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Going beyond the dualistic view of culture and market economy: Learning from the localization of reality television in Greater China

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Recent development of the global media market, including the purported decline of American media and the rise of regional centers, have shown the inadequacy of existing theories in capturing the essence of such changes and an urgent need to re-conceptualize key concepts such as culture and market economy. This paper examines the role of culture as it is reflected in the way viewing preferences feed back to production decisions that lead to the transformation of imported media genre, using the reception and transformation of reality television in Greater China as an example. The paper argues that there is the need to go beyond the dualistic “either-or” conceptual framework and see cultural/economic, and media/audience power as moving forces rather than dualistic dichotomies with a linear, predetermined relation. The paper explores the potential of the Chinese Yin/Yang mode of thinking for developing an alternative analytical model for media studies.

Keywords: globalization; audience; reception analysis; culture; media market; localization; reality television; television format; dualism; Ying and Yang

The myth of a homogenizing, or heterogenizing global culture

Communication researchers still seem caught in a quandary between the critical tradition and the post-modern perspective. Although the cultural imperialism theory has suffered from a lack of substantial evidence, the implications of Hollywood’s global market domination, e.g., deprivation of audience choices, threat to cultural autonomy, and alleged Americanization and homogenization of local cultures, remain a genuine concern to critical researchers and policy makers. Some fear that globalization will lead to a single, integrated, assimilated, and standardized sphere where no “de-linking” is possible.

To those who have adopted a post-modern perspective, the global culture looks different. With an emphasis on “de-differentiation” and the erosion of boundaries between the popular and modern, between leaders and followers, postmodernism is, in Bell’s terms, a “rage against order, bourgeois values and society” that creates an active, involved public (Bell, 1979, p. 115; Fiedler, 1992; Swingewood, 1998, p. 163). The communication content of globalization, therefore, is rather a celebration of popular democratization, difference and differentiation in that cultures are “placed in tolerant contact with each other” and produces a de-centered, de-Westernized and heterogeneous cultural landscape composed of widely differing mixes of groups, races, genders, and ethnicities (Curran & Park, 2000; Jameson, 1998, p. 57).

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Both schools can find evidence to support their version of the global culture in what has happened since the 1990s. Diverse social movements have grown side by side with the further expansion of transnationals through international division of labor, while in the media world, neither homogenizing nor heterogenizing defines the whole picture. By now it is becoming clear that Hollywood has not achieved global market dominance in the way critical theories had foreseen. In 1977, Jeremy Tunstall published a book titled *The Media are American*. In 2008 he followed up with another book with the same title – except for the verb tense: *The Media were American*. This simple difference told how much has changed in American media's global domination (or the perception of it). However, what has taken place instead does not necessarily support the post-modern view, either.

Rather than celebrating the emergence of a pluralist world with center/periphery AND leader/follower distinctions being blurred, trading blocs of different sizes and regional centers of audio/video productions began to emerge when the stronger of local cultural industries found a market niche for their products as the cost of satellite transmission fell and regulatory barriers were removed. More countries have joined the ranks of cultural exporters, among them new leaders in the trade. Egypt, Syria, Brazil, Mexico, India and Korea are emerging as leaders, while smaller, poorer nations, including those in the Caribbean and Central America, south and southeast Asia, and conservative Islamic Arab nations remain “net importers”. According to UNESCO, over one-third of the nations of the world still do not produce any films (Sinclair, 2000; Thussu, 2007; Tunstall, 2008).

The appearance of linguistic/cultural markets seems to lend support to the postmodernist view of a less centralized and Westernized media world. However, if the past view of Westernization did not necessarily reflect Western influence in the first place, and if Hollywood products did not dominate the viewing agenda of global audiences as many had believed, no one can claim with certainty that films and television programs now popular in linguistic/cultural markets have been *replacing* Hollywood products rather than local products. In other words, the emergence of cultural trading blocs is evidence of greater cultural heterogeneity *if* audiences around the world had all been watching Hollywood programs; if not, the trading blocs may have in fact hidden greater homogeneity within each cultural/lingual market.

