). While it is normally known as talkback radio in Australia, in the United States this radio format is known and discussed under the term ‘talk radio’ (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999). I use ‘talk radio’ when I review the American case to respect the origin of the term.

At a time when decentralisation and deregulation forced the radio industry to look for cheaper formats (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999), talk radio was recognised as ‘the fastest growing medium of popular culture’ in the 1990s in the developed commercial-oriented US radio industry (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999, p. 65). In contrast to the celebratory discourse of radio’s potential to achieve an on-air public sphere, Carl Boggs and Tina Dirmann remind us that talk radio ‘represents a convergence of media spectacle, commodified culture, and postmodern diffuseness’ (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999, p. 65), and that it contributes to ‘reproduce, rather than challenge overall corporate agendas in the US’ (Boggs & Dirmann, 1999, p. 65). Discussions about the contribution and frustration of radio in promoting democracy expanded worldwide with the adoption of talk radio beyond the United States (e.g., Jost, 1994; Lee, 2002).

In the context of China, such research raises intriguing questions. For example, is the perspective that sees connections between radio and democracy applicable to China, which is not a liberal democracy? To what extent is it relevant to China, which, despite the lack of liberal democracy, nevertheless features a high degree of democratisation of knowledge production in sociocultural sectors in the neoliberal era? The Chinese media have participated widely and deeply, offering advice and suggestions about a range of issues including daily consumption, personal relationships and keeping healthy. This

raises the question: How does radio make use of public participation in the Chinese context, which is politically an authoritarian regime, but at the same time has gone through a high degree of democratisation in everyday life? What concrete forms and exercises does radio adopt in engaging with and defining the process of democratisation—if not democracy itself—in China?

The third and also the most important perspective in this thesis is the role of radio in the modernisation process. As Hemant Shah points out (2011), modernisation theory, developed in the postwar years in the United States, recognised and advocated the positive role of media in promoting modernisation in newly independent and Third World countries. Daniel Lerner, the pioneering founder of modernisation theory, considered that the ‘mass media was a multiplier and enhancer of the modernization process’ (Shah, 2011, p. 4). As Hemant Shah puts it, ‘mass media were assigned the key task of making this modernization model attractive and irresistible’ (Shah, 2011, p. 4). As radio was the most available and convenient medium in developing countries, it was at the forefront of these discussions about media and modernisation.

However, the vision of modernisation theory, as well as its practice in nation building and societal transformation in postcolonial countries, has been critiqued for its close association with American interests (Shah, 2011). In contrast to its image as a neutral, value-free and objective theory, modernisation theory has been criticised for its geopolitical bias (Shah, 2011). By examining Daniel Lerner’s intellectual trajectory, Hemant Shah demonstrates that American political and national interest was behind the universalisation of western modernisation in postcolonial countries (Lerner, et al., 1958; Shah, 2011).

More significantly, the modernisation process taking place in newly independent and developing countries after World War Two has presented circumstances and characteristics that distinguish it from western modernity. The localised modernisation process has produced what Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande call ‘varieties of second modernity’ (Beck & Grande, 2010) besides western modernity. Applied to the Chinese context, modernisation in the post Mao-era China has shaped a form of what Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande call ‘compressed modernity’ (Beck & Grande, 2010) as a result of economic reforms in the post-Mao years. While industrial modernisation in Western countries took more than a century to complete, China has managed to achieve a similar level of industrial modernity within three decades. Furthermore, while modernity in the West has been built in parallel and in conjunction with a reasonably developed social welfare system, offering its citizens with reasonable—though not always fair and equitable—access to social welfare goods and services, the compressed Chinese modernity (Beck & Grande, 2010) has been developed without it, thereby exposing Chinese individuals to diverse forms of competition, exploitation, discrimination and risk (Beck & Grande, 2010).

In relation to Chinese radio, the theory and practice of modernisation begs key questions: How has radio facilitated Chinese modernisation at each of its different historical stages? In what ways have the similarities and differences between western modernity and compressed Chinese modernity shaped the relationship between radio and society in post Mao-era China? How has radio coped with a variety of issues and tensions associated with compressed modernisation in post Mao-era China? What forms of competition, exploitation, discrimination and risk are Chinese individuals exposed to?

And in what ways does radio inform and educate Chinese individuals to deal with these problems in their everyday lives?

Yuezhi Zhao (2008) offers an illuminating and thought-provoking outline of where media is situated and what it contributes in contemporary China:

Communication is treated not only as a key dimension of Chinese politics, but also as an increasingly important sector of the Chinese economy, a site of capital accumulation, as well as a crucial means of social organization and class and identity formation in the current era of informationalized capitalism. (Zhao, 2008, pp. 10-11)

The dimensions Zhao identifies—politics, capital, class and identity—have received extensive attention in scholarship about Chinese media, with media production and consumption in China in print and television at the forefront of these investigations (e.g., Sun, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Zhang, X., 2007, 2011; Zhao, 1998, 2008, 2012; Zhu, 2008). Radio is subsumed under the general category of ‘Chinese media’ and has been largely unexplored. However, this by no means implies the absence of radio in contemporary China. On the contrary, as the available literature outlined below suggests, in the economic reform era radio in China has transformed itself into a medium that engages broadly and deeply with issues in Chinese public and individual lives.

1.3 A Chinese perspective: studies of Chinese radio

Although studies of Chinese radio by scholars outside and inside China have been patchy and inadequate, they offer crucial accounts that trace the history of radio since it was introduced into China in the early 20th century. These studies of Chinese radio can be roughly divided into three historical stages: the Republic China (1912–1949), Mao-era China (1949–1976) and post-Mao China (1978 to the present).

Studies of radio in the Republic China shed light on radio stations launched both by the Chinese and by foreigners. Carlton Benson (1996, 1999, 2004) examines how Shanghai-based radio practice enabled the commercialisation of culture in Shanghai and its interaction with the rising nationalism of the Republic China. Benson focused specifically on *Tanci*, a traditional local form of storytelling that was popular in the Shanghai region. Private commercial radio helped move *Tanci* from teahouses to the airwaves during the Republic years (Benson, 1996). Michael Krysko (2011) examines radio stations established by the Americans in Shanghai during the Republic years. Krysko (2011) argues that the contribution of these stations was to help Shanghai-based Americans strengthen their American identity rather than to facilitate diplomacy. In the case of religious radio stations launched by American Christian missionaries, these went beyond the primary aim of converting native Chinese to Christianity (Krysko, 2011, p. 128). They also delivered a number of ‘social gospel-oriented programs’ (Krysko, 2011, p. 135) such as the transmission of childcare, scientific and medical knowledge. In addition to improving the American Christian profile, religious radio stations followed the wider American move to diffuse ‘a beneficial American model of development’ into China (Krysko, 2011, p. 3).

Investigating radio in communist China, Franklin W. Houn (1961), Alan Liu (1975) and Franz Schurmann (1968) recognise radio as a propaganda apparatus in their larger discussions about ideology, organisation, national integration and modernisation. Radio was a dominant platform for disseminating ideology, and ideology was the key criterion in orientating radio program production (Liu, 1975). In most cases, the ideology was a mixture of nationalism and socialism, in which nationalism was regarded as more important (Zhao, 2009). Meanwhile, radio fostered national integration through

organised collective listening, which mobilised the people either for political movements or material production. For instance, in the case of the anti-American and aid-to-Korea campaign in the 1950s, it was reported that two million listeners (excluding audiences in the armed forces) tuned in to the reports by the representatives of the ‘Chinese Volunteers in Korea’ (Liu, 1975, pp.121-122).

In their examination of the political economy of the media in post-Mao China, Yuezhi Zhao (1998) and Daniel Lynch (1999) discuss radio as a sub-section of the media and communication sector. Daniel Lynch (1999) expresses doubt about the ability of commercialised media to achieve liberal democracy due to the renewed involvement of the post-Mao Chinese state. However, Yuezhi Zhao (1998) finds the commercialised media was compatible with the post-Mao Chinese state governance. Both dwelt on the commercialisation aspect of radio broadcasting by examining the groundbreaking radio practices adopted by Southern China-based radio stations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). Details of the economic scope, social influence and cultural consequences of the commercialisation of the radio sector are yet to be documented.

In addition to the limited studies existing of radio in China, Jia Gao (2006) offers an account of Chinese radio launched by the Chinese diaspora for overseas Chinese communities. Based on the case of 3CW Melbourne Chinese radio, Jiao Gao examines how overseas Chinese radio operates as a hybrid commercial business and community-building institution among Chinese migrants in Melbourne. A number of radio stations in China offer content to 3CW Melbourne Chinese radio. Thus, in contemporary times instead of operating separately, Chinese radio operating overseas maintains some co-operation with radio in mainland China (Gao, 2006). The information about China

offered on air allows overseas Chinese migrants to form opinions about social changes in China and at the same sustain their connection with China, arguably negotiating and reproducing their Chinese identity (Gao, 2006).

Apart from the work by scholars outside China, China-based scholars provide both historical material about the history of radio in China and observations about contemporary radio in China. One of the leading authors in this area is Zhao Yuming who, along with a number of China-based media scholars (Zhao, Y.M., et al., 2006), provides a chronological account of key moments from radio's introduction into China to post-Mao China. Sharing a common interest in the history of radio in China, a number of scholars have paid particular attention to radio at specific historical stages or in specific geographical locations. For instance, Guo Zhenzhi (1986) outlines private commercial radio in Shanghai in the Republic of China (1912–1949) before the Chinese Communist Party took power. Ha Yanqiu (1988, 1999) examines the exploitation of radio in facilitating imperialism and colonialism in Japanese-occupied northeast China during the anti-Japanese war. Zhao Zongjin (2006, 2008) examines the program content of both private radio and state-owned radio in Shanghai and Guangzhou in the Republic of China (1912–1949). Moving to the present, studies on radio are increasingly interested in emerging new radio programs, genres and practices in a fast-changing China. All in all, 'radio in China' is a rich area of study for scholars from a wide range of disciplines that include media studies, cultural studies, historical studies, sociology, political science and technological science.

Economic reforms since the late 1970s ushered in a number of transformative social processes that have produced profound impacts on class formation, gender relations, rural–urban relations, value reorientation and ways of living of Chinese

individuals and families. The most fundamental of these processes is that of privatisation. This is because privatisation has resulted in not only private property but also in the private self (Ong & Zhang, 2008). Privatisation has also taken place in tandem with the process of globalisation. Since China officially adopted its ‘open door’ policy in 1978, China has become increasingly integrated with the rest of the world not only in the economic and finance sectors, but also in the domains of culture, lifestyle and social practices. The mutual promotion and contestation between privatisation and globalisation have resulted in a form of individualisation in contemporary China. This process of individualisation shares some similarities with its Western counterparts, but has been demonstrated to be profoundly different from both the western norm and the Mao-era norm (Yan, 2010).

Against the backdrop of these large social processes, the focus of my thesis is the interaction between radio and social changes in China from the early 1990s to the present. This is the period I know best. I grew up in a rural–urban migrant family during this period, having witnessed and experienced the promises and struggles brought about by social changes in China. More significantly, the 1990s were also a time of great change in transforming radio production, distribution and listening. In comparison with the 1980s, the 1990s saw the more aggressive entry of market forces into a large number of public sectors including radio itself in China. The influence of market forces has gone beyond the economic domain to infiltrate the lives of individuals (Ong & Zhang, 2008). Through globalisation, the inflow of foreign goods and culture has introduced more individually-oriented elements and values. The process of individualisation in this decade accelerated, giving rise to a form of ‘power of the self’ as well as to prevalent feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, insecurity, loneliness and disorientation among

individuals (Ong & Zhang, 2008). Among various social processes in modernising post Mao-era China, privatisation, globalisation and individualisation have been crucial in remaking Chinese society and Chinese individuals.

1.4 Privatisation in post Mao-era China and its social consequences

One primary change reshaping China in the post Mao-era is the return of market forces, privatising chiefly the economic domains (e.g., Harvey, 2007; Zhao, 1998, 2008). The privatisation of economic domains took the shape of a restructuring of the socialist workplace, be it the factories in urban cities or farming communes in rural areas.

Positioning profit as the new primary orientation, socialist workplaces were transformed with market-defined management and competition mechanisms. As a result, the Mao-era employment system characterised by assigning individuals to particular positions in workplaces fell apart. Individuals were allowed to follow their interest; yet at the same time they were looking for employment in a competitive marketplace. Meanwhile, the restructuring of socialist workplaces withdrew the provision of public services that include health care, education and housing (Ong & Zhang, 2008). One immediate consequence that added increasing pressure to Chinese individuals was the transfer of the cost and responsibility of social welfare from the state to individuals. In post Mao-era China Chinese individuals were required to be ‘more self-regulating in areas such as job creation, education and health management’ (Kohrman, 2008, p. 136).

The withdrawal of the state from much of its earlier Maoist commitment to social provision (Kohrman, 2008; Zhang, 2008) has given way to the commercialisation of the healthcare and educational systems, which have been increasingly referred to as the health and educational industries. On the one hand, the commercialisation of the

healthcare system has democratised the provision of health care and the production of health knowledge. On the other hand, it has led to the high cost of health care, resulting in an unequal distribution of medical treatment. While a small and privileged percentage is over-treated, the majority of Chinese—especially the lower class that includes peasants and workers—are excluded from decent quality medical treatment. Parallel with the collapse of both religious and national attachments to health, health has become committed to serving individual interest in post Mao-era China. The impact is that the Chinese individual has become engaged in a constant process of selecting ways to restore and maintain their health in the face of various healthcare treatments and diverse health knowledge.

Similar issues have at the same time emerged in the commercialised educational system in post Mao-era China. Accompanying the democratisation of the provision of education, a range of inequalities has taken place in the distribution of educational resources, including the rural–urban divide and the west–east disparity. A considerable number of adolescents are deprived of educational entitlements due to their families’ low financial capacity. Moreover, the orientation of education has been transformed, with the focus falling on economic interest over social commitment. Education has been increasingly exploited as a tool for individual social mobility, a means for the individual to survive and thrive in the market economy more than a resource to achieve the greater public good and social justice.

Equally influential on Chinese individuals has been the decline of the guidance offered by family, community, society and the state, with the loosening and even the collapse of social ties established around socialist-structured workplaces. No matter how restrictive these social ties were, they provided a form of protection and instruction in

directing individual life in Mao-era China. In urban China, the *danwei* (work unit) was the place where social relations and support systems were produced, taking care of the members' personal development including marriage, family and health. For instance, the co-existing mixture of neighbourhood and collegial relationships built a form of friendship and support between individuals and families in the *danwei*-based communities. As Li Zhang points out, these communities 'included relatively large housing compounds constructed, owned, and regulated by work units' (Zhang, 2008, p. 26). In the economic reform era, the commodity-oriented housing market, in which the public purchase their residence in light of housing prices, came into shape with the decay of the former *danwei*-based residential structure and also the breakdown of established friendship and support networks. Not only were individuals pushed into the market to earn and meet their economic interests, but they were also pushed into the emerging social spaces to seek and form new relations, catering to their social needs. In the words of Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang, 'In the 1990s, citizens were urged to 'free up' (*jiefang*) their individual capacities to confront dynamic conditions in all areas of life without guidance from the state, society, or family' (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 7).

At the same time, the force of 'freeing up' (*jiefang*) (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 7) gave rise to class reformation and stratification, lowering the status of peasants and workers and forming another significant subaltern group: rural–urban migrants (Sun, 2008; Carrillo, 2011). The destinations of rural–urban migrants include big cities far from their home villages, as well as towns and small cities in the home province (Carrillo, 2011). My family history is a representative case illustrating this group—rural-urban migrants with little property, few skills, little social welfare and limited community support. In 1988, two years after I was born in a small village in Shandong

Province in North China, my parents took their four children and all their belongings and moved to the small city to which my hometown is subordinated. The harsh farming conditions, my parents' health problems and the heavy burden of four children left my parents no choice but to seek opportunities in an urban area. With neither property nor skills, my father was concerned about surviving in the city. If we had stayed in the village, at least we would not starve to death with the grain harvested from farming land. However, my mother made a firm statement, showing her determination to leave the countryside, 'I prefer begging in the city rather than farming in the village' (personal communication, 5 June 2013). In contrast to my father, she saw no hope in continuing to live on farming land. Eventually, in the late 1980s my parents moved to the small city with their four children. As the sole breadwinner, my father went through a number of self-employed businesses that included processing peanuts for private grocery stores and selling bearings to private businessmen in those years. My mother devoted herself to all the housework that included cooking, laundering, child care and all the other domestic chores. We did not have our own home, resulting in frequent moves from one place to another whenever the landlords decided to take back their properties.

1.5 Globalisation in post Mao-era China and its sociocultural consequences

There is no single definition capable of explaining what globalisation refers to and what it leads to. Instead, globalisation encompasses a wide range of processes in—but not limited to—the political, economic, social, and cultural domains. Globalisation in politics has given rise to global governance, which has been challenging and negotiating with conventional concepts of nation-state-bounded governance. Globalisation in the economy has led to a global market, which has enabled the global flow of capital, labour, goods and information, generating enormous wealth as well as creating massive

disparity across nations, regions and continents. Globalisation in the social domain has intensified the social site, with various sets of values, beliefs, behaviours and lifestyles originating from different societies competing, contesting and negotiating with each other. Globalisation in the cultural domain has accelerated cultural exchanges on a global scale, with a diverse range of cultural products flowing in multiple directions, transgressing multiple boundaries, and negotiating with local contexts on a daily basis.

Maintaining its control over the domestic political domain, in post Mao-era China the Chinese Communist Party-led regime approved and encouraged globalisation primarily in the economic domain (A, 2014). The economic reforms and openness policy in late 1970 (A, 2014, p. 52) was the official beginning of globalisation in China, which ‘emphasized privatisation, deregulation and government budget cuts’ (Beneria, et al., 2000 & Jaggar, 2001, in Wesoky, 2007, p. 340). Globalisation in China began accelerating from the early 1990s when the Deng-led top leadership reaffirmed the return of market forces. China’s entry into the WTO in 1999 marked its wider and larger participation in and competition with the global market. Alongside the economic significance to the Chinese government, WTO membership is ‘a matter of national pride—restoration of China’s rightful place in the international system’ (Zhao, 2003, in Yin, 2006, p. 37).

China’s close integration into the global economy has largely transformed Chinese social life. Post Mao-era Chinese everyday life has seen the introduction and popularising of a wide range of consumption items originating from foreign countries, western countries in particular. Foreign consumption items ranging from food and clothes to appliances, transportation and leisure have all found a large market and high profit in the Chinese landscape. After their establishment in China, western food—

especially fast food giants such as McDonald's and KFC—have become popular especially among the Chinese upper and middle class. Western fashions such as jeans, business suits and dresses have gained wide popularity among Chinese individuals; at the same time, Chinese clothes have been growing more colourful and diverse, departing from the Mao-era dominance of blue and grey. With the localising of white good manufacturing, appliances like washing machines and fridges soon found their place in urban Chinese households and later with rural Chinese families. A similar process has also taken place in private car manufacture and consumption. With increasing wealth generation and accumulation in post Mao-era China, the Chinese upper and middle class have held both interest and purchasing power in international car brands such as Volkswagen, Toyota and BMW. As consumption has been increasingly established as an orientation in Chinese individual life, all of these consumption transformations have profoundly shaped and defined the Chinese social domain.

Beyond their close integration with global trends in social life, the cultural domain in post Mao-era China has multiplied and grown more complicated with increasing communication and exchange with foreign cultures from near and far. The media has long been a crucial domain in the globalisation of culture. Foreign popular cultural forms, especially those from western countries, such as print works, music, movies, radio and television genres, formats and practices have been widely dispersed and quickly taken up in Chinese cultural life. The Chinese media initially exploited foreign popular culture as a source of attraction with the aim of appealing to the audience at a time when Chinese media was pushed to the market for survival in the early years of the economic-reform era (Lynch, 1999; Zhang, X., 2011). Daniel Lynch (1999) and Xiaoling Zhang (2011) consider globalisation of the media in post Mao-era

China as a close association with commercialisation (Lynch, 1999; Zhang, X., 2011). The past years have seen the commercial success of a growing number of imported cultural productions and the subsequent increasing localisation of imported cultural genres and formats.

The negotiation and accommodation with the globalisation of culture suggest what Mike Featherstone called ‘global cultures in the plural’ (Featherstone, 1990, p. 10) instead of one homogenised global culture. The most visible globalisation of culture in Chinese media is taking place in television, which has the widest reach of all media in post Mao-era China. Chinese television has broadcast a range of original foreign genres including popular music, foreign drama and documentaries. More than that, it has at the same time produced its own television programs after purchasing the copyright on successful television formats from foreign countries. The reality show is a typical contemporary case of the practice of adopting regional and global television formats to produce programs that fit the Chinese context. Changes are made in both content and format. Despite and perhaps precisely because of these changes, a range of reality shows such as musical contests, talent shows, dating shows and parenting shows have earned both reputations and profits among Chinese viewers inside and outside China. As the media’s capacity to produce, circulate and appreciate culture has been enormously strengthened with technological advances, the time is ripe for further close investigation of the role of the media in the globalisation of culture in post Mao-era China.

1.6 Individualisation in post Mao-era China and its social consequences

Economic privatisation and globalisation in post Mao-era China has inevitably led to the articulation of a renewed individualisation. Prior to economic reforms,

individualisation had occurred in Mao era China when individuals were detached from conventional social structures such as the feudal family kinship and the tribe (Yan, 2010). However, this individualisation was partial as individuals were placed into a state-defined social structure (Yan, 2010), where individual effort and achievement were encouraged for the collective interest, be it the rural commune, urban workplace or the nation. Viewed from the macro perspective, the superiority of the national interest over individual interest led to the subordination of individuals to the state. More specifically, the strong tie between individuals and their institutions generated the existence of individual in a collective form. What resulted from this partial individualisation was that individual life was organised around the collective unit in which individuals were geographically located.

Economic reforms in post Mao-era China have largely transformed this partial individualisation into a wider form of individualisation, in which individuals are pushed into the market for their own survival and development. A primary feature is a new wave of what Yunxiang Yan calls ‘disembedment’ (Yan, 2010, p. 493), which frees individuals from the previously state-defined socialist economy, structure and network. Individuals are allowed to pursue their individual interests over collective interests. The notion of ‘a life of one’s own’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 54) rose to become the orientation and the principle for organising and achieving personal life. As a result, individuals prioritise the satisfaction of individual interests whenever making a decision and making a move in everyday life.

Renewed individualisation has two key dimensions. It represents a transformation from Mao-era partial individualisation (Yan, 2010) as individual interest is increasingly pursued as a priority over collective interest. At the same time it is

distinguished from contemporary western individualisation because it is occurring in a context where the crucial factors that create the western mode of individualism—cultural democracy and the welfare state—are absent (Yan, 2010; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Yan, 2009). In the Chinese context, this renewed individualisation results in what Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang called ‘an enforced sense of autonomy’ (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 8) and a form of independence with either little preparation or little protection. In many cases, this power of the self without socially assured confidence leads to ‘loneliness and disorientation’ (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 18). In order to survive and thrive in the market place, individuals are motivated to seek information about the surrounding environment, and guidance for themselves from all kinds of available resources (Ong & Zhang, 2008). Among all of these resources, the media is the most accessible and least expensive one for the public, across all social classes. In the case of radio in China, it has developed and expanded its role as a provider of advice in a range of areas that include personal relationships, health and lifestyle.

One particular consequence from the processes of privatisation, globalisation and individualisation is the rise of the discourse of self-responsibility and self-reliance. This discourse has been widely promoted in both transnational and Chinese media. Besides global influences, the process of individualisation in post Mao-era China has played a crucial role in the rise of this discourse of self-responsibility and self-reliance. In post Mao-era China, individuals occupy an independent status yet have neither financial nor social support. While the lack of support may stem from different circumstances, estrangement from both public institutions and personal relationships (e.g. to family) is a normal one, making life difficult for many Chinese individuals, especially those in the lower social class. With increasing tension in social ties, the rational response has been

to develop a sense of self-reliance. This sense of self-reliance was not only passed on from the older generation to the younger generation, but is also rooted in each generation's own experience.

1.7 Social changes and radio in post Mao-era China

Radio in post Mao-era China has been profoundly transformed in response to the large processes of social changes outlined above. First and foremost, the entry of market forces into China's media and communication sector has changed the content and form of radio in post Mao-era China. Like other media in China in the reform era (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998, 2008; Zhang, X., 2011), radio has shifted from a state-owned and state-funded institution to a state-owned media with commercial orientation. In Mao-era China, radio was defined as a propaganda instrument of the Chinese Communist Party in a hierarchically and bureaucratically organised national system (Liu, 1975). In the late 1970s, media reform—mirroring the broader social and economic reform—resulted in radio communication services being largely liberated from powerful political control. However, what was withdrawn along with powerful political control was also state funding. Consequently, radio stations needed to reorient themselves to search for funding in the market and were led to devote airtime to creating revenue whenever and wherever possible.

The production of radio broadcasting has been growing more sensitive, responsive and adaptable to social changes because of this need to make a profit. Its response to social changes has given rise to a wave of radio production reforms since the early 1990s. Zhao Yuezhi points out that radio stations have two ways to expand their scale: 'by the establishment of new stations by government administrations that have not had their own stations, usually in municipalities and counties, or by the addition of new

channels to existing stations' (Zhao, 1998, p. 94). The state-defined radio system allows only one radio station under each level of governmental administration, and radio stations were established at the four levels of national, provincial, municipal, and county administration. As a result, the second way of launching new channels has become the primary choice for most radio stations as they attempt to attract and expand their listening audience. Radio stations have engaged intensively in producing volumes of programs, both to fill the proliferated airtime resulting from the launch of multiple channels (Zhao, 1998) and to attract the increasingly fragmented and stratified listening audience.

The 'Zhujiang model' (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998) was the pioneer in this wave of radio reform, in which new programs and genres emerged with the aim of targeting listeners with purchasing power. Zhujiang is a city located in Guangdong province in eastern coastal China. Its geographical location close to Hong Kong provides privileged access to Hong Kong-based radio broadcasting, which offers both competition and opportunities. For instance, the 'Zhujiang model' introduced call-in programs, which proved popular among the local public in a limited urban area (Zhao, 1998). These telephone-based public participation shows were generally called hotline programs, the content of which varied from news, talk and entertainment to education (Liu, S.Q., 1994; Wang, P., 1996; Xu, G.P., 1993; Zhou, H.J., 1993). Members of the public who could afford telephones were encouraged to call in to report news, discuss topics with invited officials, complain about consumption issues, ask questions about health and legal issues, seek help for their personal troubles, attend quiz shows and request songs (Liu, S.Q., 1994; Wang, P., 1996; Xu, G.P., 1993; Zhou, H.J., 1993).

In the 1990s and nationwide, a wide range of new channels came on air producing a diversity of content, genres and formats. Channels are often established to specialise in a central genre such as music, storytelling, and traditional Chinese opera. The contents, genres and formats have been largely transformed from the perceived monopoly of propaganda to increasingly cater to individual needs and interests. With the recent comeback of radio in urban areas due to the rise in private car ownership, radio is involved in renewing program schedules and producing innovative practices, responding to class reformation and identity reconstitution in contemporary China.

In addition to home-grown genres and practices, radio in post Mao-era China has constantly looked to its western counterparts as a reference point, and western cultural production remains a source of supply. The importation of media production from the West became permitted politically following the economic reforms. At that time the open market and technological advances made the flow of information into and out of China difficult to control. The inflow from the West to China in the radio domain began with program exchanges. As Daniel Lynch points out, since the early 1980s both national radio stations and provincial and municipal radio stations began exchanging programs with foreign countries and regions, in particular classical and popular music programs (Lynch, 1999, p. 123).

It is not only radio production but radio listening that has been transformed in post-Mao era China. This is due to a number of processes, the most crucial of which are the privatisation and individualisation of listening and the digitalisation of listening. As in the West, in contemporary China radio listening is now a private and individual activity. In contrast, in Mao-era China, political control, economic shortages and technological under-development led to collective listening as the dominant mode. Only

a small percentage of the population could own radio receivers, principally Communist Party members, governmental and army officials and affluent urban families. The perception that owning a radio receiver was a sign of modernity continued until the late 1970s when radio receivers became widely affordable, and television sets rose to replace radio receivers as the new sign of modernity. Post Mao-era China has witnessed radio listening shift to become a private and individual activity. Economic growth and technological improvements resulted in the increasing availability of radio receivers in individual households. Meanwhile, watching television has replaced listening to radio as a family activity. Radio listening has become an individual activity in contemporary China, taking place in private and mostly alone.

Digitalisation has had an equally powerful impact on modes of listening. The digitalisation of radio listening features the rising adoption of a range of listening devices including digital radio receivers, in-car radios, computer-based online platforms, and mobile phone-based applications. The digitalisation of radio listening carries the promise of enabling individuals to listen to radio broadcasting at anytime and in any place provided individuals possess one of the digital listening devices. More than that, radio promises to become a 'more participatory medium' (Hendy, 2000, p. 231), encouraging more audience interaction. Radio has therefore multiplied and pluralised to a number of spaces, in what Last Moyo named 'virtual space, network space, mobile space while at the same time remaining a physical space' (Moyo, 2013, p. 214).

As a result of a range of social and technological changes, the once unified mass of listeners in China has been fragmented and stratified, with different radio listening times, locations, preferences and relationships with radio listening. In other words, listening to radio broadcasting has been economically, socially and technologically

structured. While listening to radio broadcasting via radio receivers remains popular among the elderly, the rural and rural–urban migrant workers, listening to radio broadcasting on the in-car radio and personal computer-based application is favored by middle class listeners.

China-based market research institutions conduct regular audience research into the specific composition, substance and characteristic of radio listeners in contemporary China. One 2013 statistic (Niu, C.Y., 2014) offers a partial picture of the fragmentation and stratification of listeners in post Mao-era China. In 2013, the listening audience was 0.672 billion, an increase of 1.8% on the 2012 listening audience. In terms of the rural–urban divide, urban listeners accounted for 0.447 billion, with rural listeners making up the remaining 0.225 billion. Preference for listening to radio broadcasting through the in-car radio reached 34.2%, an increase of 10% in comparison with 2012. The group aged over 50 accounted for almost 50% of those who listened to radio broadcasting via a radio receiver. The group aged 30 to 49 accounted for over 60% of the individuals who listened to radio broadcasting on the in-car radio, including taxi drivers and private car owners. The group aged 20 to 39 (featuring students) accounted for over 60% of those who listened to radio broadcasting via personal computers. The group aged 20 to 29 accounted for over 60% of listeners who used ipads and smart phones for radio listening. The occupations of this group include company employees, middle-level managers, the self-employed and students (Niu, C.Y., 2014).

These transformations in the production of and listening to radio broadcasting in post Mao-era China pose urgent questions about the interaction between radio broadcasting and social changes in post Mao-era China. What specific radio genres, formats and practices has radio produced in post Mao-era China? To what extent have

the old genres, formats and practices been changed or maintained? What kind of social identity does a specific radio genre, format and practice participate in constructing? More significantly, how does the transformation of radio become part of, and further contribute to, the processes of privatisation, globalisation and individualisation in post Mao-era China?

1.8 Sources and methods

To engage with these questions, I develop my discussion of radio genres, formats and practices using a set of ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. The ‘what’ question refers to an exploration of what each radio genre, format and practice does and sounds like. The ‘why’ question refers to my investigation into the political, social, economic and cultural circumstances in which these genres, formats and practices are created. The ‘how’ question delves into the ways in which new radio genres, formats and practices both constitute and influence social changes in China. I pursue these questions through three pathways.

Firstly, I make use of a large volume of written and audio archives on official websites and academic databases. On official websites, I access the history of radio in Shanghai offered by a Shanghai municipal office dedicated to document the history of radio and television in Shanghai (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*). Through academic databases, I find articles which were written in the 1950s and onwards, describing and discussing radio production and listening in different historical periods in China. These accounts were written by China-based officials and academics. Besides, I manage to acquire online a few of radio programs such as news, musical programs and crosstalks broadcast in Mao China. One primary use of these archives is to indicate the arrangements and the kinds of radio programs and the purposes for which they were

produced. Another use of these archives is to locate the historical context in which radio institutions were established and radio programs were produced. The radio archive allows me to identify the foundation on which contemporary radio evolved and the extent to which it has been transformed. Apart from its contribution to an historical account of radio in China, the archival recordings and documents also enable me to establish the background from which the radio genres, formats and practices discussed in the individual chapters of this thesis emerged and how the Chinese public and the academic community responded to these radio productions.

Secondly, I make extensive use of the program content of four kinds of radio genres and practices: news, late night talkback, health infomercial and drive radio. This requires the close and critical reading of on-air programs to examine the content and format of each radio production, scrutinising their representational strategies. This qualitative content analysis involves three steps. The first step selects appropriate cases from a sample of each radio production based on their representativeness and availability. The second step involves listening to and transcribing selected cases. The third step involves critical analysis, based on the listening experience and transcription. The focus on radio genres, formats and practices broadens the gaze to both national and local radio stations instead of limiting it to a specific radio station. The radio stations involved in this thesis include radio stations in both economically developed and less developed regions. Based on the Chinese radio system structure, radio stations of four levels, which refer to national-provincial-municipal- county, feature the cases of such as China National Radio, Beijing Radio Station, Shanxi Provincial Radio Station, Zhengzhou Municipal Radio Station, and some local radio stations without identification for the purpose of protecting interviewees. Through this wide coverage of radio stations

nationwide I offer a comprehensive picture of the past and present of radio genres, formats and practices in post Mao-era China.

Thirdly, I conduct in-depth interviews with a dozen of China-based radio-related individuals, including radio journalists, program hosts and advertising agents. Interviews with radio journalists reveal the news practitioners' perspectives on their role in radio news production as well as their relationships with policy makers, decision-makers and listeners. For instance, three journalists working in China National Radio offer crucial accounts of how they produce radio news in daily practice and what they take into consideration when gathering news sources, selecting news material and deciding on the final news output. Interviews with radio hosts inform my examination of how late night talkback radio deals with individuals and the public at large. A local radio host who has worked on late night talkback radio since early 1990s offers his experience and interpretation of the emergence, rise, change and role of late night talkback radio in post Mao-era China. Interviews with advertising agents shed light on the extent to which market forces shape the production of radio broadcasts in post Mao-era China. A car-advertising agent explains the strong interest the automotive industry has in radio and the move to establish a commercial alliance with the radio industry. These face-to-face interviews were undertaken during fieldwork in China in 2013.

In addition to the face-to-face interviews, I also interviewed some participants through social media to suit the interviewees' preference. For instance, a technician working in a local radio and television station offers background information about the impact of commercialisation on the operation of a local radio and television station in the 1990s. A medical representative offers his inside knowledge on the promotion of medical products on radio in post Mao-era China. Four individuals who have lived

through Mao-era China offer the accounts of their living and listening experiences in both Mao-era and post Mao-era China.

1.9 Structure and scope of the thesis

This thesis consists of six further chapters. Chapter two critically reviews the history of radio in the Republic and Mao-era China. It traces the first half of the 20th century as far back as the available archives allow, investigating how radio was introduced and applied in China. It shows how different players became involved in the production of and listening to radio at a time when they fought to decide China's fate. It further identifies the role of radio in nation building, national development and modernisation in the years before the economic reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The significance of this historical review in chapter two is three-fold. Firstly, it attempts to make the early soundscape visible, examining the different structures and uses of radio under different political regimes. Secondly, this review demonstrates how the structure, production and role of radio was largely defined by China's political power shift from a semi-colonial and semi-feudal nation to a nation led by the Chinese Communist Party. Thirdly, it paves the ground for the discussion in the subsequent chapters of how the orientation, production, circulation and reception of radio has changed as China has been reformed from a socialist country to a more privatised country.

Regardless of political, economic and media systems, news is considered the most authoritative and important genre in national radio in many societies. Chapter three focuses on the changes and continuities in China's news radio. On the one hand, news in China has always been the most tightly controlled media genre. On the other hand, radio news in the economic reform era has had to reckon with market considerations for

purposes of generating profit and economic survival. What were the determining factors in the production of radio news in Mao-era China? What new determining factors have emerged and how do they negotiate the tension between the state and the market? To scrutinise radio news in both Mao-era and post Mao-era China I pursue these question through a discussion of Voice of China (*Zhongguo Zhisheng*), the chief channel of China National Radio. Voice of China is the primary national platform through which the Chinese Communist Party and central government release their intentions and decisions to the public. More significantly, Voice of China has attracted renewed appeal among an increasing listening audience in recent years. The questions I ask in this chapter are: How was radio news produced and listened to in Mao-era China? How is radio news produced and listened to in post Mao-era China?

Apart from the politically significant and permanent genre of news, a range of new genres, formats and practices have emerged on radio in post Mao-era China. In particular, radio stations in post Mao-era China are much more proactive than ever before to provide information and knowledge about personal issues, health and cars. The moves radio stations have been taking in participating in defining the sociocultural meaning, production, and consumption of intimacy, health and cars are nationwide and far-reaching. They are closely associated with Chinese individuals's expanding desires growing out of the processes of privatization, globalization and individualization. These spaces on radio function as contested sites in which the prioritised concerns in post Mao-era China are produced, negotiated and multiplied. In chapters four, five and six I focus on a new radio genre and practice in each chapter, asking: Why and how did each of these radio genres and practices emerge in post Mao-era China? What concern does each

of them address and speak to? What is information presented in each genre, and how do listeners respond to it?

Chapter four focuses on late night talkback radio to investigate the role of radio as a technology of intimacy in catering to Chinese individuals in post Mao-era China. Late night talkback radio engages individuals in on-air telephone conversations and deals with their personal issues such as courtship, marriage and family conflicts. Talkback is one of the earliest programs in the advice genre in the media landscape in post Mao-era China and was at one time a most popular program type. The years from the 1990s to 2000s saw the emergence, rise and fall of late night talkback radio in China as Chinese people experienced increasing privatisation and individualisation in everyday life. Through a few case studies, this chapter examines how late night talkback radio functioned as what Mike Featherstone called a ‘disembodied mode of interaction’ (Featherstone, 1995, p. 233) yet at the same time was capable of producing intimacy. Late night talkback radio was a crucial site where numerous listeners, the majority of whom were college and university students and migrant workers, accessed advice on matters related to love and personal feelings. These programs engaged both on-air callers and off-air listeners in a new—and often gendered—form of socialisation which was previously unknown to Chinese radio listeners. This chapter considers the mass production of intimacy on radio and investigates how this cultural form facilitated the relocation and reorientation of Chinese individuals in their personal life when they were caught up in their quest for individual survival, existential meaning and social mobility in post-Mao China.

Moving from matters of the heart to matters of the body, chapter five discusses health infomercial radio, examining the role of radio as an advice media in catering to

physical health in post Mao-era China. Health infomercial radio emerged in the early 1990s, when both radio and healthcare domains were commercialised in China. It features the on-air promotion of medical products packaged as the provision of medical information. Radio has established a close commercial tie with the production and consumption of health information since the commercialisation of both radio and the healthcare domain in post Mao-era China. This chapter revisits China in the 1990s to identify the specific circumstances in which health has grown to be a primary site for cultivating the self-responsibility discourse. The chapter studies the elevation of the ‘expert’ as an authority figure and the democratising of medical knowledge production in post Mao-era China. I explore how health infomercial radio generates a range of physical and emotional experiences including expectation, frustration, disappointment, calculation and resistance among Chinese individuals and how it contributes to the production of additional risks and the privatisation of the regime of healthy living (Sun, 2014b) in contemporary China.

Moving away from the controversial domain of health infomercial radio, chapter six turns to drive radio in contemporary China. Drive radio as a distinct radio channel emerged in the 1990s in urban China, defined by its primary concern for car-based traffic flow and road infrastructure. Recent years have seen a growing interest in drive radio, which produces and promotes the consumption of a privately owned car-based lifestyle around what is often referred to as ‘automobility’ (Urry, 2004; Featherstone, 2004; Walks, 2014). With the early 1990s as a key moment, this chapter explores the transformation of automobility towards a private mode encompassing the private ownership and use of cars in post Mao-era China. Privately owned cars have been increasingly replacing taxis, with private drivers becoming the main road users in urban

China. Listening to the radio has been increasingly taking place in the private mobile site the car offers. By analysing several programs on drive radio, this chapter investigates how drive radio in urban China constructs a form of on-air auto-space promoting private car purchase and use, cultivating cosmopolitan leisure consumption and negotiating consumer-citizenship inclusion and exclusion. It sheds light on how radio in contemporary China plays a role in class reformation and identity reconstitution with the private car construed as a significant visible signifier of economic and social status.

This study is one of the first systematic and comprehensive attempts to make ‘radio in China’ visible not only in scholarship in radio studies but in media studies in general. In doing so, this thesis offers a much needed case study of how radio operates in ways that are at once globalised and localised in a given society in the contemporary world. In telling this story of radio in China, I also demonstrate how a number of dominant forces—political, social, economic and technological—interact to shape radio, and how it, in turns, shapes the social and private lives of individuals in China. In doing so, I hope to make a contribution to addressing a significant blind spot in media studies, arising from the economic, social, cultural and technological bias against radio. ■

Chapter 2

Radio in the Republic and Mao-era China: political change, market retreat and cultural reform

2.1 The role of radio in the formation of modern China

Soon after it was introduced into China by political and commercial forces in the early 20th century, radio became engaged in nation-building, national development and the process of modernisation. It was mobilised to establish top-down communication between the government and the public. It was also involved in developing commercial culture in a limited number of cities. It witnessed the regime transition from the Republic of China (1912–1949) to Mao-era China (1949–1976), through its involvement in the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) and civil war (1945–1949) in the first half of the 20th century. In the second half of the century it also participated in political establishment, socialist construction and material production. Radio listening was crucial in forming Mao-era citizens as political subjects. More relevant to the everyday life of Chinese listeners, radio was a carrier of modernity. Across many years of the 20th century, radio was the first form of electronic communication technology that enabled the Chinese to experience a sense of novelty, excitement, hope, and progress. In addition to a bike, a sewing machine and a watch, a radio receiver was a significant domestic item for Mao-era Chinese families (‘Zhongguo Jiating Xiaofei’, 1994).

In order to better understand the continuities and transformations of radio broadcasting from the past to contemporary China, I provide an overview of the production of and listening to radio broadcasting in China in both the Republican and Mao period in the 20th century. More specifically, the chapter reviews radio during the Republic of China (1912–1949) and the socialist decades (1949–1976). For the purpose of the discussion in this chapter, the Republic of China is alternatively referred to as the Republic China in comparison with the following Mao period. In the Republic of China, the central location of power shifted from the Northern government (*Beiyang zhengfu*)—a group of Northern Navy officers who ruled China from 1912 to 1927—to the Nationalist Party (*Guomin dang*, 1927–1949). This was replaced in 1949 by the Chinese Communist Party, which led China into the socialist decades. I draw on a variety of sources, including both official accounts and individual accounts that document radio broadcasting in China in these two periods. The official accounts include the historical material released by national and local governments and documents written by China-based media scholars (e.g., Guo, Zh.Zh., 1986; Zhao, Y. M., 1982a, 1982b, 1982c; Zhao, Y.M., et al., 2006; Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989; Zhao, Z.J., 2006 & 2008). In particular, the official online documentation of the history of radio and television in Shanghai (Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi, n.d.) provides rich information in tracing the development of radio broadcasting in Shanghai in the Republic era. Besides written data, I have also managed to access online some original and recorded radio broadcasts from these two periods.

Wherever relevant, I will compare the development of radio in China with discussions of how radio broadcasting was used in the first half of the 20th century in western countries such as Britain, the United States and Germany (Oswell, 1998; Lacey, 1996 & 2013; Badenoch, 2008). I will also engage further with work on radio

broadcasting in the Republic China conducted by scholars outside China such as Michael Krysko (Krysko, 2011) and Carlton Benson (1996, 1999, 2004) on private commercial radio in Shanghai, both of whose studies have been mentioned in chapter one.

2.2 Locating radio in the Republic China

How radio technology was used, and for what purpose, has been subject to specific political and economic circumstances in different national landscapes. In western countries, radio broadcasting in a range of models was launched as a communicative service to the public, to assist citizens to participate in democracy, modernisation and nation building. In particular, the American commercial model and the British public model contested, confronted, negotiated and at the same time mutually supported one another, forming what Michele Hilmes calls ‘historical dualism’ (Hilmes, 2003, p. 13). Taking place at the same time period, the entry of radio into public and private lives in China was far more complicated and intense under semi-colonial rule. The diffusion of radio technology and the process of negotiation in establishing its roles and functions were closely associated with the location and strength of the dominant political and economic powers at both domestic and international levels. This section begins with the involvement of political forces in shaping the role and use of radio in the Republic China.

2.2.1 The involvement of political forces in radio: from military applications to an instrument of governance

After the Northern Warlords government was constituted, it issued the first telecommunication regulation in 1915, establishing that both wired and wireless telecommunication was managed by the state (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a). Wireless equipment was primarily used for military purposes, and was not allowed to be imported into

China without permission from the Department of the Ground Army (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a). The regulation also prohibited foreigners from launching radio stations in China without permission from the Chinese authorities (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a).

The adoption of radio technology for military purposes in China was dependent on conditional support from the leading developed western countries. The diffusion of radio technology in China thus became a contested site, in which international forces negotiated with the Chinese government in an attempt to establish monopoly status over the control of radio technology in China. After the First World War, three contracts signed between different departments of the Northern Warlords government and western countries (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a) indicated the intervention of western capitalist countries in China and the tension between capitalist countries about the development of wireless telecommunication in China.

