

THE POWER OF TELEVISION  
WITHIN  
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A LECTURE BY

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TO STUDENTS OF

NEWS AND MEDIA STUDIES

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Respected Professor Jiang Shu Sheng, leaders and students of Nanjing University, I am very honoured to be a Guest Professor for the Faculty of News and Media Studies at your esteemed university, and very pleased to have this opportunity to both address you and to meet you. As university students, you represent the future of this glorious country and as students of media studies, you have the potential to contribute to the growth and progress of our society.

I am Robert Chua and my career, my experience and my passion is television broadcasting. I have been in the business of television broadcasting for 35 years, first in Australia and Singapore, then in Hong Kong where I have spent the majority of my career. I was there when television was just starting, when the creative ideas, the skills and the fundamentals were just being developed that are now the foundations of television as we know it today. I was there when some new ideas didn't work, when we found out what viewers didn't want and when we realized what an incredibly powerful communications tool television could be, just how much of an impact our work could have on people's lives. As someone who has been in television for 35 years, I will tell you without hesitation that television is the most influential and powerful medium man has ever known.

A crucial question for every society is how to define the social responsibility of such a powerful medium, especially now that technology has overcome historical limitations of distance and capacity.

I believe that my own perspective on the question may be insightful for you because of my background. I am Chinese, but I was born in Singapore. I was raised in a family proud of its Chinese heritage and traditions, but I was educated in western schools in the English language because that was perceived to be superior. Singapore was a British colony, and therefore we were not taught to appreciate our own Chinese culture and our roots. We were influenced to perceive the English and therefore westerners to be more superior than we Chinese. It was only when I reached Australia to start my television career, since there was no television yet in Singapore, that I got to see that not all westerners are rich and successful, that western society has good and bad just like any other society. It was in Singapore and later 1967 in Hong Kong television that I not only achieved career success but that I was also able to communicate to Chinese people using my own Chinese heritage and culture, where I learned the importance of being socially responsible given the power of the television medium. It was in Hong Kong where I experienced the meeting of Chinese and western cultures, the clash of different values and priorities and negative impact that the business of television can have on inexperienced viewers.

Television is mass communication that conquers time and distance. It combines sight, sound, motion, and emotion in the viewers' home for a unique connection and involvement. It is that capability that makes television big business, and makes no mistake about it, television, including news in most parts of the world, is very big business. Advertisers understand its power to influence and use it to create favorable impressions of their favour. And the currency of that business is eyeballs, the more viewers a television channel can attract, the more valuable and powerful it is.

While there is nothing wrong with television being a business, or with mass communication, or with advertisers using television to communicate their messages, once you recognize the power of the medium to influence, you realize as I have over the years, that its power must be regulated and adapted for each society it serves. There is nothing wrong with the automobile, but you would not put a child behind the wheel, nor would you allow cars to have

unrestricted right of way through crowded parks, or to operate without speed limits.

Every society in the world has a culture and a set of values that is unique to its own history and a result of the realities of its geography and necessities. There are no right or wrong comparisons between societies, just the realities of their individual evolution. Television is a reflection of each society, its ways, its culture and its values. At its best, television draws a people together through common experience and communication, at its worst, television can help to destroy the foundations of society.

Television viewing like most social interaction, requires an accumulation of experiences in order to be digested wisely. Even those experienced TV viewers in the western society, their lifestyle and decision's can be influenced and changed when daily negative TV programming are aired. A daily diet of sex, violence or negative social actions on TV can be interpreted as normal in daily life. The less experienced a society is with the power of television, the more likely they are to be unduly influenced by its images. In the early days of television in Hong Kong, we literally could change fashion styles, create trends and instant celebrities, with every programme we created. As the people of Hong Kong became more experienced viewers, it was more difficult to have such an impact, more and more creativity was required to overcome their viewing maturity, and if that didn't work, some resorted to more sensational, more daring, more anti-social topics to lure audiences and attention.