The theoretical dilemma brought by the above development in media globalization is challenging. In past decades, rapid, interlinking development at both the micro and macro level has characterized the global media landscape. The shifting political economy of transnational media, technological and regulatory change have brought opportunities for market expansion, new business models including strategic alliances and co-productions, and the emergence of hybrid, glocal¹ texts, not to mention myriad infrastructural changes. Most of the development has been extensively researched (Kraidy, 2005; McPhail, 2006; Thussu, 2007; Wang, 2003; Wang & Yeh, 2005) yet the emerging media landscape does not answer to our understanding of the meaning of globalization – the world as a single system, either homogeneous or closely interrelated. Hence, the need to review our approach to studying media and globalization becomes urgent.

Two areas demand closer attention; the much overlooked interrelations among the many changes brought by media globalization as mentioned above, and the way key concepts, including culture, economic forces, global media, and audience are conceptualized. Here we encounter the fragmentation and disconnectedness that

McQuail (2003) saw as problematic in communication research. Thorough investigation of the above development calls for research at both the macro and micro level, examination of theories based on starkly different and incompatible philosophical traditions, and review of bodies of literature that seldom relate themselves to other areas of study in communication, all of which make the description and analyses of linkages and relations difficult to manage. In addition, there has been a tendency to contextualize linkages and relations as part of a dualistic model – a mode of logical reasoning that distinguishes between a pair of dichotomous concepts such as mind vs. body. In philosophy, dualism has long been denounced and proclaimed as successfully overthrown, yet at least two pairs of dualistic dichotomies can be delineated in the debate on the homogenization and heterogenization of global culture, that of culture vs. market economy, and global media vs. local audiences. Will the power of existing theories significantly improve if the means to conceptualize key concepts remains the same? Are we looking at change in a way that can allow us to properly grasp its fluidity and complexity?

To respond to these questions, this paper examines the role of culture as it is reflected in the way cross-cultural viewing preferences feed back to the transformation of imported media genre – one of the crucial linkages among various dimensions of media globalization. The paper uses the transformation of reality television in Greater China as an example.² To capture the complex patterns of exchanges and interactions, this paper argues that the localization of reality television in China demonstrates the need to go beyond the “either-or” conceptual framework that has characterized our discussion on issues surrounding media and globalization. It is proposed that concepts such as culture and market economy, media and audience need to be seen as moving forces rather than dualistic dichotomies with a linear, predetermined relation. Given its rigor in conceptualizing change as the result of ongoing interaction among dynamic forces, the paper explores the potential of the Chinese Yin/Yang mode of thinking as a seed to develop an alternative analytical model.

Defining culture

Culture – its role and conceptualization – is central to our concern not only because of the homogenization vs. heterogenization debate, but also because both globalization theories and a large body of research findings point to blurring cultural boundaries in a global era, yet the emergence of new markets largely has followed existing linguistic/cultural lines.

Culture is generally understood as the way people conduct their lives, including the visible and observable artifact, ritual and place, and non-visible memory, value, and meaning structure. In academic research, however, defining culture has proven to be a much more challenging task. In anthropological studies where culture is the center of attention, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) surveyed the literature and found 164 definitions, the broadest of which was “anything that is not natural”. Outside of anthropology the meaning of culture seems to be equally, if not more, difficult to unravel, as it has been influenced by a wide range of theoretical frameworks (Swingewood, 1998, p. x) including sociology, economics, linguistics, discourse analysis, and postmodern theories. Of the many different ways to conceptualize culture, the critical theorists’ view of the commoditization of culture is perhaps the

most relevant to the study of transnational flow and reception of cultural products. It puts culture in the context of cultural production and consumption, underscores the way culture is materialized and the extent to which it is materialized in a capitalist system. However, commoditization also tends to overlook the workings of culture that do not fall neatly within the theoretical framework. Geertz, for example, saw cultural processes as “the construction of meanings”, “a context in which [events] can be intelligibly described” (1973, p. 14). Tomlinson (1999, p. 24) suggested that it is on the basis of this “culturally meaningful context of local mundane lifeworlds” that individual actions became globally consequential. Reflexivity, connectivity, and dynamism characterize the way culture matters for globalization, as well as the fluidity involved in its conceptualization.