The three contracts are well documented in Zhao Yuming's (1982a) historical account recording the origin and progress of radio telecommunication in the Republic China. In February 1918, the Department of the Navy signed a contract with Japan, in which Japan agreed to help launch a wireless radio station in China on the condition that no other countries were allowed to launch wireless radio stations in China for 30 years (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a). In August 1918, the Department of the Ground Army signed a contract with Britain, in which Britain loaned China money for the purchase of wireless telegraph equipment. The condition was that China was restricted to purchasing the wireless equipment only from the Britain until the loan was paid back. China was prohibited from turning to other countries for assistance in repairing and producing wireless telegraph equipment (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a). In 1921, the Department of Communication signed a contract with the United States, allowing China to receive a

loan from the United States for the construction of wireless communication in China. The condition was that the United States would join the Chinese government in managing the radio stations if China failed to repay the loan within 10 years (Zhao, Y.M., 1982a).

The international wireless telecommunication conference, held in 1926 in Washington D.C. in the United States, was a crucial moment in offering the Northern Warlords government a chance to recognise the role of radio broadcasting as a tool for communicating with the general public. The Northern Warlords government sent representatives to attend the conference (Wang, N. & Yu, J.Q., 2013). After the conference, the Chinese representatives visited the United States, European countries and Japan, where they inspected the development of radio broadcasting as a communication service catering to the public. When they returned to China, they advocated the use of radio broadcasting in China to facilitate communication between the government and the governed (Yu, Shi.L., 1989, pp. 183-191). The first Chinese government-run radio station was established in Harbin in northeast China in October 1926 (Yu, Shi.L., 1989). The next year witnessed the establishment of another government-run radio station in Beijing (Yu, Shi. L., 1989).

Despite the regime change to the Nationalist Party-led government in 1927, the role of radio broadcasting in facilitating state governance and control was confirmed and strengthened. Government-run radio stations were launched in other locations, especially in politically, economically and culturally significant regions in Eastern China, where the financial capacity allowed the purchase of radio equipment and devices from overseas.

After the Nationalist Party-led Chinese regime chose Nanjing in Eastern China as its national capital, a central national radio station was launched there in 1928 (Zhu, Y., 2004). In 1932, its transmission power was strengthened to 75 kw, which was claimed to make it the most powerful transmission in East Asia and the third most powerful in the world (Zhu, Y., 2004). Transmission was claimed to cover the majority of the nation and even to reach the United States, Australia, India and the Soviet Union (Lin, X.R., 1999, pp. 5-8). In Shanghai, government-run radio stations were launched in the 1930s, sometime later than private commercial radio, which had been launched in the 1920s and developed rapidly (Shanghai Gangbo Dianshi Zhi, n.d.). After the launch of radio broadcasting by the Shanghai Municipal Department of Communication in 1935, the Shanghai government launched radio broadcasting in 1936 with principally to publicise governmental construction and popularise civic education (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.).

To the south of Shanghai, Guangdong, which was another Nationalist Party power centre, set up government-run radio broadcasting in 1929 after overcoming financial difficulties in purchasing radio transmission equipment (Zhao, Z.J., 2008). Zhao Zongjin's historical work (2008) on radio broadcasting in Nationalist Party-led Guangdong provides an account of how the production of and listening to government-run radio broadcasting was regulated in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, in the Republic China. According to Zhao Zongjin's work (2008), the Guangzhou government launched seven radio stations during the Republic years. Instead of excluding commercial interests, the Guangzhou government encouraged these radio stations to seek funding from commercial businesses. Meanwhile, the government banned the launch and operation of privately owned radio stations out of concern that

privately owned radio stations might be used for political and military purpose (Zhao, Z.J., 2008). In order to promote radio listening, the Guangdong provincial government relaxed the restriction on the importation of radio receivers, requiring local citizens to register when they purchased one (Zhao, Z.J., 2008).

The June 1937 statistics show that the number of Nationalist Party-led government-run radio stations reached 23 and that transmission power reached 110 kw, accounting for more than 94% of the total transmission power nationwide (Zhu, Y., 2004). Efforts to build and maintain government-run radio stations were patchy during the ongoing anti-Japanese war. In 1944 when the anti-Japanese war drew to an end, the number of government-run radio stations returned to 23, with transmission power reaching 154 kw (Zhu, Y., 2004).

Wang Xueqi and Shi Hansheng (1988) offer a historical account of the content production and regulation of government-run radio stations from the years 1928 to 1949. Government-run radio stations concentrated on news, education and entertainment. In addition to informing the public about current affairs, the main concern of the news was to give information about the political establishment, 'delivering the party doctrine and the leader's speech to enlighten the public, and offering explanation on nation-building strategy and institution to inspire the public awareness' (Wang, X.Q & Shi, H.Sh., 1988, p. 98). To widen the spread of news to local members of the Nationalist Party, radio news was written down on blackboards and printed on newspapers so it could be read (Wang, X.Q. & Shi, H.Sh., 1988, p. 97). The educational themes included national culture, Mandarin and English language, natural science, social science and religion. Entertainment included the Peking Opera, national and foreign music and radio drama. Meanwhile, in the interests of political cohesion, cultural development, and nation

building, the Nationalist Party took action to regulate content on radio stations that were not part of the governmental-run system. These radio stations, which were placed under regulation, were mainly private commercial radio stations.

After the launch of the Central Radio Station, the Nationalist Party-led central authority started to issue increasing numbers of regulations about the production of content on private commercial radio stations. This will be discussed further in the following section. The Nationalist Party regulation of radio broadcasting in Shanghai is roughly documented in online documentation of the history of radio and television in Shanghai (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). This account shows that the Department of Communication ordered that from the first of May 1935 all radio stations should broadcast in Mandarin. Control was tightened in 1936 as the state council ordered that all radio stations should relay the radio programs of the Central Radio Station from 20:00 to 21:05 (except Sunday). Relayed content included brief news, current affairs commentaries, celebrity speeches, academic speeches, plays and music. Later, the Shanghai Telegraph Bureau established pre-broadcasting censorship, which ordered that the program scripts of all radio stations should be reviewed in advance by the responsible governmental institutions including the Shanghai Telegraph Bureau, the Social Affair Bureau and the Education Bureau (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.).

2.2.2 The involvement of market forces in radio: the rise of a commercial radio culture in Shanghai

The particular political, economic and cultural circumstances of Shanghai in the first half of the 20th century provided appropriate conditions for the emergence of a private commercial mode of radio broadcasting in China. China's defeat in the first Opium War against Britain in 1843 forced it to open up Shanghai to foreign trade and settlement as one of five commercial ports (Dai, An.G., 1987; Liu, J.T., 1992; Wang, M.Y., n.d.). The

commercial development of Shanghai attracted a constant inflow of capital, labour and goods from home and abroad. As Shanghai was well established as a trade, business and financial centre in the Asian region in the early 20th century, it turned into a migrant city, populated by both domestic and international migrants from places near and far (Wang, M.Y., n.d.). A number of foreign concessions such as the British and the French were established and developed in Shanghai (Wang, M.Y., n.d.). Both domestic and international commerce found their markets and competed with one another, transforming Shanghai into a consumption-oriented city. Meanwhile, domestic and international migrants to Shanghai brought with them their local culture and customs (Wang, Y. 2007).

Radio devices were introduced as commercial products into Shanghai when the United States promoted its open markets policy (Krysko, 2011, p. 18), with the aim of exporting its domestic-made products to the overseas market. After selling radio receivers and components imported from the United States in Shanghai (Guo, Zh.Zh., 1986; Krysko, 2011), in 1922 the American businessman E.G. Osborn then launched the first radio station, attempting to cultivate public interest in purchasing radio devices (Guo, Zh. Zh., 1986; Krysko, 2011). Named the Osborn radio station, the station broadcast in English, covering brief news, concerts, records and jazz. Despite the fact that it was closed soon after due to the regulation of the Northern Warlords government in defending national sovereignty, radio stations launched by Shanghai-based foreigners continued up until the Nationalist Party-led regime (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.).

The first commercial radio station launched by a Chinese businessman was on air in 1927 (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). It was not until 1928 that the in-power

Nationalist Party-led regime recognised the legitimacy of private commercial radio and allowed private commercial radio stations to be launched, with the permission of the government (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). From then on, the number of private commercial radio stations in Shanghai expanded and contracted with the interruption of anti-Japanese war. As historical accounts reveal, the total number of private commercial radio stations reached over 200 in Shanghai during the Republic period (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). The June 1937 statistics reveal that 55 of the total 78 radio stations in Shanghai were private commercial ones (Zhao, Z.J., 2006).

Shanghai-based private commercial radio was a site where upcoming politicians and leading intellectuals reached the elite public who could afford radio receivers. In 1923, before the Nationalist Party took power, Sun Yat-sen, the foremost pioneer of the Nationalist Party, delivered a speech about *The Declaration of Peaceful Unification* (*Heping Tongyi Xuanyan*) on air on the Osborn radio station. He later pointed out the political significance of radio technology in spreading and advocating politics as well as radio technology as a symbol and vehicle of modernity:

I wish every Chinese could read or hear my speech. Now it has been made possible to distribute it widely. It was heard by hundreds of people who have a wireless radio receiver. More than that, it could reach Tianjin and Hong Kong. This is surprising and amazing. We who are committed to unifying China welcome the wireless radio receiver as a huge advance. Not only can it verbally connect China with the world, but it can also connect domestic provinces and counties together, strengthening solidarity further. (Sun, Yat-sen, 1923, in Zhang, Y.J., 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

Private commercial radio was at the same time caught up in the tension between its commercial interests and national priorities, particularly with the outbreak of the anti-

Japanese war in Shanghai and nationwide. The content private commercial radio produced and the role it played was largely shaped and contested by the interplay between commercial interest, political influence and anti-imperialist nationalism.

In addition to delivering timely and up-to-date war information from the front line during the anti-Japanese years, private commercial radio in Shanghai actively promoted consumption and nationalism by encouraging the public to purchase national goods. This point is well examined in Carlton Benson's studies of private commercial radio in Shanghai in the Republic years (Benson, 1999). Before the Japanese occupied Shanghai, private commercial radio turned consumers, especially women consumers who were the dominant group of shoppers, into soldiers by encouraging them to purchase national goods in the battle against the Japanese (Benson, 1999).

On the other hand, entertainment programs maintained their dominance on private commercial radio both before and after the Japanese occupation. The dominance of entertainment on private commercial radio drew criticism from the elite public (Zhao, Z.J., 2006). In order to curb the excessive level of entertainment, the Department of Communication of the Nationalist Party-led central authority sought to regulate private commercial radio. In 1936, the Department of Communication issued policies that stipulated that entertainment programs were not allowed to exceed 60% of radio airtime (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.).

In spite of the regulations, the dominance of entertainment on radio airtime continued during from 1937 to 1941, during the period the Chinese call 'the period of the isolated island' (*gudao shiqi*) (Ge, Q. & Dong, Q., 2013; Fei, Y., 2014) after the defeat of Chinese army in the battle against the Japanese in Shanghai in 1937. The Japanese army occupied the former Chinese-controlled area of Shanghai. Most of the

international settlements, which were relatively free from Japanese control yet at the same time surrounded by Japanese power, were called ‘the isolated island’ (Tao, J.Y. 1979, in Fei, Y., 2014). Chinese refugees flocked into this section for survival and protection (Fei, Y., 2014). Some private commercial radio stations were closed as an act of resistance against the Japanese occupation, whereas others went back on air (Benson, 2004).

Once again, the elite educated public responded with a critical voice to the dominance of entertainment on private commercial radio, criticising them for ignoring the Japanese intrusion and national suffering. For instance, *Shen Newspaper (Shenbao)* published a satirical article criticising the preference given to entertainment on these resurgent private commercial radio stations in Shanghai in 1938:

After all, Shanghainese love wealth more than their country. Once the sound of the cannon has faded away, it is thought that the sky is high and the emperor is far away (*tiangao huangdi yuan*). The former once closed radio stations were back in business one by one, and new radio stations were launched in one location after another. (Dong, L., 1938, *Shenbao*, p. 12, in Zhao, Z.J., 2006, p. 30, translated by Lei, W.)

Nevertheless, entertainment was a politically safe cultural form that was allowed on air during the Japanese-occupied years. Following the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, the Japanese took charge of controlled radio in Shanghai, establishing strict rules to supervise the production of and listening to radio broadcasting to protect against any anti-Japanese voices and activities (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). Faced with this strict Japanese control, on-air private commercial radio preferred to broadcast entertainment because of its capacity to generate more profit as well as to cause less political trouble.

The most popular genre of entertainment both before and after the Japanese occupation of Shanghai was *Tanci*. *Tanci* was a traditional local musical form, originating from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces, both of which are next to Shanghai. The performance location of *Tanci* was expanded from the teahouse to the airwaves during the Republic years (Benson, 1996). *Tanci* was number 1 among all entertainment programs before Japan occupied Shanghai, continuing to be the most popular program in Shanghai in 1938 (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). *Shen Newspaper* reported that the most popular radio program in Shanghai was *Tanci*, with 103 *Tanci* programs broadcast every day (Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi, n.d.). The popularity of *Tanci* on private commercial radio spoke directly to the numerical and economic dominance of migrants from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. Migrants from these provinces accounted for over one third of the urban population in Shanghai (Zou, Y.R., 1980, pp. 112-114 in Wang, Y., 2007, p. 21).

Faced with the criticism that it lacked patriotic spirit, private commercial radio somehow produced and restored a sense of normality and familiarity by maintaining the regular broadcasting of entertainment as it had before the occupation. Alexander Badenoch (2008) argued in the German case that on-air radio broadcasting brought a sense of normality back to the German people after World War Two. In the Chinese case, during the war years this sense of normality and familiarity helped build the domestic setting as a safe retreat and protection from external Japanese control, uncertainty, insecurity and chaos.

Apart from entertainment, programs about health care, child rearing and how to be a modern mother and wife were also regularly broadcast during the war years (*Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi*, n.d.). On the one hand, these educational programs

were politically safe and did not challenge any political power. On the other hand, they engaged in the modernisation process, targeting urban women to encourage them to renew and maintain their traditional gender roles.

With private commercial radio at the forefront, both Christian and Buddhist religious groups in Shanghai found their space on air in Shanghai (Shanghai Guangbo Dianshi Zhi, n.d.). Christian religious radio stations, which were launched by American Christian missionaries, functioned as what Michael A. Krysko calls ‘an adjunct to the era’s escalating foreign imperialism’ (Krysko, 2011, p. 128). At the same time, the provision of on-air religious services produced a sense of comfort, belonging, and certainty to the public at a time when the physical surroundings were filled with chaos, uncertainty and crisis. More than religious services, religious radio stations were engaged in the modernisation process in the Republic China by providing knowledge. They delivered a number of ‘social gospel-oriented programs’ (Krysko, 2011, p. 135) such as the information about childcare and scientific and medical knowledge. They attempted to improve the profile of American Christianity in China and to diffuse ‘a beneficial American model of development’ (Krysko, 2011, p. 3).

In regions where the Nationalist Party was less influential, the development of radio was shaped by different political forces. Two particular political forces were influential in shaping the production of and listening to radio. As the rising political power domestically, the Chinese Communist Party played a crucial role in defining the use and role of radio in less developed parts of China and in further establishing radio after the Chinese Communist Party took power nationwide. As the foreign political power, the Japanese force was more influential in shaping radio in northeast China, which was largely occupied by the Japanese from the 1930s. In contrast to the American

commercial and religious mode of radio in Shanghai, the Japanese mode of radio in China was more straightforward and explicit in its efforts to transform China into a Japanese colony.

2.2.3 Radio as a site of colonisation in Japanese-occupied northeast China

Given that little is known about the role of radio broadcasting in facilitating colonisation, Ha Yanqiu's work (Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989) on the history of radio broadcasting in northeast China (refer to Hei Longjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provinces) in the first half of 20th century is crucial in informing us about how radio technology was diffused and used when the Japanese occupied northeast China. I base this section about radio broadcasting in Japanese-occupied northeast China on Ha's study (Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989).

Launching Japanese-controlled radio stations was primarily a move aimed at claiming Japanese authority over the occupied region of China and establishing pro-Japanese communication with the Chinese public. Following its victory in the Japan–Russia war in 1905, Japanese troops occupied the Liaodong Peninsula (a section of northeast China) and named it Guandong state under Japanese administration (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). Japan established Dalian (a coastal city of northeast China) radio station soon after the establishment of radio stations in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya in 1925 (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). The Japanese took over the already established Chinese government-run Harbin and Shenyang municipal radio stations and placed them under its control after it occupied the three provinces in northeast China in 1932 and set up a puppet regime, called 'fake Manchuria' by the Chinese (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). The Japanese went further, launching new radio stations including a new one in Changchun city, which was chosen as the capital of the puppet regime (Ha, Y.Q., 1989).

The following year saw the establishment of a Japanese dominated telecommunications company. This strengthened the Japanese political and economic monopoly over radio and its use for Japanese benefit (Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989). The company, named Manchuria Telecommunication and Telegraph Company Ltd, was formed based on a contract between the Japanese and the puppet regime. On the Japanese side, the Japanese government held 330,000 shares and Japanese consortiums and Japanese broadcast association held 300,000 shares (Ha, Y.Q. 1988 & 1989). The puppet government held 120,000 shares and its central bank held 50,000 shares (Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989). The division of the shares determined how management power was distributed between the Japanese and the puppet regime. On the board of directors, six of the eight members were Japanese and the top leader was also Japanese (Ha, Y.Q., 1988 & 1989). The Japanese government, Japanese businesses and Japanese public institutions formed an alliance to manage and develop radio technology in northeast China.

The Japanese controlled both radio hardware and software, that is, radio receiver manufacturing and sales and also radio program production and distribution. In 1934, the company established radio receiver business shops, selling radio receivers imported from Japan and offering a radio receiver repair service (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). In 1936, the company attempted to manufacture radio receivers in localities in northeast China (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). The control over radio receiver production process enabled the Japanese to limit the reception capacity of radio receivers to avoid signals from the Soviet Union and Southern China (Ha, Y.Q., 1989). The Japanese attempted to dominate the market by pricing radio receivers cheaper than those imported from Britain and the United States to maintain the monopoly of Japanese-made radio receivers in northeast China (Ha, Y.Q., 1989).

With all the locations of radio broadcasting outlined above, the diffusion of radio was mainly limited to urban areas in eastern China. Listening to radio broadcasting was primarily achieved with privately owned radio receivers. Around 2000 upper and middle class households and businesses registered to purchase radio receivers in 1928 in Beijing (Song, H.Q., 1984). In the majority of the cities, radio listeners belonged to a politically, economically and culturally privileged minority. Due to its particular political, economic and cultural conditions, radio listening was more popularised in Shanghai, where the production and purchase of radio receivers were more commercialised. With the opening of local factories making radio receivers, and a general expansion of consumer culture, the private ownership of radio receivers grew more widespread in Shanghai in the Republic China (Wang, Y., 2007).

2.2.4 Radio as a site of resistance to the ruling authority: Chinese Communist Party-controlled radio in western China

Chinese Communist Party-led radio started as a device for party internal communication. Chinese publications about the Party's history of radio broadcasting (e.g., Wei, G. Y., 2011; Liu, Y., 2014) offer an outline of how the Chinese Communist Party gained radio technology and devices when it was an underground party and regarded as politically illegitimate by the ruling Nationalist Party. In the 1920s, when the Chinese Communist Party expanded into a number of branches based in different geographical locations, the establishment of its own wireless telecommunication was seen as critical for party internal information exchange (Liu, Y., 2014).

The first issue the party needed to deal with was access to radio technology, technical knowledge and equipment, which was concentrated mainly in Nationalist Party-controlled urban China—in Shanghai in particular. Wireless telegraph, which delivered written messages, was used initially to build communication between the

Shanghai-based central committee of the Chinese Communist Party and other bases. During its time underground, the Chinese Communist Party sent undercover members to study wireless technology in Shanghai (Liu, Y., 2014). In 1929, an underground radio station was established in Shanghai (Liu, Y., 2014). In the following years, the communist central committee selected 10 members from its sub-bases to learn radio technology in this underground radio station (Liu, Y., 2014). In 1930, another underground radio station was launched in Hong Kong, which built the first telecommunication connection with the Shanghai-based central committee (Liu, Y., 2014).

In order to develop external communication with the public, the possession of a radio transmitter was the first material condition the Chinese Communist Party needed to achieve. How they gained a radio transmitter, overcame various barriers and successfully brought it to the Communist Party's power centre in Yan'an¹ in northwest China is documented in the account of the history of Chinese Communist Party-led radio (Wei, G.Y., 2011; Liu, Y., 2014). In 1939, Zhou Enlai went to the Soviet Union for medical treatment after his fall from a horse. When Georgi Dimitrov Mikhailov², the general secretary of the executive committee of the Communist International, asked Zhou Enlai about what Chinese Communist Party needed for further party development during a meeting with leaders of the Communist International, Zhou Enlai expressed the

¹Geographically, Yan'an is located in northwest China. It is a prefecture-level city in Shanxi province. Politically, it became the Chinese communist party's power base from 1936 to 1948 before the top central committee of the communist party moved to Beijing. Further information: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yan%27an> for more details.

²Georgi Dimitrov Mikhailov was a Bulgarian communist politician. He was the general secretary of the executive committee of the Communist International from 1934 to 1943. Further information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgi_Dimitrov for more details.

need for Yan'an to acquire radio equipment. After negotiation with the government of the Soviet Union, a Soviet-made radio transmitter was provided in the name of the Communist International. At that time the Chinese Communist Party base in western China was blocked by the Nationalist Party and the Japanese. Supplies such as radio equipment, medicine and other industrial productions were banned in Chinese Communist Party-controlled areas. In order to successfully bring the radio transmitter into Yan'an, Zhou Enlai disassembled it, making it unrecognisable and easier to carry, avoiding the risk of being checked and having it confiscated when passing through checkpoints (Liu, Y., 2014).

Yan'an Xinhua radio station was launched with the call number XNCR on 30, December 1940 (Wei, G.Y., 2011). Chinese Communist Party personnel worked as content producers, aiming to reach out and target both domestic and international audiences. In order to win support from international listeners, especially support from western governments, the Chinese Communist Party launched English language broadcasting in the 1940s with the help of foreigners (Wan, J.H., 2006; Li, H. & Wang, W.H., 2010) such as the Englishman Michael Lindsay, who settled and lectured in China (Cui, Sh.F., 2015). The interest in expanding English language broadcasting and gaining international recognition grew with the outbreak of the civil war between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party after the anti-Japanese War. Nie Rongzhen, one of the top military leaders in the Chinese Communist Party, met Sidney Rittenberg, who stayed in China as part of the United Nations relief program after World War Two and developed a close relationship with Chinese Communist Party ('Sidney Rittenberg', n.d.). At their meeting Nie said:

We hope you can stay, participating in building a bridge. We will win the national regime in a few years. [At that time we will] engage in construction. [We are willing to make] friends with the United States, and build friendly relationships with other countries in the world. Americans in China know us but Americans in Washington don't. We are preparing to launch English broadcasting at Zhang Jiakou radio station. [We] hope you can stay, joining the further work, and building a friendship bridge with us between China and the United States. (Li, H. & Wang, W.H., 2010, p. 75, translated by Lei, W.)

As the Chinese Communist Party moved further east, it included more provinces under its power. In 1946 Zhang Jiakou radio station (in Hebei province, next to Beijing), with the call number XGNC, started broadcasting a program in English for 20 minutes each day (Li, H. & Wang, W.H., 2010).

Both the Chinese Communist Party and the Nationalist Party were aware of the instrumental importance of radio in the battle for domestic power (1945–1949) after the anti-Japanese War. In addition to the radio stations launched in Shanxi and Hebei provinces (Zhao, Y.M., 1982c; Li & Wang, 2010), the Chinese Communist Party extended its power on air in northeast China after the Japanese retreated from this region (Zhao, Y.M., 1982c; Luo, Q., 1982). The Nationalist Party restored and expanded its control over radio resources. From August 1945 to May 1946, the Nationalist Party reclaimed 21 radio stations that had been launched by the Japanese during the Japanese occupation, and 41 radio transmitters (Zhao, Y.M., 1982b). The number of radio stations associated with the Nanjing-based Central Radio Bureau of the Nationalist Party reached 41 in September 1947 (Zhao, Y.M., 1982b). While the Nationalist Party attempted to maintain the control over radio broadcasting nationwide, the Chinese Communist Party advocated the restructure to break its media monopoly (Zhao, Y.M., 1982b). The

ongoing on-air fight between the Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party paralleled the civil war on the ground in the 1940s.

On the establishment of People's Republic of China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, radio became centralised and nationalised. Initially, private commercial radio stations were allowed to continue their operation without challenging the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party-led regime. Then in the 1950s the Chinese Communist Party-led state began a buyout of private commercial radio (Yuan, J., 1991 & Li, S.Y., 2009). This saw privately owned industries and businesses transformed and integrated into the state-owned system. From then on, commercial interests were excluded from the radio broadcasting system in Mao-era China. Along with print media, radio was defined as the mouth and tongue of the Chinese Communist Party, functioning primarily as a propaganda instrument for the regime.

2.3 Locating radio in Mao-era China

While radio indeed played a crucial role in producing and circulating Chinese Communist Party ideology and propaganda for political purposes, the 'monopoly' analytical framework is reductive. It constrains our understanding of radio in Mao-era China and fails to appreciate the characteristics of radio itself. This monopoly framework highlights the primary and absolute control of the Chinese Communist Party over radio, downplaying the fact that radio was used to facilitate multiple missions such as economic growth, cultural and scientific education. As Zhao Yuezhi argues in her examination of the Chinese Communist Party-led state:

The state, despite all its authoritarian and patrimonial dimensions, is invested with the normative expectations of promoting positive freedoms, defending territorial

sovereignty, promoting national integration, as well as engendering social economic developments. (Zhao, 2012, p. 150)

In addition, an analytical framework focused solely on the ideological monopoly of Chinese Communist Party omits the question of how the Chinese people in Mao-era China listened to, experienced and understood radio. Unlike the West, where mass production of radio sets made them widely available to consumers from the 1920s onwards, in China the availability of radios was politically, economically and technologically circumscribed in the first half of the 20th century. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, radio listening was limited largely to the politically, economically and culturally privileged in a number of emerging cities. More particularly in the Chinese context, 80% of the Chinese population were peasants (Zhai, Zh.W., 1991), the majority of whom were illiterate and marginal, scattered throughout rural China. They knew nothing about radio technology and had no experience of radio listening. The Chinese Communist Party-led central authority viewed radio as crucially significant for Mao-era China. *The People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)*, the print organ of the Chinese Communist Party, stressed the importance to China of radio broadcasting in an article on 6 June 1950:

Wireless radio is one of the most powerful tools in mass education, especially [when] the circumstances such as the underdeveloped transportation, mass illiteracy, and short newspaper supply in China are taken into account. If wireless is used well, it will have a profound impact. (The Editorial in the *People's Daily* on 6 June 1950, in Li, Sh., 2012, p. 10, translated by Lei, W.)

While the top leadership recognised the instrumental role of radio in political establishment, the lower levels of the populace expressed their excitement about the

first electronic communication they had access to. When radio was introduced to ordinary Chinese people, especially those in rural China who knew nothing about electronic communication, they were fascinated to hear the human voice emanating from an inanimate object. They wondered if someone was almost living in the radio receiver and loudspeakers (personal communication, 3, June, 2013). The palpable excitement about radio persisted in Mao-era China and paralleled the launch of the state-led radio system, encompassing both radio communication infrastructure construction and radio content production and circulation.

2.3.1 Making radio listening possible: from radio reception network to national wired radio network in Mao-era China

The first issue the Mao-era Chinese state had to deal with in order to use radio for political purposes was: How could the state enable ordinary Chinese to listen to radio broadcasting, given the limited number of radio receivers it had? It was reported that there were around one million radio receivers in China in 1950 (Wang, X.L., 2009; Li, Sh, 2012) when the national population was 0.54 billion (Tian, X.Y., 1981). Most of the radio receivers were concentrated in the hands of the middle and upper class in coastal cities and in the northeast. By contrast, in western countries mass private ownership of radio receivers was widespread, enabling private and individual radio listening. In the United States, 46% of American households owned a radio receiver in 1930. By 1940, more than 80% of American households owned radios (Craig, 2000, p.15 in Craig, 2008, p. 134) although private ownership of radio receivers was not always evenly distributed but structured by various divisions (Goodman, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the Chinese Communist Party encouraged the confiscation of privately owned radio receivers for collective use to maximise the listenership (Liu, 1964, p. 6). In 1950, the national news bureau issued ‘Decisions on the

establishment of the radio reception network' (*zhongyang renmin hengfu xinwen zongshu guanyu jianli guangbo shouyinwang de jue ding*) (Hu, Q.M., 1950). In general terms, the radio reception network was a project to assign and mobilise a group of individuals to carry radio receivers and travel to places where there was no electricity or radio equipment, enabling the residents to listen collectively to radio broadcasting. These individuals, who were called radio reception servants (*shouyinyuan*) (Hu, Q.M., 1950), were in charge of switching on and off radio receivers for the residents, who were assembled to listen to radio broadcasts. Radio reception servants were also responsible for summarising news, polices, orders and other important programs from national and local radio broadcasting onto a blackboard newspaper on display. Radio reception servants could read out the written version to illiterate groups. Literate individuals could read the written version on their own.

One documented case describes how radio programs were delivered to the residents living in remote areas with the arrival of radio reception servants. In October 1950, when the Chinese central authority decided to send the Chinese army to North Korea to fight against the American army, radio in China was engaged in mobilising public action and support for the war (Li, Sh., 2012). Hebei provincial radio station launched a feature program designed to inform the public about the war and gain their support for it:

A large number of radio reception servants took action. Some of them carry shoulder baskets with radio devices resting in the front basket and batteries in the back basket, going up mountains and down to the villages. Some ride a bike, carrying devices on their backs and travelling through villages and households. Some ride a horse, carrying devices and travelling over the grassland. In April 1950, the statistics collected in 10 days from 67 counties indicate that 116 radio receivers were taken down to villages.

The times of organised listening reached 1355, in which more than 310,000 individuals joined the listening (Wired radio broadcasting in China, 1988, p. 283 in Li, Sh., 2012, p. 10, translated by Lei, W.).



Figure 2.1 A radio reception servant summarises the important content from radio broadcasts onto a blackboard in Ningjing Town, Canli County in Hebei Province in 1951

Photographer unknown

Source: <http://www.jiaxiangwang.com/cn/bj-1951-guangbo.htm> (accessed 5 May 2015)

However, this human distribution-based radio reception project proved a difficult way to deliver radio broadcasting to the population at large. In his examination of wired radio network in rural China Li Sheng (2012) explains the transmission problems of the portable radio receivers. For instance, their limited transmission power restricted the

reach of radio signals. Secondly, harsh weather sometimes interfered with the scheduled listening to a radio broadcast, and signals from other radio frequencies also interfered with the reception. Moreover, the late arrival of radio reception servants and radio receivers meant that scheduled broadcasts were delayed or missed (Li, Sh., 2012).

The subsequent technological solution was the widespread use of loudspeakers. The loudspeaker became a significant device that allowed Mao-era people to listen to radio broadcasting and had a major influence on their understanding about listening. As the former leader of China National Radio, the national radio station, Yang Zhengquan recalled in his autobiography:

I knew nothing about radio broadcasting in 1960 when I applied for university education in the news department of Beijing Broadcasting College. My decision had nothing to do with an interest in radio. It was only because the department was one of the easiest to pass the examination. I did not even know what a radio receiver looked like. The only thing I knew was the loudspeaker installed on the tree in the village, which peasants nicknamed the ‘opera box’ (*xi xiazi*). (Yang, Zh.Q., 2008, translated by Lei, W.)

Loudspeakers were installed in public spaces in local communities and workplaces. These loudspeakers were connected through wires to radio receivers and relevant radio devices, which were kept in the local or workplace-based radio studio.

The installation of loudspeakers nationwide in rural China was closely associated with the organisation of production communes. From the mid-1950s these structured communes replaced the individual family-based mode of production. In 1955, the central broadcasting bureau issued an instruction proposing the construction of wired radio network in rural China (Li, Sh., 2012, p.13). In 1956, the Central Political Bureau

confirmed the construction of a wired radio network in a range of production communes including in the agriculture, forestry, fishing, animal husbandry, handicrafts and manufacturing industries (Li, Sh., 2012, p.13). The construction of a wired radio network was accelerated with the development of the Great Leap Forward³ (1958–1961) in the late 1950s (Li, Sh., 2012). In the case of Shandong province, where the first production commune-based radio station was launched across the province in 1958, the number of loudspeakers installed reached 13,400 and the length of the wire reached more than 4,900 kilometers by the end of 1958 (Li, Sh., 2012, p.14). By the end of 1960, the number of commune-based radio stations reached 1,338, accounting for 93% of all communes across the province, and the number of loudspeakers reached 620,000 (Li, Sh., 2012, p.14). The number of loudspeakers rose to 6,040,000 in 1960 from 3,040,000 in 1958 and 940,000 in 1957 (Zhao, Y.M., 2006, p. 250 in Li, Sh., 2012, p.14). The installation of loudspeakers continued throughout the Mao-era years.

From the 1940s, then, the Chinese radio situation contrasted markedly with that in western contexts. Listening to radio broadcasting was purchased and privatised in western countries, while listening to radio broadcasting in Mao-era China was collective, organised by the leadership level for the populace. In the British case, listening to public radio broadcasting was defined as what Paddy Scannell calls ‘communicative entitlement’ (Scannell in Oswell, 1998, p. 129). How, then was listening to state-owned non-profit Chinese radio broadcasting in Mao-era China defined and structured? If news, especially national news, was the primary and the most

³The Great Leap Forward was an economic and social campaign from 1958 to 1961 led by Mao Zedong. It aimed to aggressively transform China from an agrarian economy to a communist economy through rapid industrialisation and collectivisation. Further information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Leap_Forward.

significant genre radio in Mao-era China offered, how was listening to radio news defined and structured?



Figure 2.2 A loudspeaker being installed in Jinzhai county in 1974, in Anhui Province in Central China

Photographer Ma Zhaoyun, 1974

Source: <http://www.fotocn.org/mazhaoyun/38093> (accessed 4 May 2015)

2.3.2 Listening to news: the political obligation to the Chinese state

There were two politically significant news programs on China National Radio: the morning news program *News and Newspaper Selection* (*Xinwen He Baozhi Zhaiyao*) and the evening news program *United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide* (*Quanguo Gedi Renmin Guangbo Diantai Lianbo*). The morning news program was first broadcast on 10 May 1950, under the name *Capital Newspaper*

Selection (Shoudu baozhi zhaiyao) and developed into a daily half-hour news program (Zhongyang Renmin Guangbo Diantai, 2013a). Initially it was a night news program but later moved to a morning news slot. The title of this program was changed multiple times until 1967 when the name finally settled as *News and Newspaper Selection* ('Xinwen He Baozhi Zhaiyao', n.d.). It is still on air to this day, broadcast at 06:30 am in contemporary China. The night news program *United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide* first aired on 1 May 1951 ('Quanguo Xinwen Lianbo', n.d.). It, too, is still on air to this day and broadcasts at 18:30 in contemporary China. The title of this program was changed to *National News Bulletin (quanguo xinwen lianbo)* in 1995 ('Quanguo Xinwen Lianbo', n.d.). The production of radio news and its response to the shifting priorities across the stages of Mao-era China will be examined in more details in the next chapter.

The Mao-era central leadership was what Zhao Yuezhi summarises as 'the source of information and the primary definer of news' (Zhao, 2012, p.150). Their activities, the release of policies and orders, and newly issued regulations and laws were all produced as news. In addition, national events and international affairs were announced to inform the Chinese about tensions and circumstances inside and outside China. The following headlines broadcast in Mao-era China on 30 September 1964 give a partial picture of how the Mao-era central authority informed the public through radio news:

Central People's Radio Station, it is now United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide time. The content of today's United Broadcast program is:

- Chairman Mao Zedong, Chairman Liu Shaoqi, Vice Chairman Song Qingling and Dong Biwu, Committee head Zhu De, and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai hold a grand

National Day celebration reception, enthusiastically celebrating the 15th anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China.

- Chairman Mao Zedong meets Mali president Modibo Keita and his wife.
- More than 10,000 people from all walks of life in the capital ceremoniously rally, warmly greeting Crown Prince Sihanouk, president Modibo Keita and president *Massema-Débat*. (*Gedi Renmin Guangbo Diantai Lianbo Jiemu*, 1964, translated by Lei, W.)

Both the morning and evening news programs were mandatorily relayed on radio stations of various levels nationwide, enabling a form of top-down communication that both benefited state power and allowed the public to listen to the voice of the government in Mao-era China. Although hearing the government's voice was not the same thing as having access to the government, the radio broadcasts represented the first time that most Chinese people had been able to hear from their government, and radio became politically significant for the public in the early years of Mao-era China. Radio broadcasting connected the top leadership and the grassroots directly and immediately, reducing the distance between the central authority and ordinary Chinese people. Compared to the very limited contact there had been between the central authority and the rural public in pre-communist China, radio broadcasting brought the voice of the central authority to rural Chinese who listened to the loudspeakers provided by their government.

Nevertheless, listening to state-defined radio news was defined as compulsory, an obligation integral to Chinese political life in Mao-era China. Instead of individuals having autonomy and control over switching the radio on and off, designated personnel such as workplace-based propaganda team members and rural leaders were responsible

for switching on and off the collective-owned radio receivers and loudspeakers. As the public near and far, urban and rural, was required to listen to national radio news, radio receivers and loudspeakers were tuned on nationwide during news time.

Due to the compulsory nature of listening, the broadcast of radio news functioned as a time keeper for the public. In Mao-era China timepieces including clocks and watches were largely unavailable, especially in rural China. Beijing time was recognised as the national time. As Li Sheng (2012) reports, Beijing-based China National Radio started its daily broadcasting at 05:30. *News and Newspaper Selection* was broadcast and relayed nationwide from 06:30 to 07:00. A fifteen-minute news program was broadcast nationwide at 12:30 and 18:00 respectively. *United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide* was broadcast nationwide at 19:00. Lao Yu, a columnist of the Chinese-language section of the *Financial Times* offers an account of collective life in Mao-era China (2013), noting that the sense of time was closely associated with radio broadcasting at a time when the rural commune was the dominant mode for organising production and consumption:

The high-pitched music 'The east is red' (*dongfang hong*) was on, waking the peasants up to the Mao-era China ... We worked three shifts per day. From 05:00 to 07:00 in the morning ... from 9:00 to 12:00 ... from 13:00 to 18:00 ... When it came to off-work time with nightfall, the music 'Singing for the Nation' (*gechang zuguo*) flew out of the loudspeaker in the night. (Lao, Y. 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

The function of radio broadcasting as a timekeeper disciplined the Chinese, especially those in rural China, training them to adjust to mechanised time in the process of industrialisation and modernisation for nation building.

The wired radio network enabled the Mao-era Chinese central authority to expand the spectrum of political control. In particular, previously ungoverned groups such as rural residents were included and turned into political subjects through listening. What distinguished radio listening in Mao-era China from its western counterpart was that radio listening, especially radio news listening, was defined as an obligatory political activity. As a result of this political structuring of listening to radio broadcasting, in Mao-era China the listening public were treated simultaneously as political subjects with the focus on their obligations towards the state.

2.3.3 Listening to literature and the arts (*wenyi*): the democratisation of traditional culture in Mao-era China

In addition to news—the primary political genre radio offered on air in Mao-era China, radio also offered the public other genres, literature and the arts (*wenyi*) in particular. Literature and the arts genres such as music, opera, and storytelling occupied most non-news airtime. Bai Jin's account (1959) of radio program arrangement and management on China National Radio in Mao-era China indicates that literature and arts programs occupied more airtime than political programs (Bai, J., 1959). According to this 1959 article, literature and arts programs on the first channel of China National Radio programs occupied 7 hours and 25 minutes, accounting for 54.9 % of the total broadcasting time of 13 hours and 30 minutes (Bai, J., 1959). On the second channel of China National Radio programs, literature and arts programs occupied 11 hours and 10 minutes, accounting for 68 % of the total broadcasting time of 16 hours and 25 minutes (Bai, J., 1959).

The Mao-era Chinese state played a leading role in using radio to widen the general public's access to a range of cultural works, especially for those who were low in literacy or economically poor. In the 1950s, to guide and encourage the diversity of

cultural production and reception Mao Zedong proposed the principle of ‘hundreds of flowers simultaneously blossoming, hundreds of schools competing’ (*baihuang qifang, baijia zhengming*) (‘Mao Zedong Tichu’, n.d.). Despite and perhaps just because cultural works were required to contribute to political education in Mao-era China, radio enabled the rural and urban public to listen to cultural works in ways that had not been possible in the past. The capacity of radio to increase access to cultural forms, especially to forms that had previously been available exclusively to the politically, economically and culturally privileged, explains the popular reference to radio receivers and loudspeakers as ‘opera boxes’ (*xi xiazi*) (Zhang, H., 2007). Chinese people who lived through Mao-era China viewed listening to radio broadcasting as a dominant source of pleasure in their leisure time in that period (Liu, Zh.G., 2014). In the general public’s accounts of radio broadcasting in Mao-era China, the three most mentioned cultural forms were Peking and local opera, storytelling (*pingshu*) and crosstalk (*xiangsheng*).

In the case of Peking opera (*jingju*), radio enabled the transformation of Peking opera into a national cultural form appreciated across all social classes. Before Mao, Peking opera, which had developed from a number of local operas (Wang, Zh.L., 2008), was established as a visual–verbal performance appreciated mainly by the royal family, upper class and urban residents, especially in Northern China. During the debate in the early 1950s on whether to maintain or abandon Peking opera, Mao Zedong advocated a selective approach towards reforming Peking opera with his proposal for ‘hundreds of flowers simultaneously blossoming, withdrawing the old and promoting the new’ (*baihua qifang, tuichen chuxin*) (Liang, B., 2002, p.4). What this meant in effect was that the content of Peking opera was developed to further facilitate political education in Mao-era China. In this reform process, the specific musical performance was preserved as well as transformed. Radio played a crucial role in shaping how Peking opera was

appreciated in Mao-era China. On the one hand, because it could not broadcast the visual performance, radio reduced the appreciation of Peking opera (*jingju*) to a listening-based activity. At the same time it broadened the activity of listening to Peking opera to a national scale across class, gender, age and educational spectrum.

Storytelling (*pingshu*) is a traditional local visual-verbal performance, in which one performer tells stories, especially stories and legends about Chinese history and classic novels through a vivid and sequential verbal performance (Ai, H.H. & Zhang, S.Y., 2010; Qin, Y.H., 2015). Storytelling was initially performed in public places such as teahouses for a group of people gathered around (Ai, H.H. & Zhang, S.Y., 2010). In the same way that radio transformed *Tanci*, radio moved storytelling from public venues to the airwaves, offering the public a much wider access to the appreciation of storytelling through listening (Ai, H.H. & Zhang, S.Y., 2010). On-air storytelling might be considered a distinctively Chinese form of radio drama. It is conducted by one actor, who narrates the story's development as well as performing the different voices of the characters. The relationship between storytelling and radio was developed so strongly in Chinese Communist Party-led China that the distribution and appreciation of storytelling remains mainly dependent on radio and later developed audio equipment such as tapes. In addition to historical stories and classic novels, revolution-themed novels about Chinese communism were later adopted and adapted into storytelling in Mao-era China. Classic novels such as *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (*sanguo yanyi*)⁴ and the Communist

⁴*Romance of Three Kingdoms* is a heavyweight classic novel of Chinese literature. It is set in the years towards the end of the Han dynasty and the three kingdoms period. The novel encompasses a complex set of stories and characters involved in the negotiation of power and political change. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_of_the_Three_Kingdoms. For the Chinese online version: <http://www.readnovel.com/book/73146/>

revolution classic *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*linhai xueyuan*)⁵ were adapted for on-air storytelling (Ai, H.H. & Zhang, S.Y., 2010).

Meanwhile, radio also enabled the diffusion nationwide of a local lower-class cultural form, Chinese ‘crosstalk’ (*xiangsheng*). This is a traditional language performance with performers ‘using exaggeration and irony in dialogue to make the audience laugh’ (Zhang, X., 2011, p. 164). Crosstalk was one of the urban cultural forms the Mao-era Chinese state reformed to facilitate the political, social and cultural education in Mao-era China (Wang, X.T., 2012). One of the leading crosstalk performers in Mao-era China was Hou Baolin, who was already a well-known performer in Beijing in pre-communist China (‘Hou Baolin’, n.d.). After Communist China was founded, he participated in the reform of crosstalk, making the content compatible with Mao-era values and orientations (‘Hou Baolin’, n.d.). For instance, content expressing discrimination against lower and marginalised people was removed from crosstalk performances (‘Hou Baolin’, n.d.). Radios and loudspeakers enabled ordinary Chinese near and far to appreciate his performances. Joe Wong, the rising Chinese–American stand-up comedian, who performed at the White House at the radio and TV correspondents’ dinner in 2011, recalls that listening to crosstalk through loudspeaker in Northeast China in the late 1970s was his childhood experience of comedy culture (Xu, Y., 2011; Fan, Ch.G., 2012). Although the visual performance was lost, radio enabled

⁵*Tracks in the Snowy Forest* was created in the 1950s when the Chinese Communist Party was in power. It tells the story of how soldiers of the Chinese Communist Party searched and fought the hidden bandits and brigands in the snowy mountains in northeast China during the civil war years. For more details: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qu_Bo_%28novelist%29. For the Chinese online version: <http://www.kewaishu.net/yuedu/18/18302/>

Chinese of all walks of life—urban and rural, young and old, literate and illiterate—to enjoy crosstalk through listening.



