POPULAR CULTURE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE IN THE GREATER CHINA REGIONAL MEDIA MARKET: A CASE STUDY OF TAIWAN SYMBOL CREATOR CHIUNGYAO'S HUANZHU GEGE TV DRAMA TRILOGY

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

ShaoChun Cheng
March 2007
This dissertation entitled

POPULAR CULTURE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE IN THE GREATER CHINA REGIONAL MEDIA MARKET: A CASE STUDY OF TAIWAN SYMBOL CREATOR CHIUNGYAO’S HUANZHU GEGE TV DRAMA TRILOGY

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Abstract

CHENG, SHAOCHUN, Ph.D., March 2007, Mass Communication

POPULAR CULTURE PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE IN THE GREATER CHINA REGIONAL MEDIA MARKET: A CASE STUDY OF TAIWAN SYMBOL CREATOR CHIUNGYAO’S HUANZHU GEGE TV DRAMA TRILOGY (227 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Drew McDaniel

Using well-known Taiwanese cultural worker Chiungyao’s mainland China-based TV drama production the Huanzhu Gege series as a case study, this dissertation examines the operational logic of a regional media market, the Greater China media market, consisting of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong. The process of cultural production within a regional media market is cumulative and aims to take advantage of regional division of cultural labor to address the complicated cultural flows of the globalization era, which will be illustrated in this analysis.

Following Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory, this dissertation also argues that popular culture production within a regional media market can be seen as a result of the interactions between the structural factors and human agency. Structural factors - center/periphery structural asymmetry, geopolitics, economics, communication technology and media policies adopted by nation-states - provide a contextual framework for cultural workers to exert their agency, such as cultural identity/proximity, interpersonal networking, the employment of localized genre and the cultural worker’s authorship. Through the case study of Chiungyao’s successful creative career within the Greater China media market, the author believes that the creative agency is one of the most important vehicles available for the cultural workers to break the structural asymmetry within a regional media market.
Finally, through the analysis of Chiungyao’s cultural production, the author demonstrates that media regionalization, which is represented by the operation of a regional media market, with the conjuncture of migration, technology, cultural identity, and globalizing flexible capital accumulation can serve as an important channel leading to media globalization.

Approved:

Drew McDaniel

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Acknowledgments

I vividly remember a single quite autumn afternoon in 2000. Taking a leisurely walk along the Hocking River, beguiled by the picturesque scenery of Athens in the fall, I thanked God from the bottom of my heart for his grace in giving me the opportunity to study at Ohio University. What I didn’t know at the time, however, was how bumpy the road to my doctoral degree would be.

With the completion of this dissertation, my turbulent journey from Taiwan to Athens, Ohio finally comes to an end. At this point, I only have gratitude and appreciation on my mind. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the following persons who helped me through my dissertation project including my advisor Dr. Drew McDaniel and my committee members, Dr. Duncan Brown, Dr. Roger Aden and Dr. Kim Sung Ho, each of whom have provided excellent guidance and generous support during my project.

I would also like to express my appreciation for my friends, Li Li, Li Yan, Hsin-I Liu, Margit Hawelleck and Erica Butcher, who encouraged me to complete my dissertation. Friends in Beijing, Xi (Lucy) Liu, Jing Wu, and Li Gang, the capable brother of Li Li, also contributed to the success of my data collection in the summer of 2004.

Finally, I thank my family for their support. Without them, I could not have finished this dissertation project. In 2003, I lost my dearest second eldest sister, Si-ming Cheng. I believe she and my parents, Yuan-chi Cheng and Zhi-jun Niu, in heaven would be glad to know that I have finally completed my project. I am deeply indebted to my eldest sister, Chi-ming Cheng, for her financial and spiritual support during my stay in Athens. I still can recall her encouraging words during many international telephone calls when I was depressed. Those words are the most
powerful force in helping me make through the darkest moments of my days in Athens.

Six and half years after that autumn afternoon in 2000, I want to say goodbye to Athens. With all the knowledge and humbleness I learned here, I look forward to making a fresh new start. Page
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have once heard an argument that there are only two kinds of Chinese people in the world, those who know Chiungyao (瓊瑤) and those who don’t.

----Ping Xin-tao (平鑫濤), 2004, p.198

Xiaoyanzi (小燕子, Little Swallow) is one of the most popular fictional characters in China’s television history ever, maybe only next to the Monkey King.

----Cheng Hong (程宏), programming director of Chinese Central Television, personal communication, July 14, 2004

In May 1998, a whirlwind of “Xiaoyanzi” invaded Chinese television screens worldwide without any warning. Starting in Taiwan and then spreading into China’s Hunan Province, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, urban centers and small rural towns alike became infatuated with the fictional heroine Huanzhu Gege (還珠格格, The Returned Pearl Princess) from the television drama serial. Two years after the Huanzhu Gege trilogy (1998-2003) first aired, I asked a female Chinese student at a gathering in the college town of Athens, Ohio, about the popularity of this show in Mainland China. She answered, with a twist on a Chinese literary idiom, that the popularity of this show was “making thousands of people instantly disappear from the streets and alleys” (萬人空巷, Wanren Kangxiang). The charisma of the young, petite, impetuous and illiterate

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1With the exception of 瓊瑤 which is romanized in wade-Giles spelling system as “Chiungyao,” the other Chinese names and terminologies in this dissertation are expressed using Hanyu pinyin spellings. This choice is made by the fact that 瓊瑤 is a household name in Chinese communities worldwide, and “Chiungyao” is the English name she has used for a long time.

2Chiungyao’s Huanzhu Gege ensemble is composed of three consecutive drama serials. All three serials were first aired by Taiwan’s China Television Company (CTV). The first serial has 24 episodes and started on April 28,1998; the second serial has 48 episodes which was first broadcast on April 21, 1999; and the third serial has 40 episodes which was begun by July 7, 2003. Among the three installments, the first serial is the most popular one. However, what makes its popularity change will be another issue I will grapple with in a later chapter.

3The original meaning of “Wanren Kangxiang” is to describe when a celebrity comes to town, he/she will make everybody in town turn out to, see him/her. However, I think this misusage of this Chinese idiom is a cunning and right one. This is because today people’s contacts with these celebrities are basically through cultural technologies such as TV, movies or the internet. So she used “Wanren Kangxiang” to visualize the scenarios when the show was on, then everybody was rushing back to the
television heroine did not impact only Taiwan and China, however. In the following year, Hong Kong and Singapore as well as ethnic Chinese communities in Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Australia followed suit. The show’s popularity was also documented in countries as far as Mongolia and Croatia and in North America and Europe. One after another, fans became hooked on this Taiwan and China television drama co-production.

*Huanzhu Gege* is not without a history. It is the latest work of Chiungyao, a legendary Taiwanese symbol creator. This productive woman is a romance writer, filmmaker, pop music lyricist, and television drama producer. In many respects, Chiungyao represents the best of Taiwanese popular culture. Given her multiple cultural production sites, productivity and wide-spread popularity, it is fair to say she is the creator of one of the most successful Taiwanese cultural franchises. Beginning with her first novel, *Outside the Window* (*窗外*, Chuangwai) published in 1965, Chiungyao has published 60 books. Among them, 50 novels or novellas have been adapted for the big screen and, of these, 16 were produced by she and her husband and professional partner, Ping Xin-tao. She has also written lyrics for more than 200 pop songs. Chiungyao and Ping have produced 22 popular television drama serials, each one based on her novels. Some, such as the *Huanzhu Gege* serials, she wrote herself. Composed of 112 episodes filmed over five years (Ping, 2004), *Huanzhu Gege* has been the most commercially

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TV sets in their households, actually providing a much more vivid explanation of the huge popularity of this drama in China at that time.

4In this dissertation, “Taiwan” and “China” (or “the Mainland China”) are used to refer to the geographil and politically defined polities, namely The Republic of China and People’s Republic of China. When “Taiwanese” is used as a noun, it refers to the people who live on the island Taiwan, who are of Chinese descent and migrated from China’s coastal area some 400 years ago. On the other hand, “Chinese” as a noun is used to refer the people who live in mainland China. However, the adjective “Chineseness” is used to refer things or people who are born of “Chineseness,” or using scholar Tu Wei-ming’s (1994) concept, the things or people coming from “cultural China.” According to Tu, it represents a cultural space “that both encompasses and transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries that normally define Chineseness” (Tu 1994, p. v).
successful, as well as the most popular. Her popularity in the global Chinese community is matched only by one other, Hong Kong martial arts, or ‘wuxia’, writer, Jin Yong (金庸).

Chiungyao is one of the definitive symbols of Taiwanese popular culture, both in terms of domestic consumption and overseas export. With her best-selling novels, popular films and television dramas, Chiungyao has become a household name. The word “Chiungyao” has also become more than simply the pseudonym of a Taiwanese female romance writer; it has become an idiom for love and affection among modern Chinese. For example, when a Chinese girl is called “Chiungyaoish,” this implies that the girl is dreamy, sentimental, unworldly, and probably has long straight hair, a fair face and slender physique. Similarly, when “Chiungyaoish” is used to describe a young man, it implies that he is tall, handsome, well-educated, and in most cases, from the upper class. Love affairs can also be “Chiungyaoish,” if they are turbulent, passionate and dramatic, but at the same time, spiritual in nature without becoming overly occupied with erotic desire. Those who draw this description are generally wholly devoted to love and willing to sacrifice anything for it. These stereotypes, or clichés, about heterosexual love among Chinese mainly come from Chiungyao’s works. Chiungyao’s romance has built an “imagination of romantic love’ for millions of ordinary Chinese people and has also been transformed into a “habitus of love.”

Western stereotypical impressions, as well as self

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5 Jin Yong has written 15 martial art sagas and most of them have been adapted into movies or television serials repeatedly by studios in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and mainland China (Wikipedia, 2006).

6 “Habitus” is used by Pierre Bourdieu to refer a complex human psychological structure produced and reproduced by objective conditions, historical context, and social class status, which psychological structure starts to become second nature. Using his own words, the habitus means “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Here I use the “love habitus” to describe the fact that ordinary Chinese people’s outlooks on love have been unconsciously influenced by Chiungyao’s romance fictions.
representations of some of the best-known Chinese writers and filmmakers,\(^7\) imply that Chinese people are reticent and shy about expressing affection; yet, Chiungyao’s fictional heroes and heroines are all unabashed defenders of love who “take love as their beliefs” (Chiungyao, 2003, p.1101).

The immense popularity of Chiungyao’s works among generations of audiences, especially “female audiences,”\(^8\) however, seems to keep her from getting the respect in Chinese societies to which she is entitled. Her books occupied the top slots of the best-selling charts, her movies saturated theaters on holidays the whole year round during the ‘Golden Era’ of Taiwan’s movie industry, and the pop music hooks from her movies’ title songs were often unconsciously hummed by the youth. And now, in the age of globalization, one finds that “Chiungyao” has become a common parlance in the Chinese mediascape. There is, however, an “ideology of mass culture” (Ang, 1985) bestowed on Chiungyao at the same time. In Ang’s words, the “ideology of mass culture” indicates that some very popular cultural products “are tout court labelled ‘bad mass culture.’”

‘Mass culture’ is a denigrating term, which arouses definitely negative associations” (Ang, 1985, p. 94), and because of this ideology, the popular culture product has been regarded “by definition as a ‘bad object’ and [makes] it an easy subject for mockery and parody” (Ang, 1985, p. 98). For example, Chiungyao is still rarely mentioned by academics and intellectuals in Taiwan. Comments referring to her will generally qualify her as ‘the popular romance writer.’ I asked female friends, both Taiwanese and Chinese

\(^7\)For example, see Chinese-American novelist Ha Jin’s (哈金) award winning novel “Waiting: A novel” (1999), Amy Tam’s bestseller Joy Luck Club (1989) and Wayne Wang’s movie adaptation (1993); or Taiwan director Ang Lee’s (李安) “Father knows the best” trilogy—Pushing Hands (推手, Tui Shou, 1992), The Wedding Banquet (喜宴, Xi Yan, 1993), and Drink Eat Man Woman (飲食男女, Yin Shi Nan Nu,1994)—and his Academy Award winner Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (臥虎藏龍, Wo Hu Cang Long, 2000).

\(^8\)Since Modernism, feminine cultural texts, no matter in high culture or popular culture, have long suffered prejudice as inferior cultural productions (Huyssen, 1986).
thirty-something, well-educated urban professional women, about their reading experiences with Chiungyao’s novels, the typical answer I got was something like, “Oh, yes. . .but that’s when I was a teenager. . .” Have they ever watched Chiungyao’s television dramas? They answered yes but with a proviso - that the viewing was accompanying the elders or youngsters in their families rather than by their own choice. When I told people in China and Taiwan during my data collecting trips that my dissertation project is analyzing Chiungyao’s enormously popular television drama serials *Huanzhu Gege*, most would cast a curious smile at me and say, “Oh, how interesting! Why do you want to do a dissertation about Chiungyao?” The funniest experience came from a male Taiwanese professor whom I asked for some suggestions and help. After patiently asking me about the possibility of changing the dissertation proposal, he very politely yet firmly said to me, “You know, it’s not a worthy topic.” Even today, I can vividly remember the disdain and distaste in his voice. The general attitude among Chinese toward the “cultural specificity” of Chiungyao’s popularity is similar to how Ang characterized Dutch audiences reacted to the popular American television drama *Dallas* in 1980s, that is, “characterized by a certain measure of ignorance, whether delicate or not” (Ang, 1985, p. vii).

In this dissertation, I do not feel the need to defend the legitimacy of conducting research about popular culture as did Ang, since popular culture has already become an accepted topic in western sociology (Gans, 1974), cultural studies (Hall, 1977; Fiske, 1987) and communication research (Cantril, Gaudet & Herzog, 1940). Even in Taiwan today, popular culture studies are similarly common. To justify the worthiness of writing

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9 In the preface of the English version of *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang (1985) admitted that since the original target reader was the Dutch intellectual communities who were not familiar with the theoretical perspectives of Anglo-Saxon media and cultural studies, that book “acquired a somewhat ‘pedagogic’ character.” (Ang, 1985, p. vii).
a dissertation about the production of Chiungyao’s TV drama serials, however, some relevant theoretical reflections can still serve as a good introduction for this project.

**Why Chiungyao and *Huanzhu Gege***?

This dissertation project is trying to answer the following questions: (1). What is the operational logic of a regional media market? (2). What factors gave rise to *Huanzhu Gege*, a cross-strait TV drama co-production project within the Greater China regional media market? (3). What factors have contributed to the phenomenal popularity of this drama series within the Greater China regional media market and within global Chinese communities? (4). What implications can this case study provide to further the understanding of media globalization through media regionalization? This project will use this particular case study to analyze TV drama production in different contexts, such as the regional geographical context, the Chinese cultural context and the cultural production context.

I also focus in this study on the relationship between a popular symbol creator’s authorship and the popularity accumulated by his/her products. An authorship in popular culture is built upon a creator’s specific style. Such authorship is a product of the macro historical/social/economic context in which he/she works, impacting both production and consumption. Within this context are the genre, motifs, subject matter, and special aesthetic style of the creator’s cultural production, as well as what kind of values are conveyed by his/her creations (Bordwell, 1988).

Before I begin, there are several questions I must answer in the introduction. First, why have I chosen Chiungyao and her *Huanzhu Gege* serials as the topic of my dissertation project? The obvious and direct answer lies in the popularity of Chiungyao and these dramatic serials in the worldwide Chinese mediascape. In May 1998, *Huanzhu Gege*
Gege was first aired on Taiwan’s screen by China Television Company (CTV), which is one of four commercial terrestrial television networks in Taiwan. The program was an instant success, and afterwards, the dramatic serials spread rapidly into global Chinese communities.

The popularity of Huanzhu Gege is attributable to its creator, Chiungyao. Her romance novels and movies might be the earliest and the most influential artifacts of Taiwan’s popular culture known and consumed by China’s audiences. In 1987, the “tear-jerking romances” written by Chiungyao were among the most popular books that “intoxicated young readers” in Mainland China (Wang, 1996, p. 266). According to a 1992 survey of 1,500 people in Beijing, Chiungyao ranked first among eight authors with her name recognition rate as high as 85.8 percent, followed by China’s Cultural Revolution generation Writer Hao Ran, Beijing’s native controversial popular writer Wang Shuo, and the renowned Hong Kong Martial Arts genre writer Jin Yong who ranked in fourth place. In the same survey, Chiungyao also ranked in first place of those whose works were actually read by the respondents and ranked in second place by preference (as cited in Gold, 1995, pp. 262-263). In 1999, a Taiwanese official report conducted by the Cultural Affairs Committee about the cross-strait literature flows showed the most popular literature genre from Taiwan and Hong Kong in mainland China was the martial arts novel. The total number of publications was 36 million copies, and

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10 It is not clear when Chiungyao’s works were first introduced into Mainland China. According to Du (2001), the first Chiungyao novel officially published in installments by Guangdong Province’s Yang Cheng Wan Bao (羊城晚报 Yang Cheng Evening News) in 1980 was her Together and Separate (聚散兩依 Ju San Liang Yi Yi) (p.262). But according to Yu (1992), the first Chiungyao novel appearing in Mainland China was the 1982 installments of I Am a Cloud (我是一片雲, Wo Shi Yi Pian Yun) by Fujian Province’s magazine Hai Xia (The Straits) (p. 25). However, according to an article entitled “The implication of Chiungyao Novel Fever” published by Hong Kong Pro-Beijing Da Gong Bao (大公報) on July 31st, 1988, the first Chiungyao romance appeared in Mainland China’s publication Romance in the Rain (煙雨濛濛, Yan Yu Meng Meng) which started in 1987 (as cited at Xiao, 1992, p.141). Yet each writer agreed that ever since her romance was officially introduced to Mainland China’s audiences, there was a “Chiungyao fever” everywhere in China.
Jin Yong was the most popular writer. The second most popular genre was romance and the total number of publications was 18 million copies. Among them Chiungyao’s works were ranked in first place. This report also pointed out, in the heyday of Taiwan and Hong Kong literature in Mainland China, a single run of Jin Yong’s or Chiungyao’s novel could reach 700,000 copies (Chen, 1999).

In addition to her romance novels, which were read by millions of people in mainland China, the TV dramas and movies based on Chiungyao’s novels were also produced by mainland China’s television and film studios in the late 80s and enjoyed extensive commercial success (Xiao, 1992). At the same time, with the mushrooming of video booths in the streets throughout mainland China, Taiwan’s productions of Chiungyao’s romance movies were watched by a whole generation of Chinese youth. The nonstop playing of pop songs from Chiungyao’s movies by radio stations and in shops and the widespread selling of pirated recordings also contributed to the spread of “Chiungyao fever.” Chiungyao’s popular culture products introduced to mainland China became a unique multi-medium cultural franchise.

11The first mainland China produced Chiungyao TV drama was based on her romance On the Other Side of the River (在水一方, Zai Shui Yi Fang) and this four-episode serial was produced by Jiangsu TV. The second was adapted from her Hazy Birds, Hazy Moon (月朦朧鳥朦朧, Yue Meng Long Niao Meng Long) in 1986 by the same station. Chiungyao’s other novel, Inside the Garden (庭院深深, Ting Yuan Shen Shen) was produced as a movie by Shanghai Film Studio in 1988. However, these productions like the book publications were all unauthorized pirates.