Also at issue here is the way culture is positioned vis-à-vis economic forces. One of the most notable differences between the critical and the postmodern views of globalization is how economic and cultural forces form a conceptual part in theorizing about the changes taking place. For those influenced by Marx, capitalism was the “major transformative force shaping the modern world”; “a single overriding dynamic in interpreting the nature of modernity”, as Giddens (1990, p. 11) pointed out. From this perspective, cultural products are not much different from other types of commodities, their production, distribution and promotion governed by the same capitalist principles of the marketplace. The similarity between cultural products and others, however, ends here. To critical scholars, the commercialization of cultural production, while achieving social control, is believed to also have the effect of negating rationality, eroding freedom, autonomy, and the sense of history (Swingewood, 1998). The rise of transnational media, therefore, carries serious cultural implications for those at the receiving end.

In contrast to the paramount importance of the economic factor – namely capitalism – in conceptualizing globalization by critical researchers, postmodernists have tended to focus on the diversity and heterogeneity in languages, aesthetics, and images. They do not deny the economic factor, yet see it mostly in the light of a gradual “de-differentiation”, where the economic becomes cultural, and the cultural becomes economic. Cultural autonomy existed in the early stages of capitalism, Jameson (1998, p. 70) argued, but with the expansion of global capital, culture began to rapidly grow through all social realms to the extent that “everything in our social life . . . is cultural”, and “[n]o enclaves are left in which the commodity form does not reign supreme”. It is at this stage of late capitalism that culture becomes the major productive force, no longer separable from economic forces. One of the most telling proofs for Jameson is that major trade negotiations today treat entertainment no differently than other commodities such as food or textiles – a phenomenon that was most succinctly underscored in the debate on the exemption of cultural products from NAFTA and WTO treaties (Mosco & Schiller, 2001).

Therefore, neither school has denied the importance of economic forces in globalization; what sets the two apart is the role of culture in bringing about the changes that have so far taken place. Ironically what was observed of media globalization suggests that cultural forces are an integral part of market operations yet retain a certain level of autonomy. Such contradictions are reflected in the production, but most of all in the consumption, of cultural products; the box office and audience ratings of imported films and television programs are cases in point.

Ratings and box office are powerful instruments in discerning viewer preferences, thereby minimizing risks and ensuring profit for investors. They determine the life and death of cultural products, and offer valuable information that helps formulate business strategies. If entertainment and cultural products are “no different from any other commodities” such as food or textiles, then consumers – audiences in this case – deserve greater attention. With their full attention unfortunately focused on the way power – whether political or economic – dictates cultural production, critical researchers have dismissed audience preferences as determined, shaped, or inconsequential, since viewers can never choose beyond what is supplied to them. Attempts to pursue the links between audience preference and cultural production are deemed of little value or instrumental only for commercial purposes.

It is, however, impossible to ignore box office or audience ratings, especially in this age of abundant supply, if the patterns of cross-cultural flow and reception of cultural products are to be fully understood. In a global market governed by capitalist logic, ratings and box office are crucial to profit making and producer decisions.

Past studies on media globalization have tended to reinforce the critical position by focusing on a few glaring success cases of transnational cultural flow, e.g., *Dallas*, *Titanic*, and more recently, television formats such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and *Big Brother*. However, such hits tend to be exceptions considering the total supply of international cultural products on the global market each year. The theory of cultural proximity and cultural capital (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003) explains to a large extent an audience’s lack of interest in imported products, but to understand how the cultural factor works through their preferences, we need to look more closely not only at the “why”, but also the “how” and “so what” questions when certain products fail to cross cultural boundaries; in other words, how does cultural influence manifest itself in the discursive landscape of texts, and also the development of the media landscape?

