

# Brand-new lifestyle: consumer-oriented programmes on Chinese television

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Consumer-oriented television programmes are regularly broadcast programmes covering a wide range of topics relating to the individual or household consumption process. Unlike advertisements or shopping programmes, their purpose is seen by the producers as providing a service to large numbers of viewers instead of selling specific products. With the development of the television industry and the rise of living standards in China in recent years, these programmes have flourished, taking on new formats dramatically different from the early service programmes produced for the general public as a whole. With corporate sponsorship as a key feature, these programmes teach viewers where to acquire and how to enjoy the latest products in the market, 'educate' them with modern skills of home decoration, entertaining and child care, and also caution them against the latest pitfalls in the market.

China's structural reform over the last two decades has affected different social groups unevenly, generating instability of personal identities as well as aspirations for upward mobility. At the same time, Chinese mass media have undergone immense changes in a process of commercialization, transforming from a propaganda tool for party edicts to a display window of consumer goods. In China's burgeoning consumer culture, television programmes play an important role in creating desire for and 'knowledge' of new products among aspiring groups.

As Chinese audiences demonstrate growing demand for programme choices, television stations are adopting programme formats popular in the West and loading in content that is approachable for local viewers. Programmes relating to consumption activities turn out to be a promising genre for many stations. Such programmes have achieved popularity in recent years at both national and local levels, and even gained international attention - a Beijing Television

Station programme, *Jojo Good Living*, was labelled 'China's Martha Stewart Show' in a *New York Times* report (French, 2004). Unlike imported programmes on homemaking and fashion trends featuring exotic products, these programmes usually use Chinese hosts to introduce new consumer items on the market to viewers, targeting a wide audience, from business managers to young housewives. With a close eye on local consumer market conditions, these programmes not only make unfamiliar commodities more accessible to Chinese consumers, but also carry a flexibility and agility to serve the needs of merchandise sponsors better than imported programmes.

Current consumer-oriented television programmes in China can be divided into three basic types, based on their content, style and target groups. The first type of programmes provides viewers with the latest product information and market trends, usually for high-tech consumer items, newly imported luxury goods and new types of leisure services. China Central Television's (CCTV's) *Frontier* (Qian Yan) is a representative of this category.

The second type of programmes mainly aims to arm viewers with self-protective knowledge necessary for surviving in a market with abundant counterfeit and poor-quality commodities. Drawing on consumer sentiments of vulnerability and insecurity, these programmes play a supporting role in the government 'anti-counterfeit' campaign and raise awareness of consumer rights. They provide viewers with tips for distinguishing products of different qualities, expose businesses that produce and hawk harmful and dangerous products, and warn about new pitfalls and scams in the market. CCTV's regular show *Life 315* is a showcase for this kind of programme. The title comes from the intention of raising public awareness of 15 March, which has been designated International Consumer Rights Day.

The third type of programmes emphasizes the cultivation of the 'tastes' of viewers, especially young urban consumers, offering to enhance their skills in their efforts to 'modernize' their lifestyles. Topics range from how to cook Western food and how to make a hand-painted flower pot, to how to improve lighting in their apartments. These programmes are more indirect in promoting new commodities, often stressing a 'hands-on approach' and 'individual creativity' in improving the audience's lifestyle, although they rely heavily on product placements. Beijing Television Station's *JoJo Good Living* is analyzed in this article as representative of these programmes. In the next section, I provide case analysis of each of the programmes, based on research of Chinese industry publications, programme websites and news reports.

### Consumer-oriented programmes in the West

Consumer-oriented programmes on television have a much longer history and much more detailed subdivisions in the West. In the United States, these shows emerged in the economic boom after the Second World War. For

example, 1950s shows such as *At Your Service* promoted sales of the latest gadgets and appliances like vacuum cleaners and lawn mowers to suburban families. Television served as 'the primary site of exhibition' of new consumer goods in domestic life in post-war America (Spigel, 1985), introducing housewives to new consumption patterns, such as the 'TV dinner'. Television also educated Americans about French cuisine and changed the perceptions of Americans about French food, and cooking show hosts like Julia Child and Graham Kerr became celebrities (Adema, 2000). In later years, programmes on gardening, home improvement, food and travel flourished with the development of cable television and special-interest channels. In the 1980s, Martha Stewart came under the spotlight and built an empire of household consumption, including a magazine, *Martha Stewart Living*, books, a mail-order business, a newspaper column, endorsements and television shows. Her influence among American public is so powerful that news reports about her legal troubles made national headlines for months, and even her brief imprisonment did not erode her popularity.