Figure 2.3 Yuan Kuocheng, one of the best known storytellers (*shuoshu ren*), who adapted *Romance of Three Kingdoms* into a verbal version, performing a revolutionary novel in 1972

Photographer unknown. It is used by China National Radio journalist Feng Ganyong (2014) in his report recounting Yuan Kuocheng's storytelling career.

Source: http://www.cnr.cn/zhuanti1/gbyx/cbsxxdt/201405/t20140520_515554162.shtml (accessed 4 May 2015)

Although radio may have undermined the cultural integrity of the original forms of some of these literary and arts genres, it nevertheless enabled the democratisation of

culture, enabling the general public with different backgrounds to listen to cultural works. Radio was a leading source of recreation in Mao-era China, offering pleasure and enriching public social and cultural life. Although the democratisation of culture was principally concerned with programs that targeted adults, the same democratisation also took place in radio programs catering specifically to children. Further than this, child-oriented radio programs functioned as a site of sociality in urban daily life in Mao-era China, as discussed in the following section.

2.3.4 Listening to children's broadcasting: a site of urban sociality in Mao-era China

After Chinese Communist Party-led China was founded, China National Radio launched a number of programs for children and adolescents. This move copied and facilitated the educational institutionalisation nationwide, which divided children into a range of stages and placed them into different educational levels. Among all these programs, *Little Trumpet* (*xiao laba*) was the most popular and the best-known. *Little Trumpet* was established as a children's program targeting pre-school children aged from 5 to 7 (Zheng, J., 1959; Liu, Y.F., et al., 2010). Since its launch in 1956 it has been on air continuously to this day (Liu, Y.F., et al., 2010).

A range of cultural forms including stories, music, puzzles and folk songs were adapted to appeal to children ('Xiao Laba Kaishi Guangbo Le', 2009). Literary works including Chinese folk stories, animal stories, Chinese history, foreign stories and Chinese classic novels were the primary source of stories for children on *Little Trumpet*. The best-known one was the transformation of the 16th century classic novel *The Journey to The West* (*Xiyouji*) into a verbal version easily understood by children. For instance, the original title of the novel's 27th chapter is 'the corpse fiend thrice tricks Tang Sanzang, the holy monk angrily dismisses the handsome monkey king' (Wu,

Ch.En., 1990, p. 492). On *Little Trumpet*, this title is adapted as ‘Sun Wukong hits the white bone spirit three times’ (‘Xiao Laba Kaishi Guangbo Le’, 2009), making it more suitable for children’s cognitive level and interest. The successful adaptation of these intellectually demanding ancient classics as stories presented in casual and everyday language allowed children and adults as well to listen to classical Chinese literature. The adapter, Sun Jingxiu, who used to tell stories on children’s radio broadcasting in Beijing during the Nationalist Party-led regime, continued to be employed during Mao-era China, telling stories on *Little Trumpet* (Li,L.J., 2012). He was widely known under the title of Grandpa Sun Jingxiu (Sun, Zh., 2006).

Children’s broadcasting was primarily assigned the role of providing moral education (Zheng, J., 1959; Liu, Y.F., et al., 2010), cultivating children and transforming them into future citizens who would fit in and contribute to the socialist construction of China. Moral education was conceived broadly, and drew on a diverse mix of stories that promoted moral righteousness, socialism and nationalism. For instance, the story of Kong Rong giving away pears (‘Sun Jingxiu: Yong shengyin’, 2011) was told to teach children to be modest and strive to leave something good to others. This is a story about the childhood of Kong Rong, who became a writer in the Dong Han Dynasty. On one occasion when he was three years old, he argued that the two different cases of leaving the bigger pear to his older brother and his younger brother both made sense. In the first case he explained that as the younger brother he was supposed to get the smaller one and the older brother was supposed to get the bigger one. In the second case he explained that as the older brother he should leave the bigger pear to the younger brother. Stories of this kind were adapted to teach children to be morally considerate and unselfish, virtues that were required in the process of socialist construction.

Political education that emphasised patriotic and class education was also presented in a light-hearted way through stories in which good and evil was the dominant judgmental framework. ‘The crowing hen at midnight’ (*banye jijiao*) (Liuling. Erlingba. Yiqiqi.,2005) tells a story about a boy labourer’s intellect fight to humiliate and punish the landlord after the boy discovered the landlord’s trick of exploiting his employees. At the time when the crowing of the rooster functioned as a timekeeper, the landlord imitated rooster to make the real rooster crow in the middle of the night in order to make his workers wake up and work longer hours. The boy discovered the landlord’s trick one night when he went outside to urinate and saw the landlord’s tactic. The boy developed the idea of deliberately treating the landlord as a thief next time the landlord tried to imitate the rooster’s crowing in the rooster coop. The boy and his adult colleagues hit the landlord and teach him a lesson. Through stories like this, children were constructed favorably as the incarnation of political correctness, social justice and moral rightness.

Listening to *Little Trumpet* was conditional on and limited by the availability and capacity of radio technology. The presence of radio receivers in urban China allowed the regular broadcasting of *Little Trumpet* in urban kindergartens and also in domestic settings. However, the program was far less available in rural China due to the lack of privately owned radio receivers and the fact that control of the wired radio network was in the hands of local governmental leaders. As interviewees recalled, *Little Trumpet* was only occasionally broadcast through the wired radio network in rural China (personal communication, 12 June 2013). The social and cultural significance of *Little Trumpet* was more influential on urban children and families than their rural counterparts.



Figure 2.4 Pre-school children in Xueyuan Lane in Beijing. No places were vacant to launch a kindergarten. The sixth neighborhood committed to setting up a child-oriented radio listening venue, allowing pre-school children to listen to child-oriented radio programs every day

Photographer Zou Jiandong, Xinhua News Agency journalist, 1958

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/photo/2009-11/20/c_1212707_2.htm (accessed 4 May 2015)

For the urban public who could listen to *Little Trumpet*, the program was a site of sociality where children gained pleasure through listening and adults saved parenting energy. One university teacher wrote letters to *Little Trumpet* multiple times, speaking highly of the program, which was widely appreciated for the great pleasure and companionship it offered children:

One teacher working at the People's University of China (*zhongguo renmin daxue*) had three children. No having a radio receiver at their own home, they went to the neighbor every day to listen to *Little Trumpet* ... The kids jumped out of the bathtub as if they'd been shocked by the electricity when they heard the opening music of *Little Trumpet*.

They sat together naked next to the radio receiver and focused their attention on listening to this program. (Sun,Zh., 2006, p. 61, translated by Lei, W.)

As the case of *Little Trumpet* indicates, radio listening in Mao-era China was politically, economically and technologically structured. In addition to the rural–urban division seen in children’s broadcasting, the structured listening to foreign and domestic radio broadcasting reformulated the boundary between the elites and the mass in Mao-era China, as discussed in the next section.

2.3.5 Listening to radio broadcasting aired from foreign enemy countries: a boundary between the elites and the mass in Mao-era China

While loudspeakers allowed and at once restricted collective listening to domestic radio broadcasting, the private ownership of radio receivers enabled those who possessed them to listen to foreign radio broadcasting. In Mao-era China, listening to programs from overseas radio stations through shortwave reception was forbidden and deemed an anti-revolutionary crime (Fan, F.T., 2014). The range of enemy radio broadcasting expanded from Voice of America from the United States, the BBC from the Britain and radio broadcasting from Taiwan to include radio broadcasting from the Soviet Union when the relationship between China and the Soviet Union fell apart in the 1960s (Huang, Ai.H., 2010). The scrutiny of private listening reached a peak during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

Despite the political tension, individuals, who owned radio receivers through purchase or had made them themselves took the risk and listened to enemy stations (*ditai*). According to the account of China-based well-known literary author A Cheng, a radio receiver was one significant item sent-down urban youth (*zhiqing*) possessed when they were sent to relocate in rural regions. This relocation could be voluntary or compulsory, in response to pressure and instructions from leadership, which encouraged

young people to participate in and contribute to agricultural production and life ('Sent-down Youth', n.d.). In his case, during the Cultural Revolution years, he was sent to Yunnan province, where listening to foreign radio broadcasting was a common activity among the urban educated (A, Ch., 2009). On the one hand, due to the geographical location of Yunnan province in southwest China, it was difficult to get access to domestic media due to the poor reception of Beijing-based China National Radio and the slow arrival of hardcopy newspapers. On the other hand, the reception quality of shortwave radio was better than that of domestic radio broadcasting, which meant people could receive radio broadcasts from overseas countries and regions including from Britain, Russia, Australia, Hong Kong and Taiwan (A, Ch., 2009). In addition to receiving information about current domestic and international affairs, the interest in listening to foreign radio broadcasting was primarily about entertainment:

The interest in listening to foreign radio broadcasting was primarily due to the interest in entertainment more than political news ... Australian-based radio stations broadcast the Taiwanese-made radio drama *The Story of The Small Town* (xiaocheng gushi) ... The next day on the mountain, a period of time was spent chatting about the plot of this drama ... There was also religious broadcasting from a Hong Kong-based radio station ... The male intellectuals chatted about the voice of announcers, saying 'the voice of the male announcer on the Taiwan-based radio station sounded dry, and the voice of the female announcer sounded seductive but it was better not to sleep with her.' I listened to the BBC not for English but for the live relay of musical concerts. (A, Ch., 2009, translated by Lei, W.)

Listening to foreign radio broadcasting was an elite activity in comparison with listening to domestic radio broadcasting, which was a mass activity. In some ways, listening to foreign radio broadcasting therefore functioned as a status marker in

drawing the boundary between the elites and the mass. The elites were mainly those who were literate and also owned a radio receiver.

2.4 Conclusion

Like the other imported products and services made in western countries, radio and its associated devices enjoyed a privileged role and was a marker of privilege in the years after it was introduced into China from capitalist countries. In western countries, ownership of a radio receiver was widely privatised and popularised with mass production. By contrast, in the Republic China private ownership of radio receivers was limited to the politically, economically and culturally privileged. For many decades of the 20th century, China was actively involved in the process of updating knowledge about radio technology, improving the capacity of radio telecommunication and producing quality radio transmitters and receivers. If ‘golden age’ is an appropriate term to describe the status and significance of radio in the history of the United States (Goodman, 2011), the golden age of radio broadcasting in China is much longer than its counterpart in the United States. The golden age of radio in China lasted from the years when it was introduced into China for public communication in the early 1920s to the late 1980s, before giving way to television. To conclude this chapter I reiterate four points that are crucial in understanding the significance of radio to China in the 20th century.

Firstly, similar to radio in other countries, radio actively participated in nation-building, national development and modernisation in China from the early 20th century on, when radio emerged as a communication service catering to the public. In the Republic China, a range of radio stations including government-run, political party-run, private commercial and religious radio stations flourished on air, engaging in and

shaping public and private lives. They mutually contested, negotiated and influenced debates about how to build, develop and modernise the nation at a time when China was faced with a national crisis and international intrusion. With their commitments to political, economic or religious goals, all these radio stations of different backgrounds contributed in some way to informing, entertaining and educating the public. They attempted to produce the listening subjects that each radio station desired and expected to transform the nation. However, the influence of radio was concentrated in eastern urban China, with limited private radio receiver ownership. Meanwhile, this diversity of approaches to broadcasting were disrupted and reshaped with the anti-Japanese war and the domestic civil war. When Communist China was founded, a national hegemonic state-owned and state-sponsored radio system was established, featuring a wired loudspeaker network. Radio played a more influential role in Mao-era China in reaching and mobilising both rural and urban publics to become political subjects and to participate in material production and construction of the socialist state.

Secondly and more distinctively in relation to the context of Mao-era China, radio was a crucial instrument in establishing and shaping the relationship between the central authority at the top and the general public at the bottom. The limited private ownership of radio receivers restricted the reach of radio broadcasting. However, it provided the space for the innovation of adopting wired loudspeakers to allow the voice of the central authority to be heard by the whole nation. In contrast to its western counterparts where private listening was the dominant listening mode, collective listening was the dominant mode in Mao-era China, with private listening the preserve of the privileged few. On the one hand, collective listening was an activity resulting from the technological and economic underdevelopment of Mao-era China; on the other hand, however, it was effectively mobilised and organised widely to command the

general public to participate in a range of political, economic, social and cultural events, producing grassroots support for the communist party-led regime and befitting the collective mode of living in Mao-era China.

Thirdly, in both the Republic and Mao-era China, radio was constantly engaged in the democratisation of traditional culture. By altering the original forms of cultural genres, radio enabled the general public to have broader access to cultural works, compared with the previously limited access by elite groups and classes. In the case of Shanghai in the Republic years, private commercial radio democratised the local musical performance *Tanci*, relocating enjoyment of it from the teahouse to on-air radio (Benson, 1996). Given that migrants made up most of Shanghai's population, the radio democratisation of *Tanci* helped the dominant group of migrants from the provinces surrounding Shanghai to reproduce their native identity and resettle in Shanghai. Local culture from the surroundings at the same time exerted a strong influence in shaping Shanghai through the radio democratisation of *Tanci*. Despite and perhaps precisely because of the requirement for cultural works in Mao-era China to be politically engaged, radio enabled the democratisation of a range of cultural works including classic literature, music, Peking and local opera, western opera, movies and street performances. As a result, both rural and urban publics across the age, gender and educational spectrum were given access to on-air versions of cultural works. However, the democratisation of a particular traditional culture on a national scale occurred in tandem with a challenge to the diversity of traditional local cultures.

Fourthly, we see that since its introduction into China radio has been subject to political control, market forces and cultural influences from outside China as well as from inside China. Despite the domestic political changes, all Chinese governments in

the past and the present have aimed to control radio and use it to facilitate, maintain and expand their power over the Chinese political landscape. Of the two political parties shaping 20th century China, the Chinese Communist Party was more effective than the Nationalist Party in exploiting the capacity of radio to connect with and control the Chinese public. Before the Mao-era regime withdrew the market economy after the communist revolution, market forces had been strong in shaping the production of and listening to radio, just as also happened with the resurgence of market forces in post Mao-era China. Cultural influences from both outside and inside China found radio space for the broader distribution of their messages in both the Republic and Mao-era China. Listening allowed the public to appreciate a range of cultural forms nationwide, across class, gender, race and educational boundaries. Loudspeakers in Mao-era China enabled and popularised radio listening. Loudspeakers produced a form of listening that took place in a public and collective mode. Radio listening, especially radio news listening, became an activity of political obligation that Chinese were commanded to fulfill in Mao-era China. In this way the Chinese state simultaneously created and cultivated listeners as political subjects. ■

Chapter 3

Radio news and the articulation of one voice: continuity and transformation on China National Radio's Channel One⁶

3.1 News: a primary genre in Chinese radio

While studies of the news in China focus mainly on the Chinese print media and television (e.g., Tong, 2011; Zhang, X., 2011; Zhao, 1998, 2008; Pugsley & Gao, 2007), the sound of radio news in China is rarely heard in scholarly research. Given that radio news in China is produced and listened to in the same political–economic context as China's print and television news, radio news does share a number of similarities with its print and television counterparts. First and foremost, radio news has been tightly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party since the foundation of the communist Republic in 1949. Secondly, since the 1978 economic reforms the production of radio news has incorporated the market orientation, with the need to generate revenue gradually established as a secondary task for radio news. Thirdly, since its first emergence radio news has been transformed from a range of perspectives including orientation, priority, scope and presentational style. These general similarities are consequences of the negotiation between the

⁶Channel One was renamed Voice of China in 2004. I will use the title Voice of China when I discuss radio news from 2004 onwards.

Chinese state and the market. However, how this negotiation has been translated into routine radio news practice is largely unexplored. How does radio news respond to the particular political–economic context in China? More specifically, how is radio news produced, and received by listeners at different historical periods in China? What significant changes and continuities can we note in radio news production and listening from Mao-era China to post Mao-era China?

Relevant to any discussion of radio in China is attention to the specific characteristics of radio. As a sound-based medium, radio has the perceived capacity to overcome the triple barriers of distance, illiteracy and apathy (Katz & Wedell, 1977). Radio is cost-effective and time-effective in news production and reception. Radio news is distinguished from its print and television counterparts by its immediacy, and by the fact that it is a sound-based medium. Starkey and Crisell (2009) argue that the ‘blind’ nature of radio gives it certain advantages not shared by television. As they point out, ‘talk—reports, interviews, announcement, debates—is the very essence of news and current affairs’ (Starkey & Crisell, 2009, p.104). What’s more, from a global perspective, the digital technology, which is seen possessing the possibility to turn radio into ‘a great medium of tomorrow’ (Gazi, et al., 2011, p. 9), is demonstrating both strengths and limitations in digitalising radio news production and listening (Hendy, 2000; Moyo, 2013). This technology raises questions such as: How are the characteristics of radio perceived and exercised in news production and listening in China? How do radio stations in China cope with digitalisation of radio news production and listening? And how does the digitalisation of radio news production and listening reshape radio news in China?

In this chapter I engage with these questions to investigate the transformation of radio news since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Taking into account both the national political–economic context (Zhao, 2008; Zhang, X., 2011) and globalised technological trends (Hendy, 2000; Moyo, 2013), I focus on radio news on China National Radio's Channel One. There are two reasons for this focus. Politically, Channel One was the first national channel established by the Chinese Communist Party after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Since then, Channel One has retained the closest ties with the party and the national government of any other national radio channel. Due to its political significance, Channel One enjoys privileged technological status. It has advanced technological devices and possesses the infrastructure capacity to reach the largest listening audience throughout the nation and also overseas. Economically, Channel One has been transformed from a state-funded model to a model with heavy reliance on advertising to supplement its limited state funding. Its economic reliance on advertising has pushed it to produce news programs that appeal to a stratified listening public, competing with both non-news programs and news programs on national and local channels.

As discussed in chapter one, Mao-era China is a collectivised and nationalised society, whereas post Mao-era China is increasingly privatised, globalised and individualised. Aside from this principal contrast, each of these two eras consists of a number of historical phases. For instance, even in Mao-era China, the priorities in radio news on Channel One shifted multiple times, corresponding to the government's reorientation of the national agenda at different periods.

The research for this thesis draws on both written and audio materials, the two sources supplementing one another in helping give access to radio news in Mao-era

China and post Mao-era China. Archival audio recordings of actual news broadcasts in Mao-era China are hard to find. However, I have been able to reconstruct the mechanisms of radio news production and listening in this period from written sources, and from anecdotal material from Chinese listeners themselves. I also rely widely on written material when I discuss radio news in post Mao-era China from the 1980s to the present. The digitalisation of China National Radio allows one to listen online to live broadcasts of the latest radio news as well as to radio news from 2000 via its online database.

3.2 The collectivisation of the production of and listening to radio news in Mao-era China

Propaganda is the keyword in articulating and criticising the role of media and communication in Mao-era China and its relation to the Chinese state and public (Zhang, X., 2011). Anne-Marie Brady and Juntao Wang describe Chinese media and communication in Mao-era China as ‘a gigantic propaganda machine that covered the whole society’ (Brady & Wang, 2013, p. 23). Daniel Lynch defines the Mao-era Chinese regime as a propaganda state with control over media and communication (Lynch, 1999). With little presence of television in the Mao-era media system, radio was at the forefront, and high expectations were attached to its capacity to reach the largest listening audience, particularly among illiterate listeners. News, which was the primary output of all radio production, was considered as ideology more than fact and propaganda more than information (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998; Zhang, X., 2011) with the party-state functioning as the primary definer of news in Mao-era China (Zhao, 2012).

If news was propaganda, how were the favoured ideology and its tenets of collectivism, socialism and nationalism concretised into the routine news production,

circulation and listening? This ‘how’ question allows us to get closer to understanding the top-down communication system (Lynch, 1999). Drawing on collected material including academic historical accounts, personal memoirs, contemporaneous articles and audio recordings, this section sketches the process of radio news gathering, making and listening in Mao-era China. Instead of focusing on individual news item, I investigate the whole process of radio news production, circulation and listening. Instead of treating the production of news as an individual and separate practice, I examine the working mechanism involved in the production of news.

I first examine national conferences about media and communication, radio in particular, in Mao-era China. By examining the dominant news supply for radio news, I probe the common practice of sharing and remaking news output across different mediums. I then move on to one particular yet routinised form of radio genre in Mao-era China: live broadcasting of events (*guangbo dahui*) to scrutinise how this genre was produced, listened to and for what purpose. Based on this analysis, I investigate further how the Chinese Communist Party leadership attempted to make use of the distinct characteristics of radio in producing news. Finally, I explore the modes of listening in Mao-era China.

3.2.1 News as planned: a genealogy of national conferences about the broadcasting sector in Mao-era China

The planned, centralised mechanism established in material production and consumption sectors in Mao-era China also applied to the media and communication sector. The national conference, which was held by the national bureaus in charge of the broadcasting sector and attended by national and local radio station leaders and crew, was a crucial site in specifying how radio news was centralised and planned before the concrete news-making process. Although the broadcasting sector was organised to

include both radio and television, radio was the main concern of each conference in Mao-era China, given the limited presence of television in both public and private lives.

These national conferences are significant in informing us about radio news in Mao-era China for four reasons. Firstly, national conferences about the broadcasting sector closely accommodated to the national agenda defined by the Chinese Communist Party. The conferences delivered instructions on how radio news was regulated to facilitate the implementation of the national agenda at all levels. Secondly, the frequency of these national conferences means that we can use them to track how radio news was guided to change its reporting priorities at different historical phases in Mao-era China. Thirdly, these national conferences proposed ways to construct and maximise radio news circulation and listening. Fourthly, the interruption in the frequency of national conferences reflected the instability and tension within the leadership during the years of the Cultural Revolution. According to Zhao Yuming and his colleagues' work (2006) on the history of radio and television in China, a number of national conferences about broadcasting were held from 1950 to 1966 before the Cultural Revolution (Lu, Y., 2006, pp. 194-231; Ha, Y.Q., 2006, pp. 246-282). These conferences are listed in table 3.1 below.

The account of China's broadcasting history (Zhao, Y.M., et al., 2006) provides crucial material indicating the plan each national conference put forward to guide news production for the upcoming period before the next conference. The 1950 conference, which was held soon after the founding of the People's Republic of China, asserted that delivering news releases was the primary task for radio stations and that the Xinhua News Agency would serve as the main supplier of significant national and international news (Lu, Y., 2006). Radio stations were not allowed to adopt material from foreign

news agencies unless Xinhua News Agency did so (Lu, Y., 2006). Apart from this arrangement about news supply, radio stations were also instructed to develop the capacity to write news reports, conduct interview and present commentaries on their own (Lu, Y., 2006).

Later broadcasting conferences set the agenda and priorities that radio stations should follow with their routine news production. The 1954 conference ordered all radio programs to engage listeners in economic development, mobilising the masses to strive to build socialism (Lu, Y., 2006). The 1955 conference made the priority of developing rural wired radio network (Lu, Y., 2006), which will be explained further in this chapter. The 1958 conference suggested that the production of radio news adopt a ‘more, faster, shorter and better’ approach (*duo, kuai, duan, hao*), making news real, vivid, interesting and with a clear standpoint (Ha, Y.Q., 2006). From 1958 promoting politics became the primary task of radio news with the launch of the Great Leap Forward. Radio stations were commanded to stress both class politics and material production when the national economy entered a recovery stage in the 1960s before the Cultural Revolution (Ha, Y.Q., 2006). This selected chronicle of the themes of each national conference demonstrates how the production of radio news in Mao-era China was arranged to accommodate the priorities, doctrines and principles issued by the Chinese state in the period leading up to each conference. The question then arises: How did radio news production maintain consistency with the priorities, doctrines and principles set mandated during the different phases?

Date	Conference	Organiser
27 February 1950	Beijing & Tianjin News conference	National News Bureau
29 March 1950 – 16 April 1950	National news conference	-
1 December 1952 – 11 December 1952	First national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
8 November 1954 – 20 November 1954	Second national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
15 December 1955 – 22 December 1955	Third national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
25 July 1956 – 16 August 1956	Fourth national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
7 April 1958 – 18 April 1958	Fifth national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
23 February 1959 – 3 March 1959	Sixth national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
1 March 1960 – 15 March 1960	Seventh national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
3 April 1964 – 21 April 1964	Eighth national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau
20 March 1966 – 9 April 1966	Ninth national conference about broadcasting sector	National Broadcast Bureau

Table 3.1 Broadcasting sector conferences from 1950 to 1966

3.2.2 The inflow and outflow of news items: multi-dimensional news supply

News sharing was a distinct characteristic of the media and communication sector in Mao-era China. Reading print news stories verbatim, or simply rewriting them, was common practice. The reliance on national newspapers and Xinhua News Agency for news content was particularly the case for China National Radio's Channel One. Beijing-based, Channel One was geographically close to the Beijing-based national newspapers and the Xinhua News Agency. Radio news was also adopted by other mediums, especially at a later stage when radio acquired the personnel and technological capacity to gather and produce news on its own. The following section examines production of the two politically significant news programs, *News and Newspaper Selection (Xinwen He Baozhi Zhaiyao)* and *United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide (Quanguo Gedi Renmin Guangbo Diantai Lianbo)*.

As its title indicates, *News and Newspaper Selection* selected its news from the print media, particularly from the party's press organ. This program served as a print news processor, editing and arranging news collected from a number of politically heavyweight newspapers for the radio version. The radio staff read copies of the selected newspapers prior to the newspapers' publication, taking the party leadership's agenda into account and deciding what on-air treatments the different news items should be given. The primary news source was the *People's Daily (renmin ribao)*, which was the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. In order to guarantee strict conformity with the party, China National Radio established the following principles to be followed when adapting print news for *News and Newspaper Selection* in its routine work:

1. *People's Daily* is the primary source with other newspapers serving as supplements. In addition to broadcasting crucial news and commentary from each

edition of *People's Daily*, important editorials and commentaries from the *People's Daily* should be fully broadcast.

2. The report focus and highlight of the *People's Daily* will be *News and Newspaper Selection*'s daily focus and highlight, and it should fully reflect the party paper's intention.
3. Besides crucial news, it should adopt feature reports from a variety of newspapers. This will reflect and exercise the characteristic of the program as 'newspaper selection'.
4. Even though the crucial news from each edition of the *People's Daily* has already been broadcast on *United Broadcast*⁷ or other news programs, *News and Newspaper Selection* should still adopt it (the number of Chinese characters is allowed to be more condensed). (Liu, Sh.F., et al., 2010, p. 50, translated by Lei, W.)

The other newspapers whose news, editorials, and commentaries were used as sources of content for *News and Newspaper Selection* included *Liberation Army Newspaper* (*Jiefangjun Bao*), *Worker's Daily* (*Gongren Ribao*), *Guangming Daily* (*Guangming Ribao*), *China Youth Daily* (*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*), and *Dakung Press* (*Dagong Bao*) (Liu, Sh.F., et al., 2010, p. 50), all of which were either originally established as party organs or were reformed to become such after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. For instance, the *Liberation Army Newspaper* was launched as a party organ in 1949 and circulated mainly in the People's Liberation Army and party and official organisations ('*Jiefangjun Bao*', n.d.). The *Workers' Daily* is the working

⁷United Broadcast is the short name for the night news program United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide.

class-oriented newspaper of the National Labor Union ('*Gongren Ribao*', n.d.).

Guangming Daily is one of the official newspapers under the direct leadership of the Department of Propaganda. *China Youth Daily* is the newspaper of the Communist Youth League ('*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*', n.d.).

A second supplier of news content for Channel One was local radio stations. Besides the already discussed obligation to relay national news programs, local radio stations were required to supply local news to national news programs. During the transition period (1949–1956) from a Nationalist Party-led society to socialist society, the National Bureau of Broadcast Sector trained and cultivated local radio journalists (Lu, Y., 2006). For instance, in addition to their local responsibility, local radio journalists were encouraged to produce news and feature reports suitable for national radio stations (Lu, Y., 2006).

The news supply from local radio stations to national radio stations was a routine practice in Mao-era China and still occurs in contemporary China. In Mao-era China, the practice was particularly concentrated in the news program *United Broadcast of Local People's Radio Stations Nationwide*. More than that, this mechanism of local-to-national news supply was set up with radio sector and subsequently extended to television when television was popularised. The national television news program is broadcast at 19:00, overshadowing the national radio news program during this time slot. Although they share the same title of *United Broadcast of News (Xinwen Lianbo)*, the eventual dominance of television has led to it appropriating this title. When the public refers to *United Broadcast of News*, they overwhelmingly mean the television version.

The authorities not only recognised the similarities and synergies between print and radio; they also sought to make radio news more appealing, so that its potential as a

medium for propaganda could be fully exploited. In the following section, I investigate how the top leadership in charge of the radio sector in Mao-era China proposed and led the exploration on the characteristics of radio in bettering news production to attract the listening audience.

3.2.3 Beyond the distribution of print news: developing radio into a production site for news

One consequence of radio's high dependency for the supply of news on print news and the Xinhua News Agency was the limited appeal of radio news to the public due to its predominantly dry political content, official narrative discourse and formal presentational style. The party was aware of this issue in the early days of the People's Republic. An article in the *People's Daily* of 1954 by a senior central official noted this as follows:

The subject of a great deal of our radio broadcast scripts are utterly devoid of interest to a large segment of the population. Their contents are dull, without fresh ideas, and incapable of educating and influencing people. People also find it difficult to get timely and comprehensive reports by the radio on current international events and on the development of the nation's construction programs. (I Meng Chun, 1954, in Houn, 1961, p. 171)

The leadership in charge of media and communication at that time attempted to explore and exploit the characteristics of radio technology. In 1950 Hu Qiaomu, the head of the National News Bureau⁸, proposed that 'radio walks on its own' (*guangbo ziji zoulu*)

⁸The Mao-era central government established the National News Bureau in November 1949 after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Its primary responsibility was the implementation of news policy, news-relevant laws, orders and principles. This organisation was restructured in 1952. More information: <http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中央人民政府新闻总署>

(Hu, Q.M., 1950, in Gu, L., 1986; Ha, Y.Q. & Huang, Y.Y., 2011). He said this during a discussion about radio news with Mei Yi, the then deputy head of the National Bureau of Broadcast Sector (Ha, Y.Q. & Huang, Y.Y., 2011). Mei Yi, who later held the position of the head of the National Bureau of Broadcast Sector, offered an interpretation and elaboration of ‘walk on its own’. On one occasion in 1964, he explained:

Radio as a news organ, we should figure out how [it can] walk on its own. In other words, (it) should have its own commentary and interview resources to get ride of the current situation of passive propaganda. (Mei, Y., 1964, in Cao,S & Yang, M., 1979, p. 10, translated by Lei, W.)

One particular genre the Chinese Communist Party initiated and stimulated to make best use of radio’s capacity was live broadcasting of events (*guangbo dahui*), which played a crucial role in mobilising the public in Mao-era China. If we trace further back, live broadcasting of events first found its space on radio soon after the Chinese Communist Party founded People’s Republic of China (Wu, H.F., 2012). The live broadcast of public protests against the United States rearming Japan was an earlier case in 1951. Although they took place mostly at local levels, each local event converged and constituted a national movement.

In April 1951, when the United States decided to rearm Japan and establish Japan as a military base in Asia, local radio stations actively broadcast live the local moves to express public protest. What radio broadcasting mainly contributed was to use

organised listening to motivate the public to participate in the public protests. For instance, Beijing organised the live broadcast of the event themed ‘Beijing women oppose America arming Japan’ (Wu, H.F., 2012). Individually and collectively owned radio receivers and loudspeakers were all turned on to amplify the live broadcast of the public protest (Wu, H.F., 2012). This organised collective listening took place at workplaces as well as in neighborhoods.



Figure 3.1 On 25 April 1951, women in a neighborhood in Beijing listen to the live broadcast of Beijing women protesting against the United States arming Japan

Photographer unknown

Source: <http://www.jiaxiangwang.com/cn/bj-1951-guangbo.htm> (accessed 5 May 2015)

Tianjin, a city next to Beijing, organised live broadcast of the event under the theme ‘sign to support the peace treaty, vote to oppose arming Japan’ (Wu, H.F., 2012).

Before the broadcast, preparations were carried out to guarantee a smooth broadcast and attentive listening. The day before the broadcast, *Tianjin Daily* (*Tianjin Ribao*)

published the headline ‘The live broadcast of the event of signing and voting will take place tomorrow—people from all walks of life in Tianjin are organising the upcoming radio listening’ (Wu, H.F., 2012, p.110). Specific preparations included:

The municipal labour union assigned the task to sub-level labour unions. Radio stations in the 108 factories in the city all actively checked radio receivers and amplifiers ... The representatives of household registration services of the 6th district launched a competition in order to make sure that no one would be left out of the organised listening ... The 141 industries under the industry and trade association planned to organise the collective listening of industrialists and merchants based on their aligned sector associations. (*Tianjin Daily* in Wu, H.F., 2012, p.110, translated by Lei,W.)

The live broadcast of the public event produced a demonstration organised from the top down, engaging the majority of the public through speaking and listening and mobilising powerful emotional support. Listeners also participated in the public event by listening, responding strongly and emotionally to the broadcast speeches. In Tianjin, the gathered listening public responded to the on-air participants’ denunciation by declaring slogans such as ‘revenge for the dead’ (*wei sinanzhe baochou*) and by expressing their commitment to improve China’s material production to fight against intruders (Wu, H.F., 2012, p. 109).

In the early 1950s the campaign to crack down on counter-revolutionary criminals was another case where live broadcasts of events were mobilised to gain public support. In Tianjin, public discussion about the punishment of counter-revolutionary criminals took place in a stadium, attended by representatives from all walks of life. This event was broadcast live, reinforcing the authorities’ demand that ‘the

crackdown on counter-revolutionaries must reach an enormous strength and scale (*dazhangqigu*)’ as expressed in the *People’s Daily* (Wu, H.F., 2012, p. 109). The live broadcasts of local actions in the crackdown on counter-revolutionaries were also aired in other places, forming a national voice on air that supported the political movement.

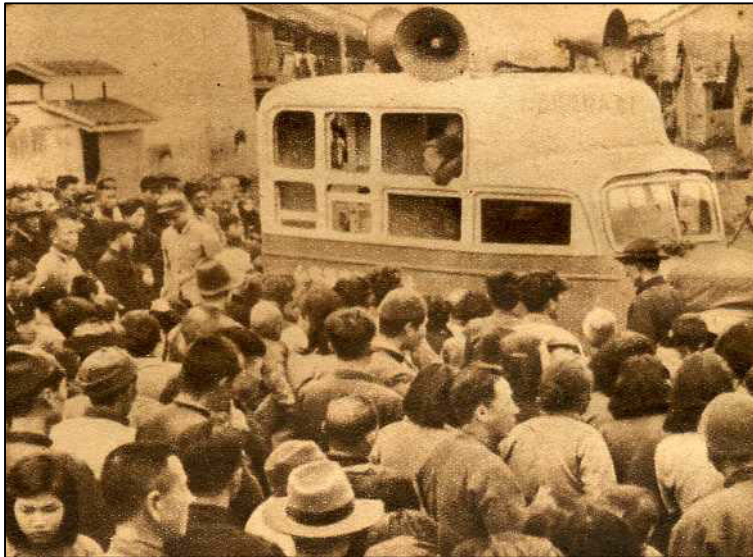


Figure 3.2 On 29 April 1951, Shanghai Radio Station sent its mobile broadcasting car through Shanghai’s urban areas, allowing the public without radio receivers to listen to the public trial of counter-revolutionary criminals

Photographer unknown

Source: <http://www.jiaxiangwang.com/cn/bj-1951-guangbo.htm> (accessed 5 May 2015)

After the Chinese Communist Party asserted its political power and social order was restored in the mid-1950s, the live broadcast of events was more extensively used to participate in the building of the socialist nation. These broadcasts supported rapid material and cultural development with the aim proposed by Mao to ‘catch up with Britain and the United States’ (*ganying chaomei*) (Wu, Y.N., 2012). During the Great Leap Forward, events broadcast live ranged from production competitions in the industrial sector to agricultural improvements and public health and educational campaigns. The conference on steel casting and forging competition and evaluation, organised by the Ministry of Machinery in 1959, was broadcast live to deliver industrial

information, mobilise further industrial competition, assign production tasks, and share advanced production experience ('Zhuduan Pingbi Guangbo Dahui', 1959). The conference aimed to mobilise the steel workers nationwide to achieve the goal of completing three years in advance the proposed output set for the second five-year plan ('Zhuduan Pingbi Guangbo Dahui', 1959). Presenters including the deputy minister of the Ministry of Machinery, the chairman of a branch of the national labor union, and a number of leaders from local steel factories attended the conference which took place in a great hall ('Zhuduan Pingbi Guangbo Dahui', 1959). Steel workers also attended the conference on site. Steel workers and factory management groups nationwide formed the off-air listeners for the live broadcast of the conference ('Zhuduan Pingbi Guangbo Dahui', 1959).

In general terms, live broadcasts of productive construction-related events constituted live coverage of a form of themed top-down public meeting, in which the off-air target listeners were organised to come together to listen attentively. The organisers of these events varied from party members and government to leadership across a range of sectors such as agriculture, industrial production, education and public health (e.g., Beijing Renmin Guangbo Diantai Taishi Bianxiezu, 1984; 'Zhonggong Hunan Shengwei Shuji', 1959; 'Shengwei, Shengrenwei Zhaokai Guangbo Dahui', 1960). At these events, which were usually in the shape of a conference, the keynote figures such as the party secretaries, governmental officials or sector leaders would give a speech, mobilising the listeners to participate in actions to achieve the proposed goal of the conference. The target listeners also varied according to the themes of these conferences. Live broadcastings of conferences was adopted on radio stations at both national and local levels. In most cases, live broadcasting of local conferences was a

positive local response to the nationally issued agenda. The themes of local conferences were thus consistent with the national ones.

Local radio stations were more aggressive in exploiting the live broadcasting of conferences to mobilise local residents to participate in material production and the construction of a socialist civilisation. Although historical documents offer a range of local cases, only a few are cited here due to space limitations. On Beijing radio station, 29 live broadcasts of conferences were organised during 1958 and 1959 (Beijing Renmin Guangbo Diantai Taishi Bianxiezu, 1984). In 1958 alone, nine of the conferences focused on agricultural production (Beijing Renmin Guangbo Diantai Taishi Bianxiezu, 1984). The themes of these conferences included making and collecting fertiliser; protective measures against frost; the launch of the movement to increase production and conserve resources; and further development of livestock production (Beijing Renmin Guangbo Diantai Taishi Bianxiezu, 1984). In 1959 in Hunan province in Central China, the live broadcast of a conference about tackling illiteracy (*saomang*) and amateur education (*yeyu jiaoyu*) featured a speech made by the secretary of the Hunan provincial party committee, encouraging further moves to promote literacy and education in various workplaces (Zhonggong Hunan Shengwei Shuji, 1959). In Heilongjiang province in Northeast China, the live broadcast of a conference mobilising the general public to participate in a public health campaign in the spring of 1960 encompassed a number of activities such as speeches by keynote figures and commitments by school children and county representatives ('Shengwei, Shengrenwei Zhaokai Guangbo Dahui', 1960).

The live broadcasting of events on radio represents a significant and distinctively Chinese example of what Dayan and Katz call a 'media event' (Dayan & Katz, 1992, in

Sun, 2014a, p.457). In their formulation, the term media events refers to the simultaneous mass viewing of ‘national events, rituals, and ceremonies’ (Sun, 2014a, p. 457) on television. The live broadcast of events on radio, involving simultaneous mass listening, is an important precursor to the media events of the television age. In most cases, the live broadcasts of events on radio took place locally under a nationally assigned theme.

Another crucial characteristic of the live broadcasting of events in Mao-era China was the public nature of listening in contrast to the private nature of listening in western countries. While there are some examples of mass listening, such as autonomous groups gathering for collective listening noted by Kate Lacey (2013), there are relatively isolated and did not normally involve the implementation of a state-approved national agenda. More significantly, instead of a neutral recorder of events, radio in Mao-era China was a crucial and active element of events, turning listeners to events into participants mobilised to achieve national goals.

Mobilisation was a significant role radio played in what Luo Hongdao describes as ‘the official model’ (Luo, H.D., 1983, in Zhao, 1998, p. 95) of Mao-era Chinese media. This official model defined media as the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. Media’s role was to speak with the same voice articulated by the party. Thus, radio news largely delivered the same news items selected from the party press and the Xinhua News Agency. Its heavy ideological content and its intellectually demanding discourse made radio news difficult to understand and appreciate. While radio news did guarantee that it spoke with the same voice as the party, it also risked becoming alienated from both the literate and illiterate public.

Radio's alienation from the Chinese public was particularly the case during the Cultural Revolution when the official political model of radio was exploited further. From 1966 on, during the most politicised period of the Cultural Revolution, radio news was reoriented to engage in the class struggle and political education. Those with radio receivers risked arrest if they tuned in to foreign radio broadcasting in secret for information, entertainment and arts appreciation (Huang, Ai.H., 2010). This paternalistic approach was maintained in the years after the Cultural Revolution. As the former chief leader of China National Radio Yang Zhengquan recalls, one old farmer who bought a radio receiver after the Cultural Revolution complained that Chinese radio broadcasts made him feel like he had bought a 'father figure due to the paternalistic tone of radio broadcasts' ('Mai Shouyinji', 2010).

3.2.4 The collectivisation of radio news listening: one unified listening public

In contrast to the autonomous group gathering for collective listening in western countries (Lacey, 2013), collective listening in Mao-era China was organised from the top down, and collective listening to radio news in particular was organised as a political activity. As discussed in chapter one, the continuous construction of infrastructure in Mao-era China enabled collective listening to radio news via loudspeakers installed and connected in workplaces and public spaces. Group listening was formed and structured by the places where individuals were located such as workplaces, rural communes, household compounds and public venues. In the process of repeatedly delivering the same news items to these groups, Channel One produced a single unified listening public out of these disparate groups.

In this uniform listening public in Mao-era China, local officials who were responsible for governing and managing local issues were primary listeners identified by

China National Radio's Channel One. Its *News and Newspaper Selection* program was designed to 'help cadres read newspapers' (Liu, Sh.F., et al., 2010, p. 50). Retired radio staff who worked for China National Radio during Mao-era China recall:

Some cadres would usually have a meeting at 8:00 pm, which resulted in them missing the *United Broadcast*. Nevertheless, the broadcast time of *Newspaper Selection*⁹ in the morning ensured their listening was less interrupted [by other businesses]. So the highlight of *Newspaper Selection* was helping cadres get to know the central spirit. (Liu, Sh.F., et al., 2010, p. 50, translated by Lei, W.)

As described in chapter one, wired loudspeakers were instrumental in enabling collective listening in Mao-era China. Wherever they were and whatever activity they were engaged in, Chinese individuals—be it the farmer, the worker, the official, the intellectual, the youth, or the soldier—found themselves surrounded by the same news issuing from loudspeakers. Loudspeakers informed the masses about domestic and international changes and progresses such as the five-year plans, political movements, material production campaigns and the tension between Mainland China and Taiwan (Wang, H., 2013). More than simply widening public awareness of orders and commands from the top, loudspeakers extended the adoption and implementation of top orders and commands to a national scale. *The Draft of the Guideline of National Agricultural Development from 1956 to 1967* highlighted the importance of the installation of loudspeakers in the collective mode of production communes:

From 1956, according to the specific circumstances of various places, the rural wired radio network should be popularised in 7 or 12 years. The majority of production

⁹Newspaper Selection is short for the morning news program News and Newspaper Selection.

communes in agriculture, forestry, fishing, husbandry, the salt and handicraft industries will get access to radio broadcasting. (The Draft of the Guideline of National Agricultural Development from 1956 to 1967, in Wang, H., 2013, p. 32, translated by Lei, W.)



Figure 3.3 Construction workers in Nanjing listen to a broadcast of the draft of the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 1954

Photographer Xiao Zhuang, 1954

Source: <http://bbs.voc.com.cn/topic-6495572-3-1.html> (accessed 21 May 2015)

In Mao-era China explicit notice of the need to organise collective listening was delivered through loudspeakers from Channel One whenever significant issues and events were scheduled to be broadcast. For instance, during the Cultural Revolution, the left proletariat team was organised and developed through loudspeakers, mobilising, unifying and educating the masses (Wang, H., 2013).

Radio news in Mao-era China both reported on collectivisation and was itself an engine of the collectivisation process. Firstly, the production of radio news was collectivised. The style of news and what was considered newsworthy was planned and discussed as part of the everyday production process. Secondly, news items were shared and remade as news items could be adopted not only across radio stations but also across mediums. The circulation of news items was multiplied through both vertical and horizontal communication. Thirdly, radio news listening was collectivised. Collective listening in a group was a prioritised mode of listening due to both the lack of listening devices and the political obligation to listen to radio news. The live broadcasting of events epitomised how the production of and listening to radio news was collectivised for political control and nation building.



Figure 3.4 On 1 October 1967, soldiers at a military base in Beijing gather around a radio receiver, listening to a live broadcast of the National Day Parade and the speech by National Vice President Lin Biao

Photographer unknown

Source: http://www.hljtv.com/2014/0924/628202_12.shtml (accessed 4 May 2015)



Figure 3.5 In January 1975, the staff of a department store in Tianjin listen to news of the successful opening of the Fourth National People's Congress

Photographer Yang Ke, 1975

Source: <http://bbs.voc.com.cn/topic-6502733-6-1.html> (accessed 4 May 2015)

The collectivisation of the production of radio news was both an ideological priority and a practical necessity, due to the lack of both personnel and material resources to produce, circulate and listen to radio news. Collectivisation was critical to the production of what former radio staff of Channel One recount as ‘one voice in the whole nation’ (Liu, Sh.F., et al., 2010, p. 50). Although the concrete content and specific theme of ‘one voice’ shifted at different historical moments, the collectivisation mechanism of radio news production and listening guaranteed that the one voice of the top authority was articulated and heard nationwide, and nationalisation was achieved.