Television's natural function is to 'inform', 'educate' and 'entertain', while the main role of the press by virtue of the printed page is to 'inform' and to 'educate'. While being informed, one sees or reads too much negative news (many western news is not well balanced), and too little good news. It will not only be depressing, but the people will take it that the negative actions or views to be correct and represent the world's society as a whole. News as we know it, represents good and bad news, and there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of news articles each day, so why not choose the good news and present the bad news only if we can show them to reflect the mistakes and how we are to avoid it. In short, to tell our viewers why we should avoid such bad news and the damage it does to our society. However, there are many good news stories presented as bad news because they are twisted to get the maximum visual effect. An example can be seen with Emily Lau, who laid down in the street to protest the selection of Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa. The unbalanced reporting gave the wrong impression to the world, that everyone in Hong Kong objected to the successful election of Mr. Tung Chee-hwa, which is not true. The protesters numbered

much less than 100, and that number, out of 6.3 million people in Hong Kong, means nothing as it does not represent the Hong Kong people. So, the TV report was totally unbalanced and damaged Hong Kong's good image and smooth Handover. Why was there no positive visual pictures but negative protest pictures in the Press and Television? Why not show the Hong Kong people congratulating themselves and expressing their support? Because protesters shouting and lying on the streets makes better visuals for the TV and Press. Negative headlines also help sell the papers and attract TV viewers to keep glued on the screens. The western media prefers showing a group of protesters that are confrontational with a negative message than a group of executives seated around giving a positive message.

Western broadcast journalism sensationalizes to an extreme, bringing shame and harm to its targets or celebrity status to those who commit crimes. In the U.S. President Clinton's reputation is damaged by unfounded rumours and accusations by a woman he may not know, but who claims to be a victim of his seduction before he was president, and O.J. Simpson becomes an even bigger celebrity for being accused of killing his wife. In Hong Kong, journalists make sensational stories of the Tang family disputes, a sad and shameful exploitation of the family in traditional Chinese culture. This is typical of western culture, to exploit and exhibit a family's difficulties in public without shame.

Having seen all of these things, it is my conviction that television must be regulated and must be a reflection of the society it serves. You can understand how my opinion and my conviction about social responsibility does not get me any support in the western press and among other television business owners. They think I am crazy to have a 'no sex, no violence, no news' programming policy, while they promoted the more commercially viable sex and violence shows. I believe in censorship and responsible reporting.

As a television owner, why would I be in favour of limitations on my business and all business within my industry.

First of all, I think that we can learn from the history of other societies who have had greater experience with television in their societies. The United States is the largest television business in the world, and not surprisingly, entertainment is the number one American export. The American system is strictly business, only generating audience counts, and the constitution gives each broadcaster and producer unbridled right to express any thought,

exploit any subject matter, use any sensationalism necessary, to attract the largest audience. Unfortunately, the market dictates that if you can't compete with quality, the secret to success is to compete for the weakness and curiosity in humanity, and that means sensationalized sex, violence and abnormal behavior.

In search of larger audiences and more profits, those broadcasters create programmes with more and more sex and violence as the main ingredients in the movie or series. In most western dramas and even comedies today, it is normally accepted behaviour that a first date includes kissing and going to bed together, all in that first encounter.

The rationalization was that people would only watch what they chose to see, that American audiences were mature and capable of digesting such influences, and that it was only entertainment. Rather than reflect the society it serves, several congressional and academic studies in the U.S. now suggest that American television is actually teaching negative social values and lowering our family values and standards. Yes, even in the U.S. there are moves underway to restrict, regulate or at least classify television content in an attempt to limit the impact of anti-social behavior being glorified and normalized. But that same sensationalized entertainment is being exported around the world. Do we really want to become their society of drugs, violence, freedom to hurt others, and casual sex.

Anti social behaviour and values are not the only dangers to a country. In France, there is concern that the French language is endangered and regulation is required to protect it in the face of outside influences. The American neighbours, Canada and Mexico, have very strict broadcast regulations all designed to attempt to save their own cultures from being lost in the tidal wave of American broadcast signals.