In Britain, prime-time programmes in the past mainly featured news, documentaries, current affairs programmes and dramas, while programmes on hobbies and leisure activities were considered generally as daytime genres. Since the early 1990s, there has been a marked increase in lifestyle programming on cooking, home decoration, fashion and gardening, making them prevalent in the evening prime-time slot. While some media scholars look at this change as a sign of the deterioration of public service television, others see it as the democratization of taste and television (Brunsdon, 2003). The *European Journal of Communication* published a special issue in 2002 on the increasing popularity of lifestyle programmes in Europe. In one of the articles, Taylor (2002) examines the popularity of such programmes in British prime-time television, and points to a shift from civic to consumer culture in contemporary society. Taylor suggests that, at the local level, 'lifestyle' is replacing the traditional 'way of life'. With the vested economic interests of the media, culture and leisure industries involved, lifestyle programmes encourage viewers to invest in lifestyle projects as an expression of individual personality, translating lifestyle ideas from the symbolic repertoires offered by consumer culture.

### Television, modernization and class identities

Scholars have suggested that the ideological messages in television play an important role in the constitution of middle-class identities and the creation of new consumer societies in different parts of the world (Liechty, 2002). In a research study on contemporary Indian women audiences, Mankekar (1999) points out how television targets the viewers' desire for the middle-class and modern lifestyle. Television confers on goods values that resonate with the viewers' aspirations and anxieties as they struggle to consolidate

their middle-class status. It is important to examine the construction of the viewers' subjectivities through the constitution of their desire (1999: 94).

Currently China is undergoing a second revolution, with a potential impact no less profound than that of Mao Zedong's first revolution (Davis, 2000). From the beginning of economic reform in 1978 to the year 2002, urban incomes have been rising by an astounding average of 14 percent a year (*Economist*, 2004). While Mao's revolution radically altered Chinese social, economic and political structures, the consumer revolution initiated by Deng Xiaoping is reshaping China through the market economy and private entrepreneurship. In the Mao years, in which people's needs were determined by the state, foreigners visiting China saw everyone on the street wearing identical blue cotton pants and jackets, which earned China the label, the land of 'blue ants'. Today, the increased supply of consumer goods in China has made it possible for people to have abundant choices in the market.

Given the transforming social structure and power relations, it is difficult to set a clear standard for class differentiation in contemporary China. While the term 'middle class' is already highly debatable in the West, it is even more problematic to apply to the case of China. In the past, the notion of class in China imbricated two models of stratification (Kraus, 1981). The first was the 'stratification of class designation', which was primarily political in nature. Its hierarchical designations specified 'categories which were clearly bad, such as capitalist and landlord, through the intermediate designations of petty bourgeoisie and middle peasant, to the workers and poor peasants in whose name the revolution has been made' (1981: 20). The second model was the 'stratification of occupational rank', with income and education levels as the major standards. Both of the models have become questionable in recent years, as China's transformation has created new status symbols, new standards for individual success, and new ideals of masculinity and femininity. Class stratification has become more complicated and unstable.

In an age of drastic social restructuring, the 'middle class' should not be seen as a unified single entity. Stivens (1998: 15) suggests that, in Asia's 'new rich' categories, there is an upper stratum of capitalists, managers and members of political elites, and a middle stratum of smaller business owners, mid-level managers and entrepreneurs, salaried men and women and clerical and administrative groupings. Some of the groups are newly emerging, while others are more long-standing. It might be useful to consider the Asian middle strata as comprising a number of classes or class fractions. In the economic reform in China, different groups in the same middle strata might have conflicting interests and hold varied expectations about their future status. In some cases, working-class members see themselves as part of the emerging entrepreneur group, with greater income potential than the better-educated state employees.