3.3 Reforms in radio news in post Mao-era China

In the 1980s, after the official launch of economic reforms in 1978, attempts to reform radio news appeared more urgent and necessary. This was in part because of the competition from television, which rose to replace radio broadcasting, becoming the

primary source of news in the public daily life. The 11th national radio and television conference held in 1983 stressed that news was the mainstream program on radio and television, and therefore that radio and television reform must start with news reform (Ge, X., 1983). This conference also advocated the decentralisation of the broadcasting sector by establishing radio and television stations at four levels: national, provincial, municipal and county (Ge, X., 1983). The following years saw the emergence of radio broadcasting reforms in Eastern China, two pioneer and prominent moves of which took place in radio stations in Guangdong province and radio stations in Shanghai (Zhao, 1998). Both of them turned out to be politically acceptable and commercially popular (Zhao, 1998). As a result, their success provided model cases for radio program reform elsewhere in China. For instance, the call-in format was adopted in other local radio stations to encourage the public to report news leads and release their complaints about public and consumption issues (Zhao, 1998). If evening was seen as the news time on television, morning was prioritised as the news time on radio. Furthermore, a wave began to produce more, quicker and shorter news. In order to produce more news in a limited time, Shanghai radio station required journalists to produce short news using no more than 200 Chinese characters. News announcers were required to increase their announcing speed from 180 characters per minute to 200 to 220 characters per minute (Zhang, H.Y., 1998, p. 58).

3.3.1 Channel One in the 1990s: making radio news in the space between the top and the bottom

When the reform of radio programs became an inevitable trend to cope with media commercialisation and competition from television, China National Radio's Channel One in November 1985 proposed a reform of its programs (Qing, Er., 1987). Articles about this reform record the changes taking places in radio news on Channel One (Qing,

Er., 1987). After preparing for the reform, in 1987 the reforms began in earnest with updated programs and newly launched programs. In terms of news, from 6:30 am to 7:30 am, ten minutes of sports news and ten minutes of international news and current affairs were added as a supplement and extension to *News and Newspaper Selection* (Qing, Er., 1987). Another program of mixed items of news, knowledge and music was aired at noon for half an hour (Qing, Er., 1987). Letters from listeners were used to measure the popularity of the programs. In April 1987, 3,294 mails were received about the news and mixed culture and entertainment programs, with *Tonight 8:30 pm* receiving 44,393 mails (Qing, Er., 1987). These letters contained praise, criticism and suggestions (Qing, Er., 1987).

However, these changes did not mean that radio news was significantly liberated from state-defined ideology. On one hand, like print and television news, radio news did reduce the amount of Mao-era dominant ideology in its coverage, including ‘Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought’ (Zhao, 1998, p. 6). On the other hand, it positively reflected the state’s reorientation by shifting to promote the renewed ideology in association with the market adopted by the top leadership. With this newly adopted ideology, the state asserted the significance of the market in realising national prosperity and personal social mobility (Zhao, 1998). Radio news was consequently produced within a market-friendly framework and reported actively on politically and economically significant cases in relation to the national agenda. An article about the propaganda work of China National Radio for 1995 (Tong, X.R., 1994) listed a number of serial reports that Channel One proposed to cover that year about nationally significant events. The titles were:

1. Steps towards Modern Enterprises [reflecting state-owned enterprise reform]

2. Transformation of Classic Representative Places [reflecting rural reform]
3. Making a Flat Lake out of a High Cliff [covering the Three Gorges Dam Hydropower Project in China Yangtze River]
4. China's Southwest Corner [reflecting the new face of reformed West China, which was a sequence following the series Steps of Northwest China broadcast in 1994]
5. Fruitful Outcome of Spiritual Civilisation [reflecting the construction of the spiritual civilisation in urban and rural area]
6. Chinese Female Heroes [coinciding with the World Women's Conference].
(Tong, X.R., 1994, p. 26, translated by Lei, W.)

Along with its positive tone on economic reforms, Channel One also made attempts in the 1990s to engage with what is referred to as 'public opinion supervision' (*yulun jiandu*) (Zhao & Sun, 2007; Lee, 2012). Also known as 'media supervision' (Lee, 2012), public opinion supervision since the mid-1990s is a form of investigative journalism whose main purpose is to monitor the conduct of governmental institutions and officials and to 'ensure that news reports represent public opinion' (Lee, 2012, p. 12). Hence, the Chinese media is considered as the fourth estate with Chinese characteristics (Pugsley & Gao, 2007, p. 459; Lee, 2012) due to its close association with the Chinese state. The scope and practice of public opinion supervision is negotiated rather than fixed. Yuezhi Zhao and Wusan Sun (2007) offer a thorough examination of the discourse, practice and limitation of public opinion supervision. According to them, public opinion supervision by the central authority since the mid-1980s encouraged both top-down and bottom-up communication across a range of media forms. Although the central authority persistently endorsed public opinion

supervision, this term had different articulations at different stages, during which 1989 was perceived as a dividing point. In comparison with the engagement in the decision-making process of before-1989, public opinion supervision in post-1989 discourse was limited to the monitoring of the policy and power implementation process (Zhao & Sun, 2007):

The post-1989 discourse was promoted in the context of tightened media control, a narrower, though more urgent, anti-corruption agenda, and the party-state's press need to achieve both ideological legitimacy and administrative effectiveness over local authorities as it confronts the contradictions of China's capitalist revolution unleashed by Deng's 1992 call for accelerated market reforms (Zhao & Sun, 2007, p. 303).

In the broadcasting sector, public opinion supervision is produced in the shape of current affairs programs (Zhang, X., 2011; Pugsley & Gao, 2007). In 1994 Channel One launched *News With A Comprehensive Scope* (*Xinwen Zongheng*), a radio version of China Television Central Station's *Focus* (*jiaodian fangtan*), which was seen as a representative program of public opinion supervision (Zhang, X., 2011; Pugsley & Gao, 2007). 'The supervision of the policy and power implementation process' (Deng, B., 1995, p. 10) was the first principle, which the specific form of public opinion supervision—a critical report—was required to adhere to (Deng, B., 1995). It aimed to promote the appropriate application and implementation of national policies by exposing wrongdoings that violated national policies. The second principle was that exposed cases needed to be typical and representative, reminding others to avoid wrongdoings of this kind (Deng, B., 1995). The third principle was completeness, which referred to the consequence that followed the release of the critical report, including response to it and outcomes. Follow-up reports were produced until the reported issue

was resolved with an outcome that satisfied the public (Deng, B., 1995). These three principles are still applicable in today's public opinion supervision on Channel One. One radio journalist I interviewed who works for public opinion supervision on Channel One differentiates public opinion supervision in China from western investigative journalism as follows:

It is precisely because of the support from the party that public opinion supervision can be conducted. The party allows a considerable space for these reports. The biggest resistance is from the local government ... The aim of public opinion supervision is to help solve this particular problem more than to get the story published. If the problem is solved before we report it and the local government asks us not to release it, we can think again about whether or not to release it. (personal communication, 10 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

In addition to suggesting these three principles in conducting public opinion supervision, Deng Bin, the responsible executive of this program in the 1990s, provides a comprehensive account (Deng, B., 1995) on the topic and aim of *News With A Comprehensive Scope*. Deng Bin classifies topics on this program into two categories. He calls the first category 'hard topics', which include important national conferences, significant foreign affairs events, the release of new policy and new law and important news in foreign countries (Deng, B., 1995). The second category is 'soft topics', which generally refer to social issues, such as commodity prices, social security, anti-corruption, traditional cultural and social morality (Deng, B., 1995).

The launch of public opinion supervision programs took place at a time when radio broadcasting declined to be a secondary medium behind television. Although one set of statistics show that radio broadcasting was still the first source of news in 1983,

audience research in 1992 shows that television rose to be the primary medium from which the public received news (Wu, G., 1996, p. 12). In the radio domain, radio stations expanded through the launch of a range of non-news channels during the years in the 1990s (Zhao, 1998). The emerging new radio practices such as late night talkback radio, health infomercial radio and drive radio, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, have multiplied the role of radio and marginalised the role of radio as news provider.

3.3.2 From Channel One to Voice of China: further reform towards information-oriented news and emerging challenges

From 2002, a new reform that addressed orientation-specific channels and channel-based management was launched nationwide with the notion of narrowcasting (*zhaibohua*) (Zhongguo Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005; Wang, M.H., 2007). Channel-based management was a move to decentralise management in radio stations. For instance, business and finance channels were established as separate from news channels. These new channels focused on economic news, information and reports. The specialised channel was a move to concentrate time and energy, rather than airing something for everyone. Take the reform in China National Radio for example. Under this reform, the business and finance channel on China National Radio removed programs irrelevant to economics and finance. Two channels targeting Taiwan, both of whose programs overlapped and contained a number of genres, were renamed Voice of China Region and Voice of Shenzhou (Zhongguo Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005). The former was reformed into a news-oriented channel. The latter was reformed into a culture and entertainment-oriented channel (Zhongguo Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005).

It was not until 2004 that Channel One was also reformed, after reforms had been conducted on other national channels under China National Radio (Zhongguo

Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005). This reform renamed Channel One as Voice of China from the first day of 2004. It turned Channel One into a comprehensive news channel (*xinwen zonghe pinlü*), news-oriented but with non-news programs as well. One issue of the journal *China Broadcasts* in 2005 provides a comprehensive account (Zhongguo Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005) of moves taken to produce more news and make news more appealing. With news programs as its priority, Voice of China broadcast 21.5 hours each day. It transformed the majority of news programs from pre-recorded broadcasts to live broadcasts. *News and Newspaper Selection* was updated from a pre-recorded format into a live program when a new round of reforms was launched in 2009, as discussed in the following section. Each day there were 36 brief news announcements on each hour and half-hour. There were also feature reports and interview-oriented programs, further expanding and deepening discussion of news items (Zhongguo Guangbo Bianjibu, 2005).

Another new practice was that listeners were allowed to participate in news program by sending text messages (Wang, Sh. P., 2005) as mobile phones became popular individual communication devices. It was reported that there were almost 400 million mobile phone holders in China in 2005 (Zheng, Y.N., et al., 2005). This text message-based interaction was much easier to control than call-in participation, which has been practised mostly for local public and personal issues on local radio stations from the late 1980s (Zhao, 1998). Although there was a call selection process before going on air, what callers expressed on air was less predictable. Text messages were produced by listeners first and then selected and read out by in-studio presenters. The text message-based interaction encouraged instant public participation. Moreover, it was politically safe on air as long as the contributor's voice was absent.

With the text message-facilitated interaction, Voice of China added new commentary programs, increasing commentary airtime into more than three hours per day, three times the previous commentary time before the 2004 reform (Guo, N.D.Er., 2006). It is reasonable to argue that news production cost was one crucial consideration. Since losing to television its position as the primary medium of news and entertainment, radio has struggled to attract listeners and advertisers. Non-news programs expanded significantly on radio in recent years. In 2009, the Director of Voice of China highlighted the rise of non-news content, entertainment in particular, in past decades and its consequent impact on the declining role of radio as a mainstream medium for news:

Radio broadcasting, previously a powerful media of opinion guidance, was quietly transformed into a media more of entertainment and service. The urban-based radio channels whose listening ratings, marketing shares and advertising revenues always top the listings are drive radio and entertainment radio. (Shi, M., 2009, pp. 4-7, translated by Lei, W.)

In the case of Voice of China, the growth of commentary programs was arguably an outcome of economic calculations. As in-studio and telephone talk was a cheap way to fill airtime, commentary programs were cost effective. The use of text messages and online posts from the public was also cheap in filling airtime for Voice of China. Despite the selection and filtering of written messages, this format did allow and encourage public opinion (although not the public's voice) on air. Moreover, commentary programs' focus on public and social issues maintained Voice of China's legitimacy as a news-oriented channel.

This reform took place at the time when Hu Jintao served as president and Wen Jiabao as prime minister, promoting the vision of a harmonious society and aiming to

resolve an emerging range of negative issues resulting from uneven economic development over the past years (Zheng, et al., 2005). One emphasis of their national agenda was the well-being of ‘ordinary people and disadvantaged groups, such as peasants and migrant workers’ (Zheng, et al., 2005, p. 5). News about the well-being of ordinary people, which already emerged around 2000 on television (Chen, L.D., & Weng, W.W., 2008), was established as ‘*minsheng*’ news (Li, Sh. & Hu, Zh.R., 2003; Chen, L.D. & Weng, W.W., 2008) and was widespread on television. Likewise, Voice of China treated *minsheng* issues including employment, education and social insurance as a focus in its reports. Concerns with the social and economic injustice experienced by migrant workers were also a regular issue. At the same time, the coverage of national events such as the Wenchuan earthquake and the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 was Voice of China’s responsibility as a national news channel committed to the Chinese state.

However, efforts made by Voice of China in the years following the 2004 reform were overshadowed by the rising crisis in news production and reception of mainstream Chinese media. Here I suggest three issues, which contributed to the birth of a decision to further reform Voice of China in 2009 for both political and economic reasons. The first issue was the credibility crisis in the media including radio in general in China after the years of growth where the approach had concentrated on economic interest over social interests. The second issue was the challenge from internet-based social media. Social media provide a platform for releasing and receiving news, particularly for breaking news released by the general public. The third issue was the expanding well-educated urban middle class, viewed by market logic as the primary target audience.

Chinese news production has encountered a credibility crisis in recent decades for reasons of market logic other than just dissatisfaction with political propaganda news. One cause of this crisis was the adoption of the globalised infotainment format, a practice in which an entertainment-value component is attached to news production (Thussu, 2007). Another local occurrence was journalistic misconduct, which China-based media scholars summarise as a 'lack of responsibility' (Du, Zh. H., 2006, p.10). As they point out, there are two forms of misconduct. The first form, called 'media silence' (Du, Zh. H., 2006, p.10), refers to the failure of media to cover socially significant events. The SARS epidemic was a primary case that the media in China failed to cover for political reasons. The political need to secure social stability led the media in China to conceal information about the SARS epidemic. Both domestic and international criticisms finally pressured the Chinese government to allow the media to pay close attention to developments in the fight against SARS (Zhang, X., 2007; Pugsley, 2006).

The second form, referred to as 'media corruption' (Du, Zh.H., 2006, p. 10), refers to a range of profit-oriented practices, such as manipulating news for money, sensationalism and reporting fraudulent news and news obsessed with the rich (Du, Zh. H., 2006). Largely an outcome of the commercialisation of media, this form of misconduct had been increasing aggressively among journalists interested in seeking to improve their individual remuneration. Corrupt and unethical conduct included practices such as paid-for news advertorials, soft advertising and ignoring socially and economically negative news and criminal activities (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). Such misconduct caused great damage to the supposed credibility of the media and, by extension, of the Chinese state, since the state defined the media establishment and exerted strict control over news production. In other words, the post-Mao political-

economic context, which overwhelmingly encouraged the pursuit of economic interest over social interest in the media landscape, at the same time posed challenges to the credibility and legitimacy of the Chinese state.

While the conventional media pledged to deal with the widespread journalistic corruption, internet-based social media has been increasing as a site of news production and reception, enabling the public to exercise a form of citizen journalism. Individuals use social media to release issues they consider as news and at the same time to access issues released by others as news. Public participation in producing and communicating news has established social media as an active and interactive space, capable of releasing breaking news to the public. The significance of social media to the public has been widely recognised and established in recent years when public participation in social media elevated a number of local cases to national issues and shaped the final outcome of these issues.

The Deng Yujiao case (Zhu, W.T., 2009; Huang, X.L., 2009; Da Chanmao Ye lai Chao Gupiao, 2009) is offered here to demonstrate the capacity of social media to attract public attention and impact on the progress of legal cases. In 2008, the commercial news portal Sina posted a news report about the De Yujiao case, which was published by *Yangzi River Commercial Paper (Changjiang Shangbao)*, a Hubei province-based, municipal commercial newspaper in Central China. The original report claimed that an argument led a female hotel worker, Deng Yujiao, to stab two local government officials, one of whom died. It was likely that the argument occurred because these two government officials asked for ‘special services’ (meaning sexual services) and were rejected by the female employee, leading one of the officials to hit her on the head with a pile of cash. The public reaction on social media quickly

provoked a national outcry, which predominantly considered the case as one of confrontation between the privileged official and the powerless ordinary worker. The intensive public attention to this case on social media and the dominant public support for Deng Yujiao generated constant pressure, influencing a change in the legal outcome to ‘not guilty’ for Deng Yujiao.

This case is credited with leading the Chinese state to recognise that social media challenges the capacity of national media to cultivate public opinion and maintain social stability. Social media possesses the competitive advantage in that it provides the public with a sense of empowerment by comparison to national media, which is closely associated with the Chinese Communist Party and the government. In other words, the challenge to national media goes beyond market considerations about audience share and financial profit. The Chinese state views the challenge to be more about restoring credibility and legitimacy and reconstructing consensus (‘Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu’, 2008).

The third issue is the further stratification and fragmentation of radio’s listening audience. Given its political and economic significance, the rising middle class has been seen as the dominant demographic group that Voice of China is interested in targeting. Shi Min, the chief executive of Voice of China, describes the features of the target listeners in the following way:

Mobile people (people who catch or drive cars) have been increasingly becoming our mainstream listeners. Their listening is fragmented. It is impossible for them to maintain decent listening for a stable time period. They have a listen when on the road, and then move to other businesses after leaving the car. (Shi Min, in Shi, Y. 2009, translated by Lei, W.)

Radio professionals are aware of the listening audience fragmentation in contemporary China. This fragmentation is largely shaped by rural–urban and inter-urban disparity. A significant indicator of the disparity is private car ownership, which has increasingly become an important material signifier for identifying and grouping population segments in contemporary China. The private car is also becoming a preferred place for the rising middle class to listen to radio broadcasting for news and entertainment. Metropolitan radio stations are making extensive efforts to target private car users (including the owner and the owners’ family), who are perceived as ‘decision makers in society and the family’ (‘Guangbo Yingxiao’, 2013). One particular contemporary radio practice in China is drive radio, discussed in detail in chapter six. Taking all the three occurrences into consideration, in 2009 Voice of China embarked on its next round of reforms.

3.3.3 Towards all news on Voice of China: further response to the rise of a privatised, globalised and individualised China

The 2009 reform on Voice of China made the channel more news-oriented (Liang, M.Zhi. & Shuai, C., 2009; Ruan, H. & Chen, Y., 2011). This reform involved a range of perspectives including program scheduling, system structure and personnel management. *News and Newspaper Selection* shifted from being a pre-recorded broadcast to a live broadcast. News airtime was increased from 40% to over 75% of its 24-hour schedule (Liang, M.Zhi. & Shuai, C., 2009; Ruan, H. & Chen, Y., 2011). The news-oriented reform also led Voice of China to treat every day as a news day, replacing the previous practice of weekend airtime featuring entertainment, literature and art (*wenyi*) (Shi, M., 2009; Yu, P., 2010). The remake of Voice of China is a Chinese variation of the all-news format, featuring the 24/7 rolling news cycle, which

‘refers to a model of radio and television that consists in transmitting only journalistic content’ (Betti, 2011, p. 362).

The all-news format has been adopted internationally but is localised within different nation-state media ecologies. The specific set-up of the local radio sector therefore has a crucial influence on shaping news arrangement and production. In the case of Voice of China, it has not yet achieved the model of all-news for 24 hours. The current practice preserves a number of specific group-oriented news programs and non-news programs for their political, social or cultural significance. Among these preserved programs, *National Defense Time and Space* (*Guofang Shikong*) is a news program catering to a military listening audience, which is on air from 6:00 to 6:30 in the morning (Zhongyang Diantai Zhongguo Zhisheng, 2010) except Saturday and Sunday. Non-news programs such as program offering emotional companion *Share the night across long distance* (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*) and program offering health-related advice *Seminar of nutrition life* (*Yangsheng Jiangtang*) are broadcast after 0:00 and before 6:00 am (Zhongyang Renmin Guangbo Diantai, n.d.).

Aside from this preservation of a couple of programs, the 2009 reform has largely broken down the program-based structure. Before the 2009 reform, Voice of China had more than 40 programs, each of which was associated with its corresponding ministry (Shi, Y. 2009). In the words of the chief executive of Voice of China Shi Min, ‘*It is likely that trouble would find us if any program is changed.*’ (Shi, M. in Shi, Y., 2009) The 2009 reform divided the time from 6:00 to 24:00 into a number of news time slots (Shi, M., 2009), packaged with commercial and public interest-oriented advertising. For instance, the time slot from 06:00 to 09:00 is the morning rush hour (*zaogaongfeng xinwen bankuai*), which fits the urban motorised rhythm of life. Three news programs

fill this part of the daily schedule. *National Defense Time and Space* caters to a military audience (Zhongyang Diantai Zhongguo Zhisheng, 2010); *News and Newspaper Selection* is the politically most significant news program, catering to party members and the general public; and *News With A Comprehensive Scope*, which lasts two hours, features investigative reports and news analysis (Liang, X.W., 2010).

Even during the daytime news schedule, considerations such as labour efficiency, production costs and appeal to the listeners lead to the channel not meeting its commitment to full-time news. A journalist who works for Voice of China admits that news quantity is prioritised over quality. However, as he points out:

If the full broadcast time is all news, the demand for news supply is considerably high ... Advertising time is regulated to not exceed 10% of all airtime ... For the news time slot, which is relatively long, such as *Xinwen Zongheng*, if there is no advertising break, the program sounds too dry. The listening experience is too tiring. (personal communication, 10 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

In addition to the careful use of advertising breaks, certain news items are repeated at different time slots. The journalist mentioned above finds the repetition reasonable and necessary from both the listening and production sides:

It takes the listeners' listening habit into account ... There are fewer than 50 journalists working for Voice of China. The pace of life is too fast and the leaders of Voice of China are also too tired to achieve the aim of full-time news. (personal communication, 10 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

During the morning rush hour, *News and Newspaper Selection* is politically the most authoritative news program and a number of conventional practices established during Mao-era China have been maintained. For instance, one male and one female serve as

news announcers, presenting news in relatively neutral and emotionless voices. The routine order of news items places news about the top leaders' activities upfront. Below I provide the headlines of an episode on 11 May 2014 to indicate the final on-air presentation of *News and Newspaper Selection*, which is broadcast in the 06:30 to 07:00 time slot. The following is the literal translation of the headline announcements in Chinese to minimise presentational changes:

- Xi Jinping inspects Henan, getting to know the economic and social development and its [achievement] in the 'mass line'¹⁰ education and practice campaign among the party's grassroots branches
- Henan acts and experiments: the first to construct a rail and air cargo transport hub, bringing together new models and better industry to enrich the people and strengthen the province, adding another powerful engine to the rise of Central China
- Li Keqiang and Kenya's president hold a meeting
- The Ministry of Education is preparing to launch a transformative reform of colleges and universities; half of the regular colleges and universities nationwide will be transformed to cultivate vocational education
- Severe rains come to South China and in North China temperatures fluctuate wildly between highs and lows

¹⁰ According to Xinhua News Agency and News of the Communist Party of China, 'mass line' refers to a guideline under which the Chinese Communist Party officials and members are required to prioritise the interests of the people and persist in exercising power for them. More information: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-09/12/c_125379622.htm (accessed 23 May 2015) <http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/206972/206976/8294717.html> (accessed 23 May 2015)

- The price of bean oil nationwide drops to its lowest level in three and half years
- Special feature: the story of the patrol in the uninhabitable zone
- Nanjing has found and recollected the radiation source, which has been lost for three days
- Thailand: pro-government red shirts gear up, news analysis: why is the political deadlock in Thailand so difficult to break
- Global, the output of corn and oil-related production this year is expected to make a historical new height. ('Xinwen He Baozhi Zhaiyao', 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

News and Newspaper Selection also functions as a foretaste of the upcoming news program *News with A Comprehensive Scope*, which extends the reports on a number of news items briefed in *News and Newspaper Selection*. *News with A Comprehensive Scope* has been expanded into two hours with a focus on multiple news items rather than its 1990s' format of focusing on one issue per episode. On the same day of 11 May 2014 *News with A Comprehensive Scope* extends the reports about Li Keqiang's Africa visit, the lost radiation source in Nanjing and the transformation of half of regular colleges and universities nationwide (*Xinwen Zongheng*, 2014a). The report about Li Keqiang's African visit goes beyond the conventional frame of describing the friendship between China and Africa. It highlights China's rising influence and growing involvement with Africa in fields of business, trade and infrastructure construction. The news about the lost radiation source alerts listeners to the issue of information management in response to a public crisis. The report about the transformation of half

of the regular colleges and universities develops and includes more opinions from education experts.

Unlike the neutral narrative in *News and Newspaper Selection*, *News with A Comprehensive Scope* uses a dramatic narrative to engage listeners. It adopts a question–answer structure, echoing its ‘seeking and asking news’ (*zhuiwen xinwen*) theme. Taking the news story concerning environmental pollution as an example, the news headline is sharp and short, raising questions about possible harmful consequences. The opening with questions starts the on-air investigation and leads to the broadcasting of a detailed report and its latest outcome:

Ask: This morning, eight tons of poisonous chemical were leaked, Fuyang city of Zhejiang has stopped the water supply. Is the water quality accepted until now? Will Hangzhou be affected? (*Xinwen Zongheng*, 2014b, translated by Lei, W.)

Following this, the headline provides more details about when and where this incident occurred:

Just after three in the early morning yesterday, one tanker truck containing $C_2H_2Cl_4$ rolled over when travelling in the area of Tonglu, Zhejiang on national road 320. About 8 tons of $C_2H_2Cl_4$ leaked, flowing into a stream only two kilometres from Fuchun River. (*Xinwen Zongheng*, 2014b, translated by Lei, W.)

The headline creates a strong sense of danger and emergency. The accurate weight of leaked $C_2H_2Cl_4$ informs listeners about how serious the pollution might be and what harmful danger might occur. The stress on ‘only two kilometres’ highlights the proximity of the location of the chemical liquid to the local source of drinking water. In terms of what this chemical element is, the report provides a specific and serious description:

This is a relatively strong poison. Ingestion could lead to symptoms such as vomiting, enlargement of the liver, jaundice, bloating especially of the abdomen and, in extreme cases, death. (*Xinwen Zongheng*, 2014b, translated by Lei, W.)

This detailed description contrasts with the general version provided in *News and News Selection*, which describes the chemical as ‘a middle-level poisonous substance that could cause damage to the liver, kidney and heart muscle’ (*Xinwen Yu Baozhi Zhaiyao*, 2014). Journalists working for Voice of China are aware that reports with stronger contradictions and conflict are easier to transmit and more appealing to the listeners:

Unlike print news, which you can go back if you don’t get sense out of it, the transmission of radio news is a linear transmission. Contradiction and conflict are placed at the moment when listeners are about to tune to other channels. For instance, contradiction and conflict are placed every two and a half minutes in a relatively long report. (personal communication, 10 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

Liang Xingwang, who works for Voice of China, describes (Liang, X.W., 2010) the differences between news item in the first and the second hour on *News With A Comprehensive Scope*. While the first hour features news investigation, interpretation and analysis, the second hour features commentary, which is marked with the personal style of its makers such as individual journalists and professional commentators. The amount of financial news, technological news, sports news, entertainment and international news were also increased in the second hour. News delivery in the second hour is at the same time faster, more dynamic and more informative than that in the first hour (Liang, X.W., 2010).

The rise of commentary on Voice of China is closely associated with its pursuit of a position as an opinion leader. It trains its own specialist journalists and

commentators from within Voice of China (Shi, M., 2009). Furthermore, Voice of China has been expanding its expert base, inviting intellectual ‘resources’ external to Voice of China. Voice of China has invited more than 200 experts as its opinion suppliers (Shi, M., 2009). These experts range from economists, university professors, intellectual researchers, screenwriter and lawyers, through to senior media professionals. For instance, one of these influential experts is the economist Ba Shusong, who gives lectures to members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (Shi, M., 2009; Liang, M.Zh. & Shuai, C., 2009). These intellectual elites are called by phone and invited to offer opinions and commentaries on relevant economic, social and cultural issues.

Opinion production such as commentary and what the Chinese journalists call ‘news embodying opinion’ (*you taidu de xinwen*) (personal communication, 12 May 2013) are a positive response to the media’s updated commitment to the Chinese Communist Party. With the aim of better reinforcing the party’s capacity to lead and manage the state, the Chinese Communist Party requires the media to ‘keep a firm hold on opinion orientation (*yulun daoxiang*), [and to] guide correct public opinion (*shehui yulun*)’ (Xinhua News Agency, 2008). In this, the Chinese Communist Party draws on the principle of ‘unity [in the task] of articulating the party’s advocacy and [the task] of reflecting the people’s concern together’ (Xinhua News Agency, 2008). Based on this principle, it entrusts these intellectual elites and journalists in general with the autonomy and responsibility to help shape a consensus among the public without challenging the legitimacy of the party.

While individual voices are mobilised to converge and articulate one acceptable holistic ‘Chinese’ voice, how the Chinese listen to this voice has been profoundly

transformed. What form does contemporary radio news listening take? How does this knowledge inform us about class reformation and stratification in contemporary China?

3.3.4 Individualisation of radio news listening: multiple stratified listening publics

The decades of economic reforms have witnessed what Kate Lacey calls ‘the privatisation of the listening public’ (Lacey, 2013, p. 113), which has also been taking place widely and rapidly in post Mao-era China. In contrast to the collective and even organised listening in Mao-era China, radio listening in contemporary China has been a private activity and also increasingly individualised and through multiple digital listening devices. In addition to the private listening through radio receivers and in-car radios, individuals can listen to Voice of China through internet-based streaming, mobile phone-based applications and *Weibo* (Chinese version of twitter). Its *Sina Weibo* account had over nine million followers at the date on which I viewed the account (Voice of China Weibo account, n.d.). Voice of China is constantly pursuing the digitalisation of radio listening and responding closely to the individualisation of the media experience. It has a registered *Weixin* account (the latest form of instant social media in contemporary China), through which Voice of China updates and pushes written news briefs to subscribers. Anyone who is interested in the written news brief could then listen to Voice of China through any available platform. The digitalisation of radio news production and listening has opened more space for Voice of China to reach individuals scattered in different places within and outside China.

The individualisation of radio news listening has led Voice of China to consider listening audience stratification and fragmentation in contemporary China, in contrast to the uniformity and homogeneity of its listeners in Mao-era China. Besides being an effective way to save on production costs, the production of news item in multiple

versions on Voice of China is an effective way to examine how listening audience stratification and fragmentation are produced in contemporary China. A news item about a reality show recording the process of birth giving in a delivery room is remodeled into three versions for three different time slots. This item is first broadcast in a late afternoon news slot called *News of Night Rush Hour (Xinwen Wangao Feng)* on 10 May 2014 (Che, L., 2014a). It is then given further coverage in *News with A Comprehensive Scope* on the morning of 11 May 2014 (Che, L., 2014b). It receives a third news treatment in the news program *Global Chinese Radio Network (Quanqiu Huayu Guangbowang)* at noon on 13 May 2014 ('Mou Weishi Zhibo', 2014).

A comparison between the first and the second version reveals both similarities and differences. Both versions employ the same material and focus on the same theme of whether it is socially and culturally acceptable to broadcast the process of giving birth. The distinctions are more pronounced in their use of vocabulary. For instance, the formal alternative in the second version to 'giving birth (*sheng haizi*)' in the first version is 'conceiving a life (*yunyu shengming*)'. Whereas the popular term 'collective watch (*weiguan*)' displays a populist appeal in the first version, 'infringe privacy (*qinfan yinsi*)' articulates a consciousness of 'what should be' in the second version. In comparison with the casual and colloquial style of the first version in the late afternoon, the second version in the next morning features more literate and formal Chinese.

The third version, broadcast on *Global Chinese Radio Network* adopts new material from feedback and observation by overseas Chinese to place this issue in an international context. After a general description of the reality show, this third version interviews a female student who is doing a master degree at Beijing University (one of the top universities in China). The broadcast then shifts to overseas, where the Japan-

based, Chinese female writer Tang Xinzi is interviewed for her reaction to the show and her knowledge about a similar show in the Japanese context. The coverage then moves further to Germany, where a specially invited observer describes the classification system for media in Germany. Finally, coverage arrives in the United States, where a specially invited US-based observer introduces the U.S. reality show *16 and Pregnant* and its positive impact ('Mou Weishi Zhibo', 2014).

The different news productions, which focus on the same topic, target stratified and fragmented listening audience with differentiated backgrounds. The obvious difference is the time at which they listen to radio broadcasts. More critically, their radio listening time is structured by their daily schedules, which is shaped by their political, economic and social status. In the case discussed above, the late afternoon version appeals to a more general public whereas the morning version assumes listeners with a higher level of literacy and education. The midday version features a global scope, appealing to a cosmopolitan and more highly educated sensibility.

In addition to the state-defined identity of people, the market has further stratified and fragmented the listening audience into different groups. The profit-making impulse drives media to produce news in different versions to fit market-led audience segmentation. *News with A Comprehensive Scope* classifies its listeners further into two groups in the two hours' program. In its view, the time from 07:00 to 08:00 is the time for freshening-up and the time from 08:00 to 09:00 is commuting time (Liang, X.W., 2010):

Due to the different start times in their working days, the dominant listener for the first hour is officials and regular staff in governmental institutions, state-owned enterprises and governmental associations. The dominant listener for the second hour is white

collar workers in foreign-owned enterprises and private enterprises. (Liang, X.W., 2010, pp. 60-61, translated by Lei, W.)

The advertising department of China National Radio is at the forefront in adopting market research methods to define listening audience stratification and fragmentation and identify their differences. They claim that the majority of listeners during the morning rush hour are ‘decision-makers in society and family’ (‘Guangbo Yingxiao’, 2013). Midday is a listening time for the ‘fashionable group’ (‘Guangbo Yingxiao’, 2013). In the case of the news about giving birth discussed above, the midday version caters to the fashionable group, in which the young and high achieving university students are a significant component. Its outward-looking approach, touching on the issue in developed countries, cultivates and demonstrates the cosmopolitan identity of its target listeners. The adoption of a formal and well-written version for the morning rush hour caters to a politically and financially powerful group, whose identity is embodied in their ownership of private cars.

However, the journalist I interviewed, who works for Voice of China in public opinion supervision insists that the station views its listeners as politically undifferentiated and equal. The journalist argues:

Why should I ingratiate myself with listeners? I don’t have to. Advertising is not my business ... We take the listeners into account [in a way different from commercial consideration]. When listeners phone us, they tell us that problem is solved with our help. The listeners do not pay our salary. The party pays our salary. The party’s money is the party membership fee we pay. (personal communication, 10 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

The notion of the people and the notion of the consumer–citizen converge on Voice of China. The convergence encompasses the tension, contestation and accommodation between the production of a unified listening public and the production of multiple stratified listening publics. In other words, the negotiation between the state and the market is constantly taking place in the everyday practice of producing one voice.

3.4 Conclusion

Both shaping and being shaped by its context, radio news in China has been transformed profoundly by the dramatic transformation of China since economic reforms. The massive change in radio news has taken place across the whole process from production and distribution to listening. Economic interest has been recognised and asserted as a significant pursuit of radio news in post Mao-era China. As a consequence, the transformation of radio news features a shift from politicisation to commercialisation and from collectivisation to individualisation. In this conclusion, I discuss the far-reaching consequences of this shift as well as the underlying continuity of radio news from Mao-era China to post Mao-era China.

In Mao-era China, the fundamental restructuring of the media and communication to a state-owned and state-funded sector was designed to equip media practice to fulfill its commitment and obligation to achieve assigned tasks such as political education, nation building, national development and modernisation. If radio news in Mao-era China is treated as a production site, then the process of radio news production, circulation and listening in Mao-era China can be viewed as a process of top-down control, restriction and collectivisation.

However, the production of radio news was not as static as previously assumed. It was instead a dynamic process, which, for better or worse, involved the acts of

discussing, learning, sharing, remaking, adjusting and negotiating in terms of news priorities, orientation and style at different historical phases in Mao-era China. Despite the changed priorities across different periods in Mao-era China, this whole process guaranteed that one voice would be produced and received. The communication process from news production, circulation to listening defined as well as participated in and reinforced the collectivisation in Mao-era China and the wider nationalisation.

Post Mao-era China saw a shift in the dominant ideology from ‘Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought’ to ‘the ideology of national and personal development through the market’ (Zhao, 1998, p. 6). This enabled state-sanctioned commercialisation of radio news, generating decentralisation in the news production, distribution and listening process. Commercialisation gave autonomy to national and local radio stations in newsgathering and making. Although the autonomy was forced at the initial stage of the commercialisation of media and communication, radio stations of various levels embarked on the journey to make radio news more informative, appealing to the public (Zhao, 1998). As the case of China National Radio’s Channel One reveals, radio news was allowed to expand in a range of dimensions including amount, format, theme and scope as long as it did not challenge the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party-led regime.

Faced with the loss of its listening audience due to competition from television and audience fragmentation, since the 1990s radio has struggled to restore itself as one of the mainstream news suppliers from its marginalised status in the Chinese media landscape. The class reformation involving the rise of the middle class is opening an avenue for the relocation of radio news in contemporary China. Radio news, which once occupied a fixed time slot within defined programs, has grown to occupy a whole

channel on Chinese radio stations. On the one hand, radio news is sensitive to the central authority in managing the national priorities proposed by different generations of national leadership. On the other hand, radio news is also participating in responding to and cultivating middle-class interests and concerns in closely following market developments. In the case of Channel One, it has attempted to rebuild itself into the voice of China as one of the leading news producers, including both information and opinion.

With ‘the progressive application of the neoliberal strategies of market rationalisation on the one hand, and a continuous (re-)articulation of China’s socialist legacies on the other’ (Sun, 2010, p. 58), Channel One demonstrates the paradox of the transformation of media and communication in China. In spite of these reforms to Channel One, the station has no intention of changing its fundamental relationship with the state. Instead, all these reforms are aimed at better facilitating the governance of the Chinese state, managing and coping with changed social contexts. The role of radio as the mouthpiece of the party is still applicable, given the consistency of state-defined ideology and its agenda in radio news production. Although progress has been achieved in making radio news appealing and listener-friendly, all these reforms on Channel One are essentially a strategic act based on market logic. The one voice in radio news in contemporary China will continue to articulate the complicity between the Chinese state and the market. ■

Chapter 4

Late night talkback radio: the production of intimacy in post Mao-era China

4.1 On-air talk about personal issues in post Mao-era China

Despite limited pre-screening promotion, *Who Says I Don't Care* (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*), a commercial blockbuster (Ning, Z. Q., 2010), achieved second place in Beijing's box office rankings of domestic films in 2001 ('Erlinglingyi Nian Yingpian Piaofang Paihang', 2002). The film is set in an urban Chinese family consisting of a middle-aged couple in the 40s and their teenage daughter, through whose eyes the film is narrated. The film portrays an emerging marital and family crisis that finally leads to divorce. Acting on her teenage friends' advice, the daughter acts to save her parents' marriage. When her various efforts fail, the daughter finally runs away from home to another city, leaving no notice behind, making her parents very anxious. In her view, running away from home is a way of becoming independent and self-reliant. It is also a warning to her parents of the consequence of their divorce.

The film interests me due to the fact that a radio appears in three scenes, with the first two occasions before the divorce decision and the third one after the decision. In the first scene the daughter is listening to the radio through headphones. The radio is playing a talkback program about marital crises. We hear one man say:

Apart from the above reasons, which can cause a relationship crisis between middle-aged couples, a disharmonious sexual life is also an important aspect. The harmonious

and happy sexual life between the couple. (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*, 2001, translated by Lei, W.)

The second scene not only reveals what the daughter is listening to, but also explains why she is listening to radio broadcasting. When the daughter accidentally pulls out the earplug from the radio receiver, viewers hear this from the radio:

A man: The advantages of feeding babies with the mother's milk are as follows. Firstly, the milk is always fresh; secondly, it is always clean; thirdly, it remains at a constant temperature; fourthly, it is free from pollution; finally, it is easily carried.

The female host: The guest answered in a funny way ... (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*, 2001, translated by Lei, W.)

In the film, the mother questions her daughter in shock: 'How old are you? You dare listen to this kind of content!' The daughter responds:

I listen to this. Isn't it much better than listening to you two quarrelling? (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*, 2001, translated by Lei, W.)

When the couple decides to divorce, the daughter comes up with a range of ideas to stop them. Participating in talkback radio is one of the ideas her teenage friends suggest. They celebrate talkback radio as what they call 'the most touching show of affections' (*zui ganren de qinggan dashuaimai*) (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*, 2001). The daughter participates in a talkback radio program about the relationship between marriage and children on the local radio station of the city she lives in. She tells her story:

I had a happy family once. I had mother and father, and both of them loved me very much. But now, everything is changed. Dad, Mum, can you hear? Can you hear what I said? If you really want to do this [divorce], why did you get married in the first place?

Why did you give birth to me? Why? (*Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zaihu*, 2001, translated by Lei, W.)



Figure 4.1 *The daughter (on the left) attends a local talkback radio program about personal issues hosted by an urban woman*

Captured by Lei, W. on 3 May 2015 from the movie Who Says I Don't Care (2001)

Radio broadcasting plays a contradictory role in this film. On the one hand, listening to radio broadcasting with headphones is one strategy the daughter uses to avoid listening to her parents' quarrels. On the other hand, radio broadcasting is considered to be a powerful site where the teenage daughter makes a public attempt to reach her parents. Her on-air self-expression is her rejection to her parents' decision to divorce and represents an appeal to her parents to reconsider divorce and take her into account.

I start this chapter with this film because it captures the popular presence of talkback radio in China around the 1990s to 2000s. Equally importantly, the film deals with a range of issues I am interested in exploring in this chapter, especially issues concerning intimacy and modernity, the public communication of personal issues and the privatisation of feelings and emotions in post Mao-era China. Putting aside the

question of whether listening to talkback radio is appropriate for a teenage girl, the talkback radio programs she listens to and also participates in deal with personal issues. Indeed as the film suggests, talkback radio dealing with personal issues emerged and proliferated in post Mao-era China. One talkback radio host I interviewed (personal communication, 1 June 2013) recalls that talkback radio of this kind arrived at its peak in China during the years from 1998 to 2002 when it was offered on a considerable number of radio stations nationwide. It is not difficult to conclude that talkback radio of this kind provides tips and advice to callers and listeners who have similar problems in the private sphere. More precisely, talkback radio about personal issues is one of the earliest and most popular programs in the advice genre that emerged in the Chinese media landscape in post Mao-era China.

In that period the majority of talkback radio about personal issues was on air late at night. I refer to this as ‘late night talkback radio’. It emerged in east China in the early 1990s. The topics on late night talkback radio in China are mostly personal issues such as sexuality, love, marriage and family. The public are encouraged to call in, express their problems, exchange and seek advice from the in-studio host and invited guests if there are any.

In order to scrutinise the emergence, rise and fall of late night talkback radio in China over the past years, I move across a number of radio programs instead of focusing on one single program. Instances of the most popular programs include *Accompanying until Early Morning (Xiangban Dao Liming)* (launched at the end of 1992) on Shanghai Oriental radio station, *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely (Yekong Bu Jimo)* (launched at the end of 1992) on Shenzhen radio station in southeast China, *The Date with the Heart (Xinling Zhi Yue)* on Hunan provincial radio station in central China, *Tonight is Not*

Lonely (Jinye Bu Jimo) (launched in 1993) on Zhengzhou municipal radio station in central China, *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality (Yidianyuan Xinxiang)* (launched in 1996) on Zhejiang provincial radio station in east China and *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles (Qianli Gong Liangxiao)* (launched in 2004) on China National Radio in Beijing. In particular, *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* was relayed and replayed on over 50 provincial and municipal radio stations (Liu, Ch.H., 2008) when satellite-based delivery was available.

The widespread appeal of this genre raises a number of questions. For example, what personal issues are discussed on talkback radio, and what kind of advice is offered by the program hosts? Who listens to late night talkback radio and why? What does talkback radio tell us about the nature of Chinese individuals' journeys towards becoming modern? In what follows, I first trace the origins of talkback radio in the 1990s when the pursuit of intimacy and value reorientation converged in individual life in China, establishing the context in which late night talkback radio emerged. I then look at a number of cases to examine the production of intimacy on late night talkback radio and its listening audience composition. Particular attention is paid to the reduced popularity of late night talkback radio in relation to subsequent social and technological changes. Finally, I discuss the role late night talkback radio has played in the production of intimacy, and consider its cultural implication for social change in China.

4.2 Talkback radio as an intimate genre

In most liberal democratic countries, where the talkback format was born, talkback radio is largely adopted to discuss public affairs, if we define public affairs as issues related to political and public spheres. Despite the theoretical view of talkback radio as an exercise and embodiment of a democratic political system, critiques have emerged,

challenging whether it is entertainment or information oriented and considering the variety of its presentational styles in practice (Turner, 2001, 2007; Turner, et al., 2006). Moreover, there has always been debate about what it is appropriate to discuss on talkback radio.

Even in liberal democratic countries, the focus on public affairs on talkback radio is an outcome of negotiation rather than an inherent consequence of the talkback format. In the Australian case, as John Tebbutt points out, in the late 1960s talkback radio in Australia went through a period of narrowing its topics to focus on public affairs rather than personal concerns in order to ‘direct listeners to important issues and raise phone-in standards’ (Tebbutt, 2006, p. 868). The strategy aimed to construct and maintain the authority and quality of radio stations, by producing a listening audience who were ‘willing captives with open and receptive minds’ to advertising (Tebbutt, 2006, p. 876). Nevertheless, recent studies about contemporary Australian talkback radio reveal that a large volume of calls to talkback radio do not neatly fit into the public affairs category but are more personal (Turner, 2001; Turner, et al. 2006).