12Never underestimate the power of radio or tape recorder in Deng Xiao-ping’s (鄧小平) reform era. As Thomas Gold (1995) pointed out, one of the most powerful influences of Gangtai (港台, Hong Kong and Taiwan) popular culture on China’s society around the late 80s was its popular music, especially the pop Taiwan diva, Teresa Deng (鄧麗君, Deng Li-jun, 1953-1995). Her soft and attractive voice and love-theme pop songs, really took China by storm. There were several popular pattens in the 1980’s China, such as “People do not like old Deng (Xiao-peng), but they adore the little Deng (Teresa). (不愛老鄧, 只愛小鄧, Bu Ai Lao Deng, Zhi Ai Xiao Deng), or “By day, Deng Xiaoping rules China, but by night, Deng Li-jun takes over.” There was a 1996 highly acclaimed Hong Kong movie, Comrade, Almost a Love Story (甜蜜蜜, Tian Mat Mat, 1996), which used Teresa Deng’s career and pop songs as a narrative thread to tell a bitter sweet love story which lasted 10 years between two illegal immigrants from rural China. Critics argue that this film wisely utilized Teresa Deng’s music to witness the sensitive historical and political changes about the Hong Kong’s 1997 return to China’s rule (Curtin, 2002). In the same vein, Rey Chow (1993b) argued that listening to “banal” popular music privately was a struggle against the official culture upheld by the state.
“Chiungyao fever” in mainland China has not faded with the passing of time. With the popularity of the *Huanzhu Gege* serials, Chiungyao is once again returning to the center stage of Chinese popular culture. In a nation-wide study conducted by The Institute of Chinese Publication Science and Zhe Jiang Provincial news and publication bureau in 2006, which claimed to be the first survey using the scientific mass scale sampling to investigate the readership and literature consumption of China’s people, Chiungyao ranked in third place, just behind China’s national treasure writer Lu Xun (魯迅) and Jin Yong. Among the 10 favorite writers in the survey, Chiungyao is the only writer from Taiwan. In 2001, another survey targeted young students asking them to identify their “Love Gurus,” meaning those persons to whom they looked to model their romantic relationships. Again, Chiungyao ranked in the third place, this time following Jin Yong and Taiwanese pop song writer/performer Luo Da-you (羅大佑) (Jin, 2001, p. 90).

Chiungyao’s popularity has increasingly gained the attention of China’s serious literary community. In a book entitled *The Era of the 1980s: The 33 Books that Changed China*, Chiungyao’s 1980 romance *Together and Separate* (*聚散兩依依*) was selected and listed along with such classics as Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Sigmund Freud’s *The Analysis of Dreams*, and David Herbert Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (Han, 1992). Some critics even argue that Chiungyao and Jin Yong started the development of popular literature in mainland China. According to Yang (2005), the initial introduction of Chiungyao and Jin Yong’s novels to China was a political propaganda strategy to patronize Taiwan and Hong Kong. Despite this, however, their popularity fills a vacancy in Mainland China’s popular literature.

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13 There are three books in the list written by Taiwan writers. In addition to Chiungyao’s *Together and Separate*, another Taiwan female popular writer San Mao’s (*撒哈拉的故事*, Sahala de Gushi, 1976) and the male political dissident writer Bo Yang’s (*醜陋的中國人*, Chou Lou de Zhong Guo Ren, 1984) were also been selected (Han, 1992).
Yang says:

It is very obvious that in the early developing stage of mainland China’s popular literature, those writers are employing Jin Yong and Chiungyao’s creations as their models. This is not only expressed by the fact that these copycats’ subject matters are either martial arts or romance, but also demonstrate in the embezzlement of the contents. (Yang, 2005, ¶ 2. Author’s translation)

He further contends that through the exchange of literature across the Taiwan Strait, a unique cultural interdependency has emerged - mainland China’s serious literatures are exported to Taiwan and Hong Kong, and, at the same time, the popular literatures from both Taiwan and Hong Kong keep being introduced to the mainland.

After I delineate Chiungyao’s influences in China’s popular culture, it is clear that Chiungyao is one of the most influential popular culture icons in China and in global Chinese communities, despite her creative activities being based in Taiwan. Yet, in the last 17 years she started to cooperate with China’s TV industries to produce her TV dramas. What makes her change the mode of cultural production; how does she manage to conduct cross-strait cultural production; why do her co-production projects continue to be well received in the Chinese mediascape? The answers to these questions are explored in this dissertation.

My interest in Chiungyao is not only because her popularity is a unique cultural phenomenon in Chinese popular culture, but also because the project has close connections with the recent development of TV fiction studies in media research. My interest is further solidified by my personal experiences as a Chinese popular culture consumer in Taiwan.
Television and TV Drama in International Communication

Even though the computer and internet have become the most cutting edge communication technologies, television still remains as the most discussed medium, in the fields of international communication and media studies. This is mainly because television is still the cheapest and most available medium for audiences worldwide for news and everyday entertainment.

According to Baker (1997), there are more than 850 million television sets in over 160 countries, and 2.5 billion people watch television everyday. The sheer ubiquitousness of television provides legitimacy for selecting television as a subject matter in a dissertation project. The following epistemic sketch will serve as a useful guide to readers to trace how television has become the center topic in both international communication studies and media studies.

When television replaced radio as the most popular medium in Western developed countries, theorists started to become intrigued with the new medium’s possible development and its potential impact on human societies. Some optimistic scholars, such as Marshall McLuhan (1964), declared that television is the extension of the human sensory system, and this unique characteristic of the televised media will extinguish the difference between personal and public affairs and finally bring about the perishing of nationalism, resulting in the world becoming a “global village.”

Paralleling this optimism, some media scholars tried to connect the spreading of “new media” and national development in undeveloped or developing countries. They believed that the introduction of new communication technologies would bring economic growth and social modernization (Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1969; Schramm, 1964). This thought was regarded as development or modernization theory which used to
be the dominant theory in international communication in the 1960s.

This theory's paradigm was challenged in the 1970s by the dependency theory, mainly originating with Latin American Marxist scholars. They noticed that media and cultural dependency relationships existed between the periphery/Third World countries and center/First World countries, and one of the factors which contributed to this dependency was the new communication technology. Along with this argument, American scholar Schiller (1969) accused the U. S. of exerting worldwide cultural imperialism through its domination of electronic communication. This theoretical development was later known as “cultural/media imperialism,” which was furthered examined by the 1974 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored survey about the one-way flow of international Television programs dominated by U. S. productions (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974). Later this issue ignited the New World Information and Communication Order debates. Since then television has taken the center stage of international communication studies, and the ideological, economic and social impacts of television have been scrutinized by different but politically drenched theoretical frameworks (Boyd-Barrett, 1982; Lee, 1980; McPhail, 1987).

Starting from the late 1980s, globalization became the zeitgeist of the new epoch, and television nonetheless entered the globalizing stage. According to Baker (1997), global television represents two related phenomenon in media development. First, it indicates transnational television as the product of innovation of new communication technology, the changing mode of media ownership, different strategies of programming, and modifying the audience habits by reception. Second, it refers to political tension initiated by the spreading of transnational television. Although the nation-state television
systems now can penetrate national borders, the thriving of global television is threatening to endanger the viability and effect of national television services. This potential development of global television makes the politically charged debate of media imperialism linger even more ferociously.

At that time, the cultural/media imperialism debate around television was fueled by some internationally successful American TV dramatic serials such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. The global popularity of *Dallas* made cultural critic Ien Ang audaciously claim, “a global cultural history of the late twentieth century would not be complete without mentioning the significance and impact of the American soap opera *Dallas*” (2004, p.303). In addition being accused by Jack Lang, then the French Minister of Culture, as the “symbol of American cultural imperialism” (Ang, 1985, p. 2), the world-wide popularity of *Dallas* also indicated a critical paradigm shift in communication studies. That is, the focus changed not only from Western ideological domination to local audience interpretation and pleasure, but also from media production to media consumption. For example, the work of Liebes and Katz (1990) focused on how American audiences of different ethnic origin have different readings of *Dallas*, not a single unified American interpretation. The focus according to Ang (1985) was on how a soap opera like *Dallas* could bring pleasures and different cultural ideological interpretations to its predominantly female audiences. In Ang’s (1985) words, that is the negotiation between “the ideology of mass culture” and “the ideology of populism” rather than political Western capitalist ideology.

This paradigm shift brought television drama into the limelight of international media studies. It represented the outcome of two overlapping developments. One is the popularity of television drama (especially the soap opera) among global
audiences. As Ang (2004) said, wherever there is a television industry, there will be television drama, whether homemade or imported. It makes no difference if it is American soap operas in Western Europe, Brazilian and Mexican telenovelas in Latin America, or Japanese (post-) trendy dramas (or the so-called idol dramas)\textsuperscript{14} and the rising Korean dramas in East Asia. The popularity of these TV dramas has become the epitome of the consumption of transnational television programming. The other factor is the political and ideological reevaluation of “the popular” in the postmodern or globalization era.

\textbf{Returning to the Encoding: From Consumption to Production}

With the emphasis of audience reception in recent media studies, researchers may have begun ignoring the importance of text production in the process of mass communication. Traditionally, the production perspective used to be the dominant paradigm to study mass communication and popular culture (Peterson, 1994). However, after Hall challenged the positivist view of media effects in his early 1970s seminal essay “Encoding/Decoding” (1980), the landscape of media studies has undergone a sea change. Hall argued that the audience’s interpretation of the media text is not a fixed one; on the contrary, the diverse meanings people got from the media texts shed light on the complicated ideological struggle operating in the decoding process. Following Hall’s insight, the “active audience” thesis promoted in the field of media studies (Fiske, 1987) accompanied the emergence of reader response theory in literature studies. The concept

\textsuperscript{14}According to Toru (2004), the “trendy drama” was emerged around the late 1980s which depicts various youth lifestyles but without a unified subject matter and narrative style. The 1991 \textit{Tokyo Love Story}, which is believed as the first “post-trendy drama” produced by famous Fuji television producer Ota Toru. Toru pointed out that "post-trendy drama" is a new genre of Japanese TV drama which developed a special stylish narrative to tell the “pure love story” between heterosexual young urban Japanese. “Post- trendy drama” is known to Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s audiences as “Japanese idol drama,” which comes from Star TV Chinese channel using this brand name to promote these Japanese dramas.
of polysemy became a buzzword when postmodernism gained currency in the Anglo-American scholarly circle (Roach, 1997). The development of feminist scholarship in social science and humanities disciplines (Brunsdon, 1995) and the introduction of anthropology’s ethnography as a solid research methodology (Ang, 1990) are epistemological trends which intertwined and contributed to the consumption/decoding perspective taking center stage in media studies and communication research.

These latter developments make the focus of media studies tilt toward audience reception research. This result invoked a serious debate between the political economy of the communication approach and the cultural studies approach. The political economy school believes that the macro capitalistic logic and the corporate media industries’ operations still dominate cultural production and keep favoring the vested interests; however, the cultural studies school emphasizes the resistance and the agency of the popular audiences in the ideological struggle about the meaning of media text interpretations (Ferguson & Golding, 1997).

When Hall put forth the idea that the communication process is composed of how the media texts are produced (encoding) and consumed (decoding), he focused solely on the decoding. What he tried to do, as he stated later, was introduce a wholesome ‘circuit of culture’ model to media studies to offer a better understanding of the mass communication processes operating in the articulation of production and consumption (Angus, Curz, Der Derian, Jhally, Lewis & Schwichtenberg, 1989; du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997). In his “Encoding/Decoding” article, Hall specified three possible audience readings, the preferred reading, the negotiated reading and the oppositional reading. Although the latter two types of interpretations are possible among the audiences, the preferred reading is still the most dominant decoding mode of
television audience’s viewing practice. This shows that the television production institution still has the power to direct the interpretations because of its ability to conduct the encoding with the shared meaning references among the audiences. Just as Brunsdon (1989) argued, even though the media text can be interpreted by different audiences, it does not mean that the way media texts are being constructed by institutions ceases to function. Morley (1989) contends that the encoding/decoding model:

... was concerned with matters of ideological and cultural power and it was concerned with shifting the ground of debates so that emphasis moved to the consideration of how it was possible for meaning to be produced ... that we should look not for the meaning for a text, but crucially, to examine those foundations as social and cultural phenomena.(p.17)

According to Brunsdon (1989), these foundations of the meaning of a text might be termed as the pre-audience text (p. 125), and encoding is important because it decides the meaning of text based on how it utilizes and arranges the pre-audience text. It is in this sense that I cannot agree with Roland Barthes' claim that only “the death of the author” can set free the meanings of the text (Barthes, 1994), nor can I agree with the extreme positions taken by some theorists of the active audience thesis (for example, John Fiske). I believe, to a large extent, the meaning of media text is still controlled by the creator, no matter whether this creator is one individualistic auteur or a whole calculating institution of cultural industries. This is the reason why I define this project as mainly a study of “media fiction production,” which emphasizes how the cultural production process is formed in different contexts.

When considering cultural production, the cultural industries themselves cannot be ignored. As Stuart Hall argues in his 1978 article “The TV Feuilleton or the
Domestication of the World: Some Preliminary Critical Notes:

Cultural production in television cannot be understood outside the framework of the institutional apparatuses which produce and the fundamental economic and production relations which organize these apparatuses, and which link and connect them, within and between nation-states. . . . But it must also be said that the level of economic determination is the necessary but not sufficient condition for an adequate analysis of cultural production. (as cited in Sinclair, 1999, p.150)

I contend this “necessary but not sufficient condition” is the agency of the TV program Creators. This includes both the individual’s creativity and strategies utilized by these creators to grapple with the institutional limitations and modus operandi utilized by the cultural industries in order to complete their cultural production.

If Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1977) *culture industry* thesis belongs to the “macro” analysis of modern cultural production, some scholars focus instead on the “micro” perspectives, that is, the operation of the process of cultural production in the cultural industry. Hesmondhalgh (2002) defines cultural industries not only as “the commercial mechanisms through which cultural texts are produced and distributed,” but most importantly, also as “systems of production in relation to texts” (p.6). Hesmondhalgh distinguishes the creative cultural workers, such as the scriptwriters or composers whom he terms *symbol creators*, from other technical cultural workers. These symbol creators are those who “utilize their symbolic creativity, the manipulation of symbols for the purposes of creating entertainment or information”; in other words, they are the “media-text makers” (2002, pp. 4-5). In the later analysis, I argue that Chiungyao is an influential symbol creator in Chinese popular culture, and the case study of the production of the *Huanzhu Gege* series serves as an exposition to show how her symbolic
creativity is used to make a popular media text in Taiwan's and Mainland China’s TV industries.

**Chiungyao and Me: A Reflection of Taiwan’s Local Media Studies**

To be honest, I have never been a big fan of Chiungyao’s creations. I have to thank my three elder sisters for my connection with Chiungyao. As I mentioned previously, reading Chiungyao’s romance or watching Chiungyao’s movies is a “rite of passage” for Taiwan’s (or Chinese) women. Since I have three sisters, in my teenage years there were lots of chances for me to encounter Chiungyao’s novels and the *Crown* (皇冠, Huang Guan) magazines which serialized Chiungyao’s romance fiction. I had sporadically read some of them, but never was quite into her “pure romance.” Like other teenage boys at my age in Taiwan, instead, I was fascinated with the Martial Arts novels of Jin Yong or another writer of Taiwan’s *wuxia* genre, Ku Long (古龍), Japanese sci-fi comic books, and Hong Kong Martial Arts movies. However, because of Chiungyao’s popularity and her excellent cultural promotion capability, it was almost impossible for anyone who lived in the 1970s and 1980s in Taiwan to avoid Chiungyao’s popular cultural productions.

Almost in the beginning of her career, Chiungyao’s romances instantly attracted the attention of the film industries in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. Chiungyao’s first movie, *Cousin Wan Chun* (婉君表妹, Wan Jun Biao Mei), was produced in 1965, only two years after she became a professional writer. This movie became a huge hit. From that time, until she bowed out of film making in 1983, her novels were transformed into 50 movies. Huang and Wang (2005) called Chiungyao's 17-year film making career “the Chiungyao Movie epoch” in Taiwan’s film history, and argued that her film making career overlapped with “the golden era of Taiwan’s movie industry” (p. 302). But after
her works disappeared on the big screens, without waiting too long, Chiungyao transferred to the TV industry. Her debut TV drama *The Sun also Sets* (*幾度夕陽紅, Jidu Xiyang Hong, 1986*) again took Taiwan by storm, with ratings reaching 60 percent at one point. Afterwards, she kept producing at least one TV drama per year, each one doing well in the ratings.

This is why it might be difficult for someone who did not live in Taiwan then to imagine how Taiwanese popular cultural consumption was governed by Chiungyao at that time. When her movies were in theaters or dramas were on the air, all of Taiwan’s audiences were inundated with the theme songs repeatedly broadcast on TV variety shows and radio programs. In newspapers’ show business pages, there was extensive coverage of each new Chiungyao production. Only those choosing not to read newspapers would be unaware of the plotlines, casts, or the gossip behind the scenes of Chiungyao’s new shows. On national holidays, if your family decided to go a movie, it would be likely that you would be sitting in a theater and watching a Chiungyao movie. Or, when you finished a day’s work and tried to watch some TV, then again you probably would will find that you were watching a TV drama produced by Chiungyao. Growing up in this cultural environment in Taiwan, “Chiungyao” had become part of my generation’s everyday lives.

Yet, not being a fan of a specific symbol creator or a TV drama does not deny a researcher’s legitimacy to conduct the studies of this creator or program. If you happen to

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15Taiwan’s ratings surveys were conducted by three companies before AC Nielson was introduced to Taiwan. They use telephone interviews as the survey method, which is quite different from AC Nelson’s ratings survey conducted through more “scientific” peoplemeters and household viewing diaries. However, today AC Nielson TV ratings survey system has become the most authoritative ratings employed by Taiwan’s TV industry. The most popular shows, take *Huanzhu Gege* Part I had only 12 percent AC Nelson’s ratings. Now, if any TV show’s AC Nelson ratings has reached 2 percent, then the producer will throw a party to celebrate the show’s success. Another important reason for Chiungyao’s early Taiwan-produced TV drama reaching such high ratings was that the island was still in the three network TV era. The audiences could watch only the programming provided by the networks.
be a audience hooked by a specific TV drama, like Ien Ang (1985) to *Dallas*, Jostein Gripsurd (1995) to *Dynasty*, or Nancy K. Baym (2000) to *All My Children* or *The Days of Our Lives*, that would be very nice. The identity of being a fan will proffer the researcher some first-hand “insider observation” from an audience member’s point of view. On the other hand, not being a faithful fan to your research subject matter could provide the researcher another advantage; that is, it will give the necessary critical distance to conduct the analysis without being disturbed by the researcher’s subjective attitude. So, this kind of fondness could serve as a sufficient but not a necessary condition for a study of a specific creator or program. My interest in researching Chiungyao and her *Huanzhu Gege* serials is based on the fact that they are a unique cultural phenomenon in Chinese popular culture. When the *Huanzhu Gege* Part I and Part II (1998-1999) were broadcast, I was personally in Taiwan and witnessed the audiences’ frenzy about these serials. Although I am not a big fan, I was attracted by its popularity in Taiwan and other Chinese communities. Since then, a desire to explain Chiungyao’s popularity and this dramatic series’ wide spread reception in the Chinese mediascape became imprinted in my mind, particularly when I encountered different theories.