Zhao (2003) contends that the emerging urban middle class has become part of the newly reconstituted power bloc in China. As the favoured consumers of both domestic and transnational capital, this group, together with

the bureaucratic capitalists of a reformed Party state and transnational capital, has assumed hegemonic dominance of the communicative processes both in and outside China, although this process has been highly contentious. An article in *Fortune* magazine points out:

China's once egalitarian society has developed a wealth gap that is among the widest in the world. By most estimates, the richest 20% of China's population controls more than 80% of the wealth.... The World Bank estimates that more than 400 million live on less than \$2 a day. (Chandler et al., 2004: 152)

Understandably the meaning of 'middle class' in the Chinese context is very different from that of 'middle class' in the West, when the huge differences in consuming power and lifestyle are taken into consideration. Critics point out that China's middle class is severely underdeveloped, representing only a small portion of the total workforce; therefore, the 'Chinese middle class' is, in fact, a minority at the top of the social hierarchy (He, 2000). According to the criteria of Fan Gong, director of China's National Economic Research Institute, the 'middle class' in China has a family income of more than US \$10,000, and the number of people fitting the criteria has reached 200 million, but economists have vastly different estimates (Meredith, 2004). The World Tourism Organization reports that, in 2003, 20 million Chinese travelled abroad, and this number was expected to quintuple by 2020. The digital camera industry is also likely to develop at a similar pace: in 2003 over 1.4 million digital cameras were sold in China (Meredith, 2004).

While China's pattern of burgeoning consumerism and integration into the global economy resembles the process that other Asian countries have gone through, what makes the case of China special is the tremendous ideological transformation (Hooper, 1998). For several decades, the Communist Party ruling China imposed a virtual cult of austerity in an officially sponsored atmosphere of extreme self-denial. After the start of economic reform in the late 1970s, this cult of austerity gave way to one of consumption, with encouragement not only from domestic and international businesses but also from the government-controlled mass media. Since the 1980s, public discourse has taken on varying degrees of hedonism with the proliferation of consumerism, individualism and self-reliance (Ci, 1994). Mass media in China have created a highly visible culture of consumption, introducing people to the world of personal desires through images of the 'good' life, beauty and success. With the Chinese television industry relying more and more on commercial sponsorship, television stations and advertisers realize that it is not just the size of the audience that matters. They are trying to attract for their programmes more viewers with real consumption power, with the emerging urban middle-class population as a specific target. Chinese audiences are surrounded by various sorts of advertisements, infomercials and shopping programmes, some of which openly proclaim their goal as making the viewer a knowledgeable and sophisticated consumer.

## Consumer-oriented television programmes in China

### Early efforts

Two decades ago, there were very few consumption-oriented programmes in Chinese television. Those available to the audience, such as CCTV's *Wei Ning Fuwu (At Your Service)*, were aimed at general viewers as a whole. The programmes provided viewers with knowledge and ideas about everyday household life without much consideration of the socioeconomic differences among the viewers. With the beginning of consumer revolution in China, and the increasing abundance of television formats and programmes, this genre gradually took on new forms and styles.

Infomercial programmes on Chinese television initially served mainly government or business clients, often providing information for state enterprises and private entrepreneurs by acting as trade fairs. For example, *Economy in Half an Hour (Jingji Ban Xiaoshi)*, on air since 1989, has been a trademark of CCTV's Economy Channel. In the last decade, programmes aimed at individual consumers gradually took shape. In 1995, Beijing Television Station premiered China's first TV-shopping programme, and this genre has been flourishing in many major television stations. The government takes the stance that the incursion of Western-style infomercials should be encouraged as a chance to bring in Western marketing techniques, although modifications and improvements are needed for the 'new practice' of home shopping.