I am very proud to be Chinese and like Chinese around the world, felt immense national pride on July 1st when Hong Kong was returned to the motherland. As a resident of Hong Kong and a broadcaster, the event was especially important as it opened the door for me to contribute to China under the doctrine of "one country, two systems". So I will use the term "we" in that we are all Chinese and now we are all one country working for mutual prosperity.

We have one of the oldest civilizations on earth. We have a strong cultural heritage, rich with tradition a distinct Chinese ways. Chinese people have spread all over the world, successfully establishing roots and futures in different lands, yet retaining their uniquely Chinese culture and traditions. We have so much to cherish but also so much at risk! We must ensure that our Chinese television celebrates our own culture in our own Chinese ways.

What are the dangers to China of foreign signals based on foreign social values coming into our country?

As I said earlier, every society is distinct as a result of its own realities and necessities. Many of our Chinese people are less experienced with television that draws on the sensational and the forbidden to create viewership and therefore, would be poorly equipped to differentiate between fact and fiction, to resist the influence on their opinions and values that can be so skillfully crafted by others.

Nowhere is that more dangerous than in news broadcasting. Foreign newscasts are, by definition, a foreign perspective of events, analyzed and presented within the context of a foreign society's interests, values and perceptions. In the television news business, it is not the most intelligent analysis that wins audiences, it is the most exciting pictures, the most provocative headline, the most sensational angles on the story. In television news, the headline is never "one man survived" it is always "two hundred died". If nothing happened, its bad television. Television news is entertainment first, information second.

Television news is irrepressibly based on social values of the originating country, the controlling editor and the contributing reporter, it is impossible for that not to be true. Imagine the event of a public beheading in an Islamic Arab state. To an Islamic reporter it is normal social justice, to an American reporter it is great video from a backward, heathen society and to an Israeli reporter it is a frightening example of the brutality and vengeance that their enemies are capable of inflicting on them.

My wife Peggy and I have been involved with China's broadcasting industry since April 1979, soon after China opened. You may recall the famous Citizen Watch "Time Check". It was my company, RCP, that secured the sponsorship for CCTV in early 1980. We have seen

the steady evolution of China's broadcasting system and the strict control with which our government has attempted to keep out unwanted foreign signals and to screen all foreign programmes imported for broadcast. To international broadcasters and financiers, these protections are repressive and un-necessary, counter productive to China being granted more world trade, to opening up its markets. China should not allow these external pressures to influence its internal broadcast regulations. I am convinced that China can and will enlarge its broadcasting system, but it should and must be done according to Chinese needs in a Chinese way.

It is my contention that all news is inherently biased by its origin of perspective and that western style news is for the most part, totally inappropriate for Chinese viewers.

In the west there is much more "bad news" than "good news" reporting which I feel is totally wrong. If you report too much bad news such as strikes, social unrest, crime and bad social behaviour, you will encourage that to happen in your own country. Occasional bad news is all right, but it must include a commentary of the negative effect it is causing that country and its people. Those that watched them can learn from the report the negative impact their actions have caused to their nation and its people. Just imagine every night one sees news reports of strikes, the people will think that is normal and will follow the western action and also go on strike. Only if they understand the bad effect it will have as a result of their actions, to their nation and the people, they will not follow the western action.

In the west they speak of "freedom of speech" and support "personal freedom" without censorship. The consequences are often misguided actions that can damage their nation directly or indirectly. Very often in the west, their personal freedom is at the expense of the society. Who does not want more benefits for himself? But, if by getting more benefits you bring social disorder or bankrupt your company or country, does it justify your actions? For example, in France, very often one hears of airline, airport bus, and trains going on strike. The French people are fed up. The transport company loses money, the people are inconvenienced because some cannot get to work, and general business are affected, less business meetings, and less work is completed. If your company plans to cut down 10-20% of workforce due to a slow down in sales and export, how would the staff react? In the west many countries will all go on strike, and in fact due to bad western influence South Korea workers would also go on strike to settle an issue. This is wrong. One must make the sacrifice for the benefit of the other remaining working staff, if you happen to be the one asked to go.