In countries outside the global West, talkback radio about personal issues acts as a contemporary variant of the advice genre. Not unique to China, talkback radio about personal issues emerged in Russia at around the same period as it emerged in China (Matza, 2009). The years since 2000s have witnessed the rise of talkback radio about personal issues in Benin in Africa (Grätz, 2014).

Despite the common provision of advice about how to deal with personal issues, the practices of talkback radio of this kind differ across countries. With psychotherapists as hosts, talkback radio about personal issues in Russia deploys what Tomas Matza identifies as ‘robust neoliberal technologies’ (Matza, 2009, p. 514). The practice in the

Benin version is more diverse and more interactive, using telecommunication technology including mobile phones and the internet (Grätz, 2014). In the case of China, talkback radio about personal issues has both similarities with this genre elsewhere as well as sociocultural particularities. It is these specifically Chinese dimensions that are the principal concern of this chapter. A number of indicators express these sociocultural particularities. Talkback radio about personal issues is referred to in Chinese as *talkback radio about sentiment and affection (qinggan tanhua jiemu)*. The talkback radio host I interviewed (personal communication, 1 June 2013) prefers to see himself as a listener and a neighbourhood brother (*linjia dagege*) rather than a mentor or counsellor. Among the listeners who are attracted to this kind of talkback radio we can identify a stable group of listeners who have been committed to it for many years. These more engaged listeners often express with passion their love for the talkback hosts by either sending love letters or by physically stalking the hosts (Hu, X.M., 2005).

My discussion of talkback radio about personal issues in China is informed by existing studies on the transformation of intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1999; Padilla, et al., 2007). In this body of work intimacy is defined as voluntary, emotionally authentic and personal, and love and care-based. This notion of intimacy has been globalised and favoured in the pursuit of interpersonal relationships (Padilla, et al., 2007). It even serves as a driving force in transnational migration, leading women to move from their original home to economically developed places in the hope of finding love and marriage (Ueno, 2013). Although the large number of discussions about intimacy is focused on courtship and marriage, the globalised notion of love and care-based intimacy also applies to other modes of interpersonal relationships. The globalised notion of intimacy is valued as a principle and an ultimate goal in seeking and forming close interpersonal relationships. However, the forms of intimacy are structured and

shaped by varying political, economic and cultural conditions (Jamieson, 1999; Padilla, et al., 2007). For instance, acts such as buying gifts and carrying out housework are considered more relevant than open verbal communication in conveying love to the female in a heterosexual relationship (Jamieson, 1999). The further development of a globalised market system has given rise to a range of commercial sexual intimacies (Jamieson, 1999; Padilla, et al., 2007).

Unlike face-to-face intimacy, intimacy delivered through electronic communication technology was first facilitated by the telephone and subsequently extended further with the globalised internet network (Featherstone, 1995; Rooney, 2013). This mediated intimacy is achieved through what Mike Featherstone calls ‘disembodied interactions’ (Featherstone, 1995, p. 233), separating the speaking body from the listening body in time and space (Featherstone, 1995). As a sound-based medium, talkback radio provides a specific form of disembodied interactions. Talkback radio about personal issues in China provides a crucial site for examining why and how radio engages in producing intimacy in post Mao-era China.

4.2.1 The deployment of two-way communication in radio in post Mao-era China

Accompanying the withdrawal of state funding from the media and communication sector, from the late 1980s creative energy with an entrepreneurial orientation was gradually unleashed in the radio domain (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). In order to attract audiences and advertising, one direct approach was to reduce the distance between the radio and its listeners. Efforts to make radio programs more listener-friendly affected various dimensions ranging from content and language to format. Aside from radio news discussed in the previous chapter, the production of non-news radio programs has gained considerable room to expand and diversify. Popular music, drama, traditional

Chinese plays, advertising and entertainment all found their time slot and space on radio. The language used on radio shifted from an official and didactic vocabulary to a more popular and colloquial one. The tone also shifted from a serious and top-down style to a more relaxed and egalitarian one.

The adoption of the talkback format was the most significant and effective step in reducing the distance between radio and its listeners as it allowed the public to call in and interact with the production team in the studio (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). This on-air two-way reciprocal communication between radio and the public was enabled by the arrival and popularisation of one key technological communication device in the household: the landline telephone. In the 1990s China witnessed the widespread and rapid installation of landline telephones in households, workplaces and educational institutions. Commercial telephone booths were also constructed as a result of this state-led telecommunication commercialisation. A journalistic account (Yin, J.Sh., 1994) reports that the desire for a telephone connection featured in general conversation in Beijing in the early 1990s:

Several years ago in Beijing, [I] usually heard friends asking, do you have any way to help me get a Japanese-made colored TV? Nowadays, the conversation is changed to: do you know any one working in the bureau in charge of telephone service? If so, can you help me shorten the application and implementation procedure of telephone installation as soon as possible? (Yin, J.Sh., 1994, p. 42, translated by Lei, W.)

This demand was quickly met thanks to the top leadership's push for telecommunication construction and growth. Economic reform leader Deng Xiaoping stressed the significance of telecommunication construction in economic development on a number of occasions ('Dianxin Gaige', 2014). Acting on his instructions, the state

council issued a range of industrial policies at different stages, privileging the construction and updating of telecommunication infrastructure (Xinxi Chanye Bu, 2001). This combination of public desire and state effort led to a massive growth in the number of landline telephones. The number of Chinese households with landline telephones grew to 10 million in 1992 from 2.03 million in 1979, reaching 100 million in 1998 (Li, J.L. & Han, Zh.J., 2001). Thus, the ongoing popularisation of landline telephones provided the technological condition for the adoption of the talkback format on radio. The talkback format consequently became the preferred practice on Chinese radio for both political and economic considerations in post Mao-era China.

4.2.2 The localisation of the talkback format in post Mao-era China

The talkback format of listeners calling in was first introduced into radio stations in Guangdong province in the late 1980s as a result of competition from Hong Kong-based radio broadcasting (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). It then found its place on radio stations in cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen in east China (Zhao, 1998) and expanded to elsewhere within China. Radio executives in the early 1990s in China viewed the participative and responsive quality of the talkback format as an effective strategy to rebuild and strengthen the connection with the public:

Nowadays, many radio stations feel that the public's interest in radio is waning. Some radio stations are faced with the prospect of running out of content source. The only way to get out of the dilemma is widely relying on the social power ... hotline telephone is undoubtedly the effective form, through which radio builds a close contact with the mass. (Xu, G.P., 1993, p. 21, translated by Lei, W.)

The authoritarian Chinese state excluded discussion of the political sphere as a possible radio practice in post Mao-era China. Despite and perhaps precisely because of this

prohibition, the talkback format became associated with politically and socially acceptable issues—issues which had a direct connection with the public’s economic and social well-being. Either in the shape of a program segment or as a separate program, public participation in the talkback format was diverse, ranging from reporting news leads, discussing topics with invited officials, complaining about consumption issues, asking questions about health and legal issues, attending quiz shows and ordering songs (Liu, S.Q., 1994; Wang, P., 1996; Xu, G.P., 1993; Zhou, H.J., 1993). In comparison with radio programs in Mao-era China, the talkback format was seen as liberating, open and progressive as it allowed the voice of ordinary people to be heard and also encouraged discussions about issues focused on concrete everyday life. The program *990 Audience Hotline (990 Tingzhong Rexian)* on Shanghai radio station is a typical example. This program was launched in early 1993 (Huang, M.X., 1994). It claimed that it received more than 30,000 calls in its first year and broadcast 324 recorded reports and commentaries, in which reports exposing negative social issues accounted for 90%, including:

Commodities of bad quality and fake products, inadequate service industry cases, problems concerning water, electricity and gas supply, illegal construction disturbing urban appearance, traffic in public places and on roads, environmental pollution, harmful noise, infringements of citizens’ personal rights, abuse of children and so on. (Huang, M.X., 1994, p. 22, translated by Lei, W.)

Moving away from the coverage of issues about daily economic and social well-being, the talkback format went further and touched on personal issues including sexual concerns, love choices, marital tension and familial disputes. The public disclosure of personal issues on air emerged in a larger social and cultural context in which

individuals were focusing more and more attention and energy on their private sphere. Commercialised media and the communication sector devoted increasing time and space to personal issues. A range of cultural forms across different mediums such as print, magazine, book, movie and also radio produced large volumes of works dealing with issues of sexuality, love, relationships, marriage and family (Evans, 1997). These large volumes of work introduced the Chinese public to notions and practices of intimacy and how to pursue it. The increasing concern with intimacy in the private sphere paralleled the transformation of the forms and locations of intimacy in post Mao-era China. On one hand, public spaces increasingly lost their function of providing intimacy in various interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, the private sphere, which has previously been regulated by the state and overshadowed by collective concerns in Mao-era China, was being returned to the hands of individuals (Yan, 2009).

4.2.3 The transformation of intimacy in post Mao-era China

The pursuit of intimacy is a consistent individual human need, be it in Mao's era or in the post-Mao era. During Mao-era China most Chinese settled in the place of their origin, leading to limited migration. The collective mode of organising individual life in Mao-era China allowed intimacy to take place in interpersonal relationships across both private and public spaces. The forms of intimacy developed mainly in what Mike Featherstone calls 'face-to-face relationships amongst kin and locals within a bounded known world' (Featherstone, 1995, p. 229). Intimacy emerged out of a range of interpersonal bonds such as kinship, friendship, workplace relationships, neighbours, couples and family.

Post Mao-era China witnessed the relocation of the locus of intimacy, along with the restructuring and in many cases disappearance of collective units. These had

previously functioned as the main place for providing emotional intimacy in Mao-era China, and their decline exerted a profound influence in reshaping where and how to seek and fulfill intimacy in post Mao-era China. Following the end of the collective mode of development with the Deng-led economic reforms, the disintegration of the collective units gave way to the individualisation of collective-oriented interests and concerns. As Yunxiang Yan (2009) discovers in villages, the intimacy level of interpersonal relationships has been largely subject to the primary concern of individual interest. If it is the case in rural China, the influence of individual interest on forming intimate interpersonal relationships is no weaker in urban neighborhoods and workplaces in post Mao-era China.

The individualisation of economic interest played a vital role in forming and ending interpersonal relationships previously based around public spaces. The achievement of economic interest, which once united people in socialist nation building in Mao-era China, was transformed in post Mao-era China into individual interest, pursued on their own and in their own way. In particular, the three primary indicators of social well-being—housing, health and education—became the responsibility of the individual with the withdrawal of state-funded welfare (Ong & Zhang, 2008; Yan, 2009). Interpersonal relationships have increasingly been considered as a source of economic benefits more than a source of emotional intimacy. The role of workplaces in cultivating emotional intimacy between colleagues has been significantly weakened with the transformation of workplaces into places of competition for individual economic interests. This is also the case with kinship relationships in rural China. Connections with family and relatives are increasingly less stable and more flexible as individuals either maintain or break connections based on ongoing calculations about the benefits or loss of economic interest from the connections (Yan, 2009).

In addition to the impact of the reorientation of interpersonal relationships, the forms and locations of intimacy in post Mao-era China have been largely regulated by the rising form of what Mike Featherstone calls ‘impersonal and secondary relationships’ (Featherstone, 1995, p. 229). As Featherstone points out, secondary relationships are closely associated with modernity and the establishment of cities and nation-states (Featherstone, 1995). Although this secondary relationship still relies on face-to-face communication between individuals, it is a relationship that mainly takes place in a world of strangers with limited knowledge about others and also less emotional attachment (Featherstone, 1995).

In post Mao-era China, especially after the further push for market reform in the early 1990s, a massive population migration occurred, involving both short-distance and long-distance relocation. One frequently mentioned group is the Chinese rural–urban migrant workers, who have made a significant contribution to China’s economic rise in the globalised market and whose number has reached 268.94 million in 2013 (Liu, Z., 2014). Population migration on such a scale has opened up new possibilities for forming interpersonal relationships and developing intimacy. These interpersonal relationships are mainly secondary relationships, in which the level of intimacy is largely circumscribed.

Paralleling the increasing flexibility and instability of interpersonal relationships, the couple relationship has grown into the main source of intimacy for individuals in post Mao-era China. The private sphere has not only become the primary space where individuals fulfil their physical needs, it has also grown to be the primary space where individuals satisfy their need for intimacy. The notion of intimacy—defined as

relationships that are voluntary, personal, emotionally authentic and love and care-based—has grown more attractive and desirable in individual life.

However, interest in private intimacy is at once encouraged and frustrated by what Everett Zhang calls ‘China’s sexual revolution’ (Zhang, E., 2011, p.106), which has been taking place in the past decades in post Mao-era China. This sexual revolution has seen the separation between sexual desire and reproduction and the further delinking of sexual pleasure and love (Zhang, E., 2011, p.132). It has been expressed through the proliferation of sexual activities both within and outside the conventional heterosexual marriage and family structure. In comparison with Mao-era China, new forms of sexual relationships such as pre-marriage sexual engagements, extramarital affairs and commercial sexual bonds increased (Zhang, E., 2011). These new forms of sexual relationship might help fulfill the individual’s need for intimacy yet at the same time threaten the level of intimacy within the conventional private sphere of marriage and family.

As a result of these competing pressures, intimacy in post-Mao China is paradoxical. On the one hand, intimacy is privatised and individualised, giving individuals more autonomy to give and gain love and care in the private sphere. On the other hand, intimacy is structured and disciplined, motivating individuals to seek love and care from possible alternative spaces. Against this backdrop, late night talkback radio offers a form of disembodied interaction yet at the same time produces intimacy of a different kind. In comparison with the pursuit of intimacy in real life, individuals access a form of on-air intimacy, which they consider is charged with love and care and at the same time free from economic calculations.

4.3 Late night talkback radio: the mass production of intimacy

Like other cultural forms dealing with personal issues, late night talkback radio has helped to provide advice to individuals on how to improve sexuality, love, relationships, marriage and family. According to a journalistic account (Li, X.J., 2003), listeners' letters to the program *0 Clock One plus One (Lingdian Yijiayi)*, launched by Guangzhou radio station in 1993 and claimed to be the first live-broadcast program focusing on sexual education in China, revealed that middle-aged female did not know what an orgasm was until they listened to the program. The elderly called in to express their appreciation for this program as having helped them realise that it is normal for the elderly to have sexual needs. For programs with calls focusing more on decision-making dilemmas in love and marriage, hosts and callers frequently discussed issues such as parental intervention, economic considerations, pre-marital sex, extramarital affairs and socially or morally unacceptable love affairs with someone such as cross-generation in-law relatives.

Beyond serving as advice provider, what distinguishes late night talkback radio from print versions of advice is its production of intimacy through sound-based one-to-one communication. This mass production of intimacy is an early manifestation of what Mike Featherstone describes as 'new possibilities for intimacy and self expression' (Featherstone, 1995, p. 233), which are opened up by disembodied interactions facilitated by electronic communication technology. More profoundly, with the changes outlined above to where and how Chinese individuals access intimacy, late night talkback radio demonstrates its capacity to fulfill the individual's need for love and care. In what follows, I investigate what constitutes intimacy on late night talkback radio and I discuss how late night talkback radio produces and circulates intimacy to a mass

listening audience. The starting point is how one radio host opens his local late night talkback radio.

4.3.1 Four strategies adopted in the production of intimacy

The stars in the night sky are singing a silent song. Do you have any mood you cannot find a place to express? I am willing to listen to your worries, and use my soft talk to defuse your unhappiness feeling is in tonight, tonight has feeling ... The program *Night Mood of the Municipality (Dushu Ye Xinqing)* welcomes your participation, and I am your old friend. (Fu, H. in Li, P.F., 2011, translated by Lei, W.)

Various elements of talkback radio enable listeners to experience intimacy in different ways, according to individual preference. I identify four key strategies for producing intimacy. The first one is the construction of an intimate moment. The late night time slot determines the adoption of a soft and gentle sound on talkback radio in order to calm listeners and send them to sleep. In addition, late night is framed as an isolated moment as well as a self-expressive moment. On the one hand, late night implies alienation and loneliness if people are on their own; on the other hand, late night sets people free, albeit temporarily, from the social codes and regulations that confine how and what they say and do during the daytime. The late night associations of isolation and freedom converge in late night talkback radio. Isolation implies the individual's need for other's company, love and care. Freedom reminds people to retreat from mundane daily life and look after their inner space, assessing and communicating with the authentic self.

The second strategy is the construction of an intimate space, in which listeners are encouraged to participate in and express what they want to say without self-identification. This space is invisible but accessible by voice, which determines the brief

life expectancy of this space. Once the voice has gone, the space disappears. For callers, the space exists only when the call is taking place between the individual caller and the host, with this moment excluding the participation of other callers. This on-air space enables a form of anonymous self-expression, guaranteeing the safe and free disclosure of personal issues and feelings without self-identification. For listeners, especially the committed listeners who tune in every night that the program is on, the program allows them to visit a space by hearing it, taking them beyond the physical space they are confined to. At the same time, they are unidentified in this invisible space. Furthermore, their expectation of finding peace, pleasure and love in this space is highly likely to be realised, although it may last for no more than two hours each time.

In this talk-constructed air space, the third strategy adopted to activate the access and flow of intimacy is the cultivation of an intimate relationship between the host and callers (listeners), regardless of how little they know each other. As the host's opening statement announces, he acts as a dedicated friend, offering companionship without intruding on callers' and listeners' physical private space. Instead of an invisible mass, listeners are treated as interactive individuals with feelings and emotions. Thus, listeners are seen to possess both the capacity and the interest to express themselves. The hosts' voices, which sound attractive with their soothing, calming and comforting tones, play a vital role in expressing love and care for the listeners. As Hu Xiaomei, the female host of *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* describes it:

In a noisy and lonely city, I cover the sky with the voice. I hope in here, people give warmth to each other, and peace and gentleness can thus emerge in their hearts (Hu, X.M., 2000, translated by Lei, W.).

As the voice encourages callers and listeners—the potential callers—to emotionally support each other, callers and listeners invite the voice into their private sphere and disclose their most intimate issues. Temporary multi-layered bonds are established simultaneously between the host and the caller, between the host and listeners as well as between the caller and listeners.

The fourth strategy to create intimacy is the construction of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) on air. This is a crucial condition in defining the mass nature of intimacy production. Responsive talking, attentive listening and vocal silence constitute this imagined community, in which listeners are free to join or leave without notice by tuning in or turning the radio off. The on-and-off of listening in this imagined community causes no interruption to the on-air production of intimacy. In spite of the one-to-one talkback format, the host is well aware of the presence of a group of listeners regardless of the size of the group. Talking to one specific individual by no means stops the host from producing intimacy with the group. Instead, the on-air public communication has the potential to maximise the delivery, thus achieving the mass production of intimacy. The imagined listening community is boundless and elusive, allowing intimacy to flow as far as it can.

4.3.2 Intimate issues and the motives for calling in

While we can identify multiple motives that lead individuals to call talkback host, one motive in calling in is to seek advice from the host when there is no one else in life the caller feels appropriate to turn to for help. The following is cited from a transcribed conversation between the host Ye Sha of *Accompanying until Early Morning* and a female caller. The conversation is well documented in a book published by Ye Sha (2000), which is a selective collection of the transcripts of her on-air conversations with

callers. The following conversation reveals how intimacy is produced in a case concerning what a woman should do when she is struggling with being the third person in a marriage.

Woman caller: I fell in love with a married man. He treats me very well. But he cannot divorce his wife. I am not young anymore. I don't know what I should do.

[...]

Woman caller: It's none of them. He gives me a lot. He bought me a house. He also gives me 10,000 RMB every month. He is very generous in spending money on me. I am very grateful to him.

Ye Sha: Yes, it's not easy to make money these days, and more and more things can be priced these days ... When an item is priced for sale, this item is not valuable any more ...

[...]

Woman caller: He told me that he doesn't love his wife any more. But he feels bad about divorcing his wife.

Ye Sha: So what? Think about it. If one man says he loves you very much ... You marry him ... and then he turns to another woman, saying, 'I don't want to hurt her. Actually I don't have any feelings for her.' Do you think you want this kind of husband?

Ye Sha: It's important to find a job ... If a woman does not have her own career she will depend on a man. Even though this man ignores her, she does not have any power to resist, this is the real pain. I hope you don't live a life like this.

Woman caller: Thanks. I know what I should do now. (Ye, Sh., 2000, translated by Lei, W.)

The rise of various forms of unconventional love affairs in post Mao-era China does not necessarily mean that individuals allow and accept unconventional love affairs among their loved ones. Individuals like this female caller are still socially and morally criticised and marginalised whenever affairs make the news. In Chinese culture the female caller quoted above could be described as ‘the third one’ (*disanzhe*), a person who intervenes in a marriage. The pejorative term ‘the secondary breast’ (*ernai*), which refers to a woman who is sexually involved with a married man and financially dependent on him, might also be applicable to the female caller considering that she financially benefits from the love affair. Given this climate of discrimination and marginalisation in post Mao-era China, it is difficult, even impossible, for the female caller to expose her love affair to her friends and family. She chooses late night talkback radio as the best place to talk to someone and seek advice anonymously.

The sincere and touching conversation between the host and the female caller generates a form of intimacy that is normally found in private conversations with friends and family members. The temporary trust established on late night talkback radio allows the female caller to disclose her inner struggle. In response, the host treats the female caller seriously as an independent individual rather than immediately dismissing her as a marginalised other. In general, the host disapproves of the love affair the female caller is involved in. She explains specifically her disapproval by distinguishing authentic love from commercial sexual intimacy. The host’s explanation is framed around consideration for the female caller’s long-term good in, expressed through a comparison between the constraints of dependence on a man and the freedom that comes with independence.

Among all the cases I studied, a second main motive is just to talk with the host for the sake of communicating, rather than to seek advice. In other words, whether it is providing advice or not, the communication between the host and the caller is itself constitutive of the love and care felt by callers and listeners. As the local host I interviewed points out (personal communication, 1 June 2013), some callers just need to find a place to express themselves and find a person to talk to. The following case from *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* signals how little care and love the caller feels in real life and the intimate relationship the caller holds with the host Hu Xiaomei. The case is documented in Hu Xiao Mei's book (2000), which is a selection of transcripts from her on-air conversations with callers:

Woman caller: Good evening, Xiaomei, thanks for giving me this chance. I was just afraid that you would not give me this chance to talk to you.

Hu Xiaomei: We've still got 10 minutes.

Woman caller: OK. I've talked to you twice on the phone before. Once in 1996, and the second time in 1997. This will be the last time I call you before I leave Shenzhen. Something big has happened in my life every time I've called you. So I think no matter what, I must give you a call, and listen to your advice. Although I have made my decision, still I want to tell you.

Hu Xiaomei: Why do you want to leave?

Woman caller: For a date. Now everyone is celebrating the coming of the year 2000, and everything is exciting. The whole world is like this. But no one can imagine what kind of place I am going to to celebrate my year 2000 and Christmas Eve. I guess you cannot imagine either. I am going to prison.

Hu Xiaomei: To visit someone?

Woman caller: Yes...

(Hu, X.M., 2000, translated by Lei, W.)

In this case, the female caller has already established an intimate connection with the female host, indicating trust in the host as someone emotionally close to her. She calls in and talks with the host whenever she feels her life is at a turning point. In this clip, the caller speaks more than the host, turning the host into a listener to the caller's thoughts and feelings. In the case of callers who have already made a decision about what to do, what they need is to share their thoughts and feelings with someone they trust to gain emotional support. This is particularly the case for people who are alone, without social support from family and friends.

4.4 Between egalitarianism and authoritarianism: the paradox of intimacy

4.4.1 *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles*: intimacy as a subject-formation device

By now, one may be forgiven for thinking that all listeners are searching for intimacy and all late night talkback hosts specialise in offering it. However, as the examples I will give below show, this is not always the case, and indeed the process of giving and seeking intimacy can be paradoxical. *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles* is a daily two-hour late night talkback radio program from 0:00 to 2:00 am on China National Radio. *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles* limits the use of the call-in talkback format by encouraging listeners to participate by mobile phone message and internet-based social media to discuss pre-set themes. Its production of intimacy is described well in one of the program slogans: 'people somewhere else can understand your heart and affection. The soul late at night is without fences' (*Nide xinqing you ren dong, Yewan de linghun bu shefang*) (Qianli Gong Liangxiao, 2014). The social media-

based responses from listeners speak highly of the intimacy this program delivers to listeners and indicates listeners' commitment to this program in return, as this example shows:

I listened to *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles* for the first time tonight when I could not fall asleep. I fell deeply in love with this program. The gentle and sweet voice, and the affective talk deeply touched me. (iTao_O, 2010, translated by Lei, W.)

In particular, the quality of the human voice is a vital element in forming and mobilising intimacy. Listeners' comments on the host's voice indicate the capacity of the human voice to embody and deliver love and care:

I have listened to the programs hosted by Yao Ke [a male host of *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles*] for many years. I have always been deeply attracted by his voice. His voice is full of emotion. His voice is deep, solid, rich and very masculine. ('Wo Ai Xinjiang Tu Techan', 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

The host's voice is the key that allows both the host and listeners to open a space within which they develop trust and attachment, and these are then sustained by the host's voice. The capacity of the host's voice to enable listeners to feel love and care makes what is delivered sound more acceptable to the listeners. What matters most to the listeners is the love and care they feel from the host's voice.

In parallel with the quality of the human voice, music is another regular element that adds both economic value and social function to talkback programs. Firstly, music is economically effective as a cheap resource to fill airtime. Secondly, music in the program creates a calming, soothing and warming effect on listeners. As Martin Shingler and Cindy Wieringa (1998) put it, 'music radio [...] removes the more negative and

disturbing aspects of life from its programmes and concentrates on something altogether idealistic and romantic' (Shingler & Wieringa, 1998, p. 125). As music in *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles* is selected mainly from contemporary music, it appeals to the younger generation in particular, given that the primary theme of popular music is love and romance.

More significantly, intimacy is at the same time used as a device to facilitate the delivery of the core message of each episode. To explain how intimacy facilitates the delivery of the pre-determined meaning, I focus on a specific episode (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012), in which discussion deals with the theme of how to achieve positive energy. The female presenter Qing Yin (literally translated as 'voice with light green') hosts this episode, joined in the studio by a male psychology expert. The episode starts by persuading listeners that a negative mood is normal, and ends by suggesting seven ways listeners can apply to gain positive energy, such as each individual taking responsibility for one's own life, helping others, and being content with what one has. The following analysis starts with the episode's opening:

The host: Hi, how are you, I am Qingyin, who are you? Did you have a good day today? A new day has just begun. It is a pleasure that we are together ... the new day started just six minutes ago. Every time I say this, I have a feeling of dynamism and vibrancy. Although it is late at night, I have this feeling no matter what has happened during the day, or what has happened in our respective lives just before zero o'clock. A new day has begun after all. (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

The host starts the episode with an intimate greeting, expressing her personal feeling about the arrival of a new day, establishing a listener-friendly discursive space. The host's voice is gentle and sweet. Her tone is peaceful and light. Before the conversation

goes further to explore the concept of positive energy, the host asks the male guest to join her in disclosing their negative moments. Such self-disclosure reduces the distance between the in-studio broadcasters and the listeners.

The host: How about we share our negative feeling with listeners first? Give our own examples to demonstrate that we are actually the same as everyone. We also have moments when we are vulnerable, and stages when we feel terrible. (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

The host mentions a moment one night when she cried when she heard an old song. The male psychologist joins her, describing himself as an individual with unstable moods, which are highly influenced by the quality of his work during the day. In his attractive male voice, the expert offers a method of positive thinking that involves thinking of the moments when he is satisfied with his work or when he receives praise from others in order to overcome negative moods.

After disclosing their inner selves to the listeners, the host and the guest maintain the form of an intimate conversation when they further discuss the Chinese twitter-based responses from listeners. In response to a message arguing that ‘positive energy is something ordinary people are not entitled to enjoy’ (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012), the host denies this in a relaxing and gentle way and the expert agrees. The gentle manner and smile are used to ease the tension and maintain the relaxed atmosphere. In response to another message expressing anger, the host says:

If you are extremely angry, that means you have an intense desire for happiness. So you feel extremely unhappy. What can you do for yourself? I think, besides posting these twitters and comments, you should do something for yourself. This is what we hope to see. (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

Although the listener expresses an unfriendly and offensive attitude towards the in-studio host and guest, the guest treats the listener as a friend and explains with patience the source of happiness, which is not something given by others but that you must create for yourself. The in-studio guest attempts to reduce the level of anger among all listeners and redirects their attention to the pursuit of happiness. He stresses the self as the key to achieving happiness (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012).

The core message of reorienting the inner self is delivered in an intimate conversation throughout the whole episode. The inner self refers to the attitudes and values individuals hold in forming relationships with the self and others. As the male psychologist points out, ‘the only thing we can adjust is the way we look at and view the world’ (*Qianli Gong Liangxiao*, 2012). In other words, in the post-Mao life each individual is responsible for forming themselves as a subject. The core message is eloquently articulated and spread through the device of intimacy, which is constantly produced by the studio speakers’ controlled voices and managed interactions.

In addition to informing us about what kind of subject post Mao-era China aims to cultivate in Chinese citizens, *Share a Good Night across a Thousand Miles* demonstrates how the subject-making process is enacted through radio. The aim of transforming individuals to be more self-regulating and self-reliance (Kohrman, 2008) was proposed and pushed into practice in post Mao-era China. The crucial question became how to stimulate and smooth this subject-making process in ways that minimise political, economic and social expense. On the one hand, the private sphere has risen to a primary position, with individuals caught up with issues of how to orient their lives, existential meaning and social mobility. In contrast to the previously tough paternalistic approach of Chinese subject-formation, intimacy functions as one of the most popular

and attractive approaches in influencing individuals. At the same time, public communication via the media is a politically and economically favored way to facilitate the broader subject-making process. The meeting between the private sphere and public communication thus concentrates on how to mobilise and exploit intimacy in the interests of this broader subject-making process. The disembodiment and anonymity of radio allows radio to act as a technology of intimacy and to simultaneously alleviate the tension between the privatisation of emotion and the public communication of personal issues. Hence, what matters on late night talkback radio is not only what it offers to deal with personal issues, but also how it devises the process of offering.

4.4.2 *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality*: an exception to the production of intimacy

Paralleling the close association between radio and intimacy, late night talkback radio in China also offers several didactic programs, which are more oriented towards providing top-down advice. Wan Feng's *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* is one such program. The show was on air in Zhejiang provincial radio station (located in eastern China) from 1996 to 2009. In a television interview the male host Wan Feng insisted that his program was a serious one whereas listeners treated it as entertainment ('Wan Feng: Fenu De Zhuchi', 2005). In the television interview Wan Fen describes one example that illustrates the conflict between how he views his role and how listeners regard his program. A 20-year-old woman called in and asked about the damage caused by abortion, indicating that she was about to have her third abortion. Wan Feng was outraged and was on the point of telling her about the physical damage he believed abortion could cause. However, the girl moved on quickly to her next question which was whether it is true that women would get pregnant after making love during their menstrual period. Wan Feng recalls his reaction to this girl:

I was very angry. I said I am not going to blame you today. It is clear that your father and mother know nothing about what you did. If they knew, they would beat you to death. I am old enough to be your father. If you were my daughter, I would really give you two slaps. ('Wan Feng: Fennu De Zhuchi', 2005, translated by Lei, W.)

Many view his reaction featuring the outrage as the expression of his role as a moral guardian who is entitled to take a protective approach towards female callers. However, Wan Feng's expression of his outrage says much about gender inequality in post Mao-era China. The issue of how gender inequality influences the nature of late night talkback radio in China deserves its own scholarly study. However, what is more relevant to the discussion of intimacy is that what Wan Feng produces is anything but intimacy and his approach is not the conventionally intimate one. Callers and listeners' expectations are for intimacy expressed in a gentle way from late night talkback radio hosts. This contrasts with Wan Feng's focus and priority on matters such as responsibility, morality and justice. In a case concerning the break-up in a relationship between a couple, the host of a local intimacy-oriented talkback radio (personal communication, 1 June 2013) responds to this issue with empathy and personal experience. The host (personal communication, 1 June 2013) describes the feeling about the break-up by saying 'The heart is dug out', and the host shares this description with the caller who is in pain caused by breaking up. In contrast to applying empathy to the caller, Wan Feng focuses on how to minimise the impact of the break-up and move on. He responds as follows to a female caller who is suffering from pain and still feels deep love for the ex-boyfriend after the relationship has broken down:

Wan Feng: Right now you are a toad at the bottom of the well. What you can see is just the toad next to you. One day when you climb out of the well and see a better toad, you

will not think about the toad next to you. There are loads of toads out there, and why stick to this particular one? (Zhao, An. P., 2005, translated by Lei, W.)

The toad (*hama*) story is Wan Feng's personal adaptation of a traditional Chinese story about a frog (*qingwa*) sitting at the bottom of a well with a limited vision of the sky. The original story is a metaphor about individuals who see the world from a narrow outlook. The story reminds them to look beyond. In addition to producing humour by changing the metaphor from a frog to a toad, Wan Feng applies the story to encourage the female caller to move forward. As he speaks from a father-like role, love and care might be delivered but no intimate feeling. The following case indicates how Wan Feng reacts to the girl who finds out the man she is in love with is married.

Woman caller: I am 18 years old and knew a man. I slept with him three months ago. A couple of days ago, he told me he is married.

Wan Feng: I tell you, he is a bastard. How did you meet each other?

Woman caller: My classmate introduced us.

Wan Feng: I bet the person who introduced you to the married man definitely knew the man was married. They are bastards! (Buzuo Kaopu Nü Qingnian, 2009, translated by Lei, W.)

For a case like this, intimacy-oriented late night talkback radio is likely to offer sympathy, support and comfort and to suggest ways forward for this young girl. Wan Feng departs from this emotionally restrained reaction. Instead he delivers an angry outburst, earning him the nickname of, the 'angry man on the airwave' (Yan, G.X., 2007, p. 29). His way of showing support to this girl is paternalistic and authoritarian. His raised voice breaks the invisible boundary of the talk space, which is supposed to be quiet and restrained in order to achieve intimacy. His loud expression of outrage also

breaks the intimate atmosphere expected in this space, awakening the invisible listeners rather than sending them to sleep.



Figure 4. 2 Wan Feng on air during his radio program

Photographer and date are unknown. It is used in the CCTV (China National Television) interview transcript, which is available online.

Source: <http://www.cntv.cn/program/rw/20040517/101088.shtml> (accessed 11 June 2015)

Despite and perhaps because of its consistent authoritarianism in both the content and in its non-intimate approach, *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* was widely popular not only in its home province but also across China. For some time, *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* ranked as the top program, achieving the highest ratings of all Zhejiang-based radio programs in the same time slot. It was also relayed and replayed on over 50 provincial and municipal radio stations in China (Liu, Chen.H., 2008) when satellite-facilitated transmission was in use.

In contrast to the consistent authoritarianism, the counterparts adopting the intimate approach discussed above embody the paradox of intimacy between the egalitarianism and authoritarianism. Hosts make use of their skills and emotions to express friendly empathy to listeners on one hand; they deliver didactic paternalistic lecturing in the advice-offering procedure on the other hand.

4.5 Listening in the margin

4.5.1 Students and young rural-urban migrant workers

The popularity of late night talkback radio is reflected in both the number of listeners and in the intimate relationship listeners construct with the host. A 2006 article (Shi, J.H., 2006) reveals that the average number of listeners to *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* achieved more than two million in Shenzhen, a migrant city with a population of almost eight million. Another way to measure the number of listeners is the on-air and off-air phone calls and mail letters the hosts received. The host I interviewed (personal communication, 1 June 2013) claims that he used to receive letters every day, with 170 the maximum received in one day. The content of the letters varied, ranging from seeking advice, recounting personal situations to expressing love for the host. Female admirers even waited outside the radio station building in the hope of seeing the host. The host Hu Xiaomei recalls in her book (2005) the acts of countless male admirers who expressed their love for her and who disturbed her everyday life. In her recount (2005), one admirer pursued her for ten years, sending love letters, stalking her, crediting her with inspiration for his creative work, and other extreme behaviour. Nevertheless, as discussed above, I suggest that no matter how far listeners' reactions go, it is the production of intimacy that listeners feel and appreciate on air. The intimacy produced by late night talkback radio is highly appealing to people who look for and fail to find satisfactory relationships in real life.



Figure 4.3 The front cover of Hu Xiaomei's book *Speak, Loneliness*. The woman on the cover is Hu Xiaomei

Photographer Re Bingjiling (Hot Ice Cream), 26 October 2007

Source: <http://bbs.szhome.com/commentdetail.aspx?id=42026694&page=3> (accessed 11 June 2015)

Despite the different occupational activities they get involved in, the social circumstances of college and university students and migrant workers lead to a number of similarities across these two targeted groups. In the first place, all these groups have left their hometowns and relocated to a new place in urban China, where education and employment opportunities are concentrated. Education has been long seen as a crucial tool to achieving social mobility in China. Young students, who live outside urban areas and succeed in the national university exam leave home and travel long distance to universities and colleges, most of which are located in economically affluent cities and municipalities. For those who do not pursue education due to financial difficulty or lack

of interest in study, looking for employment in cities is seen as an alternative path to achieving a better life. However, most of these migrant workers find jobs in low-end, labor-extensive workplaces such as manufacturing factories, construction sites, service industries and as domestic maids (Pun, 2005; Sun, 2008). Yunxiang Yan's anthropological study of a north China village (2002) reveals the increasing presence of young unmarried women as a migrant workforce in urban China. Some even end up in socially marginalised and denigrated occupations such as prostitution and massage.

What both college and university students and migrant workers need to deal with in migrating is to form and manage secondary relationships (Featherstone, 1995). College and university students may initiate and develop interpersonal relationships among students on their campus. Migrant workers get to know their workmates and may also meet people from fellow towns and villages. In addition to their primary role as education providers, colleges and universities in China are responsible for providing living facilities including meal services and accommodation, which are partly subsidized by state funding. Dining halls, of which there are normally more than one on each university campus, offer students three meals a day at a lower price than food price in the public marketplace. Dormitories provide a form of same-sex collective inhabitation in a university campus. Migrant workers, particularly those laboring in workplaces offering food and accommodation, share a similar collective lifestyle as students. In the relatively collective living conditions that these groups experience, there emerge both opportunities and tensions in cultivating a range of secondary relationships. Issues emerge as a result of the encounter between people of different social and cultural backgrounds.

More significantly, students and migrant workers are involved in the process of developing and reshaping their values and behavioral orientations on their own in an increasingly commercialised urban environment.

Separation from their traditional bonds within the family and hometowns means both students and migrant workers live their new lives largely free from parental guidance and surveillance. Their choices in love, marriage and friendship fall outside both the patriarchal influence of parents and ‘the regulatory purview of the state’ (Friedman, 2005, p. 322). At the same time, the transnational and Chinese cultural forms on media offer a modern vision of love and life. As Yunxiang Yan (2002) finds out in rural China, imported cultural forms such as TV drama and popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan provide young people with something to look forward to in a ‘comfortable middle-class lifestyle as well as the modern values of family life’ (Yan, 2002, p. 37). The influence of commercialised popular culture has spread widely in China, especially in urban China. Students and migrant workers are attracted to the new directions they discover in the imported and domestic popular culture, both of which provide appealing sites for displaying and promoting intimacy-oriented values and behaviours in the private sphere.

At a time when market research and official audience statistics were at a primitive stage, the demographic identity of callers and the perception of hosts and production teams about their listeners were the main material relied on in scrutinising listeners’ identities. One incident, which led to the removal of *A Date with the Heart* on Hunan provincial radio station in 2003, demonstrates college and university students’ preference for this program (Tang, J.G. & Wu, P.Sh., 2003). According to a journalistic account (Tang, J.G. & Wu, P.Sh., 2003), on 25 February 2003, a caller claiming to be a

Japanese student studying in Hunan, wanted to talk about Japanese–Chinese relationships on air, hoping the host would not interrupt him while he read an article he had written. The host granted the caller a full three minutes in order to show the fairness of the Chinese host. The caller expressed racist views, claiming that Shina (an original and pejorative translation of China used by the Japanese) people were the most inferior race in the world. The public response to this incident the next day revealed that even during the winter holiday time, college and university students, who had returned to their campuses from their hometowns, had listened to the offensive episode. One official working in a university called the host to tell him that university students were very angry and were taking action to express their anti-Japanese sentiment (Tang, J.G. & Wu, P.Sh., 2003). Putting populist anti-Japanese nationalism in China aside, this incident shows that students make up a sizable segment of the listeners to late night talkback radio.

Besides students, the production team of *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* identifies migrant workers as a second major group of listeners. The host Wan Feng is described as *the head of migrant workers (minong touzi)* and an *educated godfather of migrant workers (you wenhua de mingong jiaofu)* (Cao, L., 2008, p. 27). The host Ye Sha of *Accompanying until Early Morning* in Shanghai recognises that an increasing number of calls were coming from migrant workers from the year 2000. She describes migrant workers as a group, who has ‘no place to express themselves, no care from others, speaking dialects and expressing points indicating cultural conflict’ (‘Yesha: Qinggan Rexian 13 Nian’, 2005). The program *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* in Shenzhen (Shi, J.H., 2006; Wu, Y.L., 2002; Ye, Zh., 1998) is a highly representative case of the close association between late night talkback radio and migrant workers.

The close bonding between *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* and migrant workers is a result of the transformation of Shenzhen from a small town close to Hong Kong to the economic special zone with political and economic privileges (Yang, L.X., 2000; Zhang, G.L., 2000) in the 1980s. The large inflow of labour turned Shenzhen into a migrant city, where its migrant population accounted for up to 87.8% in 1994 (Kong, Ai.L., 1995). For those individuals who physically and emotionally detached themselves from home and home-bound relationships, relocation to Shenzhen was an experience of 'loss, nostalgia and disorientation' (Spitta, 2009, p. 21), similar to the feelings Silvia Spitta (2009) finds in her study of migrants in Europe and the Americas. Thus, this experience required the construction of new social and culture spaces in order to re-arrange personal life and feed emotional needs. Late night talkback radio was introduced as one of these new social and cultural spaces. As all that was required was a radio receiver and (preferably) a pair of earplugs, late night talkback radio was the cheapest space where individuals were allowed to disclose private information and seek emotional support. The voice-based communication of radio produced and sustained emotional intimacy, which was lacking and even absent in the secondary relationships of daytime. This explains why the hosts view late night talkback radio as a place for listeners to relax their hearts and minds (Shi, J.H., 2006; Wu, Y.L., 2002). It delivers a sense of love, care and belonging to individuals from social groups that are displaced and marginalised.

4.5.2 Listening as a gendered site: the construction of Chinese lower-class women

Not surprisingly, despite its accessibility to both men and women, late night talkback radio is a feminised site. The feminine ethos of late night talkback radio manifests in a number of dimensions. First and foremost, the focus of late night talkback radio on

private issues articulates the feminine ethos. Issues including personal relationships, marriage and familial concerns have been primarily and persistently considered as feminine issues, given the conventional confinement of women to the domestic sphere.

Secondly, these programs feature the active participation of women. Of all the calls to late night talkback radio, the voice of female callers dominates the air. Although few statistics are available about the gender composition of callers, the male host I interviewed recounts that the majority callers to his program were women. In Hu Xiaomei's books (2000, 2005) documenting callers' stories and her off-air relationship with callers, she also makes it clear that the majority of the stories are the lived experiences of young women migrating and surviving in urban China. These cases feature socially and morally unaccepted interpersonal relationships of young marginalised female group. One 19-year-old woman called in to disclose her inner struggle over a relationship with a middle-aged married man. Another 21-year-old woman expressed her sense of guilt about being sexually involved with her aunt's husband.

Rather than empowering women by allowing them to participate in public talk, late night talkback radio expresses women's struggling, suffering, loss, disorientation, anxiety and uncertainty in post Mao-era China. In the case of *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality*, Wang Feng is more pronounced in explaining why women call in and why he chooses to empathise with women involved with irresponsible men and support women by encouraging them to break with the past:

If a couple is happy, do they call me? They say, Wan Feng, I tell you, we two are having a happy life. They must have nothing else to do. Aren't those who call me people who have an unhappy family? Especially women, who are deeply hurt, say their

husbands are bad, gambling, involve in paid sex, having fun, ignoring housework, or beating their wives. ('Wan Feng: Fennu De Zhuchi', 2005, translated by Lei, W.)

Thirdly, host's control of the on-air talk with women in fact embodies and maintains the submission and suppression of lower-class women to a male-dominated social structure. Instead of allowing callers to express themselves freely and without interruption, the host structures, intervenes and leads women in their articulation of their struggles in light of the time limit, the story's appeal and the solution framework. In one case on local late night talkback radio *Tonight is Not Lonely*, the struggle that a female caller is caught up in eventually emerges through the host asking questions and clarifying what the caller was attempting to express. The caller had been with her partner for nine years without a marriage certificate, and had two daughters. She was working in the small business owned by her partner. However, her partner began a love affair with another young woman and ignored his responsibilities to look after his children.

While the host functions as a moral judge, harshly criticising the evil personality and bad behaviour of the male partner, the advice he offers suggests a compromise with reality, one that continues the submission and suppression the caller is subject to. At the end of the phone conversation, the host concludes:

Live together for the time being, and feed the kids. When [you are] financially independent, then leave ... You must remember four words, *ren qi tun sheng* [literally translated as 'hold the breath and swallow the sound', which in this case refers to bearing suffering and subjection]. You will need money to leave. So, first you need to have financial independence. (*Jinye Bu Jimo*, 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

By treating the caller's story as an isolated individual case, the host leaves out the systemic cause and also the scale of the submission and suppression of lower-class

women in China. The employment market bars lower-class women like the caller in this case from financial independence due to their low education and domestic burdens.