In July 1996, CCTV launched a regular magazine programme, *Life (Shenghuo)*, focusing on new consumption trends and lifestyle in China. According to Yang Weiguang, chief of the television station at that time, the purpose of the programme was to 'adapt to the changes in the economy and people's lives in the era of transiting from socialist planned economy to socialist market economy'. CCTV intended to create a programme to 'get close to people and their lives, and guide scientific consumption and raise the quality of life' (Liu, 1999: 110). With 'the largest consuming group' of China in mind, the producers of the programme defined their target audience as 'the salary class' with monthly family income around 2000 yuan, and a mid-level educational background. At that time, the monthly income of an average factory worker in China was 400-600 yuan. A Gallup poll showed that, in 1998, China's average annual household income was 8000 yuan, while in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing the figures were 21,600 yuan, 20,000 yuan and 16,000 yuan, respectively (Li, 1998). Apparently the television station was shifting its direction, from serving 'the masses' to serving specific socioeconomic groups with purchasing power that made them relatively attractive to the sponsors of the programme at that time.

*Life* regularly reported new consumption trends in urban China, such as ordering fast-food by telephone from home, buying pre-cleaned and sorted vegetables, sending friends New Year greetings through beepers and cell

phones instead of visiting in person, and purchasing health club memberships. The programme particularly addresses the increasing shift in Chinese society towards the improvement of quality of domestic life. For example, in a mini-serial titled *The Symphony of Dishes, Bowls, Pots and Pans*, broadcast in 1998, the *Life* programme informed its audience of the functions and handling tips of high-pressure pots, non-stick pans, electric rice cookers, gas stoves and antiseptic dish cabinets, and introduced to viewers the notion of the environment-friendly kitchen (Liu, 1999).

Less than a year later, the prime-time half-hour programme increased its frequency from three to six episodes a week, with every episode rebroadcast during daytime hours. It became one of the most popular programmes on CCTV's Channel Two. Starting with this programme, CCTV has created more consumer-oriented shows, with more detailed division of content and more varieties of format.

### Frontier - representative of trend guide programmes

In 2003, CCTV combined three shows that focused on computer technology, real estate and automobiles respectively, and created a programme called *Frontier (Qian Yan)*. According to the CCTV website, the goal of the programme is to provide for the 'urban core consumer group' a programme of 'guidance and positive influence' on their consumption and investment activities. It focuses on useful and timely information on the 'frontier of consumption', with five major areas, consisting of real estate, automobiles, telecommunication, tourism and fashion. The programme is broadcast by CCTV Channel Two every weekday at prime time and re-run the next day. It has a male and a female host, who report and comment on the latest consumer information and hot trends, bringing some 'personality and attitude' to the programme (CCTV, 2005).

One set of episodes in *Frontier* broadcast in late 2004 and early 2005 is called 'Small Town Impressions', which promotes self-guided car travel. The episodes encourage viewers to become 'adventurers' and 'explorers', to visit ancient towns, villages and tribes 'hidden in every corner of the motherland'. Covering a 40-day trip by the CCTV crew through 50 small towns in various parts of China, the programme provides viewers with travel route, lodging and food information, assuring them of wonderful experience with flavours of local cultures, primitive customs and ancient history, as well as beautiful scenery. At a time in which a private-owned automobile is becoming the status symbol of the successful and affluent, such a programme is indeed addressing the increasing desire for status, autonomy and leisure activities with 'class'. Obviously, this programme is not produced for the underprivileged factory workers who are trying to make ends meet.

Travel topics in *Frontier* also include trips to foreign countries that have become open to Chinese tourists, providing information on major attractions

and travel agency prices for joining a specific group tour. For example, during the 2004 Chinese Spring Festival vacation period, *Frontier's* episode on 7 January 2004 introduces an 8-day trip to Germany from Beijing, priced at 15,800 yuan. The episode on 8 January 2004 introduces a 10-day trip to Cuba from Beijing. The host provides an appealing account of the trip:

Cuba is the largest and most beautiful island country in the Caribbean. It is the favourite tourist spot of people in the Americas, and it is also the first country opening to Chinese tourists. In the trip you will not only enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Caribbean, but also learn about the uniqueness of the Cuban people.

The host goes on to describe the attractions of Cuba, including tracing the footsteps of Ernest Hemingway, enjoying the Latin music and dance of the Cuban people, learning about the nationalist revolution by Castro in the Revolution Museum, and listening to the stories of Che Guavara ... The tour has a price tag of 21,000 yuan.