If no one is asked to go, then the company will be bankrupt, and all the staff will lose their jobs. If you are one of the best or hardest workers, you will be the last to go. If you are lazy and unproductive, then you will be the first to go. Ask yourself this, if you were in charge, what would you do? You would do the same.

It is my contention that it is impossible for international broadcasters to be socially responsible, if they are not of the culture and society they seek to serve. International broadcasters understand only profits, they do not understand Chinese culture and family values. How can a non Chinese feel patriotic to China, to know our feelings and our culture?

It is my contention that many Chinese viewers are not yet equipped with the variety of viewing experiences which would allow them to properly assess western style journalism and the glorification of anti-social or deviant behaviour which is so common to western entertainment. Even experienced western societies have been negatively influenced by the constant broadcast diet of sex and violence, resulting in lower social values and order.

It is my contention that there is much to lose of our heritage, our culture and our unique Chinese values, all of which are the social treasures that make us who we are, Chinese.

I have seen the impact of sensationalized western entertainment and news on Hong Kong. While our Chinese language and some traditions have survived, for the most part with each Hong Kong generation being exposed to more and more western media we have seen an increased appetite for more violence and more sex on television, and erosion in basic family values, and as a result, more selfishness and anti-social behavior among young people.

Chinese never call their parents by names, some in the west do. Respect for the elderly is very much Chinese and even older men (my age 51 years, as an example) still call our parents friends or parents of our own friends, uncle or auntie with no shame. Chinese are more humble, always lowering our family abilities in favour of our friends. For example, one of my own experiences at TVB when my father told my staff (who happened to be much older than me), to teach me and guide me because I did not know much as I was still young, even though I was their boss. My father's intention was good because our Chinese culture demands that we be humble.

So, how can the Chinese broadcasting system foster positive growth of such a powerful medium, benefit from and be open to external experience, and still maintain the need for social responsibility?

My own vision of that potential has been incorporated into my channel, CETV Family Channel. As Chinese students of media studies, I want to share that vision with you and have you contemplate whether it can strike the delicate balance between creating good entertainment value on a powerful medium, while being both socially responsible and culturally relevant.

Because my channel is a business, it must attract audiences which in turn, attracts advertisers. Therefore, we have a natural market incentive to be entertaining and relevant, by being more creative to give ‘infotainment and edutainment’.

CETV does not believe it needs to be all things to all people. We are Chinese, we understand Chinese culture, so we broadcast only in the Mandarin language and only to Chinese in the Asian region. A good example is our country’s promotion of simplified characters as a written form of common Chinese culture. To date, CETV is the only satellite broadcaster in Hong Kong to use simplified characters, as we do not want to cause confusion among the people.

We believe that national and local broadcasters, such as CCTV, are best equipped and experienced to gather, select and interpret news for the people, so CETV does not broadcast news. But when there is a national event of importance to the people, such as the National Day celebrations October 1 in Hong Kong, and the July 1st Handover, we broadcast live coverage. CETV coverage isn’t just restricted to the entertainment portion, but full coverage. Most of the western TV and all the Hong Kong broadcasting, have made “entertainment” their priority in their programming, at the expense of informing and education more viewers. In the past Hong Kong National Day Celebration show, all their Hong Kong and satellite TV stations unintentionally, disrespectfully, deleted the National Day speech prior to the show, to broadcast only the entertainment items, so that the viewers would not switch channels to watch a competitors channel during the speech. Our CETV Family Channel, respectfully included the speech, even if some viewers did switch channels during the speech, because it

is most disrespectful to exclude it.

The good news is that this year, because of our channel's promotion as the only station that has telecast the full show of National Day celebrations, including opening speeches, one of our competitors reluctantly decided to also include the opening speeches in their broadcast. The CETV good example resulted in benefits for the viewing public.