Society largely fails to offer such women any actual mechanism to assist them to fit into the employment and social spaces beyond the family. In other words, the marginalised female has become the human site where the gender hierarchy, social inequalities and structural problems have come into play. Through its construction of Chinese lower-class women, radio at once reproduces and reinforces male dominance in post Mao-era China.

4.6 The reduced popularity of late night talkback radio

Just as the rise of late night talkback radio in China is captured in the 2001 film *Who Says I Don't Care?* mentioned earlier in this chapter, the reduced popularity of late night talkback radio is portrayed in the popular sitcom *Love Apartment (Aiqing Gongyu)*, produced since 2008 in Shanghai and by Shanghai cultural companies ('Aiqing Goyu', n.d.). All the characters in *Love Apartment* are urban young educated individuals, and one might see it as a Chinese counterpart to the American sitcom *Friends*. *Love Apartment* creates a late night talkback program called *Your Moon My Heart (Ni de Yueliang Wo de Xin)*, aired at midnight and with very low audience numbers. One leading male character working in the radio station volunteers to host this program because he is suffering from insomnia caused by the emotional pain of breaking up with his girlfriend. Against this backdrop, late night talkback radio is used to embody and display this character's personality through his phone conversations with callers, thus generating laughter for the sitcom viewers.

After years of popularity, late night talkback radio encountered a time of decline in both scale and influence. A large number of late night talkback radio programs have

been taken off air. *The Sky in the Night is Not Lonely* was taken off air in 2007. *Letters to the Garden of Love and Sexuality* ceased broadcasting in 2009. In the local city I visited for fieldwork, four late night talkback radio programs were removed, leaving only one on air for the time being (personal communication, 1 June 2013). Even with this last one, the host is experiencing the declining popularity of his program, with lower listener participation. The host I interviewed (personal communication, 1 June 2013) and the host Ye Sha in a television interview ('Yesha: Qinggan Rexian 13 Nian', 2005) both mention the internet as the main competitor that is luring the listeners away from late night talkback radio.

As the Chinese television produces programs offering advice on personal issues, the internet opens up an invisible space for an increasing number of Chinese to develop and experience intimacy in a more private and individualised way. The Chinese instant message software QQ emerged in the late 1990s, allowing any individual with a basic education and internet literacy to build connections with strangers near and far. In the late 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s when personal computer ownership was limited to the affluent urban-based upper class in China, commercial internet cafés emerged, attracting ordinary individuals, especially the young, to play videogames and talk to strangers online.

A variety of innovative Chinese social media have been popularised since 2000, generating more opportunities for individuals to seek intimacy with invisible strangers. One significant phenomenon from the early 2000s is the emergence and rise of *online love* (*wanglian*), a term that refers to intimate romantic relationships that develop from online talk with strangers (Huang, P., 2004). Individuals across ages, genders, educational levels and occupations have become involved in the internet's virtual space,

becoming acquainted, chatting, cultivating love, and organising possible dates when correspondents judge that they are ready to take their intimacy to the next stage. When this internet-facilitated intimacy meets reality, tension and risks may arise. The distance between what people imagine about each other and what they really look like and who they really are can cause frustration and conflict. In addition, criminal incidents such as fraud, kidnapping and rape have been reported as happening when people physically meet each other (Huang, P., 2004). Nevertheless, at little economic cost and limited self-identification, online intimacy connects and attracts individuals whenever they need someone to talk to and spend time with.

In the radio industry itself, the tension between the commercial value of airtime and the demographic features of listeners has resulted in late night talkback radio being moved to a later timeslot, as implied in the sitcom *Love Apartment*. Late night talkback radio is less able to attract profitable advertising. The first reason for this is that its dominant listeners—students, migrant workers and other marginalised groups—have low purchasing power. The close association of late night talkback radio with the economically and socially lower class poses a critical challenge to the genre's future. Late night talkback radio is very likely to be marginalised further in the Chinese radio landscape as it is overwhelming seeking to attract listeners from the economically and socially privileged class. The rise and reorientation of drive radio, discussed in chapter six, provides a perfect counterpoint and contrast to the reduced popularity of late night talkback radio.

Secondly, the capacity of late night talkback radio to grow its listening audience is limited. Marginalised groups might rely on late night talkback radio for advice as they have little access to alternative advisory resources. In contrast, more educated groups

increasingly view late night talkback radio as a source of entertainment. In the view of this latter group, the callers are uneducated and ignorant, ask a range of stupid questions and receive hilarious responses, generating amusement for the educated.

Although it is faced with multiple competitors that include television and social media, late night talkback radio remains its attraction to a dwindling listening audience. Some rural migrant workers I met in the industrial zones of Shenzhen in August 2015 were still faithful listeners to some local late-night shows on love and emotion. Late night talkback shows were also one of the favourite programs some female workers born in the 1980s in the hospitality sector of Beijing I met in October 2015 used to listen to. They dropped the listening either due to the interest shift to the internet or work and life-related full schedule.

4.7 Conclusion

In contrast to the absence of personal issues on Mao-era Chinese media, late night talkback radio with its focus on personal issues supports the legitimacy of the post Mao-era Chinese state. While Maoist China was portrayed as a regime of repression and oppression, post-Mao Chinese state and mainstream intellectuals celebrate post-Mao China as a time of liberation, openness and responsiveness to individual interest. This view seems to be shared by some Westerners (Kristof, 1993; Lawrence, 1993), who view late night talkback radio as a sign of post Mao-era progress. They see it as a genre that fits well into the post Mao-era discourse of ‘reform and openness’. This chapter has argued that late night talkback radio allows a public discussion of personal issues, opening up the individual’s inner space and enabling a sharing of the individual’s experience with the wider group. However, these individual accounts evoke various

troubled personal problems associated with a range of feelings including loss, disorientation, frustrations, vulnerabilities and uncertainties.

As late night talkback radio provides a morally, ethically, and socially accepted framework for dealing with personal problems, the Chinese state recognises late night talkback radio as a form of social education. The Chinese state has included late night talkback radio in its social education category, one of the three dominant program categories in post-Mao Chinese radio and television broadcasting (Chen, Z.F., 1995). Social education is a broad category that encompasses political, social, moral, legal, physical and psychological educations that contribute to producing subjects the state and the market expect (Lian, W., 2010). This officially defined identity of late night talkback radio as an education provider is an explicit indicator of the renewed role of the media in guiding public opinion in post Mao-era China (Zhao & Sun, 2007). As late night talkback radio demonstrates, commercially oriented Chinese radio assists rather than challenges the post-Mao Chinese state by establishing a shared and consensual moral and ethical space.

What is more significant about late night talkback radio in facilitating the post-Mao Chinese state is its offer of intimate love and care to a considerable number of socially marginalised individuals, especially those who are marginalised and exploited and who are considered to be a potential threat to social stability. Post Mao-era China has encouraged the constant production of intimacy and the use of intimacy as a device on radio to achieve individual reorientation and social stability. Radio broadcasting is the cheapest, most labour-efficient and cost-effective telecommunication technology to produce and circulate intimacy to a mass listening audience.

As a technology of intimacy radio has played a crucial role in the subject formation in post Mao-era China. It has participated actively in the making of neoliberal subjects, encouraging everyone who tunes in and listens to talkback programs to develop the skills needed to survive in the market. At the same time, the paradox between egalitarianism and authoritarianism is constantly produced, contested and maintained with the provision of anonymous intimacy. However, as the privatised and individualised production of intimacy grows and multiplies with the digital telecommunication technology, the mass production of intimacy has gradually lost its capacity and appeal.

Through its expression of love and care, late night talkback radio downplays systemic problems and structural inequalities in the Chinese state by confining discussion to private sphere issues. As Kathleen Erwin argues in her investigation of Shanghai-based late night talkback radio, the private sphere has risen to become a place where the state intervenes indirectly in making subjects in post Mao-era China (Erwin, 2000). Individual subjectivity is thus confined to the private sphere, where various social tensions, conflicts, inequalities, discriminations, and biases come into play. The private sphere has become a source of pain, suffering and impairment more than a source of pleasure, happiness and fulfilment. Consequently, personal issues have become an endless source of topics on late night talkback radio, all of which are couched in the context of social stratifications and conflicting values. Late night talkback radio paradoxically demonstrates the structural barriers that constrain the meaning and scope of self-responsibility and self-reliance. ■

Chapter 5

Health infomercial radio: privatisation, medicine and self- responsibility in post Mao-era China

5.1 Health broadcasting in post Mao-era China

Apart from offering advice on personal feelings and emotional matters, since the early 1990s radio has simultaneously been involved in offering advice on how to improve one's physical health. Radio broadcasting about physical health is the focus of this chapter. Throughout the chapter the word 'health' refers to physical health. Like late night talkback radio, health-related radio, has been popular for some time among certain segments of the population. However, due to the health promise the advertising makes, which lets consumers down with the actual quality of products, it remains much more controversial and notorious among the public than other radio shows. Medical products and services, especially medicinal products, promoted on health-oriented radio are widely criticised as fraudulent and for many years such promotions generated outcries of disappointment and complaints from the public. In response, since the 1990s both the national and local governments have issued a range of regulations and crackdowns on programs promoting fraudulent medical products and services.

Several perspectives are relevant to this discussion of health infomercial radio in China. The first relates to health and bio-power. According to Michel Foucault (2004), health has been incorporated into both state governance and economic management

since the 20th century. The political economy of health in the 20th century reshaped health as at once both an object of state governance and as market consumption. Viewed from the macro-level, Michel Foucault (2004) suggests that the redefinition of health as a right led the state to take responsibility for protecting and improving health, making state regulation of the individual body appropriate and legitimate. Besides its participation in and reproduction of workforce, health entered into the macro-economy, resulting in the second involvement of human body in the market through medicine and health consumption (Foucault, 2004).

The second useful perspective is that of health and the social process of individualisation. Here health is seen as ‘a task and achievement of the responsible citizen, who must protect and look after it or face the consequence’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.140). Health is at once a constant production and a primary value, which is sought after in everyday life through practices and products ranging from illness therapy, anti-aging treatment and food, clothes, and exercise to lifestyle habits . The process of individualisation is more complicated in contemporary China, which is caught in a range of new problems and uncertainties that grow out of Chinese modernisation. In this process, individuals constantly negotiate with the widespread self-responsibility discourse on how to take care of their health (Sun, 2014b). A privatised regime of healthy living is on the rise in contemporary China. This regime of healthy living features both the privatised consumption practice and privatised ethical position of engaging in, selectively participating in, and resisting a range of advice on healthy lifestyle principles and practices (Sun, 2014b). What role does media play in shaping the privatised regime of healthy living? In the case of post-Mao Chinese radio, which has been providing health education since the launch of the economic reforms, how has

health-oriented radio shaped current public opinions and feelings about the production and consumption of health?

The third significant theoretical thought in informing the discussion on health-oriented radio in post Mao-era China is that of compressed modernity and its associated risks (Beck & Grande, 2010), discussed in chapter one. As the consequence of the compressed modernisation process, China and other East Asian countries face ‘deficiency risks’ (Han & Shim 2010, p. 471 in Beck & Grande, 2010, p. 422), and regard these as more urgent and worrying than the risks that preoccupy western countries such as economic crises, terrorism and climate change. Deficiency risks feature regional issues such as air pollution, water contamination and food and medicine insecurity (Beck & Grande, 2010), all of which have a direct and indirect influence on public health and the individual’s everyday practice. More specifically, the modernisation process in China has produced additional risks to public and individual life. In light of this, the question to ask is: Is health information produced on radio in post Mao-era China providing a solution to these risks, or is it in fact adding additional risks?

In this thesis I explore the role that the genre of health-oriented radio plays in helping individual consumer-citizens to cope with health-related anxieties and risks in everyday life in post Mao-era China. At the same time I describe the discourse it has promoted. In what follows, I start by setting up the political and economic context, identifying how health has been transformed in post Mao-era China and why this transformation has generated the widespread discourse of self-responsibility in everyday life. Drawing on interview materials with both radio practitioners and listeners as well as content analysis of actual programs, I then discuss the influence on radio of the market-

oriented media transformation in post Mao-era China, considering how a commercial relationship between radio and health has been formed. After constructing the particular local context, I move on to offer an account of the early stage of health-oriented radio and how health-oriented radio generated hope as well as frustration among the public, resulting in increasing governmental regulations and inspections of health-oriented radio. In light of this position shift, the study then examines contemporary talkback health-oriented radio to scrutinise how it is responding to the privatised regime of healthy living and who constitutes its listeners. To conclude the chapter I then look at the off-air side of health infomercial radio, discussing the changes in listening practices in contemporary China.

5.2 The transformation of health in post Mao-era China

When the Communist Party-led China was founded, a state-owned and state-sponsored public healthcare system was put in place. People enjoyed open and equal access to the state-funded public healthcare system, which was committed to providing medical treatment to everyone. People who grew up in the 1960s in China recall that the provision of medical treatment took priority over payment. If patients could not afford medical treatment, they were treated first but allowed to pay at a later stage (personal communication, 15 June 2013).

Although open and equal access to health care was promoted, the rural–urban division structured the access to quality medical treatment. Constructing and improving medical facilities in urban China was prioritised over providing healthcare facilities in rural China. This co-occurred with the individual’s healthcare costs being covered by state-owned workplace units (*danwei*) in urban China. Rural China faced ‘medical facilities shortages and medicine inadequacy (*queyi shaoyao*)’ (Xia, F., 2011, p. 13) for

many years, and this remains a national issue in contemporary China. In Mao-era China, barefoot doctors (*chijiao yisheng*) (Potter, 2010)—farmers who received basic medical training and provided medical treatment in rural villages—were mobilised as a solution to the unequal distribution of medical resources across the rural–urban divide.

5.2.1 The commercialisation of the public healthcare system in post Mao-era China

Although the post Mao-era Chinese state has constantly claimed that it has responsibility for its citizens' health, health has been largely reformed, with responsibility for health gradually shifting from the state to the individual. The impact of market-oriented reforms on the healthcare system is far-reaching. It is also much less egalitarian. On one hand, politically and economically privileged groups such as governmental officials and state-owned enterprise managers, can have the cost of their health care covered either partly or largely by their workplace-based social insurance. These privileged groups have felt this shift in responsibility less because of their access to the mainstream healthcare system. On the other hand, ordinary people, who are less affluent or without social insurance, are marginalised from the mainstream healthcare system. Now subject to an unwritten principle of 'no medical service without fee payment' (personal communication, 15 May 2013), ordinary people have to bear the financial burden of health care when they are diagnosed with illness, including serious terminal and chronic diseases. We therefore hear cases of people being refused medical services because they cannot pay (Wang, H.W., et al. 2009; 'Huanzhe Wei Dai Gou Qian', 2013).

The commercialisation of the healthcare system in post Mao-era China has resulted in multiple facets of inequality in the access to health care (Li, J.H., Zhang, K.N. & Tian, L.Ch., 2006). As already indicated, this inequality manifests itself

primarily in the differential access for rural and urban consumers. This rural–urban inequality already existed in Mao-era China but it has become further entrenched in the reform decades. The market solution to the supply and distribution of health care has led to the concentration of medical resources in urban China rather than a more equal distribution between rural and urban China. Statistics indicate that access to almost 80% of national health resources is limited to urban residents who make up only about 20% of the Chinese population (Li. C. in Li, J.H. Zhang, K.N. & Tian, L.Ch., 2006). In addition to the geographic distance from urban, developed medical services, the economic conditions in rural China prevent a sizable number of rural residents from receiving appropriate and quality medical service. It was not until the 2000s that the Chinese central state publicly admitted the failure of the post-Deng healthcare system (Huang, 2009).

Accompanying the highly structured and unequal access to health care, the commercial democratisation of medical production has provided the public with a market that offers an expanding diversity of treatment options. The post-Mao Chinese state decentralised and commercialised medical production and distribution, enabling individuals to seek medical products and treatments on the medical market. In 1984, the Chinese government issued the *Law of Regulating Medicines*, allowing the establishment of pharmaceutical manufacturing enterprises and assigning responsibility for their regulation to the local administration level (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Yaopin Guanli Fa*, 1984).

The increased production of pharmaceutical supplies was soon recognised by local governments as a profitable industry capable of boosting local economies. Shanghai has played a leading role in the transformation of the medical domain. As

early as 1993, the Shanghai government proposed listing the pharmaceutical industry as one of its high-tech pillar industries. In 1995, the Shanghai government formally declared the goal of ‘establishing modern biology and medicine to be the high-tech pillar industry by the end of this century’ (Zhou, F.M., 1997, p. 4). On multiple occasions the then Shanghai mayor stated that the production value of the Shanghai pharmaceutical industry was expected to reach 15 billion RMB in 1997, becoming the seventh pillar industry and reaching 30 billion in 2000 (Zhou, F.M., 1997).

This wave of pharmaceutical growth gave rise nationwide to large-scale enterprises associated with the latest medical knowledge and equipment as well as a significant number of ‘production facilities that were small-scale, duplicative, and greatly uneven in quality’ (Sun, et al., 2008, p. 1043). Statistics reveal that the number of drug manufacturing firms increased to more than 5,000 in Shanghai alone (Sun, et al., 2008). Meanwhile, both individuals and organisations participated in this distribution process, resulting in a growing number of pharmaceutical salesmen, private and hospital-run pharmacies and other alternative and even underground channels. The availability of medicinal products on the accessible market provided an alternative space in which the Chinese public pursued medical treatment. Ordinary Chinese citizens described their medical consumption as ‘go to hospital if it is serious; and go to pharmacy if it is not so serious’ (*dabing qu yiyuan, xiaobing jin yaodian*) (Yuan, Y., 1997, p.17).

5.2.2 The sociocultural redefinition of health in post Mao-era China

In addition to reorienting the pursuit of health as an economic activity, the marketisation of health care has had social and cultural implications. In Mao-era China health was endowed with higher meanings through its association with nationalism and the

building of socialist modernity. For instance, Mao Zedong proposed the national slogan ‘develop sports activities, strengthen people’s physical quality’ (*fazhan tiyu yundong, zengqiang renmin tizhi*) (‘Fazhan Tiyu’, 2002). The slogan was later extended with ‘increase awareness, protect the nation’ (*tigao jingti, baowei zuguo*) (‘Fazhan Tiyu’, 2002). With the removal of the socialist collective orientation in post Mao-era China, individual interest has come to take precedence over collective interest. In the case of health, in spite of the existence of some collective physical exercise activities, the value of health has become increasingly individualist in orientation in post Mao-era China. The value of health has come to be understood mainly as a benefit to the individual.

This shift in the meaning of health from the collective to the individual is particularly prominent in light of the increasingly aging society in China. With death no longer closely associated with religion—assumes the extension of life after death—or socialism—which assumes death contributes to a greater purpose—death comes to be seen as an ending rather than a stage in the individual’s life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Death is now defined as one’s own as life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In the face of an aging society, and with constant improvements in medical technology, Chinese individuals are increasingly interested in health. The population aged 60 or over reached 200 million in China in 2013 (China News Website, 2013). It is predicted that the aged population in China will reach 221 million by the end of the 12th five-year plan (2011–2015) (China News Website, 2013). The number of people aged 80 or over will reach 24 million, and the number of ‘empty nesters’ (*kongchao laoren*), referring those elderly who live alone or with partners only, will reach 51 million (Wei, M.L., 2012).

If we view health care as a crucial component of care for the elderly, the discourse of self-responsibility is seeing a shift in responsibility to the shoulders of

elderly Chinese themselves. For the elderly who are financially and physically capable of living on their own, they can take the responsibility for their care off the shoulder of their children, making life easier for the younger generation. The case is more complicated for the elderly who are either financially or physically incapable. The tension between the conventional family model of caring for the aged and the contemporary independent self-care model is intense. The Chinese media has touched on a considerable number of individual cases where there is conflict between parents and children about care of the elderly and where there are fights between children about the division of responsibilities for the care of elderly parents (Xu, F. & Wang, H., 2012; Wang, Q.S. 2012). Cases like this test the strength of family bonding and may be emotionally hurtful to the older generation. According to this view, post Mao China has been transformed into a place where ‘offspring are unreliable and we should depend on ourselves’ (personal communication, 15 June 2013).

As individual subjectivity is reoriented to the quest for health, how the Chinese seek health has been individualised, depending on a range of personal economic, social and cultural conditions. For instance, in the health-keeping (*yangsheng*) wave, which has been sweeping across China in recent years, practice options have been democratised, with citizens offered practices ranging from food therapy and exercise routines to practices to improve one’s everyday mood and behaviour. In the quest for health, medicinal products and services are widely purchased and consumed due to the popular belief in the capacity of medical science to provide health (Sun, 2015).

5.3 Advertising the promise of health: a lifeline for the struggling radio sector in post Mao-era China

In parallel with the commercialisation taking place in the health domain, China’s media and communication sector have also undergone the transforming process of

marketisation (Zhao, 1998 & 2008; Sun, 2012). When looking for ways to promote their products directly to consumers, medical manufacturers and sales representatives fixed their gaze on the media as the most logical site. In the years since 1990, direct-to-consumer advertising emerged and grew aggressively. Chinese media practitioners recall that they were forced to participate in the promotion of the promise of health at a time when Chinese media was pushed to search for funding, due to the withdrawal of state funding. In a newspaper article, one radio practitioner explains:

There is no other choice. If [you] stand in the shoes of the radio station managers, what should be done with so many people waiting for the meal? This is the system. Nobody wants to do this [medical advertising]. If there were state subsidy, these [medical advertising] programs would not exist. These programs would disappear in three months. (Chen Disheng, in Huang, R.H. & Zhu, Y.X., 2012, translated by Lei, W.)

Direct-to-consumer medical advertising is therefore a critical product in identifying the relation between the Chinese media and health, and the promise of health has provided the initial capital for media commercialisation in post Mao-era China.

5.3.1 The commercialised relationship between radio and health in post Mao-era China

The proliferation of direct-to-consumer promotions of medicine is to a considerable extent a result of freeing individuals in the public sector and granting them ‘entrepreneurial freedoms’ (Zhao, 2008, p. 6). Some of these individuals, who voluntarily left or were forced to leave their former occupations, made a promising and lucrative business out of the production, distribution and consumption of health products. The initial commercial success of health products encouraged more individuals and organisations to join the health product business, establishing a home-grown health industry (a broad term including that includes the production and

consumption of pharmaceutical and health products and health services) in the following years. Medical advertising in the Chinese media played a significant role in the commercial success of a range of health product brands in the early years (Zhe, Y.C.H., 2004; Han, Y.G., 2005). In return, the health industry has shown a growing interest in occupying more time and space in the Chinese media, in order to achieve increased profits.

Apart from providing a livelihood for the medical and insurance industries (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), the promise of health threw a lifeline to the media sector. In China, health products that are advertised include such as medicinal products, non-drug medical treatments, medical devices and private medical service providers. The financial significance of medical advertising to the media can be traced back to the early 1990s. Medical advertising was one of the leading contributors in the early stage of the market-oriented reform of the media. An article published in 2008 reveals that the health industry was among the top five industries to invest in media advertising since 2002 (Lan, H., Chen, W.J. & Xie, W. J., 2008). In the media sector, the advertising revenue from the health industry ranks first, with 18.54% share of total national advertising revenue in 2009. In the radio domain alone, the 2004 statistics indicate that the average revenue generated from medical call-in radio programs¹¹ accounted for between 50% and 90% across a number of radio stations. One extreme case took place on one local radio channel, where 96.7% of its advertising revenue came from medical advertising (He, F., 2004). As one local radio station manager reveals:

¹¹ Medical call-in radio programs are a form of medical advertising in which patients call in for a consultation, which ends with the caller being prescribed the advertised product or service. Normally medicinal manufactures, pharmaceutical sales representatives and private hospitals are the sponsors of these medical call-in radio programs.

Medical advertising time accounted for 70% of all advertising time before 2005. We decide that medical advertising must be reduced ... the amount of medical advertising is too much. 80% of advertising on news radio channel sells medicine ... 30% of advertising on drive radio channels is medical advertising ... We have a channel called wealth channel, on which medical advertising accounts for 40% of all advertising time ... Medical advertising on news radio channel, municipal radio channel, and sports radio channel has occupied up to 70 % to 80% of advertising time. (Duan, W.W., in Fan, J.W. & Gao, Y.Y., 2007, p. 7, translated by Lei, W.)

The convergence of radio and health information was made possible largely by the decentralisation of the media sector. In the socialist decades, local radio functioned more as a relay station for national radio (Sun, 2012). In the era of the economic reforms, the decentralisation of state administration took place in the media and communication sector, resulting in growing autonomy in the practices of local radio stations. As the link between local radio stations and local authorities has grown stronger than the link with central authorities, local radio stations have placed local economic interests and also their own survival ahead of national and social interests. Since radio dropped into second place thanks to the arrival of television in post Mao-era China, it has been at the same time pushed to seek the funding in order to survive. To gain a competitive edge, many local radio stations have largely become local profit-making institutions, selling a great deal of airtime to advertisers. A technician who works for one local radio station recounts the financial hardship local radio struggled with and their efforts to attract advertising in the early 1990s:

I joined the local broadcasting station in the late 1991. The station already failed in issuing our salaries. The head of the station asked all of us to look for sponsors,

specifically speaking, looking for advertising. As a result, almost everything could be advertised on air as long as money was offered to us. (personal communication, 15 May 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

The primary medical product advertised on radio has been medicinal products. The early medicinal products promoted on air were those described as ‘not commonly available in the mainstream medical marketplace due to the conflict with contemporary Chinese culture but in great demand’ (Lanhai ZhiDa Team, 2010). The typical case was medicinal products treating sexual problems. Since the 1990s, sexuality has grown into a key site for (re)constructing individual subjectivity (Zhang, E., 2007). Male sexuality has been prioritised with the institutionalisation of sexual problems into the mainstream medical system through the men’s clinic (*nanke*) (Zhang, E., 2007). Medicinal products treating sexual problems were offered on air in the 1990s. Certain medicinal product manufacturers and sales representatives became very wealthy very quickly from the increasing sale of advertised medicinal products treating sexual problems (Lanhai ZhiDa Team, 2010). This testifies to the enormous profitability of on-air medical advertising regardless of medical authenticity or product efficacy.

5.3.2 The corruption of the regulative system for medical advertising

In an effort to remove systemic corruption, since the 1990s we have seen the gradual formation of a comprehensive pre-market and post-market supervision system to regulate medical advertising. Regulations governing general medical advertising have developed and multiplied in response to growing public complaints and reports about medical advertising overpromising and under-delivering on health. The regulation of medical advertising issued in 1992 (*Yaopin Guanggao Guanli Banfa*, 1994), prohibited a number of claims and practices that were being used in medical advertising to

demonstrate the promise of health. This regulation prohibited content that claimed the promise of health in ways that included but was not limited to the following:

Unscientific claims and assertions indicating the medical efficacy, descriptions like ‘produce the best treatment result’; ‘illness is removed once the medicine is applied’; ‘cure the fundamental root of the disease’; ‘safely prevent’ and ‘safe with no side effect’; descriptions indicating the curing rate and efficacy rate; descriptions exploiting the reputation and image of medical research institutions, academic institutions, medical organisations, experts, doctors and patients as evidence supporter; products specialised in treating sexual dysfunction, descriptions indicating the reward products received (*Yaopin Guanggao Guanli Banfa*, 1994, translated by Lei, W.)

These prohibitions were further included in the *Advertising Law*, which was issued in 1994 (*Guanggao Fa*, 1994).

In the following years, the regulation of medical advertising was updated further yet at the same time decentralised. A pre-market approval and post-market supervision system was established with the aim of avoiding medical advertising that promoted fraudulent products and services (*Yaopin Guanggao Shencha Banfa*, 1995). The decentralisation process in post-Mao Chinese state governance has assigned responsibility for implementing the system to the local hygiene administration, which is in charge of assessing medical advertising before it is published by the local media of the same level (*Yaopin Guanggao Shencha Banfa*, 1995).

However, instead of achieving the intended aim of eliminating illegal medical advertising, decentralisation fed into the emergence and rise of local corruption in implementing the pre-market approval and post-market supervision system. The local institutions responsible for implementing this system implementation became

commercialised to some extent as a result of the economic empowerment of local governance. When they assessed and made a decision on the approval of medical advertising, economic interest was considered more important than social interest. As Kenneth Lieberthal argues, the late 1970s economic reform gave ‘the horizontal (that is, the territorial coordinating) line of authority priority over its vertical counterpart’ (Lieberthal, 1997, p.4). On one hand, the local state ‘tends to prioritize local agendas and incentives over the administrative directives passed down to it by the higher-level governing unit’ (Wang, 2005, p.11). On the other hand, the central state formulates a national political-economic deal, which is exercised in a trading form as economic growth for political promotion (Lieberthal, 1997). Consequently, the local state ‘functions like a semi-autonomous decision-making agent’ (Wang, 2005, p.11) in an environment, which ‘provide(s) enormous incentives for key officials in each locality to become entrepreneurial—to find opportunities to maximize economic growth in the territory under their jurisdiction’ (Lieberthal, 1997, p. 5).

Free from the responsibility of checks and balance, local radio stations made airtime available for medical advertising as long as medical products were approved for advertising in the media, regardless of the authenticity of the approval. More worryingly, local radio stations stepped in to help speed up the advertising approval process, appealing to and retaining medical advertising clients (personal communication, 11 April, 2014). At the other end, the post-market punishment of the medical advertising exposed as false was lenient considering the size of the lucrative business of medical advertising (*Guanggao Fa*, 1994). One interviewee, who used to be a pharmaceutical sales representative in 2000s, recalls that the profit margin was up to 500% (personal communication, 11 April, 2014). The production cost of the medicine he represented

was 22 RMB and the sales price was 138 RMB (personal communication, 11 April, 2014).

Continuous public complaints about health infomercial radio and other medical advertising has fed into more debates and led to more central and local regulations on medical advertising. The years since 2000 have witnessed the enactment of a renewed medicine administration law, regulations for the implementation of medicine administration law, and standards for the examination and publication of medical advertisements (e.g., *Yaopin Guanggao Shencha Fabu Biaozhun*, 2007). The pre-market approval and post-market supervision system is updated frequently whenever it is necessary to deal with emerging problems in medical advertising practice.

An on-air regime to monitor the promise of health has been formed, in which the state, the medical market, the media and the public are all involved in the negotiation and regulation of how to present the promise of health in politically, socially, culturally and scientifically acceptable ways. The on-air presentation of the promise of health is the outcome of negotiation and regulation, and at the same time triggers new rounds of negotiation and regulation. The formats of on-air presentation vary from brief regular advertising spots to sponsorship and paid shows. Thus, the on-air space for the promise of health can expand and shrink, depending on how flexible the airtime on local radio stations is. Program-length health infomercial radio has also become increasingly commonplace.

5.3.3 The separation between production and distribution in the broadcasting sector

The year 2000 saw renewed efforts to reinforce the integration of production supply and distribution in the broadcasting sector. However, the report of the 16th party congress in

2002 issued a renewed policy supporting the separation between the production supply and distribution networks (Lü, P., 2010), allowing individuals and private groups to act as production suppliers to the broadcasting sector. The separation-oriented policy was confirmed in the following years with the growth of privately produced programs, especially non-news programs on radio and television. A number of privately produced entertainment programs have successfully appealed to the public and generated profits.

State regulation of the separation between production supply and distribution networks further legitimised the production of health-related advertising on the radio. As local radio stations are concerned about limited funding and a less affluent listenership, selling airtime to private production groups is one financially effective option for local radio stations to save production energy as well as to make a commercial profit. As a result of this marriage of convenience, medical advertising clients and the advertising agencies they employ acquire program-length airtime, which is devoted to the subject matter of health in the form of health infomercial radio. The program-length health infomercial radio is a mixture of health knowledge and commercial advertising. Providing health information is represented as a public good, but in fact listeners end up being advised to purchase the advertiser's medicinal product. A radio practitioner finds a vivid satire, describing the health infomercial radio landscape:

If you listen to radio programs these days, they are full of dialects. One radio station is broadcasting diagnosing diseases, and another one is selling medicine. Experts specialising in the liver are passionately talking, and professors specialising in cancer prevention are explaining. The paid callers are eagerly asking, and the fake patients are boasting the successful therapeutic effort. Radio stations are transformed into hospitals, and audience is transformed into patients. (Zhao, D., 2006, p. 45, translated by Lei, W.)

5.4 Health infomercial radio: the mass production of the promise of health

A health infomercial radio program normally lasts for one to one and a half hours a day, depending on the arrangement between radio station and advertiser. The programs are given titles such as ‘Health Dictionary’ (*jiankang baodian*), ‘Nutrition Dictionary’ (*yangsheng baodian*) and ‘Expert Clinic’ (*zhuanjia menzhen*) to legitimate and highlight their factual orientation. A typical episode of health infomercial radio consists of three segments. The first segment is a recorded piece, which contains a number of claims about the efficacy of the advertised products. In the second segment the in-studio expert delivers a short lecture that includes knowledge about how the body works and an explanation of the causes of diseases. The lectures typically mix knowledge and interpretations drawn from biology, medical science and traditional Chinese medicine. Following the lecture listeners are invited to call the expert with their questions and comments.

To exemplify how these programs work, I will discuss one health infomercial program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio (located in Western China), drawing on two other programs for additional detail. All these programs offer a mixture of medical advice and promotion of a medicinal product. The medicinal product I focus on is a form of capsule that the manufacturer claims improves the health of human cells. The in-studio guest is introduced as a female professor, whom the callers address as Teacher Yu (*Yu laoshi*) or Professor Yu (*Yu jiaoshou*). In what follows, I highlight, three strategies health infomercial radio employs in its production of the promise of health throughout one typical episode: the production of expertise, the creation of an appreciative doctor–patient relationship and the limited availability of the promoted product.

5.4.1 The production of expertise: the authoritarian medical figure armed with scientific discourse

In referring to the production of expertise I draw on Nikolas Rose's definition of it as:

a particular kind of social authority, characteristically deployed around problems, exercising a certain diagnostic gaze, grounded in a claim to truth, asserting technical efficacy, and avowing humane ethical virtues. (Rose, 1998, p. 86)

Establishing the speaker's expertise is crucial to the framework in which the 'expert' talks. In the case of health infomercial radio, we need to identify who is considered an expert and how they express and legitimise their expertise. Individuals who possess widely recognised titles in the medical field such as professor and Doctor of Medicine are considered masters of expertise and this status is highlighted in the introduction of in-studio speakers. The introduction normally reviews the speaker's professional education, training and employment. For example, teacher Yu is introduced as a veteran medical professor, who has mastered both western and Chinese medicine. The lecturer on another program promoting Miao ethnic medicine is introduced as a Doctor of Medicine who trained in the United States (*Jiankang Rexian*, 2014).

After their professional credentials are presented, the experts make use of the discourse of science to legitimate their expertise, using this to add credibility to the products they are promoting. The discourse of science is widely adopted to explain how the human body works, the cause of diseases, and how the promoted product functions to achieve the promise of health. Professor Yu explains the fundamental significance of cells to the body, providing factual knowledge that also justifies the mechanism of the promoted capsule:

When the cells are sick, the body is sick. Cells renew themselves every 100 to 120 days. They have a self-recovery capacity. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

Professor Yu backs up her statement with reference to cell theory, introduced as a fundamental theory in medical science. Based on this theory, disease is arguably the consequence of damage to cells, the basic units of the human body. The advertised product is claimed to have the capacity to improve human cells and facilitate the cell renewal process.

The recognition of science as a crucial driving force in Chinese modernisation (Yue, C.X., 2010), has led to the widespread acceptance and celebration of the discourse of science in China, especially since economic reforms. In the economic reform era, since Deng Xiaoping-led central authority has affirmed the significance of science to national development, asserting this through a range of slogans such as *Science and technology is the chief productive force (Kexue jishu shi diyi shengchanli)* (Zhou, Y.Ch., 1991) and *National Rejuvenation with Science and Education (kejiao xingguo)* (Liu, Y.Zh., 1996). Among the public, the discourse of science has gained in strength and prestige, exerting an increasing influence on how Chinese citizens think, act and behave. Advertisers have recognised that almost anything looks and sounds more appealing and persuasive when it is associated with the discourse of science. In the post Mao-era health domain, the production and reception of the discourse of science has been commercialised and democratised in the public communication of medical science. The medical field has been constantly importing Western medical science to update the health information and health care it provides. Market reforms in the healthcare system

have accelerated and widened the production and consumption of the discourse of science.

Health infomercial radio uses the discourse of science throughout its programs. Science-based claims and references are constantly offered in presenting diagnoses, demonstrating expertise and validating products. These claims and references are declared to have been developed from a range of sources including advanced western medical science, biology, and the works of classic Chinese medicine. This scientific knowledge is offered to explain and justify the efficacy of the promoted products in restoring, maintaining and reinforcing health.

Health infomercial radio also adopts the discourse of science to renew the articulation of traditional Chinese medicine. Throughout China's modernisation process there has been discussion about whether traditional Chinese medicine has been—or should have been—eliminated in favor of western medicine (Chen, X.G., 2006; 'Zhongyiyao Zhi Zheng', 2013; Zhou, P., 2014). However, with the increased concern about health keeping (*yangsheng*), traditional Chinese medicine has seen a revival in recent years in China in both public communication and everyday practice. In the Voice of Health program, after diagnosing the caller's complaint and prescribing the promoted product, Professor Yu also offers a traditional Chinese therapy. The traditional Chinese therapy features either food therapy or an exercise routine, which Professor Yu supports as compatible with cell theory and of benefit to cell recovery.

5.4.2 The adoption of talkback format: the production of an appreciative doctor–patient relationship

The second strategy employed by health infomercial radio is the use of the talkback format, enabling interaction between in-studio experts and their 'patients', the listeners. This two-way communication enables the production of an appreciative relationship

between the doctor and patients. The in-studio speaker deploys her diagnostic skills to solve callers' questions and confusions, exhibiting her expertise as well as expressing care, concern and responsibility. Professor Yu offers a simple diagnosis based on each caller's specific description of their physical condition and symptoms. For example, one female caller consults to Professor Yu about her grandson, who is suffering from frequent coughing due to bronchitis. After learning that the child has been vulnerable to flu and has taken anti-flu medicine for a prolonged period, Professor Yu analyses the case in a sympathetic voice:

The immune system has been broken by the consumption of anti-flu medicine from a young age. His bronchitis is a man-made disease. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

In another case, when talking with an elderly caller Professor Yu explains:

Many symptoms are the consequence of the body aging. They cannot strictly count as illness. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

Callers usually offer a personal account, disclosing their age and showing trust in the in-studio speaker. Calls from older listeners usually mention the difficulties they face in everyday life because of their compromised health. Both first-time buyers and patients who have used the promoted products participate in the construction of personal account about dealing with aging. In addition to expressing their interest in consuming the advertised product, first-time buyers often describe the difficulty of living without any external assistance and care, aiming to generate a broader empathy for the elderly.

I have been listening to your lecture for a number of months ... my partner is over 60. She suffers from cataracts, high blood pressure, and difficulty in falling asleep. More

than 10,000 RMB has been spent on medicine this year. I am 77 years old. There are only two of us in the house. Our offspring is not around us. We live on the seventh floor, and have difficulty in getting downstairs. We want to take medicine but we are out of medicine. Both of us are high intellectuals. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

The callers' participation in the program with their primary identity as patients constitutes an invisible community, in which personal living circumstances, disease experience and the progress of the medical condition are shared. This constructed community is particularly appealing to the isolated elderly and to those who suffer from similar diseases. The informal talk about health between the in-studio expert and the callers creates a space for communication, which listeners can become part of despite the physical distance.

The appreciative relationship between doctor and patients is produced through the callers' passionate appreciation of the expert's knowledge and callers' grateful testimonies about the efficacy of the products being promoted. This passionate appreciation is embodied in calls both by patients who have not used the advertised products and by those who have. One caller expresses his appreciation to Professor Yu:

Hi Professor Yu, Thanks for your efforts! I have been listening to your program for three days ... the product is really good for the body. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

The caller validates the program by highlighting his commitment to it as a regular listener, and demonstrates what he gains from it. He simultaneously acknowledges the authoritative identity of the in-studio speaker, the knowledge orientation of this program and the medical value of the advertised product. His demonstration serves to stimulate

other listeners' interest in both the expert and the program and encourages them to take action to purchase the advertised product.

In addition to those who are interested in purchasing the advertised products, patients themselves or those whose relatives have consumed the advertised product also call in to express their gratitude and validate the therapeutic efficacy of advertised products. An elderly female caller describes on air the recovery of physical health and the ability to manage daily life:

The medicine works very well on me. I want to register for my elderly partner (*laoban*) ... I used to suffer from cerebral thrombosis ... I could not wash my hair ... Now there is no problem to handle the move of washing my face, combing the hair and taking the meal ... there is no problem in looking after myself on my own ... I used to have cataracts in my eyes ... Now my vision is clear ... I used to have asthma ... now I don't have difficulty in breathing and I don't cough ... my feces used to be dry ... now it is normal. (*Program on Voice of Health on Shanxi Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

The female caller's personal account demonstrates that with the consumption of the advertised product, a new healthy body has emerged out of the old sick one. The rebirth of a new healthy body brings with it independence and a better quality of life.

Responses from elderly callers reveal that what tortures them is not only the physical pain caused by bodily disease, but also the loss of dignity and decency caused by difficulties in managing everyday life on their own. Thus, the advertised medicinal product embodies both the promise of health and the promise of individual subjectivity. The return of physical health achieved by the medical solution enables the return of self-care, which is highly desired by elderly Chinese citizens who suffer from both physical

difficulties and isolation from possible carers such as offspring and social workers. These products are therefore constituted as effective in curing diseases and improving health and everyday life. Three functions are inscribed onto the medicinal products promoted on health infomercial radio: they offer a medical alternative with a superior function over mainstream treatments; they help achieve independence, autonomy and self-care in everyday life; and they are a means of expressing care and achieving health for the whole family. The icing on the cake is that the commodity is easily available from retail outlets at a discounted price.

5.4.3 The articulation of the commercial purpose: the limited availability of the promoted medicinal products

The third strategy health infomercial radio adopts to encourage the achievement of the promise of health through consumption is sales promotion. This strategy also boosts the impulse to purchase. Health infomercial radio highlights limits on the promotion of the advertised product: it is typically available in local pharmacies only for a limited time and in limited quantities. In the program promoting a form of Miao ethnic minority-made medical soup on Shanxi provincial radio station, the product is introduced as follows:

Consuming Miao medical soup is therapeutically more effective than consuming one sheep a day (*meitian yizhi yang, buru he miaotang*). It is Miao's old soup, [the formula] of which is a thousand years' old. It is one of the primary protected products in the category of medicines of Chinese minorities. It treats multiple chronic diseases and problems, which both traditional Chinese medicine and western medicine have failed in curing ... The original price is 2,970 RMB. Now it is 1,470 RMB, which helps you save 1,500 RMB. (*Jiankang Rexian*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

Another medical program on the rural-oriented radio channel of Shandong provincial radio (Eastern China) airs at the same time slot as the one promoting Miao medical soup on Shanxi provincial radio station. It states:

The original price is 4,140 RMB. Now its lowest price is 1,380 RMB. It means that the most serious disease is cured with the daily treatment cost of less than 5 RMB ... the promotion campaign will be over a day later. The discount applies only to the first 30 buyers every day. (*Program on Rural-oriented Channel on Shandong Provincial Radio*, 2014, translated by Lei, W.)

By highlighting limits such as the approaching deadline for the promotion the program generates a sense of hurry and competition, driving listeners to place their order immediately and to purchase as many as possible during the promotional period. Nevertheless, the in-studio expert plays an authoritative role in deciding the appropriate amount callers should purchase based on callers' descriptions of their physical progress and most recent physical condition. Instead of persuading callers to purchase more, in-studio expert normally suggests a smaller quantity when callers express interest in ordering a large quantity. The expert justifies the smaller amount with a medical analysis that argues that consuming the suggested amount of the advertised product will be enough to achieve the benefits of the treatment. This negotiation over the amount, with the expert suggesting less rather than more, is another moment in signifying the expertise of the in-studio speakers. More significantly, the 'less, not more' suggestion contrasts with the 'more, not less' message typical of consumer culture. This conflict ironically and precisely legitimates the products. It enhances the credibility of the program, giving the appearance of putting the welfare of consumers ahead of the

advertisers' economic interests. In doing so, it also protects itself from criticism that it is blatantly chasing after profit.

Specific information on how to purchase the advertised product is also provided on air. Listeners are offered a regular off-air hotline to register and order advertised products. Buyers can either ask for the advertised products to be delivered to their preferred address or they can go to suggested local pharmacies to make the purchase. Off-air health consultants can assist buyers further by advising them how to take the advertised products.

5.5 The consumption of the promise of health: the elderly, the rural and the migrant

One significant segment of the population persistently targeted by these programs is the elderly, especially 'empty-nesters' (*kongchao laoren*). To address these intended listeners in-studio speakers use terms such as 'middle-aged and senior friends' (*zhonglaonian pengyou*), 'old brother and old sister' (*laogege, laojiejie*) and 'old comrades' (*lao tongzhi*) (*Yangsheng Baodian*, 2014). Callers normally highlight their age and their difficult physical condition when introducing themselves. Due to the aging process, the elderly are conventionally identified as the group most likely to face life-threatening diseases. For this reason, they have a particular interest in health information and medical knowledge. Because of its ease of access, electronic media provide the elderly with their main daily source of health information and medical knowledge. Since many elderly Chinese live apart from their offspring, many of them have limited social contact, and the consumption of electronic media constitutes a regular daily activity and a key method of staying in touch with the outside world. For the elderly—both rich and poor—accessing information on the media is one of their most important consumption activities.