For the 'Golden Week' of early May, the column introduces a 'Golden Tour' from Beijing to Egypt, priced at 14,800 yuan. Information on tours to other countries, such as Australia, Indonesia, Hungary and Cambodia also are part of the show's coverage in 2004.

New gadgets introduced in *Frontier* provide high-income busy professionals with status as well as convenience. An episode on 20 May 2004 introduces one Shenzhen resident who owns a cell phone with a wireless connection to the computer camera at home, which enables him to monitor the work of the nanny. The host explains that, with this kind of cell phone, it is also possible to watch from home the situation in his office and garage. An episode on 10 January 2004 informs pet-owners of the functions of an electronic pet locator, which can be easily attached to a dog collar as it weighs little and is neatly shaped. This device would relieve the owners of the worry of their dogs running away. Robot vacuum cleaners, home theatre systems and MP3s with feminine or masculine designs are also featured in the programme.

In addition to trends in luxury automobiles, home fashions and high-tech devices, the *Frontier* programme also provides guides to cultural events and weekend getaways for the elite consumer groups. When the musical *Cats* made its tour to Beijing in April 2004, the programme reported that local actors had a chance to perform with the international artists in the People's Great Hall. *Frontier* also introduced to viewers the opening of the largest rodeo ground in Beijing in late May 2004, and reported on the performance of a group of 25 cowboys from Texas and Utah.

#### *Life 315 - a representative of scam warning programmes*

CCTV's Life Channel has a series of regular shows, ranging from real-life stories of ordinary people to tips on household management. Traditional

shows, such as *At Your Service*, typically offer viewers knowledge of how to remake old clothes, or the alternative uses of toothpaste, including serving as shaving cream, drinking glass detergent and graffiti eraser. One of the shows, *Life 315*, represents a new brand of consumer-oriented programme, finding its niche in an environment where consumers are full of fear and worry about counterfeit and shoddy products but short of legal help.

The homepage of *Life 315* states its goal as 'preserving rights, cracking down on counterfeit, and serving public livelihood'. It asks for news tips to its telephone hotline with the slogan: 'When counterfeit and shoddy goods emerge, when legal rights are violated, when fair trade is threatened, when individual dignities are challenged, *Life 315* will be there.' This programme targets urban viewers with average incomes, and warns them about traps and scams in their everyday consumption activities. It can be regarded as an interesting example of the monitoring function of mass media with Chinese characteristics.

An episode on 19 October 2004, 'Secret of the Telephone Stand', exposes cheating behaviours at telephone stands with attractive long-distance prices. The reporter follows a tip, arrives at a neighbourhood near the border of the city, and comes upon several telephone stands with price tags of only 0.20 yuan per minute for long-distance calls. The reporter uses a stopwatch while making a telephone call and finds that the meter at the stand goes to one minute while the stopwatch indicates only 49 seconds.

When counterfeit and poor-quality goods cause serious consequences for consumers and attract national attention, this kind of television programme would usually follow related stories and address audience concerns. In 2004, poor-quality milk powder produced in Fuyang, Anhui province, led to serious malnutrition syndrome in more than 100 infants, and among them 13 infants died. Most of the victims were from poor families who could not afford more expensive and reliable brands of milk powder for the children. An episode on 22 April 2004, 'Suspicious Milk Powder Appears in Wenzhou', addresses the public concern about similar products in other regions in China. A reporter visits a milk powder factory in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, and discovers that products with nice packaging claiming to be made from 100 percent pure milk from a natural ranch in Inner Mongolia were made with ingredients of little nutritional value in an unhygienic workshop.

This programme also exposes pitfalls that migrant populations often encounter in a new metropolitan area. In an episode on 17 February 2004, a migrant worker from a poor county in Guangxi province describes his experience with a job agency at Nanning, the provincial capital. The young man recounts that, as soon as he stepped out of the train, the agency representative took him in, offered him a job in a company and charged him 50 yuan, which was all he had with him. After taking a look at the company the man found the real situation totally different from the description of the job agency. He went back to the representative and demanded a refund but was rejected. With no money to return to his hometown, the young man eventually sought help

from the city commerce monitoring patrol, and once again tried to get a refund. This time the job agency had to take it seriously.