However, this is only one motivation for my research. Another reason comes from my discontent with current media studies in Taiwan. It is easy to find numerous studies of the popularity of Japanese idol dramas or, more recently, Korean dramas among Taiwan’s audiences. Granted, these studies are closely connected with transnational cultural consumption, media globalization, and the emergence of an East Asia regional media market. All of them are important issues in media studies. But my question was why an analysis of the popularity of Chiungyao and her *Huanzhu Gege* serials in global

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Chinese communities is virtually absence in Taiwanese media research. Until now, there is only one serious academic study of Chiungyao’s cultural production - Lin Fang-mei’s (林芳玫) 1992 dissertation in cultural sociology focusing on Chiungyao’s literary creations. I adamantly believe that compared with the studies of transnational consumption of Japanese dramas or Korean dramas in Taiwan, the research of Chiungyao’s cultural production is not of less academic importance, despite being told by one scholar that such research was ‘unworthy’. As a matter of fact, being Taiwan’s most popular symbol creator in the Chinese mediascape, research on Chiungyao is both more “localized” and “globalizing” in nature.

Both from the perspectives of the importance of TV fiction production studies in the current media studies and being a researcher who is from Taiwan, I think these arguments should provide sufficient legitimacy to justify this project.

Outline of the Dissertation

After explaining the motives, interests, and the academic significance of my dissertation project, I will use another four chapters to complete this study. The respective content of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 2 includes the literature review and methodology. This chapter lays down the theoretical framework for my exploration, and simultaneously explains what methodology has been used.

Chapter 3 describes the formation and operation of the Greater China regional media market and provides an explanation of why and how the cross-strait TV drama

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co-production emerged in this context.

Chapter 4 details the case study of Chiuangyao’s TV drama the *Huanzhu Gege* series. In addition to the making of this drama series, Chiuangyao’s creative career trajectory will be introduced, and how she developed her cultural co-production in mainland China will also be explored. Through this case study, the practice of popular cultural production within the Greater China regional media market will be analyzed.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the findings of this study. After demonstrating the complicated interaction between the structural factors and human agency in the operation within a regional media market, I argue that under the structural asymmetry of a regional media market, the human agency will be one of the most important resources that cultural workers from the cultural production periphery could utilize and empower them to break the structural constraints of media regionalization.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

My dissertation project aims to explore the inner workings of the Greater China regional media market by examining Chiungyao’s successful career in the Chinese mediascape. My literature review begins by examining the discussion of how media regionalization emerges in the study of international communication as distinct from the dominant media globalization thesis. I then will single out some critical components operating in media regionalization, such as center/periphery structure, cultural proximity, cultural and national identities, localized cultural genre, and the change in the mode of cultural production.

In the second part, I will introduce the methodology I employed to conduct this research. Through the exploration of some focal concepts in the formation and operation of a regional media market, my aim is to provide the theoretical foundation to understand the functional logic embedded in media regionalization. Finally, I will utilize this theoretical foundation to execute my case study of Taiwanese cultural worker Chiungyao’s cultural production practice within the Greater China Media market.

The Problematization of “The Global Village”: Through Communication to Globalization

Globalization has become a buzzword in recent decades and communication has been singled out as a pivotal factor in its emergence. According to McGrew (1992, “globalization” refers to political interactions, economic developments and cultural flows, operating on a global scale and cutting across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time compression,
making the world more interconnected both in reality and in personal experiences. However, there is no consensus about globalization being a totally new phenomenon. Some theorists argue that globalization is rooted in modernity that was initiated as early as the seventeenth century with the emergence of the Western nation-state. In other words, globalization at best is only a consequence of modernity (Giddens, 1990; Robertson, 1992; Wallerstein, 1991). When we examine the relationship between globalization and communication, we find that the new communication technology, which makes the “time-space compression” possible, serves as the driving force behind globalization. Besides that, the development of communication as an academic discipline also sheds lights on the interdependency between power and knowledge.

In academia, the development of studies of “communication” was accompanied by the introduction of communicative technology in the 1920s and the emergence of a mass society. These critical changes in the historical, socio-economic and international political milieu meant the discipline of mass communication in American academia began initially as a means of serving the needs of ruling elites for the dispersion of meaning, rhetoric or propaganda. With this historical backdrop, the modern theories of mass communication were strongly influenced by the instrumental rationality which started to thrive in the U. S. in tandem with the rising behaviorism in social sciences. It is understandable that almost all the early theorists of mass communication were concerned with how to create a consensus in national societies. They studied which mass communication media were most effective in persuading people to accept the dominant ideologies. Using Carey’s words, mass communication was seen “as a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control” (Carey, 1979, p. 412).
This particular theoretical interest was reflected also in the field of international communication studies. Hanno Hardt (1988) criticized the fact that international communication research is dominated by the economic and political interests of the United States. After World War II, theories of mass communication were utilized to support the advancement of theories of modernization and development in international politics. One of the best-known pioneers of mass communication theories dominated by western hegemony was Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian theorist who proclaimed the Western centered apocalyptic gospel of “the global village” in the 1960s (McLuhan, 1964). His theoretical works implied that with the development of communication technologies and capitalism the world will finally become a Western-like modern homogenous community. McLuhan can be seen as one of the first academics to advance this concept of “globalization” in communication studies.

The landscape of international communication was further complicated by the introduction of cultural industries. With the flood of mass circulated newspapers, motion pictures, and radio and television shows, the production of popular media texts has become a lucrative business. Unlike other capitalistic operations, the popular culture products manufactured by cultural industries, especially electronic media, are believed not only to influence the general public’s perceptions and behaviors, but also to impact the individual’s sense of identity and their relationship with the time-space continuum (Meyrowitz, 1985). While employing the profit-maximization logic of capitalism in the development of cultural industries, developed Western countries--the United States in particular--began to aim at the international market for larger economic returns. In addition to economic considerations, media globalization was
also believed to be dominated by the Western super powers' political agendas under the Cold War framework. For example, global television was argued to be the product of U.S. political strategic interests to counter the Soviet Bloc’s propaganda threat. According to Curtin (1997), the U.S. government in the 1960s started to adopt a series of communication policies utilizing cutting edge technologies to assume a dominant position in international communication endeavors. However, this one-directional media flow from the U.S. initiated strong protests from the receiving countries, especially third world developing nations that did not have the capabilities to produce local TV programming of their own.

Intellectuals both from the West and the developing world built a system of theories—the most renowned being dependency theory, cultural imperialism, and postcolonial theory—to fight against the unbalanced development of capitalism and international media flows. If the dominant Western knowledge paradigm based upon modernity represents the “global” and the “center,” then these critical voices from the third world and some liberal Western intellectuals could be categorized as the “local” and the “periphery.” The controversy initiated by the imbalanced media flow between the West and the third world was not only limited in academia. In the 1970s, it had become one nodal point in the global political power struggle. Since then, the global and local nexus has become one of the most important metaphors to define communication in the era of globalization. The conflict on media flow between the “global/center” and the “local/periphery” finally brought about the McBride Commission report conducted by UNESCO in the 1980s, which proclaimed the need to build a much more balanced “New World Information and Communication Order” (NWICO) (McBride, 1980).
However, the recommendations of this document did not make an instant and obvious change in the landscape of international communication. According to some studies, western countries, especially the U. S., still dominated media business. Until 1995, at least 75 percent of the worldwide television program exports originated from the United States (Hoskins, McFadyen Finn & Jackel, 1995). In terms of different regions, the programming imported from the U. S. accounted for 21 percent of the total broadcasting hours in Asian countries (Waterman & Rogers, 1994). In Western Europe, imported U.S. programming comprised 13 percent of broadcasting hours (Pragnell, 1985), and the same percentage of U. S. programming occupied Latin America’s TV schedule (Antola & Rogers, 1985). With the introduction of satellite broadcasting technology in the 1980s, global television became possible for the first time in a real sense. Some Western cultural industries, such as Star TV established by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and the Cable News Network (CNN) begun by Ted Turner, have developed direct satellite broadcasting systems. Employing the capitalistic strategy of synergy, these global multimedia conglomerates have emerged and dominated the markets. According to Herman and McChesney (1997), the Big Five transnational media conglomerates, Time-Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom and News Corporation still control most of today’s world’s media trade.

Recently, the theory of Western media domination has been challenged by the empirical findings that witnessed the increase of domestically produced TV programming in developing countries (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Sinclair, 2000). Sepstrup argues (as cited in Baker, 1997, p. 49) that at the end of the 1980s, 73 percent of the programming worldwide was locally produced. In Asia, countries such as India and South Korea have even claimed that they produce 92 percent of their daily
programming content (Sreberny, 1996, p. 103). Additionally, several East Asian countries, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, reportedly have become active programming exporters (Hara, 2004; Lee, 1993). Countries in Latin America, such as Brazil and Mexico, not only have become global programming exporters, but their TV productions are even exported into the U. S. (Sinclair, 2000; Strarbhaar, 1991, 2000). The boost of local TV production, according to Chung (2005), is a result of “economic development . . . rapid diffusion of multi-channel video delivery systems, such as cable television, governmental efforts of media liberation and abandonment of protectionist regulation” (p. 2).

This development actually echoes Raymond Vernon’s (1966) “product life cycle” theory in international culture production, which predicted that American programming exportation would lead to the establishment of local production facilities, the enhancement of coproduction efforts between local and foreign cultural workers, increased local accumulation of imported television culture, the erosion of American programming domination, and the rise of foreign produced programs in America. In a similar vein, Waterman (1988) argues that media privatization and new communication technologies would bring short-term and long-term effects on programming traffic. The short-term effects would be the increase in programming importation from wealthy and large countries, but the long-term effects would reflect an increase in domestic programming. This is because with the inception of a domestic TV industry, the output of domestic programming cannot fill the schedule and, therefore, an increase of imported programming is unavoidable. After domestic TV industries begin to mature and become more experienced in production, however, the American-dominated programming would be replaced with local programming.
The swing in program balance back to the local production is a natural outcome of the market mechanism.

Meanwhile, inside western academia reflective critical communication studies continue to grow on the basis of Marxist critiques of capitalism. In addition to the Europe-centered political economy and Humanist Marxism (such as the Frankfurt school), this discipline keeps assimilating diverse scholarship such as feminism, literary criticism and anthropology, and has developed a focus on the dominance of western media in economics and cultural politics. One of its representative criticisms against international communication is active audience theory (Fiske, 1987). Methodologically employed by ethnography and theoretically empowered with British cultural studies of the Birmingham School, this theory argues that the local audience, with the power of interpreting, can still wage a resistance against the dominance of West-centered media content. So, in the field of international communication, regardless of the practical research or theoretical studies, there is a tug of war between the global center and the local periphery. This debate not only puts the Western-centered “global village” version of globalization into question, but also underscores the important role played by media regionalization in the holistic view of globalization.

**The Missing Link in the Global/Local Nexus: Media Regionalization**

Although the notion of West-centered globalization in international communication studies is still attracting the attention of many researchers, globalization discussions have recently become much more subtle and sophisticated. As mentioned earlier, the “global/local” bipolar thesis had served as the overarching framework for the discussion of media globalization for decades. Yet the empirical
disjuncture between global and local media production and consumption has incurred increasing criticisms about its simplification. As Sreberny (1996) and Straubhaar (1997, 2002) argued, media globalization operates on a much more sophisticated level. There are different levels of media markets including truly global, supranational, regional or geolinguistic, national, subnational or national regional, and totally local. This complicated framework repudiates the traditional bipolar “global/local” nexus of media globalization that overlooks the sophisticated interdependence of media flows, which exist not only between but also within the media industries of the so called “West/center” and the “Third World/periphery” framework.

Theorists like Ferguson (1995) and Sreberny (1996) emphasize the importance of nation-state and traditional political economy in media globalization. On the other hand, recently there are quite a few empirical studies demonstrating that there are many regional media markets operating under the global/local nexus framework (Chan, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002; Sinclair, 1999; Sinclair, Jacka & Cunningham, 1996; Straubharr, 1991). The latter framework demonstrates what Crane (2002) called the “network model of cultural globalization” (p. 7). In Mike Featherstone’s words, this new model shows,

It is no longer possible to conceive global processes in terms of the dominance of single center over the peripheries. Rather there are a number of competing centers which bring about shifts in the global balance of power between nation-states and blocs and form new sets of interdependences. This is not to suggest a condition of equality between participants but a process which is seeing more players admitted to the game demanding access to means of communication and the right to be heard. (1995, p. 13)
In other words, the real trajectory of cultural globalization is an isomorphism instead of a bipolar confrontation. As a matter of fact, it might be closer to the truth to see the surge of localized cultural productions and the emergence of regional media markets as the unavoidable consequence of media globalization.

However, as some scholars point out, regional media markets still remain a relatively under-explored field (Sinclair et al., 1996, 1998; Straubhaar, 1991, 2002; Wang, Servaes & Goonasekera, 2000). The “regionalization” of a media market, according to Straubhaar (2002), indicates multicountry markets linked by geography, language and culture which might be more accurately called ‘geocultural’ or ‘cultural-linguistic’ media markets, since not all these linked populations, markets and cultures are geographically contiguous (pp. 183-4). Until now, Latin America has been not only the first but also the most commonly studied regional media market (Sinclair, 1999; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003). One of the most cited studies of Latin American media flows is Joseph Straubhaar’s 1991 study about how Brazil became the regional media production center in Latin America. Initiated by his discontent with media imperialism and dependency theory, Straubhaar (1991) saw the media flow between the center and the periphery as not exactly one-directional but instead having an asymmetrical interdependence. Developed from Galtung’s (1971) structural analysis of center-periphery relationship in imperialism, Straubhaar suggested that the asymmetrical interdependence existing between center and periphery indicates a variety of possible relationships in which countries find themselves unequal to each other but still possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in politics, economy and culture production. Straubhaar (1991) refers to the international media exchange as a fluid and dynamic interdependent relationship of media flow between the
regional center and peripheries, ranging from complete dependency to dominant
interdependence. Straubhaar (1991) further argues that the development of a regional
media market is influenced by several interlinking factors, such as international
political and economic relationships, the adoption of communication technologies, the
localization of cultural production, the creation of unique local popular cultural genre,
the audiences’ agency of interpreting, and the class structure of the local society.

There are at least two direct factors contributing to the development of a
regional media market. First, thanks to the low entrance barrier of media production
causated by communication technology innovation, many countries which originally
imported media contents started to develop their own TV programming and other
cultural productions in the 1970s (McQuail, 2000). This trend was accelerated by the
falling cost of television production in the following decades (Straubhaar, 2003). Second,
people are naturally attracted by local cultural productions which are
produced in their own language and convey cultural values close to their own (Pool,

Employing the framework of Anthony Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory,
which highlights how human agency operates within the constraints imposed by
social structures, Straubhaar (2002) later divided this theory into factors influencing
regional media flow - structural factors and cultural factors. Structural factors include
economic frameworks, technological bases, and political/institutional forms of
organization and operation. There are also cultural factors including the historical
dynamics, the development of culture and language, as well as the creation and
maintenance of cultural/national identity. Although Straubhaar did not explain how
the agency, or the cultural factors, interact with the structure in any empirical study,
what can be inferred from his division between the structural and cultural factors is that the former represents the nation-state(s) and the cultural industries and the latter the cultural workers and the audiences. Within his framework of analysis of regional media flow, Straubhaar highlights three effective elements. They are the center/periphery structure, cultural proximity, and the particular cultural form created by local cultural industries, or the localized program genre.

**The Dialectic between Center and Periphery**

Even for a non-believer in structuralism, the binary framework of center and periphery usually operates as a semi-natural and convenient vehicle to analyze the operation of existing systems. As Shils (1975) has explored from the perspective of sociology, every human society has its center and periphery; the center of society being not a spatially limited locality, but a phenomenon of the realm of values and belief. According to Shils, the center of society could be a center “because it is the ultimate and irreducible; and it is felt to be such by many who cannot give explicit articulation to its irreducibility. The central zone partakes of the nature of the sacred” (1975, p.3). As for the people in the periphery, especially those “more alertly intelligent,” the acknowledged distance from the center would bring “a painful feeling of being excluded from the vital zone which surrounds the center of society” (Shils, 1975, p. 13). This can be interpreted as a socio-psychological explanation of the dependency of periphery on the center.

When the scope is extended to a region or the international society, the center and periphery also exist in different levels, such as political, economic and cultural. A region is composed of different places in which there are unequal interdependences. In other words, it is a spatial power relationship. To various extents, for example,
some satellite cities or states are dependent economically, politically, militarily and culturally on the center cities or states. This is what Massey (1995) called “a geography of power,” which is defined by the functioning of “activity spaces.” These activity spaces provide a spatial network for operations of agency. In cultural production, this “geography of power” (p. 70) reflects in the differentiation of media production centers and consumption peripheries within the regional media market. Scott (1999) argues that modern cultural production is supported by a special geographic milieu for creation. He concludes that the reasons why most cultural economic activities are taking place in some global cities are that these cosmopolises are equipped with the networks of inter-firm transactions and local labor markets which are critical to cultural production. This can be interpreted as one aspect of material dependency of periphery on center.

Even in the symbolic cultural sphere, the center and periphery still exist. Russian semiotician Yuri M. Lotman (1990) developed a concept of semiosphere to exemplify the functioning of culture. According to Lotman, a semiosphere is “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of language” (p. 123). Yet the semiosphere is not limited to languages, it includes texts, genres, and all cultural products. Asymmetry and binarism are the two guiding laws of semiosphere. Binarism refers to a series of binary dichotomies, such as internal vs. external or ours vs. others. The asymmetry refers to the unequal relationship between the center and the periphery.

According to Lotman, this asymmetric relationship is fluid and dialectic. Sometimes the periphery of culture can move to the center, and the center can be pushed out to the periphery. The position shift between the center and the periphery is
taking place in “the frontier zone of culture” or the boundary of a semiosphere.
Lotman argues that semiophere is transected by boundaries of different levels and that boundaries are the “hottest spots for semioticizing processes.” According to Lotman (1990), “the boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into ‘our’ language, it is the place where what is ‘external’ could be transformed into what is ‘internal’.” (p. 137)

Cultural logic of globalization can offer us a better understanding of the cultural flow in the new era, and I concur with the fluidity between center and periphery. However, when some theorists argue that globalization is a process taking place in multiple sites independently, the implication there is a total blur between center and periphery in the cultural functioning is far-fetched. The best known representative of this theory is cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996), who proposes to explore the global cultural flow through the disjunctures among the different trajectories of media, migration, technology, politics and capital. In other words, he explores mediascapes, ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes and finanscapes. It should be pointed out, however, that his analysis of cultural flows in the globalization era is pushing heterogenization to an extreme. In Appadurai’s eyes the cultural flow in the globalization era is nothing but chaos, a point of view with which I don’t agree. This picture of radical globalization presented by Appaduai has undermined power relations between center and periphery from the operational logic of globalization. My argument is that although this power relations have become much more fluid and flexible in the era of globalization. They still function as the dominant principle of the cultural flows. The scenario presented by Appaduai is a space in which everything is dependent upon the operation of agency. However, just
as Giddens (1984) argues, every agency is situated in the structure. Without the limitations placed by structure, the operation of agency is unimaginable. On the other hand, the power relations embedded in the structure do not always indicate negative limitations. Usually they also provide the foundation from which the possible strategic alliances or tactics can be built by the underdogs (de Certeau, 1984).