Workings of the cultural factor through viewing rates

Cultural boundaries were found to be fading from the media content perspective. Different reasons can be attributed to each globally successful film or television program, yet there is one underlying similarity that cuts across most, if not all, of them – an “aculturalness” (Wang & Yeh, 2005) or “cultural odorlessness” (Iwabuchi, 2000, 2002) that typically deemphasizes values, beliefs, habits, names, places, historical events specifically relating to any particular culture, nation, ethnic or social group in order to minimize the risks of presenting something that may be difficult for a transnational audience to comprehend or relate to. Included in this family of “acultural” cultural products are most of the genres popular on the global marketplace: Japanese cartoons, Hollywood blockbusters, and more recently, television formats of reality game shows. Hybridization, “aculturalization” and glocalization have characterized the strategic thinking of media producers in responding to the emergence of transnational markets, and also the type of media content that audiences find occupying their program schedules. Within this context, television formats in Greater China exemplify what is taking place in the cultural/linguistic markets.

Format licensing, the international sale of television program formats, began to mature into a major business in the 1990s (Moran, 1998). Because formatting allows

room for local adaptation while introducing new program ideas, some programs have quickly achieved global popularity. *The Weakest Link*, a game show format jointly developed by the BBC and NBC, was one successful example; it was sold to over 75 territories in 50 countries and achieved dazzling success in Europe, North America, the Arab world, and parts of Asia.

In contrast to the high ratings and lasting popularity that the show has enjoyed in US and European nations, *The Weakest Link* not only failed in ratings, but attracted bitter complaints from audiences, educators and media critics in several of the Asian nations where a local version was shown. The Thai government criticized it for promoting traits that are “unbecoming and contradictory to the Thai culture and morality”.³ In Hong Kong, the producer had to change the presentation style of the hostess, and hence the tone of the program – both its unique features – in order to survive in the ratings competition. In Taiwan, the local version came to an end after only for four months.

Findings from focus group sessions organized by the author in 2007 indicated that Taiwanese audiences’ expectation of a local program distinctly differed from that of an imported program; if a program was perceived to be local, it was to be closely in line with all things local. However, despite a local hostess, local contestants and questions on local issues, *The Weakest Link* featured British humor that was alien and appeared rude to the audience, and rules that included a large cash award for a sole winner, and an elimination-by-voting design. The combination of these elements created an image that “the Law of Jungle rules when it comes to money-grabbing”. There was consensus among focus group participants, netizens and media critics that the show pressured and discomfited audiences as they witnessed people backstabbing each other in a real, televised show. Glocalization backfired and the audiences found the show “fake”, as neither the hostess nor the contestants acted like “one of them”.

The transformation of reality television in China

Reality television (RT) that also features games with a handsome cash prize for a sole winner, and a “strategy-elimination-viewer involvement” catalyst (Keane, 2003) has met with a similar response from audiences in the Greater China market; Chinese audiences accepted RT only after a winding path of transformation.

China had its version of reality television as early as 1996, when a program produced by a provincial network sent its crew to cover the story of some college students who managed to travel a long distance with only a few dollars in their pockets. This special episode of the program, titled *Big Challenge to Survival*, received such extensive coverage in the media that the producer launched a full-fledged program carrying the same title in June 2000. A year later, the show’s second season introduced competition among players. The new format, inspired by the success of the *Survivor* series in US, was quickly adopted by a number of programs all over China. In most cases the transplantation was exercised with care; greater emphasis was placed on comradeship and bonding among team mates, rather than beating them in the competition. While elimination remained an element in the show, it was handled through a scoring system, to save contestants from targeting one another and to cushion the impact on the losers. Yet the modification was not satisfactory to the audiences; localized imitations quickly died for reasons similar to those leading to the demise of *The Weakest Link*. *Perfect Vacation*, the localized Hunan version

of *Big Brother*, was described as “disgusting live farce”. Survey results showed highly divergent responses; 63% of viewers “extremely liked” the program, 37% “extremely disliked” it, and no one was in the middle. The local government eventually took it off the air.

In 2005 RT made a come-back in China; of the new genres, the success of *Super Voice Girls* has been especially noteworthy. A televised singing competition produced by the Hunan Province Satellite Television Station, *Super Voice Girls* resembles Hollywood’s *American Idol* and it allows the audiences to participate in the decision-making process by casting their votes via mobile communication’s short message system. This voting mechanism triggered an avalanche of input from fans and supporters who were keen to have their favorites win. In 2005, SVG became the top-rated program in China; during the night of the championship, over 3.5 million votes flooded in, jamming Hunan’s telecommunications system.