We believe that television is a powerful medium that must be socially responsible, that must be used to create not destroy. So CETV is purposefully described as a family channel, a channel that is intended for family viewing by all members of the family, of any age. Our programming strategy is to purchase and create programmes that reinforce Asian values, that educate through entertainment. At any time, 24 hours a day, a Chinese family can turn to CETV with assurance that there will be no glorification of sensationalized sex or violence. CETV can be watched by the entire family without the embarrassment of unhealthy content while gaining knowledge through entertainment.

On CETV Family Channel, we present education through entertainment (edutainment). Through us, we are educating the entire family of all ages without them making an effort. The best form of learning is learning without and special effort. Let's take some examples of creative programming that we cover on our channel that brings knowledge through family interaction and fun programmes like 'English 100 Fun', 'Daily IQ', 'Ten Second Questions', and 'Kids Etiquette'.

\* RUN TAPE OF CETV PROGRAMMING

But good entertainment value that champions Asian values is not the only potential for such a powerful medium when a broadcaster commits to being socially responsible. It is important that the broadcaster be more than just a duplication of what already exists in a very good Chinese broadcasting system and that the broadcaster contribute to the growth and development of the system.

CETV is staffed by some of the best creative and production talent from Hong Kong and their combined artistry not only helps to raise both the level of execution and presentation excellence in Chinese broadcasting it also raises the expectation of the audience for all broadcasters.

\* RUN TAPE OF VIEWER COMMENTS

CETV also uses the power of television to make positive contributions to the Chinese society it serves. Rather than attempt traditional news stories, CETV is focusing on presenting “good news”, stories of ordinary people and events that contribute to society to family life, to positive growth for the country. Rather than just sit back without contributing to society and take advertising revenues from the hard working Chinese industry, CETV invests in China’s industry by launching a Made In China campaign on television to promote and celebrate the success of our manufacturing and domestic technology, to make viewers aware of Chinese quality and proud to shop for Made In China products first. As well, CETV is sponsoring a competition in conjunction with China’s advertising agencies and Media & Marketing Magazine to select China’s best television commercials. CETV takes that concept one step further by asking viewers to vote on their choice of the best TV commercials. CETV wants viewers to recognize and be proud of the excellence of Chinese advertising creative.

\* RUN MADE IN CHINA PROMOS AND VIEWERS CHOICE PROMO

Our goal in creating these campaigns is not only give Chinese more pride in their country but to also hopefully create more jobs, a stronger domestic economy, more Asian demand for China made products and less imports. Because CETV is not a government channel, its message is not perceived as propaganda or protectionism by the west or by the Chinese people throughout Asia. CETV is no there to compete with the local TV stations of the countries or cities we beam into, but to compliment their programmes. For China it will be “another choice” of good programming, but for South East Asia, it is the “only choice” of good healthy programmes, because most of their local TV channels have lots of unhealthy sex and violent content in their programmes. Overseas Chinese can learn about their own Chinese culture and be given good healthy programmes.

Now that we are one country, I believe that our government will consider the two and a half year record of CETV as an Asian satellite broadcaster as validation of its commitment to social responsibility and recognize CETV as being a valuable addition to China’s broadcast system as well as a valuable contribution to viewing choice for Chinese viewers. CETV is a living example of “one country, two systems” in action.

I suggest to you that CETV is the proven and trusted channel which has earned the right to be part of China’s broadcasting system. The reasons are very clear:

1. No foreign ownership:

100% Chinese origin – no foreign influence, complies to “one country” restriction.

2. Not a precedent for foreign involvement:

I am a 35 year TV veteran and a patriotic Chinese who has contributed to the China TV industry since 1979. CETV Family Channel is a healthy channel with a 3 ‘No’ policy: no sex, no violence and no news, which other channels do not accept.

3. Fits “One Country, Two System” concept:

Guided by top Hong Kong TV talents – Hong Kong production standard with best creativity;

while promoting Mainland Chinese values, not Hong Kong western style values.

4. Supports Chinese character standardization:

CETV logo (channel name) and subtitles on all programmes are in the simplified form which is the official standard character of China, as stated in item 36 of the Broadcasting Administration Regulations.