Taking regional cultural flows as an example, they take place mainly in or between the nation-states where a power relation existed. As Ferguson (1995) has reminded us, the nation-state is still the locus where the global-local dialectic operates:

Nations are still the nexus for an oscillating dialectic of complex political, economic, technological, cultural, and social relations within and across systems of symbolic meaning and institutional power. As such, their continuance challenges notions of globalization as uni-directional process or omnipotent force. (p. 440)

Straubhaar referred to the regional media market as a multi-country cultural economy, the center and periphery binary structure will still operate within it, even though in a more complicated and elusive manner.

**Cultural Proximity: Cultural Capital or Habitus?**

As far back as the 1970s, after studying the global flow of television programming, Pool (1977) predicted that “other things being equal, consumers pick local products. The latter have many advantages which imports must overcome”(p. 143). Pool concluded these advantages included the lack of language barriers, social support and similar culture, which were categorized by Straubhaar (1991) as “cultural proximity.” Later, Straubhaar articulated the concept of cultural proximity as
a set of specific attributes that defined audiences’ cultural identities and cultural capital, such as language, “sense of humor, gender, images, dress style, lifestyle, knowledge about other lifestyles, ethnic types, religion and values” (Straubhaar, 2003, pp. 77-78).

For many theorists, language and culture are the primary market forces for a regional media market (Collins, 1994; Sinclair, 2000). Language in particular has been singled out as the domestic opportunity advantage for cultural production within a geolinguistic region (Wildman and Siwek, 1988). Straubhaar (2000) also posits the cultural-linguistic factor as the dominant reason for the emergence of regional media market in the globalization era:

What media imperialism did not anticipate was the growth of national and regional (cultural-linguistic) television producers, protected and encouraged within national and cultural-linguistic television markets, it seems, by elements of cultural capital which seem to provide natural barriers against interest in many types of imported programming, when national alternatives are available. (p. 219)

However, in these studies there is a strong tendency to see cultural proximity as essential. When studying why Japanese trendy dramas (or idol dramas) enjoyed immense popularity in Taiwan during the 1990s, Iwabuchi (2002) argues that the “seeming naturalness” of cultural proximity in empirical studies needs to be examined. He contends that using cultural proximity to explain the cultural consumption in regional media markets “runs the risk of representing culture in an ahistorical and totalizing way” (p.131). Iwabuchi continues,

Such an approach tends to be based on the assumption that there are given
cultural commonalities which spontaneously direct an audience’s interest toward media texts from culturally similar region, but it ignores the diverse historical contexts and internal differences which exist within cultural formations. . . . . It is the sense of historical contingency that tends to be suppressed in the notion of cultural proximity. (pp. 131-132)

This is why Iwabuchi (2002) argues that Japanese dramas are nearing “becoming cultural proximity” in Taiwan, because cultural proximity, according to him, is not something “out there” or existing a priori but a historical and social articulation a posteriori (p. 134).

This proposition of “becoming” represents an anti-essentialist or constructivist approach to interpreting culture. In a similar vein, Stuart Hall (1999) distinguishes two positions toward “cultural identity:” The first one refers to one shared culture that reflects a common historical experience and the same cultural codes which are beyond historical vicissitudes (p. 300). However, Hall identifies himself with the second position, which indicates:

*cultural identity . . . is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.”* It belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. *Cultural identities come somewhere, have histories.* But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to continuous “play” of history, culture and power. . . . (cultural identity is) not an essence but a positioning. (pp. 302-303, my emphases)

Hall argues that we should think of cultural identity as “a ‘production’ which is never
complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (p. 299).

Yet in cultural proximity or cultural identity there is something which cannot be deconstructed. Even from the constructionist viewpoint, cultural proximity or cultural identity is a construction, but it should be questioned on which pretenses this construct is built. These discussions about cultural proximity or cultural identity prompt further questioning of Benedict Anderson’s (1983) influential concept of “the imagined community.” As Smith (2000) argued, in Anderson’s original conceptualization, the idea of imagined political community and its relation with print capitalism was historically embedded. It is also true that any community which goes beyond face-to-face interpersonal communication is built upon the imagination. However, in recent literature “it has become a topos of the literary imagination, a metaphor for the constructed quality of all communities” (p. 58). In numerous literatures of international communications, the “imagined community” seems a self-evident truth to explain the existence of any modern nation-state or ethnic community. As Rofel (1994) rightly criticized, “Anderson never pursues the moment beyond which nations are initially imagined. His theory can explain the origin of imagined communities but not their plots, climaxes, or denouements” (p. 701, my emphasis). Smith pointed out that when any community is extends beyond direct personal interaction then it must be an imagined one, but “the nation is equally a felt and a willed community. Emphasizing imagination as the key attribute of the nation overlooks these other vital dimensions of will and emotion” (2000, p. 59, original emphasis). Simply put, this can be encapsulated into a fundamental question: “do
nations have navels?” (Geller, 1996, p. 366). For the theorists of social constructionism, such as Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson, the cultural continuity is contingent, inessential, and is either invented or imagined. On the contrary, for theorists of primordialism, like Anthony Smith, the nation-states do have navels, such as collective memories and traditions, myths and symbols, and upon which the national/cultural identity was created. Just as Hall (1999) said, cultural identities come from somewhere (p.302). This “somewhere” is composed of language, ethnicity, and collective memories. These together function like the essentialist being. So, both positions of seeing cultural proximity or identity as either “being” or “becoming” should be rejected. As Hall argues, cultural proximity or identity is “being” as well as “becoming.” It is a combination of both and functions like both.

Another question about Straubhaar’s cultural proximity thesis is that he emphasizes repeatedly that cultural proximity is a kind of cultural capital. Cultural capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984), is economic capital transformed into a set of dispositions or specific knowledge, particularly through institutionalized education, which permit elite classes symbolic dominance over the under classes. As we can see, this concept is a close derivative and variation of the classical Marxist class domination thesis. Straubhaar (2003) deliberately analyzes the relationships between economic capital and cultural capital and how they influence the audience’s cultural proximity. However, he seems to forget that cultural proximity, the premise of the audiences’ preference for local-produced media contents over imported cultural products, is basically applied to mass/popular culture rather than elite culture which cultivated through the invest of money and time. Television programming and the

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18In terms of the debate of nationalism between constructionism and primordialism, please see “The nation: Real or imagined? The Warwick debates on nationalism” by Ernest Geller and Anthony Smith, in Nations and nationalism, 2(3), 1996, pp 357-370 and a series of writings by Anthony Smith.
consumption of popular culture have little to do with one’s socio-economical status. The bottom line is, cultural proximity operates among the masses, ordinary people as well as educated elite.

The “ethno-symbolic” perspective is an approach to study the birth of modern nationalism, coined by Anthony Smith (1996). The “ethno-symbolic” approach focuses on the important role of memories, values, myths and symbols. Nationalism very often involves the pursuit of “symbolic” goals—education in a language, having your own language TV channel. . . . an ethno-symbolic approach can help us to understand why nationalism so often has such a widespread popular appeal. . . . Their vernacular culture is now valued and turned into the basis of new mass, public culture of the nation. (p. 362)

Here, the so called “vernacular culture” functions like cultural proximity which directs the audience’s choices of local-produced television programming instead of the imported ones. It is evident that cultural/national identity is built on this vernacular culture instead of cultural capital which reflects economic disparity between classes. Compared with Straubhaar’s emphasis of cultural proximity as a kind of cultural capital, I argue that national/cultural identity or cultural proximity is a kind of habitus. Habitus also comes from Pierre Bourdieu’s theory. Similar to Giddens’s structuration theory, Bourdieu also tries to articulate the dialectic relationship between objective structure and subjective dispositions. Habitus is a set of dispositions inculcated from an individual’s social position and it constitutes the agent’s identity. In other words, habitus is a psychological and cultural construct of socialization. In Bourdieu’s (1977) words,
The habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception. (p. 86)

Bohman (1999) correctly pointed out that Bourdieu’s habitus is good at explaining the reproductive and continuing cultural constraint. He argued that, “Habitus is supposed to explain how it is that agents come to share a culture and its practices, even when there are asymmetrical social positions and relations of domination” (Bohman, 1999, p. 133). Yet, this specific characteristic is pertinent to indicate the mythic and stubborn attributes of cultural identity which deny being rationally deconstructed. Just as De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) argue, national identity can be regarded as a kind of habitus, because it works

*as a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes* intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons;

(b) as well as *of similar behavioral dispositions*; (c) all of which are internalized through ‘national’ socialization. (p. 153, original emphases)

These deeply rooted structured feelings and the scheme for behaviors shared by a whole national community are reflected in numerous empirical studies indicating that imported television programs suffer a “cultural discount.” According to Hoskins and Mirus (1988), this represents “the cross-border reduction in the value of a foreign programme”(p.503). Using Straubhaar’s (1991) words, audiences always prefer a television program with cultural proximity to the imported ones. These empirical studies demonstrate how the shared common cultural habitus can influence the reception of TV programming among audiences.
Localized Genre: The Product of Cultural Hybridization

When analyzing the formation of regional media markets, Straubhaar emphasizes the important capability of cultural industries in developing a unique genre appealing to the audience’s cultural proximity. In the case of Latin America, this peculiar localized cultural genre is the *telenovela*, a Latin American version of the soap opera. Recently, in the popular *Taiwanese Soap Opera* (本土劇, Bantu Chu, Tsai, 2000) which dominate the prime-time ratings, one can also detect the cultural localization occurring in the formation of telenovelas. Taiwanese Soap Opera is also one localized sub-genre appropriating the macro-genre of the soap opera.

Actually, both telenovela and Taiwan’s prime time drama are localized versions of television dramatic serials, which is one of the most popular television genre in the world (Allen, 1995). According to Hagedron (1995), the serial is a unique narrative form which has been adopted by the publishing industry for several centuries. As Hagedron argues, episodicity is the curial trait which distinguishes the serial from the “classic” narrative text, that is, the single-unit realistic narrative. The episodicity of the serial has been used to accomplish three tasks. First, an episode of any one particular serial functions to promote continued consumption of later episodes of the same narrative; second, serials have traditionally functioned to promote product loyalty among the audience; third, serials also serve to promote the very medium in which they appear. This might explain why so many audiences acknowledge being “hooked” by some dramatic serials. So, Hagedorn concluded that the emergence of the serial as a particular format of cultural production is the result of the flux of certain social/economic/technological conditions:

Historically, for this [the serial] to occur, one needs a social context
characterized by three essential elements: a market economy, a communication
technology sufficiently developed to be commercially exploited, and . . . the
recognition of narrative as commodity. (Hagedorn, 1995, p. 29)

From the beginning, the narrative characteristic of the serial provided an advantage to
the cultural producer, because they can decide not only how and when the narrative
will develop and end, but also can predict how and when the audience will engage
with the text (Allen, 1995, p. 1). This makes the serial an ideal mode of cultural
commodity, since the producer can control the leverages to manipulate the audience’s
consumption.

This serial form provides the opportunity to question the originality of local
cultural genres developed through this medium. For example, the most discussed
Latin American telenovela can be seen as an adapted Western soap opera with Latin
American flavor. Straubhaar (1991) also pointed out that this genre was influenced by
French serial novels and U.S. radio and television soap operas, making it a product of
cultural hybridization. As Canclini (2000) contends, that hybridization has existed as a
normal way for nation-states to develop their cultures for centuries, which not only
embrace the mixing of “classical” cultures but also “include interlacings of the
traditional and the modern, of elite, popular and mass cultures” (p. 41). Canclini
highlights how the capitalistic media industries—especially audiovisual and electronic
communications—activate the constant “cultural hybridization in the globalization
era” (2000, p. 47). Put in other words, hybridization is what Roland Roberson (1992,
1995) called glocalization, that is, a localized cultural reconstruction which adopts
forms and genres that have spread globally to express the ideas and feelings of home
or locality. Hybridization is also described as a process of transculturation (Chan and
Ma, 2002), which refers to the cultural translation conducted by media industries to cater to the local audience’s taste.

**Media Industries and Media Regionalization: Cultural Agency, Cultural Producers and Audiences**

In addition to the macro political and economic structures under which the media system develops and operates, media industries serve other important players in the flow of regional media. As Stuart Hall argued:

. . . . Cultural production in television cannot be understood outside the framework of the institutional apparatuses which produce and the fundamental economic and production relations which organize these apparatuses, and which link and connect them, within and between nation-states. (as cited in Sinclair, 1999, p. 150)

For understanding the operation of a regional media market, media industries are the indispensable institutions that need to be scrutinized.

**From the Cultural Industries to the Creative Industries: An Epistemology Turn**

The idea of the cultural industry was first brought out by the two critical theorists of the Frankfurt School in the 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979). Given their concerns about the spread of Nazism in Europe, they believed that the domination and manipulation of ordinary people was explicitly connected to standardized cultural production. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the capitalistic cultural production would generate a homogenous mass culture which stifles any genuine creativity and results in a type of passive consumption. This mass culture finally would induce a pseudo individuality, and this mentality would serve as the origin of totalitarianism.
In Adorno and Horkheimer’s minds, the cultural industry does not only result in a mundane culture but also a clear danger to democracy. However, the term “culture industry” was picked up by several French sociologists, such as Edgar Morin and Bernard Miege, who converted the singular term “cultural industry” to the plural term “cultural industries” (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). These French sociologists used the term change to highlight their discontent with the Frankfurt School’s cultural pessimism. First, they disagreed with the Frankfurt School’s nostalgia towards the pre-industrial elitist culture; second, they argued that technological inventions had changed the mode of cultural production from a unified field into a complex institution. This fundamental change actually made the institution of cultural production into a zone full of uncertainties and contestations. In other words, the products produced by cultural industries are more diversified than before (Miege, 1989).

According to Hesmondhalgh (2002), there are three kinds of personnel playing important roles in cultural industries. They are, first, the primary creative personnel, the symbol creators such as authors, screenwriters, directors and musicians, who are responsible for producing media texts. Creative personnel care more about how to build their personal reputation through producing original or accomplished works. The second kind of personnel are the creative managers. These people are the brokers or mediators between the owners and executives, whose main interests in the industries are profit, and how to maintain co-operations with the creative personnel. These creative managers are simultaneously the “primary audience” of the cultural products and the “gatekeepers” of the cultural industries. In addition to the cultural and commercial considerations, sometimes national policies and ideologies will also
influence their decisions (Cunningham, Jacka & Sinclair, 1998). Finally there are the owners and executives who employ the power to set the operational policies for the industry. For cultural industries, there are not only conflicts between the organizations and macro political and economic structures, but also the conflicts at the intra-organizational level, that is, the power struggle between the creative personnel and executives or owners.

Another important player for cultural industries is the audience. If cultural industries represent the production end, then what the audience embodies is the consumption end. The audiences are those who make the final judgment of the performance of cultural industries. However, in the beginning, media industries did not take the audience seriously. Taking the American commercial TV industry for example, in network TV’s golden era, the audience was seen as a commodity that television companies sold to the advertiser for profits. In this period, the audience is basically seen merely as a market or rating number (Ang, 1991; Blumler, 1996). Hartley (2003) went even further when he claimed that TV audiences have no real existence. Rather they “are the invisible fictions that are produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival” (p. 58). Yet, after the commercial television entered into a “neo-networks” era (Curtin & Streeter, 200, p.231)—that is when mutli-channel TV, cable TV, and satellite TV fundamentally changed the landscape of TV industry—the audience’s scarcity in an over-competing television market sent a wake up call to the television industry because the executives had to grapple with the different tastes of the fragmented audience groups. The good old days of taking audiences for granted was over, and the TV industry began painstakingly creating special programming with an “edge” to
seek their target audience (Curtin & Streeter, 2001, p. 244). The audience’s subjectivity used to be overlooked in the operation of international media industries. It can help to explain why the television industries in those peripheral countries start to devote resources to produce their own programming as the audience prefers those programs with cultural proximity over the much cheaper imported ones.

With the economy developing into the phase of late capitalism, the traditional cultural industries were gradually transformed into the creative industries. According to Harvey (1989), the operational logic of late capitalism is based on flexible capital accumulation, which is a new mode of production different from the traditional “Fordism.” The difference between these two production modes lies in the former entertaining flexibility in the whole production process. The flexible accumulation is characterized by a new pattern of labor process, marketing, consumption and financing to respond to the increasingly unpredictable markets with more mobility. With this kind of new economic operation, a corresponding mode of cultural production has emerged - the creative industries. As defined by Hartley (2005), creative industries indicate “the conceptual and practical convergence of Creative Arts (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale)” (p. 5), which is partly a case of democratizing culture in the context of commerce

And also a case of creativity as enterprise sector. Creative industries were the commercial, or commercializable, applications of creativity within a democratizing ‘republic of taste’…. It focused on the twin truths that (1) the core of “culture” was still creativity, but (2) creativity was produced,

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19 Fordism as a modern industrial production mode was named after Henry Ford’s car industry, which highlights the mass production, standardized product, concentrated capital investment and specific labor-division. The epitome of Fordism is the assembling line running through the factory (Harvey, 1989).
deployed, consumed and enjoyed quite differently in post-industrial societies.

(p. 18)

In other words, the creative talents or symbol creators who are equipped with individualistic charisma are highly valued and are desperately sought out by cultural industries. With the combination of mass scale production ability and charismatic creative talents, the new creative industries began to dominate cultural production in the postmodern and last capitalism era.

**Authorship in the Popular Culture Production Era**

Authorship in popular culture production had long been a serious debate. On one hand, there were theorists like Fiske (1987), who developed the active audience thesis to question the importance of authorship in popular culture production. He argued that the audience serves not only as the interpreters of the media text, but also utilizes its agency to serve as the liberating power of capitalistic cultural productions. On the other hand, there were theorists such as James Ettema (1982), who followed Paul DiMaggio’s (1977) organizational sociological study of modern cultural industries, and argued that individual creativity in popular culture production has to compromise with different organizational limitations. Both views question the existence of authorship in popular culture.

Audience plays a critical role as consumers of popular culture. As Appadurai (1996) points out, cultural consumption can be seen as a practice of imagination, which is a common psychological ability possessed by all. Through the emotional engagement/displacement with the storylines and identifying with the heroes or heroines, the audience can live vicariously through the characters from different times and spaces and derive satisfaction and pleasure from the experience. This is what
Appadurai (1996) observed:

There is a peculiar force to the imagination in social life today…. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others. (p. 53)

Yet, with the “ethnography turn” in media studies and the theoretical focusing on the audience’s agency in decoding the media texts, the authorship in popular cultural production is facing challenges from both the organizational constraints and the audiences’ agency. However, I argue that cultural consumption as a practice of “imagining” is initiated by the cultural industries, or more precisely by the creators of the media texts. When Firth (1988) studied the modern music industry, he pointed out:

My starting point is that what is possible for us as consumers—what is available to us, what we can do with it—is a result of decisions made in production, made by musicians, entrepreneurs and corporate bureaucrats, made according to governments’ and lawyers’ rulings, in response to technological opportunities. The key to “creative consumption” remains an understanding of those decisions, the constraints under which they are made and the ideologies that account for them.(pp. 6-7)

As he emphasized here, the content of media is determined during production and puts limitations on the audience’s interpretation of the media content. The most famous motto of theorists of the active audience thesis is that audiences are not “cultural dopes” (Garfinkle, 1992, p.37), but there is no reason to assume that the cultural industries or symbol creators are “cultural/commercial dopes” either. As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000) pointed out, even if we accept the concept of “active
audience,” the fact cannot be ignored that the media also actively seek out their audiences. “Whatever collective audience preferences and desires there might be, they are still shaped commercially and ideologically as markets for certain forms of genres by media corporations” (p. 15).