In September 2007, China’s Broadcast Bureau issued a list of restrictions on reality programs of a similar nature, banning the uses of all forms of audience voting in television programs. The official statement accused a proliferation of televised talent shows of distracting youngsters from their studies while promoting vulgar language and poor taste. Critics, on the other hand, suspected that the action was taken to stop the fever of “participation” from helping a democratic decision-making style to take root beyond entertainment affairs.

Whatever the government’s real reason, the ban on audience voting means the phenomenon is unlikely to reappear in China. However, from *Survivor* to *Super Voice Girls*, it is difficult not to notice that almost none of the major ingredients characterizing reality formats introduced earlier survived in China.

In both *Super Voice Girls* and its successful Taiwan “cousin” *The Starlight Boulevard*, opportunities to become a professional singer replaced a huge cash award. The tears and laughter of contestants in a challenging learning process supplanted the excitement of strategic competition. Rather than focusing on the contestants’ plots and maneuvers to advance in the competition, the shows emphasized perseverance, determination and the support contestants received from family and friends.

Although both *Survivor* and SVG featured voting, in the former it was used for contestants to vote out one of their own; in the latter it was instrumental to rally audience support for the singer of their choice. In Taiwan similar trends of development occurred when *The Starlight Boulevard* – also a televised singing competition – topped the ratings chart. The “voyeurism” that characterized RT viewer psychology (Andrejevic, 2004; Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003) was replaced by “fandom”, and the audience was no longer a third party watching real life drama unfolding, but passionate supporters of emerging idols and ardent participants in a public event.

Several factors could be attributed to the failures of reality television formats in Greater China, yet the most frequently and consistently mentioned in reviews was cultural incompatibility. It was believed that Chinese audiences, as are those in many Asian nations under Confucian influences, are characterized by resentment towards competition and rivalry. The transformation of RT in China shows that competition alone does not alienate the audience, as it is the backbone of SVG and all talent shows; the way competition takes place does make a difference. Competition that encourages contestants to strive for excellence was not just accepted but encouraged, yet competition that pushes them to target one another in order to win was found

disturbing. Confucian teaching, as we are reminded by cultural critic Hsueh Baohai ([http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate.big5/news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2005-06/20/content_310](http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2005-06/20/content_310), June 20, 2005), stresses harmony, compassion and humanity. These and other characteristics of East Asian cultures (Kim, 2002; Miike, 2007; Yum, 1988) – reciprocity, interrelatedness, and other-centeredness – form the cultural context in which fun and entertainment are defined and received.

Glocalization as a strategy to appeal to transnational audiences, therefore, can work but only under the assumption that the format does not contain elements that seriously contradict local cultural values and practices. The same reason explains the rise of the cultural/linguistic television markets; as programs are imported from countries with a similar linguistic/cultural background, the chances for cultural incompatibility and contradictions are minimized.

The above case underscores the cultural factor both as a force independent of economic influences and as an important linkage of the capitalist system. The mode of interaction between cultural and market economy can be contradictory, but also complimentary and mutually transforming, exhibiting far more dynamic fluidity than a dualistic, dialectic model is able to offer.

Going beyond the dualistic mode of conceptualization

Dualistic models are attractive as they underscore differences and outline the parameters within which analyses can be structured and unfolded clearly, logically and effectively. As Tomlinson (1996, p. 86) indicated, most of Giddens' discussion on globalization, modernity, and cultural production follows a dialectic and dualistic model: "[T]hroughout his work on modernity Giddens insists on a dialectical push and pull between opposing tendencies: the local and the global, and disembedding and reembedding". Although for Tomlinson Giddens' approach is problematic in the unbalance of disembedding global modernity and reembedding of global belonging, an over-reliance on the dualistic model in which social forces are treated as opposing, uncompromising elements may be the very reason for this oversight on the issue of imbalance.