The elderly spend less on entertainment, clothes and fashion than the younger generations. As their primary concern is health, the elderly spend as much on medicine and health products as possible. Health infomercial radio is a place where they access for free health information, medical knowledge, medical expertise, potential medicinal products and social support. The extent to which the elderly are able to purchase and consume the advertised medicinal products is determined by their individual financial capacity. According to one interviewee (personal communication, 11 April 2014), who was a pharmaceutical sales representative in 2000s, patients who were in a better financial situation could afford long-term consumption of the advertised medicine, whereas those with more limited financial means often chose to purchase the advertised medicine only when needed. For instance, the elderly with limited financial capacity typically purchase the medications in winter when respiratory symptoms are serious (personal communication, 11 April 2014).

The targeting of the elderly is predicated not only on their concern about health but also on their media consumption patterns. The elderly represent a generation who developed an interest in listening to radio in Mao-era China, and they have maintained the regular habit of listening to radio in the post Mao-era. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, it has been a common phenomenon in both rural and urban China for the elderly to listen to radio broadcasting with a portable radio receiver at hand. For instance, the elderly listen to radio at home and in public places after they get up in the morning. They keep the radio on while they do their morning exercise in local parks. They listen to the radio when they sit down and take a nap at noon. Radio has somehow maintained its status as the main source of information, entertainment and company for the Chinese elderly in post Mao-era China.



Figure 5.1 Radio is the main company for Chuande Cao, who was 65 in 2012. He works and lives alone. Since 1999 he has been employed to guard a local cultural heritage site at provincial level.

Photographer Cao Chengping, 2012

Source: http://news.cntv.cn/20120202/123527_1.shtml (accessed 21 May 2015)

Other marginalised groups with rural backgrounds—rural residents and rural-urban migrant workers—have also been the target of health infomercial radio. The earliest health product manufacturers and sales representatives recognised rural China as a primary potential market and consequently chose a ‘countryside surrounding the city’ (*nongcun baowei chengshi*) marketing strategy (Wang, 2008). As Jing Wang (2008) points out, the countryside surrounding the city, which was also Mao’s revolutionary strategy, became adopted as a commercial distribution strategy in post Mao-era China. This marketing strategy with distinctive Chinese characteristics has been widely used in the commercial success of some homegrown national brands of a range of commodities (Wang, 2008). One of the pioneers in the Chinese health product market explains his decision to focus on rural China in the 1990s:

My product targeted people who were diagnosed with alteration of intestinal flora and people who were diagnosed with a dysfunctional intestine and stomach. The market was not only in cities. The market in rural area was larger. Getting access to medicine and medical service was difficult in rural area. In every ten persons in rural area, there were nine persons who had stomach problem (*shiren jiuwei*). (Wu, B.X. in Chen, J.H., et al., 2010, translated by Lei, W.)

Since the 1990s medical advertising has continually targeted rural residents and its promotional strategies have become more sophisticated. The promotion has become more specialised, based on the analysis on changes in the composition of the rural population resulting from rural–urban migration. For instance, in one account from a medical advertising business we find:

In Zhoukou, Anyang and Jiaozuo in Henan province, where increasing number of people are moving out of hometown for work, the group left behind at home consists mainly of women and the elderly. Medicinal products treating a range of diseases including heart, brain and vessel problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, cataract, liver disease and stomach diseases are favorably promoted. (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010, translated by Lei, W.)

Keenly aware of the fact that health is structured along the rural–urban divide, the entrepreneurs take the initiative to cater to the marginalised groups who have an actual need for medical treatment. Medical commercialisation dictates that the promotion of medicinal products is based on economic interest, not social interest.

In addition to the residents who remain in rural China, rural–urban migrant workers are another group health infomercial radio attempts to target. For instance, rural–urban migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta Region, which is known as the

‘factory for the world’ (Fabre & Rodwin, 2011), are one group targeted by local health infomercial radio. An article on the website of Lanhai Zhida Team (a company that specialises in making health infomercial radio) offers details about the characteristics of rural–urban migrant workers as a target group.

In cities like Huizhou [in Guangdong province], Putian and Zhangzhou [in Fujian province] where there are a great many factories ... the group health infomercial radio target is youth. The majority of them consist of rural–urban migrant workers. It is easier to sell products that promise to help increase one’s height or nourish one’s kidneys. (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010, translated by Lei, W.)

Rural–urban migrant workers are largely either under-covered or not covered at all by the healthcare system. Moreover, they are at a sexually active age and attuned to popular culture, which promotes a wide range of health-related lifestyles. Choosing radio to target migrant workers is also the result of an analysis of migrant workers’ media preferences:

The working environment of migrant workers is enclosed and lacks entertainment facilities. Listening to radio broadcasting at night is a common practice. (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010, translated by Lei, W.)

The low consumption power of rural residents and rural–urban migrant workers makes them unlikely target groups for advertisers. However, due to the sheer size of these social groups and their media consumption preference, health infomercial radio still makes a profit from them, precisely because of their low consumption and low media literacy.

5.6 Consuming the illusion of health: from the credulous to the sceptical

The production of health infomercial radio is a form of arranged and directed performance, featuring the on-air vocal acting of medical experts, callers and patients.

Lanhai Zhida Team is a Beijing-based company specialising in producing health infomercial radio for medicinal products. However, the health infomercial radio program-making knowledge it shares on its website (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010) in fact demonstrates that the promise of health infomercial radio delivers is an illusion.

Individuals are hired and trained to play the roles of in-studio medical experts, callers in the name of patients, and control room operators. All are coached to be committed to the promotion of the promise of health.

The published information on its website (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010) offers details on who the people-for-hire are and why they are appropriate vocal actors for the roles they each play. Individuals from different occupations who either possess medical knowledge or communication skills play the role of in-studio experts. For instance, hospital physicians are hired to function as medical experts on health infomercial radio normally during the nighttime when they are off-duty from their hospital work. Besides doctors, radio hosts, news announcers, storytellers, pharmaceutical sales representative candidates and sales representatives themselves are the main sources of in-studio experts. Radio hosts, news announcers and storytellers are preferred as in-studio experts due to their communication skills, spontaneous response and time management (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). Medical knowledge of some kind as well as communication skills are what pharmaceutical sales representative candidates and sales representatives are expected to possess as a result of training for their sales jobs (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010).

Those who do well in playing the role of in-studio experts are claimed to have three qualities (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). The first is the ability to speak rapidly without pauses or hesitations. The second is the ability to present information ‘professionally’, using scientific terms and medical stories, thus encouraging the listeners to trust them. The third is the ability to express passion for the subject, which creates confidence among the listeners, increasing their desire for and impulse to purchase the promoted products (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010).

The constitution of hired callers has shifted from the exploitation of personal networks to the formation of a business providing callers (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). Pharmaceutical sales representatives initially asked their family members and relatives to act as callers. Subsequently call-making companies (*huawu gongsi*) have been established, with employees hired and instructed to make phone calls to health infomercial radio (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). These companies are largely concentrated in a number of provinces in northern China such as Shanxi, Hebei, Henan and Shandong. A call-making company usually employs 10 to 20 people. Some companies in Shandong can number over 100 employees (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). Phone calls are performed in local accents, representing the voices of geographically dispersed ordinary people. The content of the phone call is pre-planned. It is either scripted by sales representatives based on daytime sales circumstance or personal stories about having suffered from disease for many years, producing empathy among listeners (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010).

While hired callers and the in-studio expert are coached and scripted, calls from random listeners are also possible and it is here that the role of control room operator is crucial. It is claimed that this role is mostly taken by sales representatives (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). Random callers are also coached and their calls carefully managed.

For instance, random callers are reminded to start the talk with ‘xx professor, how are you’ when the call is connected to the studio in order to maintain respect for the in-studio expert among listeners (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010). For those who report that some diseases have been cured but others have not, the operator suggests that they respond:

You have achieved something, but treating disease needs some time. You are in a hurry. You can first tell professor what disease has been cured. Let the professor know what stage you are in now and then you can ask about other diseases. (Lanhai Zhida Team, 2010)

How to respond to a range of other cases such as no positive outcome from the product must also be anticipated. The range of responses aims to lead callers to speak and think in a way benefiting the program’s commercial purpose as well as protecting the authenticity of both the program and the advertised product.

Through repetitive performances, health infomercial radio in post Mao-era China manufactures and mimics a regime of health dictated by a system encompassing elements of what Rose and Miller identify as ‘market, expertise, and a regulated autonomy’ (Rose & Miller, 1989, 1992 in Rose, 1998, p. 162). By building a fantasy about the promise of health, health infomercial radio demonstrates to its listeners that this system is capable of providing both physical and social well-being. More critically, the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred with the participation of both professional and random callers into the on-air space.

In other words, health infomercial radio is a dance that plays with fear and anxiety on the one hand, and hope and faith on the other. At one level, it constitutes a health risk through its promotion of fraudulent medicinal products. But, ironically, the

emergence of this genre can be seen as an initiative to address a palpable sense of vulnerability and the shared feeling of ‘being alone’ and therefore being ‘at risk’. In other words, health infomercial radio has contributed to ‘a complex interplay between hope and expectations and various levels of uncertainty, anxiety and fear’ (Sun, 2014b, p. 12). On the one hand, health infomercial radio generates hope and expectation by advertising the promise of health; on the other hand, it functions as a source of uncertainty, anxiety and fear about the unknown quality of the medicinal products it promotes.

5.7 The shift from obedient listening to strategic listening

In post Mao-era China the extent to which the public accepts health infomercial radio has been stratified, ranging from a popular form of obedient listening to forms of strategic listening. In the early years of health infomercial radio in the 1990s, listeners mostly believed in the authenticity of health infomercial radio as well as the claimed efficacy of the promoted products. The instant and widespread commercial success of medical advertising in the 1990s offers a glimpse into the extent of the general public’s acceptance and trust in medical advertising. I will briefly review here two cases found in online articles that demonstrate the broad acceptance and trust in medical advertising (Zhe, Y.C.H., 2004; Han, Y.G., 2005).

The first case starts with a group of Inner-Mongolians, who left their previous state-owned workplace and chose to make a living producing and selling health products (Han, Y.G., 2005; Zhe, Y.C.H., 2004). In the earliest stage of promoting their products, from 1987 to 1993, the Inner-Mongolians approached a local newspaper and bought a number of entire editions for a favourable price (Han, Y.G., 2005). Their investment in medical advertising established them as heavyweight clients for local newspapers at a

time when the Chinese media was in short of funding. More rewardingly, the Inner-Mongolians achieved commercial success with a large volume of their health products purchased. Health product businesses moved to include broadcast media into their marketing strategy (Han, Y.G., 2005).

A second case is the commercial success of a pair of so-called medical magnetic shoes (*yaoci xie*) promoted on local radio stations (Han, Y.G., 2005). In the mid-1990s, the Chiyu company who produced the medical magnetic shoes cooperated with a local radio station to air themed lectures (*zhuanli zhishi jiangzuo*). These were a mixture of medical advertising and health-related information. It was reported that thousands of people lined up on the street to buy Chiyu medical shoes during one of the outdoor promotions, resulting in traffic congestion (Han, Y.G., 2005).

Despite the constant delivery of health knowledge on air, the current public response to health infomercial radio has become more stratified and individualised. A wide range of positions is now discernible in response to health information and advice, including at one end of the spectrum accepting the information to, at the other end, resisting it. A microblog posted online offers a very vivid example of these oppositional attitudes:

My father told me that he had again bought a health product, which cost 8,000 RMB, and he is planning to buy 2,500 RMB's Qingji capsule tomorrow. It is claimed that Professor Yu Ping from Chinese Academy of Science talks about the capsule on radio and many cancer patients, who call in for consultation, have been cured. I opened the search engine on my mobile phone, showing my father that the Chinese Academy of Sciences declares that the Qingji capsule advertising is fraudulent. My father did not believe my finding, arguing how come a radio station does not regulate it and allows it

on air? So many patients express that it is effective and are they fools? (Fan, D., 2013, translated by Lei, W.)

In addition to the trust in experts as authoritative figures, older Chinese citizens' trust in health infomercial radio is closely associated with a continuing legacy of the socialist era: trust in the Chinese state. As both the first-hand interview (personal communication, 25 May 2013) and second-hand material reveal, trust in Chinese media is particularly relevant to trust in health infomercial radio. Although the media in post Mao-era China has been reoriented and complicated with the change in its funding model, trust in the Chinese media has survived to some extent among individuals with experience of living in Mao-era China. These individuals hold to the socialist conception of Chinese media as the mouth and tongue of the state. These older citizens therefore maintain belief in the reliability and credibility of media content about citizens' well-being (personal communication, 25 May 2013).

The commercial orientation associated with sponsorship from business and entrepreneurs other than the Chinese state, that is, advertising, has led to new on-air content in post Mao-era China. However, older Chinese still credit this content with the reliability and accuracy enjoyed by other media content such as news. As the quotation (Fan, D., 2013) shows, the elderly insist that health infomercial radio is trustworthy not only because of the presence of the medical experts and the voices of cured patients, but also because of the assumed state approval of the broadcasts. State responsibility is the other side of state ownership of the media. More specifically, the state and its governments are responsible for regulating content and issuing qualified and accountable knowledge, information and advertising. Trust in the Chinese state and its

media content thus adds to the popularity and credibility of health infomercial radio among the group who believes in health infomercial radio.

However, a more critical view of the Chinese media contributes to a more critical listening to health infomercial radio. Instead of viewing state ownership as a source of trust and authority in guaranteeing content quality on Chinese media, groups who better understand the commercial cooperation between the market and the media recognise commercial interest as the driving force behind health infomercial radio. They are aware of the complicity between commercial force and the Chinese state, and are critical of the lack of state governance in regulating health infomercial radio. Their rejection of health infomercial radio is expressed in countless verbal complaints made through formal channels such as official associations of consumers' right protection and also through informal channels such as social media. What they complain about is not only the medical inefficacy of advertised products, but also the fact that health infomercial radio is a sham.

The years since the mid-2000s have seen a reduction in medical advertising on the radio landscape. This reduction is partly the outcome of a centrally launched campaign by the state council to rectify and regulate the medicine market (Guowuyuan Bangongting, 2006) and partly an outcome of radio stations' internal reforms to restructure their financial sources and audience orientations. The incident in which 11 people died after taking a fraudulent medicine in 2006 ('Qiqi Ha'er', 2006) pushed the central authority to decide to organise a national move to regulate the problematic medicine market. Medical advertising is a primary target, with the regulation targeting fraudulent and illegal medical advertising. The pre-approval and post-supervision system must be strictly implemented, and media supervision must be reinforced. The

regulation also calls for the establishment of an accountability mechanism and self-regulation in media and communication. National and local radio stations in developed regions have taken the move to reduce health infomercial radio on a large scale whereas the move on local radio stations in less developed regions is more limited. Since 2006 Voice of China, the leading channel on China National Radio, has banned medical advertising on air during prime time from 6:00 am to 9:30 am (Zhao, D., 2006).

In addition to state regulation, the radio industry has been renewing and reorienting itself, accommodating the class reformation in contemporary China. For national radio stations and radio in developed regions, the rise of an affluent urban middle class, and the increasing importance of industries closely associated with the middle class, have formed a new target listening audience and new funding sources. These radio stations have developed an interest in and built new commercial cooperation with rising industries such as the automotive, finance and bank, real estate and telecommunication industries. For instance, the alliance between radio and the automotive industry has led to a form of on-air auto-space, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has closely examined how radio has survived and struggled with its production of the promise of health in the past and in the present in post Mao-era China. The discussion points to the seductive capacity of capitalism to manufacture the illusion of a good life. It also indicates the emergence of unethical and unscrupulous media practices unleashed by market forces. In doing so, the discussion alerts us to the enormous risk for individuals from socially and economically vulnerable groups in China of living in the time of ‘compressed modernity’ (Beck & Grande, 2010). At the

same time, the discussion presents us with a poignant case where the Chinese state and the market forces it unleashed are simultaneously in complicity and at odds.

The sound-based nature of radio as a communication technology enables the emergence of a self-care space, in which access to health information is offered to marginalised and exploited groups in China. However, it is precisely this sound-based nature of radio that shapes the production of health information as an invisible and abstract system, opening possibilities for the production of the false promise. The emphasis on economic interest over social interest in both the radio and healthcare domains has determined and encouraged the production and circulation of the illusory promise of health.

The chapter has argued that health has grown to be a primary concern around which post-Mao Chinese individuals exhibit their subjectivity and articulate their personal experiences. In this context health infomercial radio manufactures a site in which marginalised and exploited groups are allowed access to health information and are invited to construct their health experience. As a result of the suppression of class discourse in post Mao-era China (Zhao, 2008; Carrillo & Goodman, 2012), the health-themed framework is one of the few legitimate frameworks within which marginalised and exploited groups can participate in the media and articulate their sense of vulnerability, helplessness, fear and anxiety. Paradoxically, the marginalised and exploited groups, who can least afford health care, are more interested in health information offered on radio and at the same time are more desperate and more vulnerable to hoaxes and illusory promises of health.

The chapter has also suggested that health infomercial radio is a source of additional risk in the process of forming a privatised regime of healthy living in post

Mao-era China. Instead of representing an exception to the impact of post-Mao China's modernisation, health infomercial radio is precisely a production of the compressed modernisation of post-Mao China, in which the principle of economic interest has become associated with science and technology to shape the values and acts of Chinese individuals. The public response to health infomercial radio has featured a range of reactions including full acceptance, selective acceptance with suspicion, and downright resistance. The range of reactions has been arisen out of expectation, consumption and frustration about health infomercial radio. Beyond its impact on physical health, health infomercial radio has played an influential role in generating fear, anxiety and uncertainty in public and private life in contemporary China. ■

Drive radio and the construction of urban middle-class identities: from traffic radio to the '*Car World*'

6.1 Building a connection between radio and cars in contemporary China

Although the installation of radios in cars has enabled commuters to listen to the radio for many years (Featherstone, 2004), both theoretical and practical discussions on the relationship between radio broadcasting and the car are hard to find. Not only are radio broadcasting and cars normally studied as separate fields in different disciplines, but the influence of the car on the production of and listening to radio broadcasting has received only limited discussion in western countries. The most obvious manifestation of the effect of cars on radio broadcasting is the drive time traffic report and drive time radio shows such as music and news programs, which are produced to cater to private car drivers in the morning and afternoon rush hours.

As post Mao-era China is shifting from a cycling nation to a car nation (Walks, et al., 2014), radio broadcasting and cars have become increasingly connected. Beyond offering frequent traffic updates and rescheduling programs to fit into the drive time, radio broadcasting in China has been exhibiting an increasing financial dependence on the automotive industry and an increasing interest in producing car-related programs. Radio broadcasting in China has opened up a new social space, in which further engagement with the growing private car market and their owners is taking place,

reshaping radio broadcasting and renewing its audience composition in the multi-media age.

The complicated relationship between radio broadcasting and cars in post Mao-era China poses an initial terminological question: How are we to define radio practices in relation to cars in China? The direct translation of the Chinese term for the particular channel dedicated to car-related issues is *traffic radio* (*jiaotong guangbo*). However, the term ‘traffic radio’ implies mainly the regular provision of traffic updates and reports on radio, which is too narrow and limited to capture the scope of car-related radio production and consumption in China. The term ‘drive radio’ refers to radio shows aired during driving time. As this term is more capable of indicating the impact of cars on radio production and consumption, I have adopted the term ‘drive radio’ in the following discussion. One primary distinction is that in the western context drive radio takes the form of radio shows at certain time slots, whereas drive radio in China operates as a dedicated channel on a radio station. However, before I discuss drive radio in post Mao-era China, I introduce the vital concept of ‘automobility’, which derives from the car and at the same time inspires the involvement of radio in the contemporary vision of Chinese modernity.

6.2 The notion of automobility and its structured practice: a conceptual introduction

This investigation into the emergence and construction of drive radio in post Mao-era China is informed by studies on ‘automobility’ (e.g., Featherstone, 2004; Urry, 2004; Walks, 2014), whose interpretations of the term go beyond the simple practice of driving cars. The initial imagination of automobility as an expression of freedom, liberation and autonomy is critiqued and re-conceptualised based on the actual structured practice of everyday car driving (e.g., Featherstone, 2004; Urry, 2004; Walks,

2014). These theorists argue that automobility is dependent on a larger system of supplies, regulations and institutions. John Urry suggests that automobility can be conceptualised as a system:

a self-organizing, autopoietic, non-linear system that spreads worldwide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs. (Urry, 2004, p. 27).

Cotten Seiler views automobility as a complex apparatus:

[it comprises] a multi-linear ensemble of commodities, bodies of knowledge, laws, techniques, institutions, environments, nodes of capital, sensibilities, and modes of perception. (Seiler, 2008, p. 6)

Automobility is at once a technology of freedom and of governance (Hay & Packer, 2004, p. 219).

Discussions about the meaning of automobility are carried out in the context of the privatisation of car ownership and car use. The meaning of car ownership is well explained in David Gartman's (2005) account of the shift in cultural logics of the car in the United States. The 20th century witnessed three stages in the cultural meaning of the car, with the increasing privatisation of car ownership in the United States. When the car emerged in western countries in the early years of the 20th century (1900–1925), the car, which was produced as a luxury, was a symbol of class distinction. In the following years (1925–1960), the mass production of cars in the United States heralded the stage of mass privatisation and the individuality of car possession. From 1960 to the present, the car has been transformed into a symbol of subcultural difference, with a range of car types targeting a variety of niche markets (Gartman, 2005).

In contrast to the conventional image of it as an unrestricted practice, privatised car use—mainly visible in the form of driving—is circumscribed. In the first place, privatised car use is regulated and disciplined with traffic rules designed to ensure both efficiency and safety in physical public spaces. Privatised car use is at the same time economically, socially and culturally shaped as it becomes the dominant commuting practice between work and home and other daily mobility in the urban landscape worldwide. The negative association between the state of being poor and low mobility (Walks & Tranter, 2014, p. 145) indicates how economic conditions influence privatised car use. Canadian researchers have argued that the practice of driving children to school indicates the sociocultural impact of privatised car use (Buliung, et al., 2014). While their specific observation was conducted in Toronto, Canada, one might nevertheless argue that driving children to school is a globalised urban practice in the contemporary world that functions as both a pragmatic ‘solution’ to urban life and an expression of ‘what it means to a good parent’ (Buliung, et al., 2014, p. 98).

In the case of North American auto-cities, the low and even little access to automobility due to economic disadvantage also constrains access to further economic opportunities and social inclusion (Hess, et al., 2014). This is particularly so for immigrants to North America. In the case of the United States, one significant consequence of the regulation of immigrants’ automobility entitlement is that automobility participates in the citizenship inclusion and exclusion (Reid-Musson, 2014).

Automobility has been established as a consistent modern pursuit in post Mao-era China for both the nation and for Chinese individuals. Yet at the same time automobility is capable of shaping and structuring society and individuals. The criterion

of automobility enables the nation and individuals to be assessed, regulated and governed in order to achieve a socially and economically acceptable mobility with cars for various purposes. Multiple players, including the state, the automotive industry and its relevant supply industries, and families and individuals are all involved in the routine production and consumption of automobility. The socioeconomic structure is complicated and multiplied with the constant rise and shifts in automobility. Choices, decisions and acts, all of which are organised around car purchase, driving, use, repair, maintenance and regulation, take place on a daily basis for individuals.

As the Chinese media has grown more involved in socioeconomic changes in the post Mao-era, it has actively offered sizable time and space for communication about automobility. This chapter is mainly concerned the interaction between radio and automobility in post Mao-era China. The chapter asks: What form of drive radio is produced out of the interaction between radio and automobility in China? How does the shift in automobility reshape drive radio? More significantly, how does drive radio activate and structure the subject-making process in contemporary China? In what way does drive radio embody and cultivate class-based taste, sensibility and identity in a China featuring a great deal of anxieties, insecurities and uncertainties?

In what follows, I first trace the emergence of drive radio by going back to the 1990s. I will then outline the transformation from commercialisation to privatisation through an examination of the production of and listening to drive radio in post Mao-era China. My focus is the transformation of drive radio in responding to class stratification and reformation in contemporary China. Finally, in conclusion, I consider the sociocultural implications of drive radio in contemporary China.

6.3 The initial emergence of drive radio as a channel in urban China

Drive radio initially functioned as a facilitator in making automobility smooth and effective in the physical urbanisation process in modernising China. Drive radio was first made possible by the construction of a modern urban transport infrastructure. A modern transportation system accelerates the efficiency of distribution and enhances the productivity of space, capital and labour (Rodrigue, et al., 2013). Recognising this, the construction of a widespread and rapid transportation system was given priority by the post Mao-era Chinese state in its national agenda. In the post Mao-era decades, ‘to get rich, build roads first’ (*yao xiangfu, xian xiulu*) (Sun, W.Y., 2012) became a popular slogan nationwide, displayed in bold white lettering on the external walls of rural houses. The widespread visibility of this slogan was an indicator of the state acknowledgement of the vital role of transportation in the flow of resources including raw materials, commodities, services and labour. Building on the achievements of Mao-era transportation infrastructure, post Mao-era China accelerated its programs to extend and expand transportation systems. In cities, especially politically and economically privileged cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, multiple transportation infrastructures underwent dramatic development including roads, subways, ferries, airports and rail networks.

In the case of Shanghai, where the first drive radio emerged, the city was visually a construction site in the 1990s, with extensive urban physical transformation. This construction of the urban landscape was a visible implementation of the state project, which aimed at turning Shanghai into ‘an international trade and financial center’ (Zhao, et al., 2003, p. 205) and ‘a locomotive in the development of Yangtze River Valley’ (Zhao, et al., 2003, pp. 205–206). In order to achieve this end, Shanghai entered a vital

stage of large scale urban physical transformation, involving a broad spectrum of infrastructure projects including real estate development, civic service constructions, and transportation infrastructure construction.

Among all the moves in this urban landscape transformation, the construction of a developed transportation system was emphasised as the chief priority in the local government's agenda (Zhang, 2004). The proposed goal for a transportation system network in Shanghai was that the city would reach the level of mobility compatible with international cities, befitting the image of an international city (Zhao, et al., 2003). The years from the 1990s witnessed the widespread and rapid construction of bridges, roads, highways, subways and airports at an aggressive speed with domestic political support and international economic investment (Zhao, et al., 2003). The construction of Nanpu Bridge cross the Huangpu River took approximately three years from December 1988 to November 1991 ('Nanpu Bridge', n.d.). The construction of Yangpu Bridge took two years and five months from May 1991 to October 1993 (Zhao, et al., 2003). In addition to the construction speed, the scale of the construction of the transportation system in Shanghai was extensive, consisting of local, regional and international networks (Zhao, et al., 2003). A series of projects including old road restoration and new road construction extended and strengthened the inner city road network. The construction of highways and airports created transportation connections to neighboring areas and the more distant regions.

The quality of road traffic rose to be a public issue for those whose daily lives relied on commuting. To inform road users about traffic conditions and breaking news of traffic incidents became necessary to help manage traffic flow and avoid accidents. Radio was chosen as the medium to deliver traffic updates. This is partly because

wireless radio installation in vehicles made radio broadcasting the closest medium to drivers. Additionally, the technology of the sound-based medium made radio the quickest and cheapest way to get traffic information out to the widest public in the 1990s. The first drive radio launched as a channel on Shanghai radio station in 1991, was called ‘traffic information-oriented radio’ (*jiaotong xinxi guangbo*) (Huang, M.X., 1992, p. 14). It was originally designed to focus mainly on offering traffic guidance in order to direct and regulate the mobility of labor, capital and goods. The article about the early days of Shanghai traffic information-oriented radio offered a brief account on how it delivered traffic information to the public:

Traffic radio broadcasted on 2 November: From 8:00 pm tonight to 4:00 am tomorrow, the road intersection at _____ is under restoration. Any vehicles which need to pass this intersection, please change to another way.

Traffic radio broadcasted at 7:15 am, 18 November: Attention, please, driver friends, fog falls in some suburban areas. Visibility is less than 20 metres on _____ highways. (Huang, M.X., 1992, p. 15 translated by Lei, W.)

Unlike its American counterpart, where private commercial networks gather and report traffic data to their affiliated radio stations and other clients (Total Traffic network, n.d.), traffic information radio in China is a form of cooperation between radio stations and local bureaux of traffic management, themselves a sub-division of the Ministry of Public Security. Prior to the achievement of this co-operation, both radio stations and the bureaux of traffic management separately expressed interest in mobilising radio to facilitate traffic management. The launch of the Shanghai drive radio in 1991 was one of the ten achievements of the Shanghai government in its ‘project of practical issues’ (*shishi gongcheng*), which aimed to better serve local citizens (Sun, L.P., 2011). Some

months earlier, at a conference held in late 1990, on the theme of the technology use to manage traffic flow, the National Bureau of Traffic Management, which is subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security, proposed a plan to ‘rely on technological progress, boost traffic management’ (Gong’an Bu, 1991). One item of the official summary document addressed the future widespread use of radio as the primary technology in facilitating traffic management in urban China (Gong’an Bu, 1991). This specific item stated:

Popularise traffic safety-oriented radio in middle and large cities nationwide. Develop and promote 30–50 urban traffic safety-oriented radio services during the 8th five-year plan (1991-1995). (Gong’an Bu, 1991, translated by Lei, W.)

6.3.1 Development in the scope and function of drive radio

The specific radio channel normally referred to as ‘traffic radio’ (*jiaotong guangbo*) in Chinese is therefore a consequence of the co-operation between radio stations and local bureaux of traffic management. The division of labour in running drive radio is determined by the two sides’ respective work involvement. The local bureau of traffic management, which is the official institution in monitoring and regulating traffic, is responsible for supplying traffic information and updates. The radio station is responsible for the everyday operation of the drive radio channel. As a result, drive radio is placed in the media and communication sector, where commercially oriented reform has been widespread nationwide since the 1990s (Lynch, 1999; Zhao, 1998). As road traffic information alone is not enough to fill and sustain the entire channel, drive radio included other content that they considered might be relevant to the further formation of a car-based transportation system. Thus, drive radio channels took shape in facilitating the rising production and consumption of automobility. An article by

Mingxing Huang (1992) documented what constituted the original drive radio channel on Shanghai radio station:

The function of traffic information radio went beyond airing information about the traffic conditions of major roads, tunnels and ferries. It announces bus, ferry and flight timetables and the time schedule changes if there are any, bus line and stop changes, and road construction and closure. It broadcasts timely information about fog, fire disasters, the explosion of water or gas pipes, damage to telecommunication cables and traffic accidents. It also delivers knowledge about traffic regulations and the law, the issues drivers should be aware of when driving, praises police who does good deeds, drivers who drive properly, and people who maintain traffic order. (Huang, M.X., 1992, pp. 14-15, translated by Lei,W.)

In addition to informing the public about the quality of road traffic, drive radio was also established as a site through which the public was educated to adopt a set of values and behaviours judged essential to the smooth operation of automobility. In order to produce the effective and safe flow of automobility, certain rules and regulations were introduced and applied widely to everyone involved in travelling. Meanwhile, as more and more individuals participated in automobility with increasing short and long-distance travelling, travelling patterns generated a new system through which to define individual identities. For example, the system differentiated between car drivers and passengers, bicyclists and pedestrians. On-street traffic police were also involved in this Chinese operation and regulation of automobility. Drive radio was seen as the best place to spread a set of values and behaviours that fit the physical auto-space, and that shaped and defined the identities based on different travelling patterns. More than that, the public expressed their support and contribution to the construction of the physical auto-space through their participation in programs on drive radio:

It also broadcasts citizens' comments and suggestions about traffic management ...

One citizen telephoned traffic radio, reporting that two restaurants had occupied the road to set up food stalls, which disturbed bus transportation on the bus lines. A number of listeners in another district reported to traffic information radio that unlicensed vendors had occupied the road. (Huang, M.X., 1992, p. 17, translated by Lei, W.)

In this case, drive radio served as an on-air negotiation site between the urban public and the governmental institutions concerning the use of physical space. As the quotation indicates, the urban public agreed with the state authority in the urban-oriented transformation of a physical space that featured an increasing number of cars. The public called for governmental actions to remove anything that was seen to generate a negative effect on the auto-space. A hegemonic voice was achieved between the public and drive radio, both of which considered on-street businesses such as food stalls and other vendors to be a disturbance to the quality and expansion of the physical auto-space (Huang, M.X., 1992). A hegemonic voice was formed in close association with the politically and economically dominant group, ignoring the economic meaning of on-street small businesses as a source of living for the lower class. In other words, drive radio as an on-air negotiation site established an alliance with the group who both supported and afforded the growth and expansion of automobility, marginalising those who participated far less in the use of automobility.

6.3.2 The commercialisation of automobility in urban China

Two years later after the launch of the Shanghai drive radio channel, in late 1993 a Beijing radio station started its drive radio channel, using the same form of cooperation as that in Shanghai between the Beijing radio station and the Beijing bureau of traffic management. This 1990s drive radio channel was closely associated with the

commercialisation of the taxi industry, which increased motorised traffic flow in Beijing. While taxis grew to be a dominant group of road users in Beijing in the 1990s, access to taxi services was structured by the fee charge and was thus limited to the group who had the financial capacity to afford the taxi service. One journalistic account indicates the privileged economic status the taxi industry enjoyed in the years towards 1990s:

In the late 1980s, the vehicles that ran on the road were taxis besides governmental-owned cars. Basically two types of people could afford a taxi in Beijing, international visitors and domestic visitors coming to Beijing on a business trip. (Kang, K. & Li, N., 2008, p. 27, translated by Lei, W.)

The trend to make the taxi service more accessible and affordable was promoted with the guiding principle of ‘making the taxi service affordable to ordinary people (*lao baixing*), (and) making taxis available once people wave their hands’ (‘Hong Xiali’, 2009). If we view the public motorised transportation system as a collective mode of automobility and private car as an individual mode of automobility, taxis thus provide a commercialised form of automobility.

In the Chinese case, two particular developments led to the rapid demand and subsequent growth in the taxi service over a short time in Beijing in the 1990s. The first one was the changing consumption pattern and the rise in the living standards of urban residents. Increasingly, urban households purchased domestic electrical appliances such as televisions and washing machines. In both official and popular discourses, domestic electrical appliances were promoted as carriers and the visible embodiment of modernisation. They were seen as the arrival and achievement of modernisation in the domestic setting. Car-based transportation delivery rose along with the popular purchase

of these large-size domestic appliances. Furthermore, due to the reforms in the housing sector, more and more people moved from the accommodation previously provided by their work units into commercial apartments, which could be some distance from their workplaces. In response to the growing need for consumers to move and travel, the taxi industry in Beijing adopted a type of van featuring a large interior space, first produced in 1984 by the Tianjin car factory with technology imported from Japan (Xin, H., 2013). Perhaps because of the shape, it was nicknamed the ‘bread car’ (*mianbao che*) in China (Xin, H., 2013). As a 2013 journalistic account recalls, the size of its interior enabled the van to hold up to seven passengers and carry large sized domestic items of such as TV sets and washing machines (Xin, H., 2013).

The second development was the influx of both domestic and international visitors into Beijing. China’s growing political, economic and cultural engagement with the world gave rise to increasing international trips for visitors from not only European and American countries but also Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. The purpose of these trips varied from official visits to business and leisure travel. For instance, the 11th Asian Games, which was the first international multi-sports game held in China (‘Yijiujuling Nian Beijing Yayunhui’, n.d.), brought a wave of international travellers to Beijing in 1990. When cross-strait tension between Mainland China and Taiwan was relaxed from the late 1980s, the once banned activity of residents of Taiwan ‘visiting Mainland China-based relatives’ (*tanqin*) was allowed and encouraged further, and has continued in increasing numbers since then (Yang, D.X., 2009). Beijing became the first stop on the majority of international trips due to both its status as the national capital and the limited number of international airports in China. Coupled with these two developments in the 1990s, the number of taxi service companies grew to 1,380 in 1994 from 842 in 1993. The number of taxis grew to 55,000 in 1994 from 30,000 in 1992 (‘Beijing’,

1994). As the journalistic account recalls, the roads in Beijing in the early 1990s were full of yellow ‘bread taxis’ (*mian di*) and ‘yellow bugs’ (*huang chong*) (Xin, H., 2013), another vivid nickname used to describe taxis in Beijing because of their color and shape.

6.3.3 The commercialisation of drive radio

In addition to radio’s ability to respond to the increasing volume of both commercialised automobility and traffic flow, ongoing internal reform towards commercialisation within Beijing radio station further defined the orientation and the paradigm of drive radio. Commercialisation was well and truly under way in the media and communication sector, which had been reclassified as part of the tertiary industry sector. In 1985, a quantifiable key performance index was introduced to calculate the economic value of all sections of the tertiary industry (Guowuyuan Bangongting, 1985). The capacity of media and communication to make a profit was confirmed and pushed further when the Chinese State Council issued a decision promoting the acceleration of the development of the tertiary industry sector in 1992 (Guowuyuan Bangongting, 1992). From 1990 onwards, Beijing radio station embarked on an expansive move to establish a series of specialised radio channels such as business radio, news radio, music radio, children’s radio, education-oriented radio, and also drive radio (Wang, L., 2002a, p. 8). Later on, internal economic competition within Beijing radio station was implemented to urge each channel to adopt the model of financial self-reliance and self-responsibility (Wang, L., 2002a & 2002b). The then head manager of Beijing radio station, Wang Liang describes the early stage of the commercial operation of each specific radio channel as ‘primitive competition’ (Wang, L., 2002b, p. 23), in which ‘no restriction on advertising operation (such as advertising content and amount) was exercised before 1998’ (Wang, L., 2002b, p. 23). One of the consequences was

excessive reliance on medical advertising through health infomercial radio, discussed in the previous chapter.

Although drive radio was designed to facilitate traffic management, with regular reports and updates on traffic information, these were not enough to fill the air time. In addition to traffic information, this channel included weather reports, talk shows, and a variety of news, current affairs, and music programs, and story-telling programs with advertising underpinning the core of its operations. The launch of the on-air auto-space in significant cities like Shanghai and later Beijing provided a new radio practice for other local radio stations, who were desperately searching for innovative radio formats, genres and practices to attract possible listeners and advertisers. The profit-oriented mindset led both provincial and municipal radio stations to open an on-air auto-space with the name of 'drive radio' when a drive radio channel at municipal level was suitable enough to cover traffic updates in a municipal spectrum. As Wang Liang argues:

Basically drive radio in our country is urban-oriented. However, due to the aim of making money, both of provinces and cities in some regional areas have launched it. In theory, it is a waste of radio resources, but it cannot beat the hard principle that [those who earn money, keep the money]. If traffic is developed enough, the traffic services across the road, the air and the water form an extensive network, especially the high-speed way is popularised and the number of cars is considerably large, then drive radio, which covers the entire province, would be necessary. The current provincial drive radio covers mainly the traffic flow in the provincial capital. Functionally, the radio station of the capital level is enough to feed the need. (Wang, L., 2002b, p. 22, translated by Lei, W.)

At the time of writing, all radio stations at provincial level in China have a drive radio channel and the radio stations in their subordinated capitals also have one (e.g., Shandong provincial drive radio, Jinan municipal drive radio, Jiangsu provincial drive radio, Nanjing municipal drive radio). Radio market research conducted by professional institutions focusing on media markets indicates that there are 249 drive radio channels nationwide, making them second after 340 news radio channels (Sailixin Gongsi, 2014). The constant growth of interstate travel opens up more time and space for the expansion of drive radio. For instance, China National Radio has taken moves to engage with drive radio since the late 2000s. Firstly, Voice of China, the primary channel of China National Radio, routinised the provision of traffic updates on a national scale at certain time slots (personal communication, 10 August 2012). In 2012, China National Radio, in conjunction with the Ministry of Traffic and Transportation launched ‘high speed roads’ drive radio, which targets mainly the users of the high speed motorways in the region around Beijing (Feng, H. L. & Han, X., 2012).

6.3.4 Taxi drivers: the gendered listening group and its class reformation

During the time when taxis were the main road users, taxi drivers were seen as the primary target listeners for drive radio. Like elsewhere in the world, taxi driving in China is a gendered employment, in which men are the dominant workers. Although claims of male dominance in the taxi business are based more on observation than on statistics, statistics-based data supports the claim. A 2005 report (Shanghai Gonghui, 2005), published on the website of the Shanghai Labor Union, reveals there are 571 men in the 616 taxi drivers surveyed, accounting for 92.7% of the total sample. A survey of the occupational health of taxi drivers in 2014 reveals that 99% of 486 sample taxi drivers in Beijing are men (Shi, J., 2014).

As elsewhere, the social and economic status of taxi drivers is low. As a recent survey reveals, over 70% of taxi drivers have to work for 11 to 13 hours per day in order to earn about 2000 RMB per month and 20% of taxi drivers have to work for over 13 hours ('Zhiye Jiankang', 2011). The same survey lists typical problems including sitting for too long, having an irregular meal schedule, staying up at night, and holding urine as long as possible ('Zhiye Jiankang', 2011). Occupational health is a major issue that leads a considerable number of taxi drivers to leave the occupation every year ('Zhiye Jiankang', 2011).

In Chinese cities, it is mainly local residents who compose the taxi driver workforce. Despite their low status in the city, taxi drivers feel superior to rural–urban migrants, who are even more socially and economically discriminated and marginalised. This is particularly the case in mega-cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, where rural–urban migrant workers are a substantial group, working and living in far less decent conditions. Meanwhile, taxi employment leads to regular encounters between taxi drivers and international visitors. How taxi drivers treat international visitors is considered by the government to be a serious matter, relevant to the international impression-management exercise. In the national capital Beijing, which welcomes a large volume of both domestic and international visitors every day, taxi drivers are the group who meet international visitors most. Taxi drivers are expected to offer quality and decent service to international visitors, thus demonstrating and delivering Beijing's civility. In this sense, taxi drivers are framed as representatives of the city. The notion of a taxi driver as Beijing's profile has been widely used in the 1990s (Taxi, n.d.). Although this notion is less used in current times, the perception that taxi drivers are the representatives of Beijing's civilisation still matters.

Against this backdrop, how are taxi drivers addressed and produced on drive radio in contemporary China? One particular program, *Ordinary folks taxi (baixing taxi)* on Beijing drive radio, provides an example of how drive radio in current China caters to taxi drivers, whose number has reached 100, 000 in Beijing in 2013 with 66,000 taxis ('Shiwan Dige', 2013).

6.3.5 Ordinary Folks Taxi (Baixing Taxi)

As the title indicates, *Ordinary Folks Taxi* is a daily program that explicitly articulates its close connection with Beijing taxi drivers. This program creates a taxi driver-oriented community with a limited socialist ethos. It has been on air since 2001 on Beijing drive radio and its current broadcast time slot is between 11:30 to 12:00. With half an hour every day, the program is arranged with different themes for each day. For example, the episode on Tuesday invites medical doctors to deliver health knowledge, providing taxi drivers with tips and suggestions on how to avoid and treat certain diseases that taxi drivers might be easily subject to. The episode on Wednesday invites relevant experts to talk about issues of law and professional ethics. In these two cases, *Ordinary Folks Taxi* addresses taxi drivers as recipients of information and knowledge in a pedagogic way.

Taxi drivers are also regularly invited into the studio to participate in program production as knowledge deliverers. In the episode broadcast on Thursday (17 October, 2013), subtitled *Taking You on a Tour Around Beijing (Dai Nin Guang Beijing) (Baixing Taxi, 2013b)*, in-studio taxi drivers introduce Beijing and provide instruction about the Beijing-based tourist attractions they recommend to listeners. The portrayal of taxi drivers as tour guides is probably an outcome of the dual identities taxi drivers possess, as driving professionals in Beijing spectrum and as Beijing natives. Thus, taxi drivers

are perceived as travelling experts on the Beijing landscape, familiar with the history and culture of Beijing. In the broader context, the rise of Beijing as a tourist destination for both domestic and international travellers and the growing consumption-oriented economy also cast taxi drivers in the tour guide role.

The Saturday episode *Taxi Magpie Bridge*¹² (*dishi queqiao*) serves as a matchmaking platform, during which single taxi drivers are encouraged to register and look for a partner (*Baixing Taxi*, 2013a). In conversation with the program host and two invited guests, the in-studio taxi driver introduces himself (herself) and expresses his (her) expectations about a suitable partner. As invited guests are normally married experienced taxi drivers, one of them is He Suli, a regular woman guest in this matchmaking section, who demonstrates interest and care in helping taxi drivers to find a partner. The majority of those who attend the Saturday episode are middle-aged and older, either divorced or widowed.

The episode on 12 October 2013 invites a widowed middle-aged female taxi driver into the studio. She describes herself as ‘don’t know how to talk’ (*buhui shuo*) and suggests the host and other two guests adopt the question–answer form. As the host and the other two guests lead her with questions, the woman tells a brief story of her tough personal life after her husband died. She discloses her desire to find someone ‘aged between 45 and 50, outgoing, in healthy physical condition, of good character, in a good financial condition, and who has a genuine intention to build a family’ (*Baixing*

¹² Magpie Bridge comes from an ancient Chinese tale that is the origin of Chinese Valentine’s Day. In this story, a human boy—the cowherd Niulang—and a weaver girl—the Goddess’s seventh daughter—are allowed to meet annually on the seventh day of the seventh month on the Chinese lunar calendar. The bridge where they meet one another is built of gathering magpies. For more details, one can visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qixi_Festival.