The authorship of a specific symbol creator is based on more than a mere “successful track record” (DiMaggio, 1977) but is similar to what David Harvey calls image in the era of flexible accumulation. David Harvey (1989) contends that:

The production and marketing of such images of permanence and power require considerable sophistication, because the continuity and stability of the image have to be retained while stressing the adaptability, flexibility, and dynamism of whoever or whatever is being imaged. Moreover, image becomes all-important in competition, not only through name-brand recognition but also because of various associations of “responsibility,” “quality,” “prestige,” “reliability,” and “innovation.” (p. 288)

In other words, authorship in popular culture production is something like the “brand name effect” in other capitalistic productions. It not only caters to mass audiences with a specific taste, but also satisfies the economic considerations of cultural industries. For those symbol creators who work in the cultural industries, authorship can provide them with more resources, increased room for creativity and the power to control the qualities of their cultural products.

The Theoretical Framework of the Dissertation

Through the literature review, I provided a theoretical framework to analyze the operation and dialectic within a regional media market. This framework situated the symbol creators or cultural industries in the contexts of nation states and media
markets, to examine how the cultural factors (human agency), such as cultural proximity, genres, and the individual creativity, operate in the regional cultural production and influence consumption. In terms of the context of nation states, the historic, economic, and geopolitical factors will be analyzed through the functioning of the center-periphery mechanism. The readers might find from this theoretical framework that I do not invest much research interest in the audience’s consumption but rather focus on the cultural worker’s production practice. This approach reflects my misgivings towards the recent development in media studies which devotes efforts to the audience’s agency but too little energies to the media content producer’s agency. In the study of Sony’s “personal stereo system,” the Walkman, by du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (1997), the authors argued in favor of a circuit of culture (p.4) model. This model, which examines cultural text in relation to the audience’s consumption and (cultural) industries’ production, takes into account three other components of cultural practice, representation, identity, and regulation, to form a well-rounded framework that connects production and consumption. However, this kind of hologramatic study of cultural production is rare in the field of media studies. Oftentimes we find that cultural production and cultural consumption are studied separately. Usually the former is analyzed by a political economy paradigm which highlights the institutional perspectives, such as the regulation of the industries or government policies, or the demand and supply of a market mechanism. This research orientation still reflects the presumption of the Frankfurt school’s critique toward mass culture, that is, the popular culture products are treated as standardized factory products (Newcomb and Lotz, 2002). On the other hand, cultural consumption is mainly explored by the cultural studies paradigm with emphasis on the audience’s
agency of decoding through ethnographic methodology. This dualistic division in media research is even more obvious in the field of international communication, which used to be dominated by the global/local bipolar framework.

My dissertation project will focus on the analysis of the media content producer’s agency in the operation of media regionalization. I want to demonstrate the bias in ignoring the producer’s agency in current media studies, which is as important as, perhaps even more important than, the audience’s agency regarding consumption in culture production research.

**Methodology: A Contextual Pragmatist Approach**

There is no clear methodological categorization for this research project. Cunningham, Jacka and Sinclair (1998) argue that media regionalization is a field which Robert Merton’s “theory of the middle range” seems most pertinent. However, the middle-range theoretical framework I employ here is not extracted from the “grand theory” of the “free-flow” of media texts and the “American-hegemony” paradigms that have dictated the discussions of international media exchanges for decades. Rather, my research project is drawn from the divide between production and consumption within the broader context of media studies. Namely, this middle range theoretical framework straddles the political economy of communication and cultural studies. In the process of analysis, I will employ theories from different disciplines to make sense of the successful creative career of Taiwanese symbol creator Chiungyao developed in the mainland and the popularity her works enjoyed in the global Chinese mediascape. My criteria in adopting certain theories depended on the usefulness of those theories in explaining my research subject matter. Just as Ma (1999) said about his study of Hong Kong identity through a popular TV drama serial,
in which he did not intend to produce a neat theoretical model:

I agree with Keller (1995) that the more theories one has at one’s disposal, the more tasks one can perform . . . . I am going for mid-range fuzzy theories which have the flexibility of accommodating historical contingencies and at the same time allow for the fixing of cultural patterns and tendencies in specific socio-historic contexts. (p. 18)

Further, he cited Douglas Kellner’s (1995) deliberation of methodology in media studies to defend his interdisciplinary approach.

. . . theories are seen to be either useful or deficient through their application and effects. Contextual pragmatist and ‘multiperspectival’ approaches thus work together to open up theoretical inquiry to a multiplicity of discourses and methods. Theories and discourses are more or less useful, depending on the issue under question, the specific application of the theory in the theorist’s hand, and the goals intended. (p. 27)

In other words, this research project is adopting what Keller (1995) termed a “contextual pragmatist approach” as its overarching methodology.

**Studying Media Fiction Production: Levels of Analysis**

Newcomb and Lotz (2002) demonstrated how to conduct a study of media fiction production. They differentiated five levels of analysis, including, 1. national and international political economy and policy; 2. specific industrial contexts; 3. particular organizations, studios, production companies, networks; 4. individual productions; and, 5. individual agents. Yet, as they acknowledged, what really defines media production practices is the interdependence of these factors. My research project can be divided into two levels of exploration. The first level is focused on TV
drama production within the individual national media industries and the interactions between the industries of the member nation-states within a regional media market. This analysis includes the first two levels of analysis from Newcomb and Lotz’s framework. An examination of producers strategic employment of the cultural, historical and economic conditions used to transform these factors to their personal advantages is the second level of analysis. This analysis mainly responds to the last three levels of analysis from Newcomb and Lotz’s framework which highlight the individual producer’s agency. However, echoing Newcomb and Lotz’s emphasis on the “interdependency” or “interaction” between these different factors, I believe what is important to the study of a specific TV program in the regional media market lies in how to articulate the dialectic interactions between the structural and cultural factors.

Contextualizing Articulation and Structuration

How can one examine the dialectic interactions between these different levels of analysis? My answer to this question is based on a contextualized articulation from British cultural studies. According to Lawrence Grossberg (1992), the whole cultural studies enterprise can be interpreted as a response to particular relationships developed within contexts, or an articulation. Borrowed from Ernesto Laclau’s (1977) study of ideology, articulation has been developed by Stuart Hall into the representative theory and methodology of British cultural studies. Originally, articulation was employed to demonstrate how the power operations behind a discourse connect with certain social forces, but later it became a heuristic way to examine how cultural practices work within some specific contexts. Grossberg (1992) once defined articulation as:

….the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of
structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this
text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those
politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structure . . . .
Articulation offers a theory of contexts. It dictates that one can only deal with,
and from within, specific contexts, for it is only there that practices have
specific effects, that identities and relations exist.(pp. 54-55)

Because every practice is located in a specific set of relations, Grossberg (1992)
argued that a context “can be seen as a structured field, a configuration of practices”
(p. 60). In other words, the context in cultural studies represents an ongoing process
of creating structure formed by the agents’ practices. When articulation is put into the
process of contextualization, it will deepen our understanding of both how agents
practice under social structural constraints and how social structure is formed by the
subject’s agency.

This contextualizing articulation harks back to Anthony Giddens’s structuration
theory. Giddens (1984) employs structuration theory to exemplify a dynamic process
of duality of social structures and the mutual dependence of structure and agency,
which aims to demonstrate that “the structural properties of social systems are both
the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems” (Giddens,
1993, p. 122). Through the concept of “duality of structure,” Giddens shows that
structures are not only constraining but also enabling. In Giddens’s theoretical
framework, the agency is not the passive resource constrained by social structure, but
also serves as the positive vehicle for the individual actors to reproduce the social
structures. The enternal interactions between structure and agency encapsulated in the
structation theory is very similar to the contextualizing articulation.
Finally, I employ Giddens’s structuration theory for the methodological framework. As I pointed out earlier, Straubhaar (2002) has used the framework of structuration theory to lay out an analytical scheme to explore the operation of regional media markets. However, it seems that this approach did not produce many empirical works in studying the process of media regionalization. Two main reasons led to my choosing the structuration theory as the guiding framework in conducting my research. First, the binary division between the structural factors and human agency (cultural factors) will help me keep a clear focus through my study. Second, the emphasis placed on interactions between these two kinds of factors gives me the room to move back and forth among different geopolitic, economic, cultural and institutional contexts within the Greater China regional media market. This enables me to disclose the connections created by the cultural worker’s agency within these different contexts.

**Methological Procedures**

In examining the empirical levels, the question is how to collect useful data to conduct a case study of fiction production across the Taiwan Strait. According to Newcomb and Lotz (2002), this kind of study divides into two parts. The first part is the collection of historical materials, including governmental policy statements, regulations, industry documents, trade press reports, as well as newspaper and magazine interview articles; the second is the researcher’s personal participant observation and in-depth interviews with the focal production personnel, such as the symbol creators/scriptwriters, producers, and creative managers. I have encountered difficulties in both of these areas during the collection of my data.
Since American film and television industries have been developed into large-scale and well organized industrial organizations, the related reference sources—such as public corporate records, annual reports, professional almanacs and trade publications—are ample and easily accessible. The main task of the researcher is to sift through and analyze the critical information. Yet, in Taiwan, film and television productions have never developed into an “industry” under such a rigorous definition. They are basically composed of numerous independent production houses, individual producers, and temporary production teams organized by opportunistic investors. The valid industrial historical materials and professional trade press available for Taiwan’s media researchers are insufficient. In their oligopoly era, the three Taiwan TV networks used to publish separate TV Weekly publications for their own programs’ publicity. However, with the introduction of cable TV after 1993, these publications disappeared one after another. The only professional publication, *Television Yearbook of the Republic of China*, which was edited and published by R.O.C. Television Academy of Arts and Sciences, an organization loosely operated by Taiwan’s three TV networks, was abruptly stopped in 2002.20 The halt was a result of the TV networks’ interests being seriously eroded by the newly established cable TV networks. Without professional publications, conducting television production research in Taiwan is difficult.

On the other hand, media studies in mainland China is a vigorous new academic field. Although only since the late 1980s has “popular television programming” in the Western sense emerged on the China’s TV screens, the immense

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20 Because the R.O.C. Television Academy of Arts and Sciences stopped operation after 2002, the publishing of *Television Yearbook 2003-2004* changed hands to the Government information office. Since the hiatus of 2002, there is no available general information of Taiwan’s TV industry between 2002 and 2003.
commercial potential of the enormous Chinese market instantly initiated the enthusiasm of researchers. In only two decades, TV production in China has developed into a vigorous industry and publications on media research have increased dramatically. Only in the sub-field of TV drama studies do books and periodical journals with diversified focuses such as history, aesthetics, media economics, productions, management, and marketing keep hitting the market. Given the fast pace of development, most of these publications are not refined in terms of methodology, theoretical framework or argument. This situation poses difficulties for media research, a result from a burst of unqualified publications.

Field research, including participant observation, and in-depth interviews are another source of information. Newcomb and Lotz (2002) suggested that it is often easy for academic researchers to gain access to production sites. However, they did not consider the usually mobile and unrecognizable process of cultural production in places outside of the United States. My personal experiences are much closer to McRobbie’s (2000) experiences during her study of the production of fashion journalism in England. She said,

Production studies require intense periods of immersion in the field of study. Even when this means simply interviewing media professionals rather than establishing a full-blown ethnographic study of workplace routines, it is a slow and unpredictable process. There is also the difficult business of getting access to powerful people and then getting their time for more than just an ‘in and out’ interview. (p. 257) Another important factor ignored by Newcomb and Lotz is the time-lapse between research and production. Normally, by the time a TV drama attracts
researchers’ attentions it has already been aired. Then when the researcher decides to start the research project and does the required preparation homework, the production of the TV drama has been finished for a long time. The scenarios suggested by Newcomb and Lotz are only possible for the popular shows lasting for several seasons or the seemingly never ending soap operas. However, the two-season-for-one-year drama production modus operandi and the perennial soap operas are the products of the American television culture and industry. This specific production mode of TV drama is hard to compare to drama productions in other television cultures, such as Taiwan’s prime-time dramas, Latin American telenovelas, or Japan’s trendy dramas. The TV drama serials of *Huanzhu Gege* were produced between 1997 and 2003, so there is no possibility of conducting an on site field study. These difficulties might explain why most TV drama studies usually employ textual analysis, organizational sociological analysis, political economy analysis and in-depth interviews of the main creators, rather than on site production studies. McRobbie (2000) confessed that after a process of trial and error, she finally got her research done “through the modest tool of interview” (p. 260).

In addition to the historical materials and publications I gathered, another important source of information on my research into the production of *Huanzhu Gege* came from interviews. Just as McRobbie mentioned, even getting access to these “big shot” professionals and having a normal interview is not an easy job. Owing to my background working as a reporter, I conducted interviews in Taiwan successfully. In April 2004, I interviewed the *Huanzhu Gege*’s producer, Jesse Ho; the programming

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21Taiwan’s prime-time drama is similar to the Latin American telenovela, a drama which is composed of forty to fifty one-hour episodes, aired on weekday nights. Japanese TV trendy drama generally is composed of 11 episodes, and shows one episode in one week’s fixed time slot (Tsai, 2002). All these dramas have a structured narrative, which is different from most American TV dramas which loosely base their plotlines on the main characters.
executive Lai Fu-lai (賴福來) of China Television Network, which is this drama’s Taiwan investor; and the main creator’s career partner, Ping Xin-tao. Yet, I did not interview the most important person in the creation of *Huanzhu Gege*, the legendary symbol creator Chiungyao herself. Famous for her low-profile life-style, I was told by an entertainment reporter, that if it is not time for the promotion of her TV drama, making contact with Chiungyao is difficult. The reporter, however, gave me her telephone number and suggested that I “give it a try.”

In the end, I did not make the call. The reason for my decision is that even if I could talk to Chiungyao personally and persuade her to agree to my interview, what “in-depth” questions could I ask her that would expand beyond the questions which have been asked in numerous interviews for the promotion of *Huanzhu Gege*? To what extent could I take her answers an honest reflection of what really is in her mind? Garnham (1990) was similarly critical of production studies based on the “in-depth” interviews saying that “such work suffers from a tendency to succumb to the superficial glamour of the media world and to take media workers’ own evaluations of the specially creative nature of their work at face value” (p. 11). The truth is, there are many TV drama studies adopting the “in-depth interview” of the creators as the main method that turned out to be unabashed exaltations of these cultural workers’ “creativity.” They have lost sight of how a cultural worker’s “creativity” is a compromise of several conflicting factors, such as culture, institution, economy and personal habitus.

Another reason behind my decision not to “give it a try” is because Chiungyao is what Russian literary critic Boris Tomashevsky calls the “biographical legend” (Bordwell, 1988, p. 5). When discussing Japanese film auteur Yasujiro Ozu,
David Bordwell used “biographical legend” as an analytical vehicle to examine how this artist offers life stories through biography or gives interviews to justify his legendary status. According to Bordwell, an artist offers the audience the biographical version of their own life for two purposes: “to permit works to come into being, as fulfillments of the legend; and to orient perceivers to them, to favor certain construals and to block others” (p. 5). Like Ozu, Chiungyao is the kind of cultural worker who is willing to discuss their own life and work through biographical writing. When Chiungyao was a young romantic novelist, she did not write much about her work. After Chiungyao was transformed into an established popular culture icon, she began to write a good deal about her thoughts on her work. In other words, through these biographical writings, I not only get detailed first hand descriptions and reflections from a cultural worker talking about her own productions, but I also get the necessary distance to critically analyze a cultural worker’s production without risking turning my research into a promotional exaltation.

My interviewing experiences in China were filled with frustrations. The TV industry in China is not friendly to academic researchers, especially to those coming from other countries and without any guanxi (關係, interpersonal network) with them. I asked Jesse Ho to help me arranging an interview with Chiungyao’s long-time production partner in China, the high executive of Hunan Media Group. After one month’s negotiation and numerous international phone calls, the interview appointment still could not be made. Holding to the belief that a production study should include on-site observation and as many in-depth interviews with the professional workers as possible, I insisted that I wanted to visit Hunan Media Group in person. When it came to July 2004, I decided that I could not wait any longer for
their arrangement and flew to Beijing. With the help of my friends in Beijing, I finally located in QingHua (清華) University. My original thought was that physically being in China would make it easier for me to make an interview appointment with the people in Hunan Media Group. But I was naïve. When I called Hunan Media Group from Beijing, their answer still was the same as before: their manager was not available. Constrained by time and budget, I asked them if a telephone interview would be possible. Magically, the always unavailable manager suddenly could talk with me. So, ironically, after flying to China, I still made my “in-depth” interview through the telephone. The hope that I could interview some of China’s officials who are responsible for TV drama production in Beijing faded as well. When I called one official in the evening, he told me with a cold voice that he was in a music concert so could not talk with me. When I asked him if I could interview him another time, he told me with a cold voice again: “I have told you that I am in a music concert.” He then hung up the phone. The buzz sound of the telephone in my ear had never been clearer.

I have a friend whose uncle works in the department of international broadcasting of China Central Television (CCTV). I asked whether her uncle might help me interview some executives in charge of drama production at CCTV. Her uncle suggested I interview one of his good friends in the department of programming, and I successfully made an appointment with that executive by telephone. After I arrived at the highly guarded CCTV compound and was escorted by the executive’s secretary past quizzical guards, I met Cheng Hong (程宏), the programming director of CCTV. However, when I sat down and turned on my recorder, Mr. Chen briskly said: “Well, my schedule is tight so let’s finish it in thirty minutes.” I felt my smile was frozen on
my face. Fortunately, this “in-depth” interview had continued fifty minutes and only stopped when Mr. Chen was asked by his colleagues to have lunch. I also tried to interview some mainland Chinese scholars in the field of communication studies. One Ying Hong, professor at Qinghua University. A friend teaching at Beijing University told me that she had met Ying Hong several times and got to know him. She said that she would e-mail professor Ying and introduce me to him. However, Ying did not reply to my e-mail or my voice message. Even on the same campus, I could not get access to one faculty member.

Although my research was not executed very successfully, it still served as a valuable learning experience. Now I now understand why there are so few media studies adopting the cultural production approach, so few scholars pointing out the shortages in textual analysis or the audience reception analysis approach. The reason, as my personal experience shows, lies in that there are too many objective constraints to conduct research projects. Also, I can fully understand why there are so many TV drama studies employing textual analysis as the main research methodology. It’s mainly because that when conducting textual analyses the researchers do not have to depend upon other people’s willingness to collect information. Through the waste of time and money I learned first hand the difference between theory and practice.

Summary

This chapter laid down both the theoretical foundation and methodical framework for my research project. Following Giddens’s structuration theory, I try to analyze the dialectic operation within a regional media market.