Seeing global culture either as homogenizing or heterogenizing presents another example of the "either-or" quandary. As Robertson (1995, p. 27) pointed out, "[I]t is not a question of *either* homogenization *or* [italics original] heterogenization", "but rather of the ways in which both . . . have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth-century world". Robertson underscored an important problem area of the globalization debate; homogenization and heterogenization are not the extremes of a dichotomy, neither are global and local, culture and economic forces, and media and audiences. Swingewood (1998, p. 180) warned against the danger of "false dualisms" of agency and structure, micro and macro, etc. Culture, he emphasized, is "the result of a highly fluid, socio-historical field of forces". The question is, can a dualistic model – even a revised version – effectively deal with "cultural fluidity"?

Tomlinson, Robertson and Swingewood were the few scholars who paid attention to the limitations of a dualistic mode of thinking in the globalization debate, although the effort to go beyond dualism had begun long before. According to Rorty (2004), Heidegger and Derrida had both attempted, and succeeded to some extent, in overcoming the barriers. In fact, Derrida went a step further to introduce a more dynamic world view, admitting interactions and diversification of social forces

(Ji, 2008). Yet, both schools of thought from which globalization theories had developed were handicapped in capturing the essence of interactions among various forces in the process of globalization, since convergence and divergence, homogenization and heterogenization, decentralization and recentralization, fragmentation and unification, global and local can be symbiotic, interactive, contradictory but also mutually transforming.

In addition to this “either-or” quandary, in media studies, it is difficult not to notice the excessive weight and attention placed on capitalist incentives, technological power, media influence and globalizing forces in our debate on modernization, communication, and media globalization. Swingewood (1998, pp. 2–5) noted that Marx never resolved the problem of “partial autonomy” of culture (and art), but it was not Marx’ intention to see culture and economic structure as dualistic dichotomies, either. Swingewood attributed much of the determinism to later generations of Marxists:

If the production of ideas depended on economic forces and class interests then culture itself could exercise no active role in social change. Given this canonized, functionalist interpretation of Marxism it is hardly surprising that Marxist theory failed to grasp the complexity of culture itself.

This lop-sided view often leads to the need for what Curran (1990) described as “revisionist movements” in communication research, when significant modifications of theoretical standpoints are introduced to both the critical and the pluralist camps. Within the Marxist tradition, the support for the *deterministic* impact of capitalism on culture and the close connection between economic interests and ideological representation began to erode when Foucault (Curran, 1990, p. 139) presented a sophisticated view of power relations rooted in social networks. In postmodernist research there had also been signs of shift, with greater attention paid to the workings of the power structure in eroding the autonomy of cultural workers. These efforts, as indicated by Curran (1990, p. 144), would not likely lead to a full convergence of the two theoretical standpoints should the way researchers conceptualize economic and political powers remain the same. Highly relevant to our discussion here is that what Curran saw as the barrier to convergence is also the reason that necessitates a revisionist movement in the first place; this was the case then – and now – for the study of media globalization.

Rather than attempting to solve the problem from a strictly disciplinary perspective, more ground may be gained if the dualistic model of reasoning that has affected theorizing in communication and globalization research is thoroughly examined. Stripped to its barest fundamentals, a dualistic model presents not just opposing binaries, but mutually exclusive dichotomies existing in tension, with constant tendencies of one overriding the other. A look at the European history of philosophy shows striking structural similarities in the grand narratives presented by great thinkers including Descartes (mind vs. body), Kant (noumena vs. phenomena), Sartre (existence vs. essence) and Nietzsche (sensuous and supersensuous). Although a good part of the critiques they received came from the flaws embedded in the model on which their theses were based, the attempt to transcend the model was successful only recently, as represented by the works of Heidegger and Derrida (Derrida, 1997; Heidegger, 1979; Ji, 2008). Given the powerful influence of dualism in the European scholastic tradition it is not difficult to understand why the discourse of globalization

and culture has also produced “a cluster of binaries agonizingly twisted around each other” (Zuberi, 2005, p. 106).

In this regard, the potential of the Yin and Yang mode of thinking,⁴ which was often misunderstood as the Chinese version of dualism, merits our attention.