Products exposed in the programme range from pork injected with water, rice powder bleached with harmful chemicals and soft drinks made from tap water and artificial colour, to low-quality cigarettes produced in dirty village workshops, but wrapped in delicately printed Marlboro packages. Considering the nationwide scope of the programme coverage and the well-publicized hot-line for victimized consumers to call in, it seems the television station does not have to worry about sourcing stories for this show.

#### *Jojo Good Living - a new kind of lifestyle programme*

Beijing TV Station's weekly lifestyle programme *Jojo Good Living* started broadcasting in 2002 and later became available nationwide on cable television's Tourism Channel. The programme has four sections: Western cooking, home craft, party preparation and gardening. This programme is reported in the Chinese media as a pioneer in specializing in 'domestic petty-bourgeois taste' (Zeng, 2002). What makes the programme stand out from similar programmes is the Western lifestyle it faithfully promotes among the Chinese viewers. A *New York Times* report labels the host, Ms Zhou Zhu, as 'China's Martha Stewart'. The paper quotes her as declaring:

We have tie-ins with McCormick spices, with the Fissler pots and pans you see, Fanini cabinets, a German floor-maker, with Starbucks, and even with Toto toilets.... We try to work products into the show, and don't do too much on-screen advertising, though, because that might ruin our credibility. (French, 2004)

According to the homepage of *Jojo Good Living*, Ms Zhou Zhu runs her own international media company, works as columnist for the lifestyle sections of a dozen newspapers and magazines in China, and also operates an American-style chain of English-language preschools. The homepage also informs audience that she comes from a diplomatic family, lived abroad for more than a dozen years and has a happy international family. She holds a master's degree from Columbia University, as well as having years of work experience at the United Nations and in Wall Street (Beijing Television Station, 2004).

Ms Zhou Zhu emphasizes that her programme teaches viewers the pleasures and skills of 'creating a better life with their own hands', such as baking a heart-shaped cake, throwing a birthday party for the family's only child, and making a cocktail drink. It also teaches viewers how to combine different traditions in homemaking, for example, making a diced-chicken pizza, having a British-style afternoon tea and decorating the home with Japanese flower arrangements. The set for the programme is a luxurious three-storey house in Beijing's newly developed Purple Jade Villa Compound, supplied by the real estate developer to the television programme to promote villa sales. The villa

comes with state-of-the-art kitchen appliances and imported furniture, a large backyard, with access to the huge community garden and artificial lake.

Meanwhile, many people raise doubts that *Jojo Good Living* might be too 'advanced' for the consumption level of Chinese families. For example, when a backyard barbecue was featured in the programme, people wondered where one could find a grill in the market, and how many among the viewers would have a backyard (French, 2004). According to the programme's website (Beijing Television Station, 2004), young urban women make up most of the audience - only 6 percent of the programme's viewers are over 40, more than 70 percent of the viewers are between the ages of 25 and 35, and almost 80 percent of the viewers are married. Also, the majority of the viewers hold college degrees. It seems that this socioeconomic group is the ideal demographic target that advertisers of new consumer products in China are interested in. Among young people, there is more and more interest in media outlets from which they can acquire such knowledge, and experience the virtual pleasure of consuming exotic dishes in a perfectly furnished setting filled with modern appliances and luxury household items. Lifestyle programmes may be demonstrating consumption items that are only available to a small group of Chinese elite who can afford the latest luxury items, while a large portion of the viewers are probably aspiring young people interested in watching and learning about a way of life that is desirable but not yet reachable.

#### **Television and the creation of class subjectivities**

In China's transition to a culture of consumption, mass media are spreading the notion that thrift and self-denial are outdated virtues. Television opens a window for the audience to imagine an idealized leisure life. While pursuing the business of the new elite, corporate sponsors are also cultivating brand awareness among a new generation of Chinese consumers who are expected to grow in their spending power. Many of the Chinese television programmes are mainly fabulous displays of exotic living environments and foreign household items, far-fetched in relation to realistic household budgets. As corporate investors await the expansion of consumer spending power in emerging economies, advertisers are making the best effort to 'instill desire in nascent consumers and to inculcate new concepts of the self, 'educating' them with skills on how to create and display one's subjectivity through market activities (James, 1995).