In the literature review, I began with questioning the claims of media globalization and argued for the importance of media regionalization in today’s global
cultural flows. Afterwards, following Straubhaar’s (1991, 2002) emphses on the three factors that he believed profoundly influence the operation of regional media market, I discussed the dialectics between the center and periphery in the regional media market, the nature of cultural proximity, and the localized cultural genre as a kind of cultural hybridization. Then, I focused on the cultural production in a regional media market. I concluded with a discussion of cultural industries, where the popular culture productions take place, and the symbol creator’s authorship in popular culture production.

This literature reiew reflects my research interests. I believe media studies should refocus on the production perspective rather than the consumption perspective, because I believe the cultural workers are those who, to a large extent, decide how the audiences will interpret media texts. Especially during the complex production process, these cultural workers exert their creative agency to negotiate with the audience’s taste, institutional constraints, and macro-structural frameworks. I think the “return to the encoding” approach will liberate us from the long-term domination of audience reception analysis in media studies. This is the reason why I defined my dissertauion project as a “study of media fiction production” (Newcomb & Lotz, 2002).

In terms of my methodology, I defined it as “a contextual pragmatist approach,” which emphasizes the flexibility a researcher is allowed to utilize in the research process. In other words, it is a “mutliperspective” approach concerned only with bringing out some insights or producing some knowlege from the research (Keller, 1985). Constrained by time and other available resources, the research methods I actually employed in this study are limited to a literature review and
personal interviews. Regarding the analytical framework, I utilized Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory both for its clarity of the binary division between structure and agency and its focus on the interactions between these two factors.

Although theoretically I believe that a media production study is much worthier than the audience reception analysis or textual analysis for its potential in generating new knowledge in media studies, in practice this approach has many more limitations and difficulties than the previous two methods.
CHAPTER 3
THE GREATER CHINA REGIONAL MEDIA MARKET:
TV DRAMA CO-PRODUCTIONS ACROSS THE TAIWAN STRAIT

This is a case study of Taiwan’s popular symbol creator Chiungyao’s successful TV drama serial *Huanzgu Gege* to examine how different mechanisms—the economic, cultural, and symbolic—operate in the Greater China regional media market. In this Chapter, I will map out a relatively new regional media market, Greater China. By delineating its formation, I contend that Greater China is a regional market produced by the international division of labor, yet what makes the Greater China regional media market different from other regional media markets is the coexistence of internal confrontation and cooperation. Exploring the particular characteristics of the Greater China regional media market will further understanding of how regionalization functions differently from globalization. When doing so, I am also setting one of the important contexts of my study, that is, the *structural context* (Straubhaar, 2003) which is composed of the historical and geopolitical backdrop, the practices of cultural industries and national media policies. This context not only lays out the framework within which the commercial businesses such as regional media coproduction and trade are taking place, but also constitutes a field of cultural production in which cultural workers create their cultural works and fulfill their authorships.

**Greater China: Its formation and dynamics**

“Greater China” is a controversial and problematic term. According to Harding (1995), Greater China appeared in the 1930s to refer to the Chinese Empire in a geographical sense, however, most scholars agree that the term “Greater China” only gained currency after the 1980s when the East Asian “tigers” (or ‘dragons,’
especially Hong Kong and Taiwan) achieved economic successes and mainland China started to adopt economic reform. Despite geographic and cultural proximity, this region had been criss-crossed by imperialist colonization from the West and Asia\textsuperscript{22} and followed different political alignments in the Cold War era. These different historical trajectories have deeply influenced the possibility of it being fully integrated.

When “Greater China” became popular in different academic circles in the 1990s, this term did not have a stable definition. For example, there are still disagreements about whether Singapore, Macao or even Southeast Asian Chinese communities should or should not be included in Greater China (Harding, 1995; Copper, 2002). In the field of international economics, “Greater China” might only include the Chinese southern coastal provinces, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Wang, 1995). Yet, as Crane (1995) argues, “Mainland China-Hong Kong-Taiwan nexus” will be “the centerpiece” of this term (p. 270). In communication research, the concept of “Greater China” has been most thoroughly discussed in Joseph Man Chan’s 1996 seminal article entitled “Television in greater China: Structures, exports, and market formation.” He also defined “Greater China” as the economic, political and cultural space composed of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chan, 1996).

Despite Chan’s uncertainty about its development potential, today the “greater China media market” is regarded as one of the most prominent geo-cultural media markets (Sinclair et al., 1996; Straubharr, 1997; Iwabuchi, 2002). The reason is evident: with its continuing economic reform, today China is not only the biggest TV and consumer market in the world, but also a relatively “underdeveloped” media market in the international media conglomerates’ eyes. In the case of Hong Kong, it

\textsuperscript{22}Taiwan has been colonized by Dutch, and Japanese; Hong Kong was colonized by British and invaded by Japanese during the World War II.
has long proved itself as the most important Chinese media production center in the
world. Among the Greater China media market, Taiwan is the most unnoticed member.
However, a new and profitable mode of cultural production, the TV drama
co-production, within the Greater China media market germinated between Taiwan
and mainland China in the late 1980s and was followed by rapid growth.

Before going further to explore the dynamics of the Greater China regional
media market, I want to highlight some unique characteristics of this region, its origin
and operations.

**Greater China as a Product of the Old and New Regionalism**

If adopting the current dominant definition of Greater China includes China,
Taiwan and Hong Kong, the term is obviously a product of a *new regionalism.*
According to Bjorn Hettne (1994; 2000), the *new regionalism* is different from the *old regionalism* in three respects:

1. Whereas the old regionalism was formed in a bipolar Cold War context,
   the new is taking shape in a more multipolar world order.
2. Whereas the old regionalism was created “from above” (that is by the
   super powers), the new is a more spontaneous process “from below” (in the
   sense that the constituent states themselves are main actors).
3. Whereas the old regionalism was specific with regard to objectives, the
   new is a more comprehensive, multidimensional process. (1994, pp. 1-2)

In the past the relationships among the three members in Greater China have been
molded by the geopolitical divisions of the West/East confrontation framework (Li,
1998). The People’s Republic of China was once one of the most persistent threats to
the West/First World Bloc during the Cold War era. Even today it still remains the
most powerful socialist state in the world. In terms of the other two members, Taiwan was used by the U.S. as the strategic counterforce to constrain Communist China. Hong Kong was assigned as the bridgehead to provide close observation of the social, economic, political and military movements in mainland China to the west. The close cultural and geographic connections which existed \textit{a priori} within these three members were seriously distorted by the world realpolitik in the Cold War era (Li, 1998). 

The emergence of Greater China can be attributed to the trend of globalization. The business opportunities and global labor-division created by globalization not only brought about the East Asian economic miracle in the 1980s but also initiated the formation of Greater China. First of all, capital flow and the new production mode of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1989), replacing the more rigid Fordist production, brought about the East Asia economic miracle. This made rapid and rigorous economic development possible in the East Asian burgeoning economies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore. These East Asian “Tigers” adopted the globalizing economic development model, that is, they rapidly upgraded their industrial production from traditional labor-intensive industries to both technology and capital-intensive high-tech industries. This economic strategy required these Asian Tigers to find new production bases with large populations of low-wage laborers to accommodate the labor-intensive production needs. In the case of Taiwan and Hong Kong, they instantly found mainland China to be the perfect production base for their outdated manufacturing industries. During that period, mainland China just began its economic reform and desperately needed the international investment. The economic complementarity and regional division of labor is the main driving
force behind the formation of Greater China (Lin and Lin, 2001; Mittelman, 2000).²³

It is evident that Greater China is foremost a product of economic regionalization created by the profit-driven businessmen “from below.” Its emergence not only contradicted the geopolitics spearheaded by the U.S. but also did not get official incentives from the local governments. In fact, even now there are still political antagonisms operating in this region. Within Greater China, the situation across the Taiwan Strait is characterized by high levels of political conflicts coexisting with economic cooperation (Bolt, 2001).

The Center and Periphery in Greater China

Considering the sheer size, population, economic capability, political-military power, and historical/cultural heritage, mainland China is the unarguable center in the region of the Greater China. However, between the end of Chinese Civil war (1949) and Deng Xiao-ping’s Open Door policy (1978), China’s authorities, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), adopted an antagonistic approach to its own cultural and historical heritage. The ancient and overpowering Confucianism in Chinese culture was labeled as “obsolete” and replaced by socialism. In politics, mainland China first was allied with the communist Soviet Union and then moved to the anti-West/capitalism Second world. Later, in the 1960s, China alienated itself from the Eastern Bloc because of conflicts of interest with the Soviet Union, and China declared itself as the maintainer of orthodox Marxist socialism to distinguish itself from Soviet Marxist revisionism. Domestically it flung itself into a series of fanatical political movements, such as the Grand Leap and the Cultural Revolution; diplomatically it tried to take the helm of the Third World Nonaligned Movement. In

²³For instance, in 1993 the combined volume of capital investment of Hong Kong and Taiwan accounted for 74.1 percent of China’s capital utilization (Lin and Lin, 2001).
regards to culture and economics, China had receded into enclosure. During this period, China is definitely in the periphery. In the meantime, under protection from the U. S., Taiwan was active on the international stage to fight for the legitimacy of China proper. This little island where the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) retreated after its defeat by the CCP in Chinese Civil War was intentionally built as “the bastion of Chinese civilization.” Chinese nationalist indoctrination was carried out through the school system both in Taiwan and in other overseas Chinese communities, accompanied with the cultural and communication policies of Sincization. According to Wu (1994), this kind of nationalist “political tutelage” (p. 152) was initiated by the KMT from the time it established its authority in mainland Nanjing in 1928 under the threat of Japanese invasion. Taiwan’s cultural, political and diplomatic policies in the Cold War era were molded in the mindset of the Nationalist-Communist confrontation of the Chinese Civil War. Even the loss of the China seat in the United Nations in the 1971 and the following severance of diplomatic relations with the U. S. in 1979 (the same year U.S. established the diplomatic relations with mainland China), did not deter Taiwan from the reverie of being Chinese.

Taiwan’s Chinese identity only became problematic when democratization was initiated in the 1980s. Inside the island, the nativist political ideology of Taiwanese independence was spreading with democratization. This ideology is a product of “the sedimentations of Taiwanese history” (Tu, 1994, P. 10), which reflect the fluctuating historical experiences endured by Taiwanese people, having been ruled by the Qing Dynasty, colonized by the Dutch and Japanese, and taken over by the KMT after World War II. The nativist rhetoric claiming that Taiwan only has a
four-hundred-year history was successfully articulated into the anti-KMT democratic movement and later transformed the Taiwan independence movement. This new political movement directly challenged the KMT’s official story that Taiwan is not only a part of China but also serves as the defender of Chinese civilization. In the late 1980s, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc brought the Cold War era to an end. In the changing geopolitical context, the frozen relationship between Taiwan and China began to thaw. However, the increasing interactions across the Taiwan Strait brought Taiwan’s official ideological claim to be the “true inheritor of the Chinese culture” into question (Tu, 1994, P. 10). In the 1980s China began to reclaim Chinese traditional culture, Confucianism in particular, as the ideological vehicle to strengthen its modernization and economic reform. China’s return to its cultural origin further exacerbated the KMT’s defense of Chinese national identity. Under this double-layered defiance, Taiwan’s symbolic position of being the Chinese center within the Chinese ethnoscape and ideoscape 24 started to be shaken and was destined to be replaced by China proper. This landscape change within Greater China reflects Taiwan’s original peripheral position both in the imagined and historical China.

Among the three Chinese societies of Greater China, Hong Kong is also on the periphery. Hong Kong was colonized by Britain for almost a century; however, because of its proximity to the mainland, politics, economics and culture, an interdependence formed between Hong Kong and China. But geographic proximity did not prevent Hong Kong from developing its own unique local culture and identity, mainly because the adjoining Guangdong province has long been in

24 According to Appadurai (1996), “ethnoscape” is “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live” (p. 33). “Ideoscape” is a space that “often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (p. 36). Here, I use these two terms to refer to the global Chinese community and the Chinese political discourse.
the Chinese historical periphery. After its political reintegration with China in 1997, Hong Kong’s peripheral position within Greater China was fortified. Politically, Hong Kong is now a Special Administration Region (SAR) of China; economically, Hong Kong serves as the window for Chinese capital inflow, despite facing challenges from Shanghai and other Chinese coastal provinces. In the meantime, Hong Kong’s identity also underwent a sophisticated transformation from de-sinicisation to re-sinicisation (Ma, 1999). Yet, after 1997, China offered Hong Kong a 50-year special period to maintain its own form of capitalism instead of abruptly transferring to “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” To a certain extent, this arrangement helps Hong Kong sustain its unique position in China’s future development. Even now Hong Kong still plays an important mediating role between the politically antagonistic China and Taiwan in fields such as economics, logistics and cultural exchange. In the foreseeable future, if the regional political situation does not change dramatically, Hong Kong’s ambiguous status with China will maintain its peripheral but persistent position in Greater China.

The previous discussion of center and periphery within Greater China is based on the consideration of geopolitics, economics and historical genealogy. Yet, as Lotman (1990) suggests, a region is also a symbolic universe in which cultural productions take place. In such a symbolic universe, the boundary sometimes changes from periphery into center. When Tu (1994) discusses “Cultural China,” he echoes Lotman in arguing that though China is the undeniable center of “political China,” Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Chinese diasporic communities are the new centers of “Cultural China.” These centers of “Cultural China,” owing to their boundary positions between Chinese culture and modern/western culture, keep
producing new modernizing cultural elements to enrich the Chinese culture. Tu uses “the living tree” as a metaphor to describe the dialectic cultural interactions between the periphery and the center: the Chinese periphery and diasporic communities serve as the vigorous new cultural branches and leaves from the root of China, and they keep producing new nutriments to nourish and transform Chinese culture. Tu even brings up his bold deconstructionist supposition: “the center is nowhere, the periphery is everywhere” (1994, p.34).

The periphery’s cultural impact on the center is usually evident in popular culture. This is why when Harding (1995) reviews the development of “Cultural Greater China” (p. 32), he highlights the importance of Hong Kong and Taiwan’s capabilities to produce popular culture products. Summarized by Chan (1996), within this regional media market, Taiwan and Hong Kong serve as cultural production centers but political peripheries; on the contrary, mainland China is the political center but the cultural production periphery.

Lotman (1990) argues that the center and periphery in the cultural universe are positions which are open to fluidity. After China started its own popular cultural production accompanying economic reform, China was no longer the cultural production periphery within Greater China. The cultural production centers of Taiwan and Hong Kong are seriously threatened by China. This is not only because the economic mechanism and populous market operating behind media markets overpowers both Hong Kong and Taiwan but also because now the boundary positions between Chinese and Western cultures which used to be held by Taiwan and Hong Kong have been replaced by China itself. Globalization provides plenty of opportunities for firsthand interactions between Chinese and foreign cultures.
If this kind of cultural exchange is the necessary nutrient to nourish popular culture production, then we can rephrase Tu’s supposition as “now both the periphery and center are everywhere.” The critical change of cultural landscape within Greater China is another result of globalization.

**Media Markets and Mediascape**

When discussing global cultural flows, Appadurai (1996) uses mediascape to indicate an imaginative world constructed through media contents which moves far beyond regional constraints. Although Appadurai points out that mediascape is composed both of the distribution of electronic capabilities of media production and an abstract imagery landscape, mediascape is mainly employed to refer to media consumption by audiences. Compared with the formless and consumption-laden mediascape, a media market is a highly materialistic concept which represents geographically specific media productions and media transactions. Both mediascape and media market are important parts in the global cultural flow, however, the former is a subjective construction and the latter is objective. Although both are built upon the audience’s consumption, in the former, the audience is a meaning-producing agency while in the latter the audience is treated like a structural factor which determines the profitability and possibility of media trade. Culture plays a critical part both in the functions of mediascape and media market, however, in the former, culture provides audiences the specific trajectories for interpretation but in the latter culture is seen by media industries as a manipulative instrument to meet commercial concerns.

Appadurai (1996) emphasized that mediascape is essentially a visual media world. It is composed by “image-centered, narrative-based” fictional media such as television programming and films (p. 35). Electronic visual entertainment is the most
important commodity in the media market. Although there are TV news programs such as CNN in the media trafficing, global TV news programming is usually not the most profitable commodity in the market. News purveyors have to grapple with critical issues such as political ideologies, linguistic differences, and disparities with local concerns. On the other hand, film and TV programming are not only the most profitable but also the earliest media products to enter the international marketplace (Guback, 1969). In addition to most of the visual entertainment fares are not political or ideological biased at the first glance, the productions of Hollywood seemly entertain a globally appeal to audiences that extends beyond cultural differences (Olson, 1999). Media imperialism can be mainly seen as a response to the Western dominance in the unbalanced global electronic visual entertainments market.

The Chinese mediascape not only includes Greater China—China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but also extends to “cultural China,” all Chinese descendants worldwide who choose to be engaged in being Chinese (Tu, 1994). In other words, the Chinese mediascape is a virtual “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983) composed of global Chinese communities either through the “time-space compression” of satellite broadcasting, internet, narrowcasting or by the circulation of videos, VCDs, and DVDs. However, in terms of the Chinese media market, it is not just about consumption but also about production. Then, the Chinese media market is a global media market based on Greater China, not only because China, Taiwan and Hong Kong are the three most populous Chinese societies but also because they are the most important Chinese media production bases in the world.

**TV Co-Production and the Regional Media Market**

TV drama has long been one of the most popular, large-scale produced and
consumed cultural products worldwide. As Cunningham et al. (1998) pointed out, in today’s globalizing communication landscape, a wider variety of international television program productions have emerged, such as off-shore, co-production, co-venture, and straight purchase of territorial broadcasting rights for completed programs. They argued these different media production modes need to be studied in order to help us understand the complicated operation of transnational cultural production. Among all these different production modes, co-production seems to be “the most effective response strategy to the new economic pressures reshaping the television programming environment, in the USA and abroad” (Renaud and Litman, 1985, p. 254). My research project is aimed at mapping out a relatively new field of cultural production in a newly formed regional media market - TV drama co-production within the greater China media market as it emerged in the late 1980s.

Compared with transnational film co-productions (Guback, 1969, 1974), transnational co-production of TV drama is a relatively understudied field. Although Greater China became a buzzword in the 1990s, most of the interest in this regional media market is focused on China, or, the tug of war between western media conglomerates which intend to make inroads into this large market and make money out of it; and China’s government which tries to prevent Western media’s invasion and develop its own media industry. Yet, China’s place in the limelight and the dominant local/global dichotomous framework has sheltered the investigations of the interactions among these three different Chinese media markets. Through exploring the TV co-productions between Taiwan and China, this chapter tries to provide an

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analysis of the dialectic dynamics within this regional media market.

**TV Co-Production: The New Cultural Production Strategy of Media Globalization**

What is co-production? This media production mode is believed to have evolved from 1950s filmmaking and probably can be attributed to Hollywood’s dominance of the international film market after World War II. Guback (1969) pointed out that co-production between the U.S. and European countries emerged as a dominant *modus operandi* of filmmaking in the 1950s, and it was also common between European countries at the same time. Film co-production has several advantages, according to Guback (1969), such as broadening the base of financial investment, assuring two or more home markets for a film, and permitting talents from different countries working together and sharing their expertise in one production. These advantages are the same attractions for co-production in the global television market (Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn, 1997). According to Doyle (1992), TV co-production “was born out of economic need. The businesses that use programs--stations, networks, and distributors—can lower the cost of acquiring material by sharing the expense with other users” (p. 26). Some critics see co-production as the cultural production strategy associated with the emergence of the global audiovisual market because it can help TV programs break political and cultural barriers and access different national media markets. Using the European Community as an example, Verna (1993) argues that the major forces driving TV co-production are “finances, politics, and the need for global audiences” (p. 239).