The dualistic model is mechanical, according to Gunaratne (2005), but the Yin and Yang model is organic. The mechanical model features two mutually exclusive dichotomous forces existing in oppositional tension, the Yin and the Yang, on the other hand, are contrasting but mutually inclusive dynamic forces existing in ‘Chi’.⁵ As they are in contrast rather than bi-polar (Ji, 2008; Shen, 2002), their interaction can take various forms, including conflicting, clashing, but also mutually complementing, enriching, alternating and accomplishing. According to the *Book of Change*, it is only through the interaction of forces that the world can see new development and new structures.

More importantly, the continuous, endless interaction between the Yin and the Yang forces is neither spontaneous nor erratic; despite periodic confusion and deviation, overall they exhibit a relatively stable pattern of movement: Tao. Tao, therefore, is the pattern, regularities and order emerging from the movement of contrasting forces. Unlike dualism, Yin and Yang are not locked into an unequal, uncompromising power relation with one threatening to overtake the other; neither does Tao imply any perfect, permanent end-state as “truth” (“form”/“idea”) as in Plato’s vision of the *Phaedo*. Between sheer confusion and total stagnation, forces find their point of stability and equilibrium. Tao does not transcend real-world phenomena, and therefore is not metaphysical.

What we understand as the Yin/Yang world view is not a “model” in the methodological sense that we can readily apply to media and globalization research, yet the notions of the two as dynamic, contrasting yet mutually inclusive forces, and change as an ongoing process resulting from the interaction among such forces, is valuable. Change and continuity, from this perspective, describe the way the world carries on; as no one force necessarily possesses a pre-determined advantage, the direction and nature of change is seldom totally dictated by a particular party.

The failure of reality game shows in Greater China is more than a manifestation of how the choice and preference of local audiences relate back to production and content supply, one of the critical *linkages* that were largely overlooked in the literature; it also showed culture and economic forces as mutually inclusive, complementing and transforming – qualities that are better explained by a Yin and Yang, rather than a dualistic way of conceptualizing social forces. Hence the convergence of capitalism and culture as noted by Jameson does not rule out the manifestation of culture, *independent of* economic motives, through audience preferences and cultural production decisions.

There is more than one form of interaction between forces with more than one possible outcome; although in a limited time span, a force may exhibit greater advantage over the other, this imbalance is not necessarily perpetual. The Yin and Yang mode of thinking also underscores the need to conceptualize the audience as both passive and autonomous, as consumers who go after the new and the trendy, and as cultural beings who enjoy the stable and the familiar. As consumers, they are part of an economic, capitalist mechanism for profit making, yet within the constructed media environment they are active viewers anchored in their local world.

The question, therefore, is no longer just the adequacy of reasoning or evidence either to validate or invalidate assumptions, claims, or theories, but the way to conceptualize, observe, and analyze concepts and issues.

Given the dynamic nature of a concept like culture, a dualistic analytical model obviously has its limitations. As an instrument of concept building, Gunaratne (2005) noted, the strength of Yin/Yang dialectics lies precisely in its ability to capture the dynamics among elements of an analytical model. The question that remains to be answered is how an alternative way of conceptualizing key concepts can lead to the construction of an effective analytical model to fully grasp the fluidity in cultural phenomena.

Notes

1. Glocalization, meaning “global localization” was a term developed in Japan, referring to marketing strategies (Robertson, 1995, p. 173). In this study it was used in place of “indigenization” and “localization” to underscore the local/global nexus.
2. The arguments and case analyses were also presented in Wang, G. (2008), Reconceptualizing the Role of Culture in Media Globalization: Reality Television in Greater China, in *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, 24(1), 82–98.
3. Source of information on the shows includes Web information such as Wikipedia, and news reports and audience feedback in the newspapers and websites.
4. Given the complex lineages of its origin – some relating to geomancy and fortunetelling– Yin and Yang has more frequently been treated as a world view, or a mode of thinking, rather than a “model” in the strict methodological sense. The analyses on Yin and Yang in this paper are based on classical Chinese writings, including *Lao Tse, The Book of Change, The Annals of Lu Buwei*, etc.
5. There has been no consensus on the explanation of Yin/Yang in classical literature; some see it as two separate forces, but in this paper they are treated more as forces interacting within the unifying ‘Chi’ (energy).

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