5. Strong Regional image:

Sharp and clear image as a Chinese TV station – managed by overseas Chinese, broadcasting to all Asia including China in Mandarin starting from day 1.

6. Social Responsibility:

Highly disciplined – rejects all sexually suggestive adult commercials, at significant revenue loss. Broadcasts lots of social service messages, e.g. respect elders, no smoking, healthy living, protection of the environment, and China national campaigns.

7. News programming:

No news at all – not necessary to our family programming as we encourage our viewers to watch their local news programmes.

8. Healthy programme quality:

Strict self-censorship, of high standard, mostly educational and entertaining, always healthy family viewing, aiming to promote Chinese culture.

9. Chinese response to channel:

Family Channel – of interest to all family members. Audience letters and research results, all prove it is welcomed by all members in the family.

10. Consistent application of the China TV programme policy:

Fits all current China TV programme policy – will not confuse the message from China central government. CETV has rejected the recent amendment to the Hong Kong government

codes of practice that deletes the restriction on programmes likely to encourage crime or public disorder and injurious to social morality, or otherwise undesirable in the public interest. CETV realizes and accepts its higher responsibility to the people.

11. Has no cross TV promotion for banned channels:

Do not have cross TV promotion for any forbidden foreign TV channels.

12. Larger footprint in Asia:

Apstar I (larger footprint) – covers more Asian countries with numerous Chinese populations. A much more effective channel to broadcast to overseas Chinese. Have received many audience letters from other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Kampuchea, Pakistan, Christmas Island and Myramar.

13. TV management team acceptance in Hong Kong:

Better represents China to Hong Kong due to highly respected local management team. CETV is positively recognized. Important people like Zhou Nan, J.S. Zhang, and Rita Fan have appeared on CETV for profile interviews.

14. Simple execution technology:

China government will still have firm control over the western entertainment channels as all those forbidden channels on Apstar I, where our transponder is located, are all encrypted, and therefore, receiving CETV will not affect them.

There is already a small opening, in Guangdong province, where Hong Kong terrestrial station's signals have historically been available off-air. Phoenix Channel has recently landed. CETV has been assured by the Ministry Of Radio Film And Television in Beijing that we must be treated equally, and we await the local authorities recognition and carriage of CETV.

Television, with its unmatched power to influence and to educate, can and will play a significant role in fulfilling the dream of our leaders to have China reach its full potential for the benefit of all Chinese citizens. Television gives us instant communication, bonds us together in social and cultural harmony and reflects who we are and where we are going as a

country. We can learn from other cultures and other societies, through television, but that influence must be regulated to ensure it is positive and it is in tune with our own needs and our own Chinese values. It is impossible for a foreign broadcaster to understand those needs and values, to reflect our culture, or to be socially responsible in the ways which are critical to our country's future and our unique identity.

Television is so powerful an influence on society that it must be socially responsible, beyond just the considerations of profit and selfishness. My western television friends and business people have laughed at my simplistic approach to television and social responsibility, have told me that television is a business of excess, of creating attention, that I am doomed to fail. But they do not understand my vision, they do not understand China, and they do not understand what makes Chinese people and Chinese society different and unique.

I support our governments stand to ban foreign TV channels that promote sex, violence, drugs, gambling, disrespect for family values, irresponsible news reporting, and all the unhealthy western lifestyles through their type of commercial programmes.

I urge all of you to work hard to guard against the unhealthy western values and lifestyles and promote our traditional Chinese family values and lifestyle. Only through your positive contributions in the media, whether television or press, can our nation succeed. If our people lose our basic Chinese values and morals as a result of influences by western television and press which I am now observing, it will be our Chinese downfall. Like the west, increasingly more Chinese care more for money than anything else, even if at the expense of family. Keep out the sex and violence programmes and provide more positive news and avoid "negative news" unless it is natural disasters or "negative news" that can be a lesson to learn to avoid for a better tomorrow.

As students of news and media studies, it will be your challenge to understand the power of television and help shape it into a positive tool for developing tomorrow's China, for the Chinese people.



Thank you.