There have been many studies about the media flows between countries or within a specific region (for example, see Biltereyst, 1992; Hoskins and Mirus, 1988; Straubhaar, 1991; Varis, 1984). However, there are not many studies of regional TV
co-productions. According to Hoskins and McFadyen’s (1993) case study of co-production practice in the Canadian TV industry, there are three main kinds of international joint ventures in TV production. First, official co-production agreements are production formats in which both participant countries have to make an equal financial and creative investment in the project. Second, co-ventures are developed between producers in countries that do not have a formalized co-production treaty. Third, a twinning package is an agreement in which the producers from participant countries produce distinct versions of the same program for their own domestic markets.

In addition to these formal TV co-productions, there are other kinds of TV production models which have been taken on as co-production projects, such as off-shore productions like Hollywood’s “runaway” film and television productions in Canada (Hoskins & McFadyen, 1993, p. 225). Another popular pseudo co-production model is buying the format from another country then producing the program by a native crew. For example, many European countries did not have such programming traditions as situational comedies, soap operas and popular drama, so they are “responding to a growing demand for local language drama and comedy by exploiting Anglo-Saxon back-catalogues, particularly from U.K.’s, and adapting proven successes to local needs” (Fuller, 1992 as cited in Tracy & Redal, 1995, p. 353). In Asia, there is the Indonesian version of the popular Japanese melodrama Oshin (Iwabuchi, 2002). Even in mainland China, the popular British drama serial Coronation Street has a Chinese version called Joy Luck Street (幸福街, Xingfu jie) (Keane, 2002). Actually this kind of remade cultural production, or the TV format trade, is not uncommon in the globalizing television era (Moran, 1998). However, this
kind of remake of TV drama is not a co-production because there are no direct interactions and exchanges between the two different national television industries. The private copying and cloning of foreign popular television formats which prevails in the television industry worldwide also does not meet the definition of a co-production (Moran, 1998).

Television programming co-productions within Greater China, and recent co-production projects between Japanese and South Korean television industries (Jeon & Yoon, 2005; Ma, 2005) are all co-ventures between private sectors without official involvement. In these transborder television co-productions, the producers play important roles in putting these projects into action. Granted, the driving force behind these television programming co-productions is profit. Yet what a successful co-production project needs is far beyond the calculation of production cost. A producer has to take a lot factors into consideration, such as the culture/language, the genre, national media policies, and the *modus operandi* of different television industries.

**Greater China: An Emerging Regional Media Market**

In terms of international TV co-production, one of the most successful countries is Canada. The co-production venture plays an important role in the Canadian television industry. The main reason that Canada is such a flourishing television co-production center in the world is its cultural proximity to and familiarity with the U.S. television industry which dominates the world television market (Tinic, 2003). This demonstrates again that language similarity or cultural proximity to a large media market is a critical factor to the TV co-production project.

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26For example, Canada has 44 international co-production treaties which makes it one of the leading nations with formal production agreements with international TV producers (Tinic, 2003).
Language is a significant factor which has been hailed as a “domestic opportunity advantage” for co-production projects. As Wildman and Siwek (1988) pointed out:

Producers in large countries, and producers in countries that belong to large natural-language markets, have a financial incentive to create larger budget films and programs that will generally have greater intrinsic audience appeal, a clear advantage in international competition. (p. 68 as cited in Sinclair, 1999, p. 152)

Here “language” should not be only understood literally as a linguistic system, because, in this instance, “language” represents cultural proximity, which is composed of history, religion, ethnicity and a mutual reference framework that can function as a medium for reciprocal understanding.

In a regional media market, as Sinclair (2000) emphasizes, language and culture serve as the “primary market forces” (p. 19). On the other hand, to some peripheral countries, culture and language have served as a shield from the “invasion of Western culture” (Straubharr, 2000). There seems to be little doubt that most of the TV co-productions take place within regional media markets where cultural proximity exists between the adjacent countries (Chan & Ma, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002; Sinclair, 1999). However, inside a regional media market there are complicated political and economic factors to influence its operations and dynamics. In addition to cultural/language factors, the cost of production, geographic location and international division of labor are among the prime factors which need to be taken into consideration when a co-production project is considered. In the case of the Greater China regional media market, unlike other sectors in this region, interactions are
mainly facilitated by the civil economic activities “from below.”

Unlike the harmonious North American regional media market or European Community (Spa and Lopez, 2000), one of the most unusual characteristics about the Greater China regional media market, as mentioned earlier, is the confrontational relationship among its members, especially between Taiwan and China.

Like other socialist countries such as Russia (Rantannen, 2002), China’s television broadcasting system, after undertaking reform towards marketization, demands huge amount of programming to fill its schedule. In 1987, the direct media flow between China and Taiwan started after a nearly 40 year ban was abolished by both governments. Because of the cultural proximity and China’s underdeveloped popular cultural production, apolitical programming such as television dramas from Taiwan and Hong Kong were imported into China to fill the demand for television programs. But China’s populous media market and huge demand for media content, not only impacts the media flows within this new media market but also attracts numerous transnational media conglomerates’ interests, such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Group established Star TV in Hong Kong. Although a pan Asia global TV network with footprints covering many Asian countries, the ultimate target market for Star TV still remains mainland China (Curtin, 2005).

The 1989 democratic movement facilitated the formation of the Greater China regional media market. As the only existing socialist superpower, China has a long history of antiforeignism. After the 1989 democratic movement, the Beijing authorities strongly believed that western media content was a sinister cultural invasion tool threatening the regime. As Weber (2003) points out, when China employed the “spiritual civilization” movement to resist the inappropriate Western
popular culture products after China took the open policy toward western societies, the CCP began selectively importing the cultural products from culturally sensitive and like-minded overseas Chinese communities to satisfy the domestic market demands and, at the same time, provide models and incentives for its indigenous cultural industries to emulate (p. 273). It is not surprising that a Japanese pop music company’s executive in China complained that China’s official cultural policy gives top priority in airplay to songs composed and recorded by Chinese performers. Second priority is given to songs that originate in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Other, internationally “corrupted” songs, either composed or performed by non-Chinese, face difficulties in reaching an audience. (Iwabiuchi, 2002, p. 108)

Because of the political confrontation between China and Taiwan, there used to be doubts about the formation of a regional media market (Chan and Ma, 1996). Yet, as Harding (1995) pointed out, Beijing’s authorities almost always view cultural or humanitarian exchanges as a way of promoting national unification, because “the rediscovery of a common cultural identity, they believe, will produce a desire for political reintegration” (p. 21). For Taiwan, the KMT authorities also encouraged the cross-Strait media flow for a different political reason. They believed that the cultural exchanges would forestall the Taiwan independence movement which seriously endangered the legitimacy of the KMT regime. Even after the Tiananmen crackdown, when China was alienated from the Western world, Taiwan did not stop its cultural exchange with China. So, to a certain extent, the political antagonism between China and Taiwan became the driving force to facilitate the formation of the Greater China regional media market.

In the following analysis, I will explore how Taiwan’s TV drama producers
used the advantage of shared Mandarin language, cultural proximity, change of domestic media markets and adaption to different national media regulations to facilitate co-production projects across the Taiwan Strait. Before that, it is necessary to provide a summary of the distinct characteristics of television systems in Greater China’s three member societies.

**The Different Trajectories of Television Development within the Greater China Regional Media Market**

The television broadcasting system was inaugurated in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong within the same decade (1950-1960). Television, as one of the most powerful cultural technologies, has profound influences on the social, economic and political evolutions of these three member societies. However, the three television systems have very different trajectories. I will sketch the developments of these systems chronologically, and focus on how these differences influenced their television drama productions.

**China: Commercialization and the Secularization of TV Drama**

According to Wu and Jin (2004), the developing trajectory of television in Communist China can be divided into three periods. The first is the distorted period under the planned economy (1957-1977) (p.5); second, is the exploring period during the transition towards the marketization (1980-1992) (p.90); and third, is the exploring period towards the media conglomeration (1992-now) (p.91). This periodization provides a clear framework to examine the development of China’s television system.

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27 Mandarin is the official language in both Taiwan and China. In Taiwan, Mandarin is called *Guoyu* (國語), namely the “language of the nation.” In China, Mandarin is called *Putong Hua* (普通話), literally it refers to “general language.” But in both countries, there are different dialects. For example, in Taiwan the most common dialect is Taiwanese (台閩語), also known as *Ho-Lo Hua* (河洛語) or Hokkian (閩南語), a language that came from the southern coastal province. In China, almost every province has its own dialectic or dialectics. The most obvious example is that in Hong Kong or the conterminous Guangdong province, the Cantonese is much more often spoken than *Putong Hua*.
China’s first TV station was Beijing Television established on May 1st, 1958. It was a product of hectic preparation initiated by political competition with Taiwan, so the fact that television in China is seen by the CCP government as a political tool is obvious from the start. The Beijing Television station was renamed as China Central Television (CCTV) in 1976 and has served as the official mouthpiece for the CCP government ever since. With TV broadcasting serving as an ideological state apparatus, the establishment of a country-wide system capable of reaching the greatest penetration has been on the political agenda of the CCP government. However, the following hectic political movements and Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) brought an abrupt halt to further development. Not until Deng Xiaoping started the economic reform in the late 1970s, did the development of television broadcasting began to regain vigor. Under governmental encouragement and the deregulation and marketization of the media sector during the 1990s, provinces, cities and prefectures all rushed to build their own TV station systems. At the peak of this trend, there were over 3,000 TV stations in China. However, through the government’s intervention such as merging the local stations, the number of TV stations has decreased dramatically. Currently, China has more than 354 terrestrial stations, over 1387 cable stations, and over 30 provincial satellite channels; the total penetration rate has reached 92.5 percent (Liu and Iv, 2001; SARFT, 2002).

In 2001, after a 15-year negotiation, China finally realized its accession to the World Trade Organization. However, the CCP government is very nervous about the accession because it means that China will have to open its media market in the near

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28It is said that in August 1957, the KMT government hinted that Taiwan planned to launch TV broadcasting on the following year’s National Day of the Republic of China, October 10th. This information obviously caused the CCP make every effort to start mainland TV broadcasting before Taiwan (Huang and Green, 2000, p. 269).
future. The CCP government has taken a number of preventive actions, one of which was putting an end to the local propagation of TV stations and encouraging the provincial TV channels and audiovisual industries to converge into media corporations. On December 27th, 2000, the Hunan Media Group became the first broadcasting media corporation listed on the stock market in China (Wu & Jin, 2004, p. 92). In 1998, the Chinese government also restructured its multiple administrations overseeing the audiovisual media industry. Along with the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRFT), they were melded into the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) (Chin, 2003).

As in other countries, TV drama is the staple of China’s programming simply because it is the audiences’ favorite genre. In 2002, the average TV viewing time for China’s audience was 179 minutes per day. Watching TV drama takes 52 minutes or 30 percents of the total TV viewing time (Zeng, 2005, p. 402). The production of TV drama reflects the development of China’s television system. From 1958 to 1966, China produced only 8 TV dramas per year; during the 10-year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), only 3 TV dramas were broadcast. After economic reform started, TV dramas produced by China grew from 150 episodes in 1977-1980 to 7,000 episodes in 1994 (Wu and Jin, 2004, p. 120). In 2002, the total output of China’s TV drama reached 10,381 episodes, the money invested in TV drama by China’s TV stations amounted to RMB 300 million dollars (about $ 37. 8 million U.S. dollars), and TV dramas accounted for 70 percent of the total advertisement revenue recruited by China’s TV stations. These numbers demonstrate that today’s Chinese television market is one of the largest in the world (Zeng, 2005).

At the same time, the CCP government never gives up maintaining its
ideological control of people through television. Television drama, among other programming, is seen as one of the most effective ideological apparatuses. Liu (2005) incisively points out that TV drama production in China only serves as “a loophole opened by political control towards the media market, the government did not and will not withdraw from TV drama production” (p. 457). The political control from Beijing authorities can be divided into two categories: the first is control by law, including setting the quota of imported TV drama or foreign production personnel, and offering TV drama production certificates through numerous administrative regulations (行政法規, xingzheng fagui), normative documents (官方文件, guifanxin weijian) and censorship. The second control comes from administrative interventions such as gaining the final say through official investment or using official awards or public opinion created by official press to direct production (Liu, 2005). So, China’s television system is not yet a “cultural industry” in the western sense which is decided mainly by the market mechanism.

According to Keane (2002), there are three main categories of TV drama in China. The first deals with epic subject matter, particularly the struggles and achievements of the CCP leaders, such as the vicissitudes in Chairman Mao Zedong’s life or the Long March of the People’s Liberation Army. In addition to these politically charged topics, the CCP also encourages production based on Chinese literature classics such as Dream of Red Chamber (紅樓夢, Hong Lou Meng). The second category is the so-called “mainstream melody drama” (主旋律電視劇, zhuxuanliu dianshiju) designed to promote the CCP’s policies and convey a socially positive message to the populace. For example, China’s first TV drama “A Mouthful of Vegetable Pancake” (一口菜餅子, Yikou Caibingzi), which was broadcast by the
Beijing TV station on June 15th, 1958, was a typical “mainstream melody drama.”

Both these kinds of dramas are supported and produced by official institutions, such as CCTV and provincial television stations.

The third category of TV drama is the product of the media commercialization during the 1980s. The marketization and deregulation of mass media in the macroeconomic reform reflected the political decentralizing process. The role of TV stations changed from a state ideological apparatus to a state manager, meaning that TV stations now had to balance their own budgets instead of waiting for national subsidies (Wang & Chang, 1996; Hong, 2000). Under this economic pressure, TV stations started to produce popular (tongsu) drama (Keane, 2002: 125). Around 1990, quite a few popular dramas not only got acclaim from critics but also earned huge ratings. The most famous and widely discussed show was “Aspirations” (渴望, or Yearning, Expectations, Kewang), whose popularity and official endorsement initiated a national sensation (Keane, 2002; Rofel, 1995; Wang, 1999). However, it was a 1993 drama entitled “Beijingers in New York” (北京人在紐約, Beijing ren zai niuyue) which set the precedent in China’s TV history. This show was the first production completely financed by bank loans and private investment without any official subsidy (Keane, 2002; Liu, 2000). This drama not only marked the emergence of commercial TV drama in China, but also introduced TV producers to the new modus operandi of drama production.

Most stations could not produce programming by themselves, so they

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29This drama depicted a bittersweet relationship between two sisters. When the younger one treated her puppy to a humble biscuit, the act instantly provoked the elder sister’s emotional memory about how difficult their days were before the “liberation” (the KMT’s defeat by CCP in 1949) and how precious food was then. A mouthful of vegetable pancake was the only food their dying mother can give to her starving little daughter. This drama is very obvious propaganda for the moral slogans “remember the past bitterness while enjoying the happiness now” (忆苦思甜) and “be frugal to food” (节约粮食) in the period of “Great Leap” movement around the late 1950s (Wu, 1997, p. 29).
faced a severe shortage of programming content. In terms of TV drama, the main staple of most commercial TV stations, China needed 20,000 hours of high-quality TV drama series each year. However, currently only 10,000 hours were produced domestically. Because of the uneven production quality, only 20 percent among them were estimated to be profitable (Redl & Simons, 2002). This shortage resulted in a huge demand for China to import TV dramas to fill its TV schedules.

The history of imported TV drama can be traced back to the metropolitan Beijing TV station which broadcast a Yugoslavian drama serial in 1977 (Wu, 1997). After that, more and more foreign TV dramas were aired on Chinese TV screens. But before long Taiwan’s TV drama had become the most popular foreign fare. In 1990, among 174 imported TV programs, Taiwan’s productions were ranked in sixth place and far exceeded Hong Kong’s 18th place. In the same year, even in the CCTV’s prime time slot, Taiwan’s productions were the most often broadcast foreign programs (Wang & Chang, 1996).

In the late 1980s to the 1990s, in addition to TV dramas, popular culture from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Gangtai popular culture), such as movies, novels and pop music, became ubiquitous and beloved by mainland Chinese people (Gold, 1995; Yang, 1997). For attracting as many advertisements as possible, the local TV stations, which were less controlled by Beijing authorities, began to let TV dramas from Taiwan and Hong Kong dominate their schedules. For example, a Shanghai local TV station’s head admitted that, although the state had placed a quota allowing his station to import only two dramas from Taiwan or Hong Kong, it aired twenty imported dramas (Yang, 1997, p. 299). According to Yin (2001), 1990 to 1995 was the peak of Taiwan’s TV drama exporting to mainland China; the total number
Nominally, every China TV station is governed by the CCP government. Some scholars argued that marketization could not endanger the media’s role as an ideological state apparatus, or “the market-based party organ” (Pan & Chan, 2000). Yet the economic reform has changed the landscape of China’s media system. The *vertical fragmentation*, which means the decentralization of state authority (Wang & Chang, 1996, p. 197), already took place in China’s TV system. Zhao (1998) observed:

…audiences have compared CCTV programming with “distilled water,” television programming by provincial stations with “boiled water,” and municipal and county level stations—filled with Hong Kong and Taiwan productions packed with action, violence, and sentimental love stories—with “Coca-Cola.” (p. 168)

Perhaps in terms of politics, China’s TV system still remains an ideological state apparatus. Yet in terms of entertainment such as TV drama, the central governance which had been employed by the CCP government is obviously loosening its reins in recent years, particularly in regards to local and cable TV systems.

**Taiwan: The Ideological Apparatus and Oligopolistic Competition**

Taiwan’s television system is a mixture of authoritarian statism and market commercialization. Starting with the establishment of the Taiwanese Television Company (TTV) in 1962, followed by the China Television Company (CTV) in 1969 and the Chinese Television Station (CTS) in 1971, these three main terrestrial TV networks (the so-called *Old Three TV Stations*) dominated Taiwan’s TV market for nearly 40 years. This oligopoly was not broken until the legalization of Cable TV in 1993.
When reviewing the establishment of Taiwan’s television system, Lee (1980) pointed out that even after being colonized for 51 years (1894-1945), Japanese influence on Taiwan’s media system is minimal both in both infrastructure and media content production. After the KMT government took over Taiwan from Japan, the broadcasting media system was transplanted from the American commercial model. According to Lee (1980), when Taiwan started its own television broadcasting in 1962, it was at the peak of American expansionism. In order to impress the America-led Western Bloc, the KMT government wanted to demonstrate its commitment to capitalism as an effort to contrast itself with Communist China. In this historical and geopolitical context, Taiwan took the American commercial television model to develop its television broadcasting system.

Yet, the nature of television as a state ideological apparatus keeps Taiwan’s television from ever being a purely commercial venture. Lee (2000) meticulously used the “patron-client” relationship between state and media to describe the unique media ecology of Taiwan, which means “operating within ‘limited pluralism’ under a market system, mass media must fulfill the dual goals of political legitimation and profit-making” (Lee, 2000, p. 131). This relationship cannot be more obvious than the Old Three TV Stations’ long term oligopoly. Basically, the Old Three Stations were all controlled by the KMT government, but at the same time they operated in an American commercial TV mode. This particular form is “an alliance of the government bureaucracy and the ruling KMT with private commercial interests” (Lee, 1980, p. 149). When the Old Three Stations served as the ideological state apparatuses for the KMT government, they also got huge advertising revenues from the market in

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30 According to Lee (1980), Japanese tight thought control and cultural “Japanization” during its colonization of Taiwan was accomplished through education and the police instead of broadcasting media.
return. Until 1990, television ranked first in profit among other monopoly enterprises in Taiwan (Lee, 2000).