Taxi, 2013a). In order to appeal to anyone who is interested in getting to know this woman, the host and the other two guests introduce the woman in a favourable way, describing her as ‘slim, pretty and kind’ (*Baixing Taxi*, 2013a).

Despite the similarity with popular TV dating shows, the different statuses of their target groups distinguish *Taxi Magpie Bridge* from popular TV dating shows such as *Feicheng Wurao (If you are the one)*, which targets the rising urban middle class. *Taxi Magpie Bridge* caters to an urban group of the lower class. While TV dating shows have a strong capacity to attract advertising and affluent viewers, *Taxi Magpie Bridge* is far less economically powerful as the group it targets is largely marginalised in the increasingly commercialised media. The attributes taxi drivers look for in a possible partner are more practical and specific than those expressed on TV dating shows, which usually focus on consumption habits and lifestyle as signifiers of participants’ identity and status.

In addition to its on-air program, *Ordinary Folks Taxi* has been established as an off-air organisation through which taxi drivers can arrange and participate in non-work social activities (Beijing Radio Station, 2012). A number of cases cited from the official website of Beijing Radio Station are offered here (Beijing Radio Station, 2012). A number of off-air social clubs such as cultural arts-oriented association, a calligraphy and drawing association and a Tai Chi martial arts association have been established to engage taxi drivers in regular social and leisure activities. Taxi teams are formed with the voluntary participation of taxi drivers dedicated to helping the vulnerable such as the elderly and children with the offer of free trips.

Meanwhile, *Ordinary Folks Taxi* itself is committed to providing financial assistance and social support to taxi drivers. In addition to providing regular financial

assistance to taxi drivers who are in exceptional poverty, a specific fund has been launched to offer help to taxi drivers who suffer from severe diseases or other severe accidents and disasters. *Ordinary Folks Taxi* has also reached an agreement with a Beijing-based hospital to offer an annual physical checkup to 600 to 1,000 taxi drivers free of charge. The number is small in comparison with the total number of taxi drivers in Beijing. Overseas tours to Europe, Taiwan and other Asian countries have also been organised for taxi drivers and their families (Beijing Radio Station, 2012).

Ordinary Folks Taxi forms a community for taxi drivers, in which radio makes use of its resources and networks to provide social welfare to taxi drivers through its connection with local government, taxi industry management, the automotive industry, quality hospitals and cultural celebrities. A form of socialist ethos emerges out of this taxi driver-oriented community, with the radio broadcasting dedicated to multiple facets in the provision of social welfare, ranging from financial assistance and medical treatment to leisure activities and marriage. This community is politically safe as it confines itself to issues that concern taxi drivers. Although collective activities are organised in the community, taxi drivers are treated as separate individuals with various apolitical interests during their non-work time. This community exhibits and builds on taxi drivers' subjectivity with their active participation. However, at the same time it plays a role in sustaining the status quo in which taxi drivers are employed and exploited. With the adoption of a selective approach to provide social welfare to selected individuals, the socialist ethos circulating in the community is limited, flexible and less durable than state-run support, as it depends on the arrangements radio broadcasting can negotiate with management in the taxi industry and with other public service providers.

6.4 The reorientation of drive radio: the production and consumption of privatised automobility

Moving away from the 30 minutes dedicated specifically and explicitly to taxi drivers, how is the remainder of the airtime on Beijing drive radio used to make the considerable profits indicated by the statistics? Beijing drive radio, the nation's most commercially successful drive radio channel, which serves China's most congested city, generated over 60 million RMB in 2000 (Huang, Y.Q., 2007). With rapid growth in its revenue in subsequent years, revenue reached 280 million RMB in 2006 (Huang, Y.Q., 2007), nearly 400 million RMB in 2009 (Luo, X. B. 2010), and 710 million RMB in 2010 ('Erlingyiling Nian', 2011). Advertising revenue generated by drive radio accounted for over 34% of the total advertising revenue of the radio industry in 2010 (Huang, X. P., 2012). How does drive radio emerge as a profit generator? What form of public communication of automobility is produced? This section focuses on *Car World (Qiche Tianxia)*, another popular program on Beijing drive radio, to investigate how drive radio reorients itself with the growth in privatised automobility. More significantly, the discussion explores how drive radio produces and defines the middle-class taste, sensibility, and identity.

6.4.1 The privatisation of automobility in contemporary China

Since 2001 the privatisation of car ownership and car use have been privileged and aggressively promoted. In the 2001–2005 five-year plan for the automotive industry, the Chinese government proposed specific actions to restructure and strengthen the automotive industry (Guojia Jingmao Wei, 2001). The automotive industry, which had previously focused on truck manufacture and car assembly in joint ventures with foreign manufacturers, was restructured to prioritise the production of private cars (Guojia Jingmao Wei, 2001). The purpose of this restructure was to reorient the

automotive industry to produce private cars at a price that would enable mass ownership and individual use. From then on, private car ownership has increased widely and rapidly, giving rise to a number of auto cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. In 2007, the number of private cars nationwide was over 15 million ('Zhongguo Siren Jiaoche', 2008), and by the end of 2012, the number soared to over 53 million, with a growth rate of 22.8% on 2011 figures (Qian, C. & Liu, Z., 2013). In 2012, there were over four million privately owned cars in Beijing alone ('Erlingyi'er Nianmo', 2013). China is arguably shifting from a cycling nation to a car nation (Walks, et al., 2014), where the number of privately owned cars is continuously growing in step with the popular desire to own and drive a car.



Figure 6.1 Chang'an Road, Beijing, 1986

Photographer Liu Yingyi, 1986

Source: http://news.qq.com/a/20090828/002623_23.htm (accessed 21 May 2015)



Figure 6.2 Wanghe Bridge, Beijing, 2012

Photographer Wang Jing, 2012, *China Daily*

Source: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-09/27/content_15786026.htm (accessed 19 May 2015)

As China rises as a car nation, the privately owned car is one of the most significant items in embodying and expressing ‘*jiēcēng*’ (Zhang, 2008, p. 25), a term used as an alternative to ‘class’ in post Mao-era China. *Jiēcēng*, which refers primarily to what Zhang Li identifies ‘socioeconomic differentiation’ (Zhang, 2008, p. 26), is politically safer than the term ‘class’ given the close association of Mao-era China with class politics. As a car is an item that visibly displays personal assets and social status, private car ownership is precisely capable of articulating socioeconomic differences. Once private car ownership is achieved, how to use private cars becomes an extended signifier to articulate distinguished social identity and lifestyle. Car use itself then generates new forms of consumption patterns. In addition to the essential driving between workplace and home, private car-based activities, especially leisure-oriented trips and tours, have been rapidly growing in recent years along with the expansion of

the transportation system. For instance, the self-driving tour distinguishes itself from the organised group tour by its associations with notions of freedom, flexibility and personalisation. The self-driving tour has also become a way for people with similar tastes and lifestyles to get to know one other, shaping an informal social community.

6.4.2 *Car World (Qiche Tianxia)*: the upmarket move on Beijing drive radio

With the increasing number and the expanding use of private cars in the physical auto-space, new elements, new interests, and new target groups beyond taxi drivers have emerged to constitute and reconstitute drive radio. In particular, drive radio offers programs that facilitate the establishment and maintenance of the production and consumption of automobility. I use the program *Car World* on Beijing drive radio to investigate how radio produces public communication about private car ownership and car use. Table 6.1 provides a weekly breakdown of sections from *Car World (Qiche Tianxia, n.d.)*

Day	Program	Content
Monday	New Car 3+2 (<i>Xin Che 3+2</i>) ¹³	Introduces a recent new product in the automotive industry.
Tuesday	You Can Buy a Car! (<i>Hui Mai Che</i>)	Listeners are invited to communicate and bargain with a car salesperson to arrive at a deal. Following the deal all listeners can join the club and purchase the car for the same price as agreed to on-air.
Wednesday	Wednesday Drawing Room (<i>Zhousan Huikeshi</i>)	Discussion about issues related to the production and consumption of automobility such as new regulations and policies with invited guests.
Thursday	Car Arena (<i>Qiche Jianghu</i>)	Collects and publishes car owners' complaints about car problems and follows how these issues are dealt with by car sales companies.
Friday	Car Life (<i>Che Shenghuo</i>)	Introduces and promotes upcoming group tours and activities.
Saturday	Car Jack (<i>Cheshi Qianjinding</i>)	Discussion of car-driving experiences and stories with invited guests in the form of a chatty and light-hearted group talk.
Sunday	Car Fashion (<i>Che Ying Fengshang</i>)	Invites professional staff from the automotive industry to talk about cars and newly developing trends in the car domain.

Table 6.1 Weekly program schedule on Car World (*Qiche Tianxia*)

In what follows, I focus on specific episodes. I examine the participants, topics and formats to investigate what I suggest is constituted as a form of on-air auto-space. In addition to the radio hosts, a range of participants are involved in the shaping of this on-

¹³ It is likely that 3+2 is short for the Chinese term '*Sanyan Liangyu*', which is literally translated as 'three sentences two words', referring to a brief expression. This term is used in a short introduction to the Monday section as '*Sanyan Liangyu Duihua Liang Hong*', meaning a brief dialogue with the program host Liang Huang. The transcript of a Monday episode is on the official website of Beijing Drive Radio. For more details, visit <http://www.fm1039.com/2013/04/20130408143415.htm> (accessed 27 January 2015).

air auto-space including private car owners and drivers, potential private car buyers, traffic policemen, car sales managers, car repair experts, journalists specialising in the automotive industry and lawyers. Focusing on car purchase, use, traffic regulation and rules and driving sociality, the talk-based format is regularly adopted featuring in-studio discussions, call-ins and social media-based participants.

Car World starts its week with a new model of car. On the Monday episode of 23 September 2013, the in-studio host and two invited male guests, who work for *Car Weekly* (*Qiche Zhoukan*) under the Beijing-based fashion paper *Life Style* (*Jingpin Gouwu Zhinan*)¹⁴, introduce a new model from Mercedes Benz, the A260. In addition to using professional vocabulary to describe the strengths and flaws of this new model, the host and guests focus on discussing the ethos the model expresses. The discussion of a range of features including exterior appearance, interior design, driving experience and technical capacity leads to an agreement that this new model of Mercedes Benz is a dramatic change from its classic traditional style. The host and invited guests share the view that the traditional style expresses an old, conservative and domestic ethos. The host reads out listeners' responses to demonstrate their similar perceptions of Mercedes Benz traditional style.

The basic sense Mercedes Benz gives to me is old-fashioned, boring and steady. This sense has not been changed for years. I don't consider it when I purchase a car. I will think about buying it when I am over 50. (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013b, translated by Lei, W.)

¹⁴ *Life Style* (*Jingpin Gouwu Zhinan*) is a Beijing-based fashion and lifestyle-oriented paper, published every Monday and Thursday since its launch in 1993. Its commercial success has led it to expand into a multimedia group producing a number of fashion and lifestyle magazines and websites. For more details about this paper, visit <http://www.lifestyle.com.cn/>

In contrast to the conventional ethos of the classic Mercedes Benz model, the new model is described as young and pretty with a fashionable exterior look and exquisite interior fittings (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013b). Description and assessment, which are based on both professional criteria and individual experience, provide listeners with the guidance to make a decision about whether the new model is compatible with potential purchasers' profiles such as age, gender, personality and social status.

The involvement of *Car World* in private car purchase and promotion goes beyond introducing new models. Co-operating with Tencent car, a subsection of the commercial internet portal Tencent¹⁵ and with *Car Weekly*, a section of the newspaper *Beijing Times (Jinghua Shibao)*¹⁶, the *You Can Buy a Car* program (*Hui Mai Che*) organises two seasons of the annual on-ground car fair in Beijing. The episode of Tuesday (15 October 2013) is focused on the upcoming season on 19–20 October. The two invited guests are from the two media partners mentioned earlier. In the first part of this episode, the host asks them to explain the highlights of this coming session and how the public can register and attend the on-ground car fair. One guest explains:

This coming session is the biggest one in terms of scale since we launched the car fair event in 2000. Over 40 brands will attend. There will be over 200 model types. Over two months' tough bargaining with car sales managers, we succeeded in making a deal

¹⁵ Tencent, which was originally one of China's most used commercial social media founded in late 1998, has developed into a giant technological company providing multiple services such as social media, a news portal and online video games. Tencent Car is a sub-section specializing in providing information about automotive industry. For more information about Tencent, visit <http://www.qq.com/>

¹⁶ *Beijing Times (Jinghua shibao)* is a commercial-oriented newspaper section subordinated to the Chinese Communist Party's official paper the *People's Daily*. For more information about Beijing Times, visit http://epaper.jinghua.cn/html/2015-04/26/node_100.htm

favourable to potential buyers. The car price on the car fair will be lower than the average price offered on the common market ... We will also draw prizes during the car fair for car buyers. The first prize is one ton of gasoline ... We have extended the fair to two days. (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013g, translated by Lei, W.)

The description of the scale of the car fair and the price advantage demonstrate both the efforts and achievements of *You Can Buy A Car* in benefiting potential car buyers in their coming car purchase. It displays the role of *You Can Buy A Car* in building a bridge between car sales companies and individual consumers. Its position of seemingly siding with consumers by no means implies that the relationship between radio and automotive industry is neutral or distant. On the contrary, radio and the automotive industry are closely intertwined and mutually dependent. First of all, *You Can Buy A Car* promotes private car ownership and use, naturalising the car as a basic and essential item in everyday life. Secondly, the financial benefit radio obtains from car sales is hidden but significant and influential given the financial dependence of radio on the automotive industry. The success of car fairs in selling a great number of cars improves the chance that more car companies will seek co-operation with radio and become radio's funding resource.

Radio performs well as a centralised platform in attracting and organising consumers together to purchase cars. The explicit advertising in the middle of the episode adopts a well-known slogan 'unity is power' (*tuanjie jiushi liliang*) (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013g) to encourage the public to buy cars in the group-purchasing way. This slogan is the title of a themed song, composed during the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) to call for everyone to contribute to the war against intruders. It was also widely used in Mao-era China to concentrate individual subjectivity and mobilise national solidarity for

nation building. The use of this term in the commercial activity of car purchasing expresses the power of collective bargaining in achieving a favourable deal for consumers.

Car sales managers, agents, car professionals specialising in car repair and maintenance regularly participate in studio discussions and provide knowledge about cars. With its focus on auto theft prevention devices, the discussion on the Sunday episode of 13 October 2013 covers a range of knowledge from device options including both mechanical immobilisers and electronic immobilisers and the advantages and disadvantages of these options (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013f). In-studio guests include the local sales manager of FAW-Toyota¹⁷. At the beginning of the discussion, the in-studio host and guests confirm that it is necessary to install an auto theft prevention device. One guest moves on to popularise some knowledge about the development of car anti-theft options from mechanical immobilisers to electronic ones. G-book, which is the latest smart subscription service provided by Toyota Motor Corporation, is introduced. Considering the high price of G-book, the host suggests that invited guests give some inexpensive and effective options such as mechanic locks. As the discussion is mainly focused on the prevention of the theft of the whole car, invited guests also provide some tips on how to prevent and deal with theft of car components. The third part of the discussion focuses on the advantages and weaknesses of smart keys. On the one hand the smart key system is noted as the most modern, technologically advanced device; on the other hand, the host and experts explain that it can be affected if strong radio waves

¹⁷ FAW-Toyota is a Chinese joint venture between the indigenous Chinese automaker First Automobile Workshops and the Japanese Toyota automotive company. FAW is short for First Automobile Workshops. For more information about FAW-Toyota, visit <http://www.ftms.com.cn/>

are nearby, resulting in delocking of the car. In the end, invited guests emphasise that car users cannot fully rely on auto theft prevention devices (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013f).

In addition to those from the automotive industry, private car owners compose both the in-studio and out-of-studio participants in the program.

The channel devotes Thursday's program to a form of investigative report focused on consumer complaints about private car purchase deals and the after-deal car repair and maintenance issues. The episode on 26 September 2013 is concerned with consumer complaints about a particular type of FAW-Volkswagen car¹⁸. According to a global written agreement, car makers promised to provide the lifetime warranty of a timing chain (a part controlling the timing of car engine valve) (Timing Chains, n.d.) after the purchase of private cars. However, consumers received a message from the 4S car store, reminding them to change the timing chain when the total driving distance reaches 60,000 kilometres. During the off-air time, the program collected 72 complaints through its online survey. Some consumers have not yet decided whether to have it replaced or not. Some consumers have had it replaced after receiving the message from the 4S car dealership. They paid 5,000 to 6,000 RMB for this replacement. Some consumers ended up with engine failure as a result of not having replaced the timing chain after driving more than 60,000 kilometres (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013c).

This specific episode focuses on the latest updates on this case after the program sent all the complaints it collected to FAW-Volkswagen. It presents the three sides to the

¹⁸ FAW-Volkswagen Automotive Company is a Chinese joint venture between the indigenous Chinese automaker First Automobile Workshops and multinational automotive company Volkswagen Group with its origin in Germany. Again, FAW is short for First Automobile Workshops. For more information about FAW-Volkswagen, one can visit <http://vw.faw-vw.com/>

issue, including consumers, the car manufacturer and invited experts from the automotive and car maintenance industry. For instance, in the letter to this program, car makers express appreciation for the concern and supervision Beijing drive radio imposes on them. However, they also express their desire for less media intervention in solving problems. The host and two invited guests engage further in a conversation, speculating about possibilities and providing suggestions to the consumers and listeners to remind them what could be done if a similar issue arises (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013c).

With its constant on-air promotion, dispute and negotiation, *Car World* plays a supportive role in encouraging the privatisation of production and consumption of automobility. It constructs a site through which individual players including car makers, sellers, repair personnel, buyers and owners can participate, with the aim of achieving the successful consumption of automobility. Hence, this site introduces and cultivates a form of consumer citizenship for listeners. However, this form of consumer citizenship is earned and structured according to the individual's capacity to access automobility. Consumption-oriented automobility structures individuals' access to the on-air auto-space, in which eligible participants discuss actively interests such as public issues concerning automobility regulations and governance and social issues relating to experience with private car use.

6.4.3 Inclusion and exclusion in the zone of citizenship

Car World invites relevant and eligible representatives to participate in the discussion of various public and individual issues emerging out of car consumption. The program on Wednesday (11 September 2013) discusses the newly drafted measure to charge a traffic congestion fee in Beijing (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013a). This measure is proposed in the Beijing 2013–2017 air cleaning plan issued by the Beijing government with the aim

of reducing the high level of air pollution that not only provoked outrage among the Chinese domestic public but also garnered attention from foreign media (Hatton, 2013). This particular measure concerns mainly private car drivers, who will pay the fee once the measure is implemented. This episode discusses the legitimacy and efficiency of this particular measure in helping to ease air pollution. In addition to the host, the in-studio participants include the senior journalist Nan Chen who specialises in the automotive industry, traffic policeman Wang Hai from the Beijing bureau of traffic management, and a Beijing-based lawyer, Yang Hongwei (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013a).

At the beginning of the discussion, all the guests and the host voice their objection to the traffic congestion fee. Following this consensus, the three invited guests argue from different perspectives to challenge the legitimacy and application of the traffic congestion fee. The journalist Nan Chen objects for three reasons. Firstly, in his opinion, market strategy should be favoured over governmental regulation in dealing with traffic congestion and air pollution. Secondly, although one aim of the drafted measure is to encourage individuals to take public transportation more than private cars, the supply of public transportation in Beijing is significantly lower than demand. Finally, the journalist argues that it is unfair that the traffic congestion fee is applied only to private cars rather than to the public transportation system. Paralleling the journalist's objections, the lawyer provides a legal explanation to demonstrate the lack of legal support to justify the legitimacy of the drafted measure. The traffic policeman then focuses on introducing new practical techniques to smooth traffic flow, suggesting alternative options over charging a traffic congestion fee. Text message responses from listeners are selected and read out by the host. For example:

Charging money in such a simple and rude way can produce a very short-term effect only.

In the UK, where the congestion tax is charged, has already proved that the effect is very limited. Is the traffic congestion problem solved as a result of the paid fee?

I accept the charge of the fee if the subway is close to my home, replacing my current travelling mode of private car driving. However, the realistic problem is I have to take the bus first before I arrive at the nearest subway station. (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013a, translated by Lei, W.)

Car World serves as an exclusionary space in which private car ownership is the condition that grants a privileged form of consumer citizenship, thus deciding who is qualified and allowed to participate in the discussion about issues such as air quality, road use and relevant governmental regulations. In addition to the discussion on the public issues, private car owners are also involved in the casual group discussion about socially and culturally structured car experiences. A form of middle-class sociality is produced, circulated and shared by private car owners.

Car Jack (Cheshi Qianjinding) has three regular guests, two women and one man, all of whom are private car drivers. The host and invited guests on Saturday (28, September 2013) talk about the last person individuals want to have sitting in the passenger seat when they are car drivers and the role they play when they sit in the passenger seat. One female guest mentions that her mother annoys her when she is driving and her mother is in the passenger seat. Instead of giving comforting reminders when the car almost crashes with others, her mother always releases a tense sigh, which makes the female guest nervous and disturbs her concentration. Another female guest mentions that her husband annoys her when she is the driver because her husband

frequently intervenes by making suggestions. In the final part of the episode, all the in-studio guests confess and explain their own annoying behaviour when they sit in the passenger seat (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013e).

In other words, *Car World* functions as a class boundary marker excluding those who do not belong, as well as a forum of socialisation among the eligible and like-minded consumer–citizens, catering to their public concerns and social interests. More specifically, the privatised consumption of automobility is the determinant in selecting qualified members who are eligible to form this ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) of drivers on air. In other words, private car drivers are the primary members who make up this community and shape the public communication within it. The structure of the time and space in which these private car drivers develop their public communication arises from the Chinese context, where private car driver is a contemporary identity that represents Chinese middle class status. As this section demonstrates, public concerns and social interests in this on-air community are correspondingly framed and connected to the everyday structured practice of privatised automobility.

6.4.4 A space for middle-class leisure consumption

In addition to cultivating Chinese middle class status through its on-air discussions about privatised automobility, *Car World* actively facilitates a new form of tourism—another hallmark of the middle-class lifestyle. Group tours promoted by *Car Life* (*Che Shenghuo*) range from transnational tours to domestic tours organised by 1039 club, which has developed into a multi-functional social as well as commercial association affiliated with Beijing drive radio. 1039 is the frequency (FM 103.9 MHz) of Beijing drive radio. The 1039 club has engaged in a number of businesses ranging from car

insurance, maintenance and repair to tourism, all of which are called ‘after-car-purchase services’ (Tian, En.Y., 2006, p. 15). It organises both non-commercial and commercial tours. In response to the emergence of self-driving activities among private car owners, 1039 club organises and promotes self-driving tours taking place both close to and distant from Beijing (Tian, En.Y., 2006).

The episode on 27 September 2013 promotes a 5-day group tour to Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost island (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013d). The invited guests are an organiser of this tour and a so-called amateur expert on Japanese tourism. Although it is packaged in the form of a talk show about cultural aspects of travel, the commercial nature is explicitly articulated. The organiser announces the trip’s date and cost in the introduction to the tour:

This time we provide a five-day tour to Japan from 7 to 11 December 2013. The price is 18,200 RMB (US\$ 2984.8)¹⁹ per person. It is 16,200 RMB (US\$ 2656.8) for a child under six who does not occupy a separate bed. If you register before 25 October, you can enjoy the price 17,700 RMB (US\$ 2902.8), which is exclusive to 1039 club members. (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013d, translated by Lei, W.)

If we view the travelling tour as a commercial production, drive radio is engaged in the entire process of manufacturing, circulating and consuming the commercial production. The 1039 club is responsible for preparing and fixing tour arrangements including the destination, date, schedule, route and accommodation. *Car Life* is responsible for publicising this tour and attracting potential participants. The relatively high cost of the tour to Japan serves as an inclusion–exclusion bar, limiting participants mainly to

¹⁹ It is based on the exchange rate on 21 October 2013 when I wrote this section.

affluent Beijing-based travellers. In the rest of the episode, the organiser explicitly describes the schedule for the five days, focusing particularly on three special attractions of this trip, that is, skiing, hot spring spas and local food. Based on her personal experience travelling through Japan, the amateur expert assists the organiser by adding supplements and recommendations on sightseeing and shopping. She goes further to demonstrate that this trip is worth more than the price charged:

I have been to Japan and Hokkaido many times for business and also with friends. But the quality of my trips cannot compare with that of this organised trip, in which accommodation is so good and the food is so wonderful. This is the best trip with high quality facilities and the most favourable price I have ever heard. (*Qiche Tianxia*, 2013d, translated by Lei, W.)

In addition to enjoying the recommended sightseeing spots, local food and activities, the attraction of this organised tour includes its detailed preparation and organisation, saving time and energy for anyone who is interested in participating. With this prepared and guided tour, participants save time and energy in looking for places of interest, food and hotels. More importantly, it is assumed that with the assistance of the tour guide participants can avoid any possible difficulties of language and cultural difference. In other words, anyone who is financially able to afford the trip is eligible to register and book the tour without needing any skill in the local language or knowledge of the destination and its culture.

Class is not the only factor that exercises power in reshaping the on-air auto-space. Gender is also relevant, as becomes apparent when we consider the changing gender composition of listeners to drive radio. In addition to the on-road male taxi drivers, who are still a committed group of listeners to drive radio, in 2013 62.7% of

listeners accessing drive radio in privately owned cars were male (Sailixin Gongs, 2014). While male dominance in listening to drive radio is maintained, the simultaneous growth in the number of female private car owners and drivers is gradually leading to a gender tension on drive radio. Market research indicates that the number of female listeners listening to drive radio in privately owned cars increased markedly in 2013 in comparison with 2012 (Sailixin Gongs, 2014). It might be expected that drive radio will at some point need to adapt to accommodate the shifting demographics of both class and gender in contemporary China.

6.5 Conclusion

Since the late 2000s, the reaction of the Chinese radio industry to the growing significance of privately owned cars and their association with the rising middle-class has led to program restructuring and channel reorientations at different levels. The leading channel, the Voice of China on China National Radio, has re-arranged its schedule to suit the morning, noon and late afternoon rush hours (Zhongguo Zhisheng, n.d.). News slots are scheduled in each of daily rush hours: 6:00 to 9:00, 12:00 to 13:00 and 18:30 to 20:00 (Zhongguo Zhisheng, n.d.).

Local radio stations are more aggressive in approaching and attracting the rising middle-class. They normally adopt the strategy of renewing a former channel as a private family car-oriented radio channel (*sijiache guangbo*), creating a separate new space for private car owners and their families. From north to south and from west to east in China, an increasing number of provincial and municipal radio stations are opening an on-air space to target and cultivate this niche market. A few examples are offered here to indicate the increasing scale. In southeast China, FM 98.7, a municipal life-oriented radio channel in Fujian province, has been renamed a private family car-

oriented channel since 2000 (FM 987 Sijiache Guangbo, n.d.). The renewed channel claims to be the top channel in the province in terms of both listening statistics and advertising revenue. In southwest China, Sichuan provincial radio station has reoriented its FM 92.5 channel since 2013 to target private car owners. Its programs cover self-driving tourism, finance, real estate and the car market ('Sichuan Renmin Guangbo', 2013). The municipal radio station in the capital city Chengdu also has a private family car-oriented channel on air on FM 105.1, claiming that listening to its channel is associated with happiness (Chengdu Kuaile Jiachejia Guangbo Weibo, n.d.). In central China, Henan provincial radio station has transformed a formerly tourism-oriented channel into a private family car-oriented channel in 2012, claiming that it is dedicated to producing a 'happy radio' (*kuaile guangbo*) for private family car owners (Henan Renmin Guangbo, 2013). In north China, Hebei provincial radio station turned its former literature and arts (*wenyi*)-oriented channel FM 90.7 into a private family car-oriented channel in 2012 (Hebei Renmin Guangbo Diantai, 2012). In its capital city Shi Jiazhuang, the municipal radio station also airs a private family car-oriented channel. With the rising appeal of the 'private family car', radio is expressing its interest in domesticising its interaction with automobility. In this process, sociocultural meanings about family life are increasingly attached to private cars.

As this discussion makes clear, automobility is economically, socially and culturally shaped. It is simultaneously a rising indicator of inequalities across class, race and gender and a form of engagement with forming, reproducing and negotiating new forms of inequalities. We have also learned from this discussion that the mobility of capital, labour and goods is closely associated with Chinese modernisation in post Mao-era China. Car ownership and car use are crucial elements in shaping and defining the contour and composition of the automobility, and this automobility in post Mao-era

China has been transformed from a stage of commercialisation in the 1990s to that of increasing privatisation since 2000. The commercialisation stage features taxi-based automobility, in which taxi travel was popularised on the road mainly in urban China. The privatisation stage features privately owned car-based automobility, in which the private ownership and use of cars has been expanding dramatically. Both private car ownership and use display their appeal in contemporary China. Private car ownership is recognised as a desirable asset for many urban families and individuals, and private driving is growing to be a dominant travelling pattern in urban China and is extending to rural China.

Like elsewhere, both car ownership and use in contemporary China is economically, socially and culturally shaped. Private car ownership is highly structured by the massive economic disparity and stratification between different groups, resulting in the diverse production and consumption of cars in contemporary China. Car ownership in China has become a signifier of class distinction across different status groups, a trend towards mass individualisation and an expression of subcultural difference within the same status groups. One undisputable fact is that radio in China is growing more expressive and more sophisticated in participating in the shaping of this privatised, gendered and stratified vision of Chinese modernity with its unequal mobility.

In conclusion, this chapter is an account of the privatisation of automobility. It is also a story about the upward mobility of class identities associated with automobility. Moving from the history of taxi culture to that of the private owner, this story outlines the growing stratification, economic disparity, and social inequality in reform era China. While the story of taxi driver radio community offers hope for the creation of some kind

of civic and socially inclusive radio practice, the subsequent emergence and dominance of *Car World* points to the exclusionary impulse that has historically been associated with the subject-making of the middle-class. ■

Chapter 7

Conclusion: missed opportunities and future challenges

My exploration of radio in China began with my personal experience of listening to radio in China. In the 1990s and 2000s, radio was my frequent companion. After coming home from night classes at school, listening to radio allowed me to relax to the sound of popular music and the appealing voices of the radio hosts. Alone—but in the company of my radio—I could enjoy a moment’s reprieve from my relentless study schedule. My habit of listening to radio continued when I moved to Beijing in 2004 to start my university education. I went to the capital expecting that a bright future was awaiting me somewhere. As night fell, I listened to radio through earphones as I lay in my bed in the dormitory I shared with five other young women. The comforting sounds flowing from the radio sent me to sleep to a mixture of news information, smooth music, and friendly voices of the hosts. In 2009, I had the opportunity to work an internship in China National Radio. This transformed me from a radio listener to a radio broadcasting producer. My relationship with radio in China continued after I moved to Australia to study in 2011. Given that little is known about radio in China, it seemed logical that I should develop my personal interest in radio into a journey of scholarly inquiry.

7.1 Embodying social changes: radio, the Chinese state and modernity

Ever since radio lost its monopoly to television in both public and private life, it has been relegated to the status of television's poor cousin. While there are consistent calls for media scholars to pay due attention to radio, studies so far have tended to concentrate on radio in developed western countries, especially in the United States and Britain (e.g., Goodman, 2011; Lacey, 1996, 2008, 2014; Lewis, 2000; Hendy, 2000, 2007, 2008; Hilmes & Loviglio, 2002; Guy, 2012). This thesis is the first systemic, comprehensive and critical study of radio in China in English. It offers in particular a sociocultural account of radio in China in the economic-reforms era. In this thesis I have shown that although the influence of radio has declined, and it has lived in the shadow of television throughout the decades of transformation in China, the transformation of the radio sector has been no less profound than the broader social and economic changes it has accompanied.

Similarly, this study has also shown that radio has by no means been less actively engaged in building, developing and modernising China. Radio is the earliest electronic communication medium, and has presented itself as a constant and reliable instrument of China's modernisation process from the Republic era, through the Mao era to the present. Addressing the core concern of radio and social change in post Mao-era China, this thesis has explored the changes and continuities in the radio sector and has identified the political, economic, social and cultural forces in shaping the changes and continuities. In doing so, the thesis has pointed to a variety of new as well as newly constituted roles associated with Chinese radio in the 21st century. In this thesis, I have treated radio as an assemblage of history, institution, industry, technology,

programming, and listenership as well as an evolving set of media genres, cultural forms and social practices.

As I have examined in the thesis, social changes in post Mao-era China both derive from and consist of a number of social processes, the most crucial of which are privatisation, globalisation and individualisation (e.g., Ong & Zhang, 2008; Zhao, 2008; Featherstone, 1990; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Yan, 2009). As a result of these global processes, radio in China has been found to share similarities with radio elsewhere. Like its counterpart in many social contexts elsewhere, with the withdrawal of state funding radio in China has been reoriented to survive in the market. The once collectivised mode of radio production and listening in Mao-era China has been replaced by the commercialisation of radio production and the privatisation and individualisation of radio listening. We have seen innovations and conventions in practices of radio production and listening. Resources—domestic and foreign, cultural and technological—have been mobilised and negotiated to produce content, formats and genres capable of attracting an increasingly fragmented and stratified listening public. The once monolithic national air space has been divided and has multiplied into a variety of spaces, producing a variety of commodified listening publics across dimensions that include class, gender, race, age, location and education. In the multi-media era, radio listening is but one among a plethora of practices of cultural consumption, all of which compete for the individual's time and attention.

However, in China, with the authoritarian state's determination and leadership to modernise China within a short time, these global social processes have taken place in a post-socialist market economy in a little over three decades. These distinctive features of the Chinese context have resulted in striking differences between radio in China and

radio elsewhere. In addition to the particularity of Chinese history, the state has been the most crucial agent in producing these differences. While the Chinese state has ushered in and further facilitated the processes of privatisation, globalisation and individualisation, it has maintained the power and capacity to shape the direction and the extent to which these processes unfold.

The enduring strength of the Chinese state is most aptly demonstrated in the study of news as a radio genre. While there have been considerable changes in the production of and listening to radio news, one constant is that radio news has always remained committed to articulating the intention and desire of the Chinese state. In the decades of socialism, the production of radio news was devoted to the state-defined agenda and ideology. Listening to radio news was a crucial process of producing a listening public who were simultaneously constituted as political subjects. Both production of and listening to radio news were therefore acts of political obligation to the Mao-era Chinese state.

With the entry of state-approved market forces across a wide range of public and private domains in post Mao-era China, the production of radio news has grown more attentive and responsive to commercial interests, especially to the social well-being of listeners as consumer-citizens. As my discussion shows, like news in other media, news on Chinese radio now functions to support the political legitimacy of the Chinese state as well as to earn economic benefits from the market. Although radio news attempts to cover multiple publics that include both the privileged and the dispossessed, it has so far largely favoured the privileged, especially the rising middle class, who are both politically and economically significant to the Chinese state and the market in post Mao-era China.

What also accounts for the major difference between radio in China and radio in the global West is its history of what Ulrich Beck & Edgar Grande (2010) call ‘compressed modernity’. This compressed modernisation process has achieved industrial modernity comparable to its western counterpart in a much shorter time and at a much faster pace. However, this process has produced a great deal of corruption, injustice, inequality and risk in both public and private life in post Mao-era China. Chinese individuals, jettisoned from the collective mode of social life of the decades of socialism, feel extraordinarily vulnerable, insecure, and uncertain as they tread the path of personal survival and self-responsibility in daily life. In order to hold on to some sense of security and safety, they find themselves caught up in the desperate pursuit of various actually and potentially useful resources at home and from abroad, ranging from material products, information, guidance and emotional support to spiritual beliefs.

My thesis makes clear that, like other mediums, radio has played an important role in shaping and managing China’s much shorter and faster trajectory to modernity. Radio participates in the building of modernity and simultaneously offers Chinese individuals various means of coping with the pitfalls, risks and uncertainties growing out of ‘capitalism with Chinese characteristics’ (Huang, 2008; Coase & Wang, 2012). In their own ways, each of the new radio genres I have discussed in this thesis—late night talkback radio, health infomercial radio and drive radio—embodies China’s efforts to achieve modernity while simultaneously exercising radio’s capacity to manage problems, concerns and risks arising from China’s modernisation process.

As a product of the convergence between the globalised advice genre and the commercially low cost talkback format, late night talkback radio offers a level of emotional therapy, teaching listeners ways to manage emotional issues that arise from

relationships and private life. The dominant groups of listeners—students, rural–urban migrant workers and the urban poor—are drawn in most part from the lower social stratum. Late night talkback radio is a good example of how the provision of love and care has been outsourced to the market, showcasing a new form of sociality which has become increasingly familiar to, and taken for granted by, individuals in modernised Chinese society. By promising a touch of intimacy for an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) of ‘lost souls’ and estranged, unhappy individuals, late night talkback radio works to shore up social and political stability, while at the same time obeying the commercial imperative to grow ratings and profit by answering a new social need.

Health infomercial radio is another powerful case that illustrates the desperation, frustration and insecurities the Chinese face in their quest for health in the marketplace in post Mao-era China. To individuals of any society, health is a leading precondition for individual hope, happiness and sustainability. Nevertheless, due to the priority of commercial interests over social commitment, health infomercial radio also functions as a site of false promise, in which individuals from marginalised groups including the elderly, rural residents and rural–urban migrants are mobilised to articulate their disadvantages, difficulties, vulnerabilities and anxieties. Paradoxically, these marginalised individuals are exploited further in the purchase and consumption of products that offer a false promise. In this thesis I have shown that radio—a medium that citizens might expect to play a constructive role in health communication—is in fact engaged in producing additional risks in post Mao-era China, while all the time actively promoting the ideology of self-care and self-responsibility.

For the same reason that late night talkback radio and health infomercial radio cater to class-specific needs, drive radio has emerged to cultivate the rising middle-class

and cater to their new driver-oriented needs. In doing so, drive radio is actively involved in the production of automobility (e.g., Featherstone, 2004; Urry, 2004; Walks, 2014). The rapid increase in the ownership of private cars has generated problems in the management of public mobility and environmental sustainability. It has given rise to drive radio as a key form of differentiation in class status. The content of drive radio ranges from practical items including traffic management, public policy, car purchasing, use and repair services to programs with more substantial social and cultural forums. Drive radio has become an active site for cultivating and articulating the taste, sensibility and identity of the middle-class, in the process functioning as a new marker of social inclusion and exclusion. In these new roles drive radio also addresses class-based anxiety in a rapidly changing social order in which fear of downward social class mobility is as palpable as is the aspiration for upward mobility.

Considering all the genres I have examined in this thesis—news, late night talkback, health infomercial, and drive radio—I can conclude unequivocally that changes associated with radio in China are not just reflective or responsive to social change. Radio is directly and crucially constitutive of the wide and ongoing social change per se. Rather than consider the processes of globalisation, privatisation and individualisation as external forces, I have shown that Chinese radio has actively participated in the making of these processes and has shaped the specific contours of these processes as they unfold in China.

7.2 Parallel changes in the practice of listening to radio in China

Although my thesis focuses more on the history, content, and institutional context of radio, it indirectly and implicitly points to the making and remaking of listening public in China. Listening in China has been politically, economically, socially, culturally and

technologically shaped. It has not been autonomous and free from influence. In China listening has been redefined and reformulated as a result of the interplay between economic restructuring, social transformation, cultural reformation and technological advances. I have shown that in Ma-era China listening was both a political obligation and a collective practice. In post Mao-era China, by contrast, it has been refashioned into a commercial, privatised activity. In Mao-era China, the Chinese state played the determinant role in shaping the practices of listening, and these practices in turn were crucial in defining both public and private life. In particular, listening was central to the production of the political subject and a collective identity. Certainly the national wired radio network enabled a more democratised form of listening by making radio more accessible to the grassroots. However, at the same time, this democratising potential was harnessed by the state to operate as a top-down instrument of propaganda, delivering mandatory radio broadcasting to individuals. In this context, listening was exercised as a political activity, made obligatory as a form of expression of one's loyalty and support for the Chinese Communist Party-led state. Meanwhile, listening was also mobilised to produce a public commitment to socialist construction, national development and modernisation.

Nevertheless, as my discussion suggests, listening in Mao-era China was not as universally passive as is conventionally assumed. Chinese individuals were fascinated primarily by the disembodied form of sound communication, with its separation between talking and listening. Although collective public listening to mandatory broadcasting aimed to produce obedience and support, the private reactions of Chinese individuals varied according to their differentiated individual interests and capacity to appreciate what was broadcast. More than that, Chinese individuals expressed a keen interest in listening to entertainment and cultural programs such as music, crosstalk and

storytelling. The post-Mao neoliberal decentralisation of radio broadcasting has produced a new wave of democratisation in listening, associated with the commodification of listening. The post-Mao listening democratisation has allowed individuals to listen to a diversity of products offered by radio broadcasting. The economic, sociocultural and technological transformations have stratified and multiplied listening further. The reformation of social classes, in particular, produced a range of high-end and low-end listening publics. The once dominant practice of group listening has been replaced in post Mao-era China by individualised modes of listening structured around individual needs and interests. As I have discussed at various points in the thesis, individualised listening has diversified into a complex range of modes that I suggest we can refer to as credulous listening, selective listening, critical listening and resistant listening. These categories offer nuances that may be explored in future studies into the practice of listening.

My discussion has made it clear that, like other mediums in China, an account of the history and development of Chinese radio is necessarily an account of the negotiation of changing dynamics between the Chinese state and the market (Zhao, 2008; Zhang, X., 2011). Throughout China's long history from the pre Mao-era to the post Mao-era, the Chinese state has persistently exercised its strength to ensure that radio is designed, oriented and used to facilitate political legitimacy, economic development, social stability and cultural consensus. In the constant negotiation between the state and the market in post Mao-era China, it is the state that dictates how much the market should prevail and to what extent the market can exert its influence.

The Chinese state continues to recognise radio's instrumental role in propaganda, control and governance. The intention of the Chinese government to govern through the

media is clearly evidenced in a recent initiative involving radio. The broadcast of radio documentaries commemorating the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) is the latest practice in radio to continue to facilitate and produce the Chinese state’s nation-building politics. China Radio International (a national-level radio station targeting both China-based and overseas listeners) jointly with a number of local radio stations has made a series of radio documentaries titled *Remembrance (mingji)*, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the anti-Japanese war (Li, W.T., 2015). This series is committed to leading listeners to memorise the history, respect the martyrs and cherish the peace (Li, W.T., 2015). As I write this conclusion the series is being aired on all the radio stations involved in making the documentaries (Li, W.T., 2015).

Digital technology is further complicating the production of and listening to radio broadcasting in China as it is doing to radio elsewhere. Thanks to digital technology, conventional institutionalised radio stations in China have launched new distribution spaces. Chinese radio stations have created new modes of access to online radio broadcasting and have developed audio applications to make radio listening available to individuals using different reception devices. They have also opened official accounts on social media such as Chinese Twitter (*weibo*) and Wechat (*weixin*), turning subscribers into readers as well as listeners.

Meanwhile, private groups and individuals in China are using digital technology to produce and listen to what Kate Lacey calls ‘DIY radio’ (Lacey, 2014, p. 81), a cultural phenomenon which has its parallel elsewhere worldwide. Challenging the conventional airwave-based definition of radio, these DIY radios are digital platform-based sound services, where individuals can play roles ranging from being the original producer or radio curator to that of radio aggregator (Lacey, 2014). In China, for

instance, the internet-based Lychee (*lizhi*) radio station claims that ‘everyone is a broadcaster’ (Lizhi FM, n.d.). In this configuration, radio is a platform where various non-news genres including music, talk radio, radio drama and crosstalk are produced, offered, stored and listened to. These forms of ‘DIY radio’ are articulating a potentially alternative soundscape, in which each individual can be a radio broadcaster as well as listener. Although not the focus of this study, the implications and impact of the digital production of radio involving individuals as producers and listeners warrants investigation in the future.

Since its advent, radio has been universally associated with a set of progressive ideas that include democracy, modernity and development (e.g., Cantril & Allport, 1935; Boggs & Dirmann, 1999; Lerner, et al., 1958; Shah, 2011; Katz & Wedell, 1977; Goodman, 2011). By offering a critical account of radio in one of the most populous and dramatically changing societies, this thesis has implicitly measured Chinese radio against these expectations. As I have demonstrated throughout the thesis, radio has to some extent embodied the possibilities of realising these goals through its involvement in China’s journey of nation building, national development, and modernisation in the long 20th century to the present.

At the same time, radio has also unravelled the constellation of challenges and obstacles that must be overcome to truly achieve these goals in China. Among various challenges and obstacles, the issue of inequality is a prominent one, which involves multiple dimensions that include but are not limited to gender differences, rural–urban disparity and class stratification (Sun & Guo, 2013). To date, radio in China has not yet adequately addressed this issue of inequality. As I have indicated throughout the thesis, inequality manifests itself in the largely unequal access to radio production, distribution

and listening. A second major challenge is that the Chinese state is faced with enormous difficulties in negotiating the wide range of unequal relationships due to the competing demands imposed on it. On the one hand, the Chinese state is committed to persistently maintaining its political legitimacy; on the other hand, it is expected to continuously promote economic development. The Chinese state is keen to use media to facilitate the management of these competing demands. The newly launched national rural-oriented radio in the public service model (Zhongyang Renmin Guangbo Diantai, 2013b) is a good example of an attempt by the Chinese state to mobilise radio to deal with rural-urban economic, social and cultural inequalities. The extent to which the Chinese state will truly succeed in managing multiple tensions remains open. However, what is certain is that radio in China will continue to be an important prism through which we can hear and understand the drama of social change. ■

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