In the imaginative processes of identity formation, television enables viewers to partially identify with a global consumer culture through their aspirations and 'taste'. The viewers' self-association with a new lifestyle contributes to the construction of their subjectivities as citizens in a 'modern', global, capitalist world. Consumption of images of Western media culture gives them a sense of connection with the 'advanced' part of the world, a sense of overcoming the limitations of their own location. It provides them with a chance to learn to

adopt new status symbols, and to express to other viewers their dissatisfactions with their own environment and yearnings for greater personal freedoms.

In China's globalization process and in the contemporary transformation of social hierarchy, knowledge and consumption of various kinds of Western merchandise becomes cultural capital, which distinguishes the privileged groups from the masses. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1984), a society's culture is as unequally distributed as its material wealth, and it also serves to identify class interests and to promote and naturalize class differences. Cultural capital is a means by which distinctions between social classes can be expressed and reinforced. In Western societies, experiences of international travel, familiarity with exotic flavours, and appreciation of homes and gardens have long been regarded as part of cultural capital. In the process of China's entry into the world market, the access, ability and the 'taste' to enjoy Western leisure products has become 'cultural capital' for certain groups of the Chinese television audience. Thus, it is understandable that the viewer demographics of *Jojo Good Living* would deviate from that of the average viewing public.

### Conclusion - toward television audience segmentation

In the transformation to consumer culture, the Chinese public is seeking new channels to create and display one's subjectivity through different leisure activities, but at the same time the process is accompanied by caution and wariness, especially from those who find themselves at a disadvantaged position in the new environment. While ordinary citizens attempt to make sense of the influx of new images and new symbols, the quest for consumer knowledge becomes an influential factor behind the growth of various formats of consumer-oriented programmes. As individuals lack legal protections against sprouting scams and counterfeits in the marketplace, television shows like *Life 315* fill the need of a certain sector of the audience, who seek affordable products but are filled with worries about being victimized by deceitful business practices.

The increasing presence of the middle class has been playing a visible role in the evolution of new programme styles in the Chinese television industry. In television industry journals published in China, critics point to a tendency of stations producing programmes to 'narrowcast' toward specific segments of the society instead of the general public or the masses (Chen, 2004). The segmentation of viewer groups may be along lines of gender, age and geographic area, or income and education level. While some critics claim this is a sign that the Chinese television industry is becoming more mature, others express their concerns over the potential disorientation of the media system and the neglect of the needs of the majority in society. While income gaps between different segments of television viewers in China start to widen, television stations are packaging their programmes for specific audience groups. This is particularly evident in consumer-oriented programmes.

Scholars traditionally regard the broadcast media as central agents of the nation, with tasks including the mediation of modernity, the normalization of the public sphere and the socialization of the private sphere, through the continuous production and reproduction of public life and mundane life (Morley, 1992). However, in the dynamics of globalization and local adaptation, there has been greater pluralism of cultural choices in mass media, bringing new forms of modernization to pursue (Sinclair and Harrison, 2004). Although the Chinese government has used television as an important tool in promoting a state-wide modernization drive since the birth of the industry in the 1950s, under current circumstances it is questionable to what extent television is still performing the role of agent of national culture in China. In an age of post-Communist ideological illusion, it seems that increasing cultural hybridity has started to 'spill out over the constrictive molds of a fixed, state-spatialized Chinese identity and homogeneous national culture' (Yang, 1997: 309).

While the dynamics of the global consumer culture provide opportunities for individuals to strive for improvement in their positions, it also defines their endeavours for empowerment and self-expression in the direction of consumption. The sense of 'creativity' and 'empowerment' offered by the new media culture to the viewers is often linked to their position as individual consumers, which is not equally available to the audience in various segments of society. Instead of serving the general public as a single entity, television is assuming the role of creating and distributing various forms of new cultural capital in a globalized economy. In the interplay of market and cultural forces, the practices of television stations contribute to the segmentation of audience based on individual consumption power and position in the market economy. By reaffirming the privileges of the elite and enticing the desire of the aspiring groups, consumer-oriented programmes in China are embodying and reinforcing the increasingly visible class divisions in society.

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