Oligopolistic competition usually turns out to be damaging to the quality of TV programming. After CTS, the youngest one in the Old Three, joined the TV market, the competition was exacerbated by a series of CTS’s market-oriented strategies. TV drama, the audience’s favorite program genre, was employed as a weapon in this “throat-cutting war” for market share among the three TV networks. For example, CTS in 1971 once crammed four drama serials into one evening schedule (Lee, 1980s). In 1985, TV drama composed 50 percent of CTS’s programming schedule (Tsai, 2004). This huge demand for TV drama caused the deterioration of production quality, as Lee (1980) vividly described the TV drama production around that time. “Producers and script writers were so preoccupied with the day-to-day pressure of work that they made no time for creating new themes but improvised the plot as filming was being undertaken” (p.151).

In this vicious competition for TV ratings, language played an important part. Sticking to the market-oriented programming strategy, CTS started to produce many Taiwanese dialect (Ho-lo hua or Hokkian) dramas to cater to the 85 percent Taiwanese audiences within the population. This development made KTM feel threatened because the KMT regime was mainly composed of mainland power elites who saw the surge of Taiwanese dialect and localism in cultural production as a challenge to their legitimacy. In the early 1970s, under governmental pressure, Taiwanese dialect programming declined sharply from 50 percent to around 10 percent (Lee, 1980). This decision was in tandem with the KMT government’s Implementation of its cultural and language policies through education, which
emphasized Chinese national identity and promoted Mandarin as the official language.

Another outcome of the oligopolistic competition was the hollowing of the TV industry’s production capabilities. In the second year after CTS entered the market, the new network adopted the so-called “commissioned production and advertisement solicitation” (外製外包, Waizhi Waibao) method for its program production (Tsai, 1995). This method means that the independent production house is not only responsible for program production but also responsible for soliciting advertisements. At the same time, the independent production house had to pay the TV station for airtime. This method instantly made CTS’s annual balance turn from deficit to profit. Another popular method most often used in TV drama production is the so-called “commissioned production” (委製, Weizhi), which means that the independent production house is hired by the TV station to produce programs. Because the funding comes entirely from the TV station, after finishing production, the station owns the exclusive copyright on the drama. In terms of the copyright, these producers are not the “authors” of their own productions; instead, they are nothing more than the hireling or the “midwives” of programs for the stations (Ping, 2004). As a result, the margin they can procure from the production is limited.

After Taiwan implemented the Labor Protection Law in 1984, the Old Three began to largely employ these independent productions to cut their personnel expenses (Tsai, 1995).

Take the sources of TTV’s programming during the oligopoly era for example. There were 15 percent foreign productions, 31 percent self-produced, and 54 percent
produced by independent production houses (Chan, 1996, p. 133). The heavy reliance on independent productions meant the Old Three operated just like “landlords” who did nothing but wait for the “rent” both from these independent production houses and the advertisers (commissioned production). This strategy not only continued to worsen the production quality of programming but also shrank the production ability of the TV stations. According to Tsai’s (1995) investigation, TTV and CTS had no contracted producer of their own, and CTV had only nine (p. 29). Ironically in such a small TV market as Taiwan’s (population 23 million), there were more than one thousand independent production houses and advertising agencies in business in the late 1970s (Chan, 1996).

As primetime TV drama serves as the most important advertising revenue source for Taiwan’s stations, producers with successful track records become hot targets. These big-shot producers not only had their own production houses and contracted actors but also had close personal liaisons with the higher managerial personnel of the TV stations, which gave them bargaining power. The oligopolistic competition made these producers into stars who have the production capabilities and experiences to produce high quality serials.

The oligopolistic competition obviously weakened the quality of TV drama and exhausted audiences’ preference for domestically produced programming. In 1992 CTV imported Hong Kong TVB’s production, Chou Liu Xiang (楚留香), a martial arts period dramatic serial. This was the first time Taiwan’s TV industry ever imported a TV drama from an Asian neighbor. Although this drama was described as a

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31This figure of independent production combines commissioned productions (6 percent) and independent productions (48 percent). However, the definitions of these two production modes were not clearly defined by Chan (1996), so I choose to present the total percentage of these two figures combined.
“hasty production with low quality” finished in only ten days, this show took Taiwan by storm and its rating even reached over 50 percent. The unexpected success initiated a “Hong Kong drama fad” in Taiwan, and the Old Three rushed to import more Hong Kong dramas to cram into their schedules. Only after Taiwan’s actors and TV production personnel held a massive demonstration against unlimited importing of Hong Kong dramas, which they claimed had already endangered their livelihood, did the Old Three reach an agreement in 1984 that imposed a restriction on the broadcast of foreign TV dramatic serials. Although this restriction lasted for 10 years, this “Hong Kong TV drama fad” exposed a weakness of Taiwan’s TV industry (Tsai, 2002).

Taiwan audiences’ disaffections towards the oligopoly of the Old Three also reflected in the VCR ownership on this island. The VCRs increased from 37 percent in 1986 to 81 percent in 1991, surpassing all the developed industrial countries’ VCR ownership rates (Hong, 1996). Even after the Old Three decided not to air imported TV dramas, with the introduction of new cultural technology, Taiwan’s audiences started to look for TV drama with higher quality through renting the videotapes produced by Hong Kong TV industry, especially the TVB’s productions.

**Hong Kong: Media Production Center of the Global Chinese Mediascape**

Hong Kong’s commercial TV system began in 1967 with the Television Broadcast Ltd (TVB) and was followed by Reddiffusion Television (RTV) in 1973. In 1975, another TV station Commercial Television Limited (CTV) joined the competition. Three years later CTV ceased operation because of serious financial losses. On the other hand, RTV was reorganized and renamed Asia Television Ltd (ATV) in 1982. Both terrestrial networks, TVB and ATV, run two channels respectively, one in Cantonese (TVB Jade and ATV Home) and the other in English.
TVB Pearl and ATV World). TVB Jade is the most popular channel in Hong Kong. From its inauguration, TVB Jade has garnered 70 percent even 90 percent of ratings by the 1980s (Chan & Ma, 1996; Ma, 1999). Like other places, the TV dramatic serial is the Hong Kong audience’s favorite programming fare. But what distinguishes Hong Kong TV networks from other TV systems is that most of these TV dramas are in-house productions.32 Hong Kong's vigorous TV industry was built on the solid infrastructure of Hong Kong’s movie industry. Run Run Shaw, the owner of TVB, was also the builder of the movie empire of the Shaw Brothers Film Studio in the post-World War II era. In its heyday, Shaw Brothers not only established a sound distribution system in Southeast Asia but also built Asia’s largest film studio and contracted with thousands of artists (Curtin, 2003). Shaw’s successful experience with running the film studio definitely contributed to the operation of TVB. Ma’s (1999) case study of a TVB TV drama serial, Great Times (大時代, Da Shidai) demonstrates a well-organized production team working together behind the show. The production team included the executive producer, production manager, creative director, executive producer, head writer, on-line producer and production assistant. Its production organization is not inferior to any Western TV drama production. Even in the case of a “hasty production” like Chou Liu Xiang, without a highly professional and experienced studio system, it cannot be produced in just 10 days. In fact, among TVB’s 3800 contracted personnel more than 2600 are responsible for program production (Chen, 1999). The strong industrial backup from the film industry makes TVB the powerhouse of Hong Kong Chinese TV production. It not only possesses the largest Chinese TV program inventory in the world but its programs are

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32According to Chan (1996, p.138), in 1989 as much as 90 percent of the Cantonese programs were locally produced by TVB and ATV.
also watched by Chinese worldwide through its international distribution system (To & Lou, 1995).

Although in 1984 ATV’s martial arts costume dramatic serial *Huo Yunjia* (霍元甲) was aired on mainland China’s TV screens and took the market by storm, at that time mainland China was not the target market of Hong Kong’s TV industry, simply because China was not a wealthy society and a profitable market. Instead, the Hong Kong TV industry set their sights on the international Chinese media market. TVB had established a subsidiary company Television Broadcasts International (TVBI) in 1976 to take charge of its international business. TVBI has become the largest Chinese programming production and distribution company in the world. Since the early 1990s, TVB has further expanded its territories into satellite service. Nowadays Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, mainland China and even North America all can watch different TVB satellite programming (Yuan, 2003). According to Curtin (2003), Hong Kong has established itself as the media capital of Asia, or more precisely, the media capital of global Chinese mediascapes.

With China persistently implementing its economic reform, the special political liaison and geographical proximity between Hong Kong and Beijing provides Hong Kong a vantage point to enter China’s media market. In addition to continuing the exportation of their programs to mainland China, the two TV networks of Hong Kong have separately developed some co-operative contracts and barter trades with mainland China’s TV stations (To & Lau, 1995; Chan, 1996; Yuan, 2003). Mainland China used to be only one portion of Hong Kong’s audiovisual internationalization plan, but the priority has been rising dramatically in recent years.
The Emergence of Taiwan-China TV Drama Co-Production

Chan (1996) has correctly observed that the interactions among the three different television systems began only in the mid-1980s. The first reason was that after China established the open door policy in 1979, Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s popular cultural products were not banned in the mainland as before. Another reason was the thawing of cross-strait relations around that time. Taiwan lifted its 50-year martial law in 1987; in the same year, the KMT government allowed the mainlanders who followed the regime to Taiwan in 1949 to visit their relatives who remained on the mainland. Taiwan’s TV producers instantly grasped the opportunity to shoot their programs in mainland China, and the Taiwanese government did not sanction TV or film production in China until 1989 (Xiao, 1992).

The first Taiwanese TV drama shot on the mainland was a Taiwanese dialect period drama *The Legend of MaZu* (媽祖外傳, Mazu Waichuan), which was shot on location in southeast coastal Fukien province (Ma, 2002). But the largest-scale Taiwan TV drama produced in mainland China in 1989 was a Mandarin dramatic series *Six Dreams* (六個夢, Liuge meng), which was composed of six short serials adapted from the novellas of Taiwanese popular romance writer Chiungyao. Her husband and career partner Ping Xin-tao was the producer, and this drama was produced in cooperation with China’s Hunan TV Station. However, because Taiwan did not immediately lift the limitation of mainland Chinese cultural workers participating in program production, some 70 crew members, including the main casts and director, were all from Taiwan. Owing to Taiwan audiences’ curiosity and freshness toward mainland China, when *Wan Chun* (婉君), the first part of *Six Dreams* was broadcast by CTS on February 19, 1990, it garnered nearly 40 percent of the ratings (Ma, 2002; Ping, 2004).
This success impressed Chiungyao and initiated her 17 year co-operation partnership with Hunan TV Station.

Of most significance of the Six Dreams series in Chinese TV drama production is that it opened a new page in cross-strait TV co-production. According to Chan (1994), in 1993 Taiwan co-produced seven TV dramas with mainland China that year. In these early co-productions, Taiwan provided both the capital and the know-how; while the mainland Chinese partners provided general personnel and logistic support in exchange. The success of Chiungyao’s drama co-productions in Taiwan demonstrates that after the 50-year ideological inculcation, Taiwanese people have naturally transformed the mainland Chinese picturesque scenery into an exotic “imaginary China.”

The Six Dreams series also set another important precedent that had a huge influence on the later development of Taiwan-China TV drama co-production. Before Six Dreams, all Taiwan’s TV drama productions were “commissioned productions,” meaning the copyright of the drama belonged to the TV station whose investment covered the whole production cost. However, owing to the fact that the high cost of shooting an entire TV drama in mainland China could not be covered by the TV stations’ production budget, Chiungyao finally, after negotiations, got the Six Dreams’ copyright in mainland China as compensation. This breakthrough signifies that Taiwan TV drama producers started to fight for a better profit share, and the TV station’s role as the proprietor in cultural production was shaken by more severe competition in the domestic market.

The Changing Landscapes Within the Greater China Regional Media Market

In addition to the political thawing across the Taiwan Strait, the changes of the
media ecology both in Taiwan and mainland China have also contributed to the emergence of Taiwan-China co-production.

**Taiwan: The End of Oligopolistic Competition in the TV Market**

In 1993, cable TV completely changed Taiwan’s media landscape. The promulgation of the Cable Television Act officially marked the termination of the TV oligopoly in Taiwan. In a very short period of time after the legalization of cable television, more than 140 cable TV systems mushroomed in Taiwan’s media market, and each of them provided some 70 channels for choice. The penetration rate reached 44 percent in 1994 and 80 percent in 1999 (Hong, 1999). The booming cable TV service also increased the demand for TV programming. The most convenient and economical way for the TV industry is to import programming with cultural proximity, was to import programs such as the Japanese and South Korean TV dramas to fill the schedule (Chung, 2005; Hara, 2004). The popularity of Cable TV in Taiwan can be seen as a public protest against poor programming and seriously biased partisan news coverage provided by the Old Three during the past 40 years. This dramatic change of media ecology made it difficult for the ill-structured Old Three to adapt to vigorous competition, and some cable TV channels with sensitivity to the local audience's taste, such as TVBS (a subsidiary satellite service established by TVB in 1993) and Sanli (三立), often outperformed the Old Three in ratings. The joining of the Formosa TV Company (FTV) to the already intense competition in 1997 spelled further disaster for the troubled Old Three. Only after a short time, FTV's Ho-lo language Taiwanese Soap Opera (本土劇, Ban Tu Chu) gradually topped the Mandarin speaking TV dramas produced by the Old Three Stations (Tsai, 2000). In 2001, the terrestrial TV networks

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33According to Hara (2004), Taiwan was the largest importer of Japanese TV programming in 2001. In that year, Taiwan imported 194 Japanese TV programs and a total of 3948 hours.
were beaten by the cable channels in the battle for advertising revenue for the very first time (Chen & Cheng, 2003).

When the total advertising revenue is divided among many stations, the budget for each drama drops drastically. Currently for a one hour episode, the station hopes to invest only 600 to 700 thousand NT dollars (nearly 20 thousand U.S. dollars) (Yuan, 2003), and it is impossible to produce any quality drama with such a low budget. The mode of “commissioned production” which used to be employed by the Old Three Stations—the station as both the financier and proprietor of TV production—disappeared. For primetime drama, TV stations usually paid for only limited broadcasting rights (twice in 3 years) (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004). Although some producers are now also the copyright owners of the dramas they produce, finding the financial backing and the market have become their largest concerns.

**China: The Marketization and Regulation of TV Drama Co-Production**

As mentioned earlier, the TV market in mainland China has gradually evolved into a competitive battleground, and the profit-seeking logic has dominated China’s media operations. In the field of TV drama production, governmental control of the media market has loosened since economic reforms began. In terms of programming, except for the news which is still tightly controlled by the station and the central administration, the other program genres, especially the TV drama, are taking charge with independent productions. With the success of *Beijingers in New York*, a production mode similar to Taiwan’s “commissioned production” has dominated China’s drama production. According to Pan and Chan (2000), production teams of China’s TV drama are headed by producers, and the production process go like this:

. . . after a programme proposal is approved, a production team is
formed and the producer enjoys full autonomy in personnel, budget, and production. The station only exercises its power mostly in reviewing the completed programme and deciding on the programme’s release. (p. 241)

The private capital gathering strategy employed by *Beijingers in New York* has been assimilated into this producer-oriented mode. The emergence of the independent producer has been hailed as the most important development in China’s TV drama production after 1995, which makes such production really enter the marketization stage (Wu & Jin, 2004). It has now become the mainstream modus operandi in China’s TV industry.

Under state protection from foreign media competition, China’s TV and news media are seen as “the last windfall enterprises in which advertising revenues grew 200 percent in the 1990s” (Lee, 2003b, p. 12). With the market full of “hot money” seeking investment in the profitable TV drama production market, Taiwan’s experienced producers with successful track records and interests in locating market and capital suddenly found they were welcomed by mainland China’s TV industry.

There are several reasons for mainland China’s TV market being willing to invest in Taiwan’s TV drama producers. First is the popularity of Taiwan’s TV dramas among mainland Chinese audiences. In addition to being produced in Mandarin, according to Chan (1996), Taiwan’s TV dramas are well accepted in China for their emphasis on the traditional Chinese values, such as “fidelity, loyalty and thrift” (p. 142). Cultural proximity and language prove to give the Taiwanese TV drama producers a “domestic opportunity advantage.” Secondly, Taiwan’s producers offer popular TV drama with a high entertainment value. Thirdly, they are familiar with a more efficient production mode in making TV dramas. For example, Young Pei-pei
(楊佩佩), a veteran TV drama producer from Taiwan, can finish a 40-episode martial arts drama with cutting-edge visual effects within two and a half months (Lin, 2002b). Finally, some of the popular Taiwan TV drama producers have built “brand names” with their previous productions among China’s audiences. For example, Chiungyao, the writer and producer of the series of *Six Dreams* and *Huanzhu Gege*, with her highly personal-styled romantic melodrama not only made her productions known as “Chiungyao Dramas,” but also guaranteed they would be successful in China’s TV market.

For Taiwan’s producers, mainland China is not only the source of capital and market, but also stands as a gateway to the global Chinese mediascape. With the rapid marketization of the TV industry in mainland China, several big cities started annual TV drama festivals—including Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Chengsha—to attract producers, independent production houses, TV stations, and foreign buyers. These festivals not only provide locations for the “face-work” of these entertainment industry insiders (Curtin, 2003), but also serve as business arcades for the productions. The establishment of a trading institution really accelerates the marketization of China’s productions. For example, another Taiwanese veteran producer Hsu Chin-liang’s (徐進良) 2002 co-production TV drama *Wind and Cloud* (*風雲*, Fengyun), a martial art costume dramatic serials, successfully sold its overseas copyright to countries across Asia, South America, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe through the mainland China TV festivals circuit. Including the royalties from Taiwan and China, this TV drama has already earned a net profit of 40 million NT dollars (1.25 million US dollars) even before it went on the air (Lin, 2002a).

Many critics predict that the CCP government will finally give in to the media
marketization and loosen its control over media industries. However, according to Hong (2000), the PRC government has adopted “suppressive openness” as its media policies to help Chinese media industries adjust to the globalizing media environment.

In terms of TV drama production, the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRTF) started to impose a quota policy on imported programs. This policy required Chinese TV stations to broadcast no more than 15 percent imported materials in their total broadcasting hours (Chin, 2003; Hong, 2000). In 2000, SARFT demanded that no imported TV drama could be broadcast during the prime time slot from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. (Chin, 2003). This regulation supports the rise of co-production. In 1999, there were 41 serials co-produced (763 episodes); in 2000, the number of co-produced serials rose to 51 (990 episodes). Among these co-productions, more than 80 percent were Taiwan-China fares (Chin, 2003). However, this close relationship between Taiwan’s and China’s media industries raised the PRC government’s vigilance. In 2000, SARFT started to divide TV drama into two categories: “national production” and “co-production.” The “national production” refers to those TV dramas produced solely by mainland China’s TV industry, which is the only kind of drama that can be aired in the prime time slot. A “co-production” cannot be aired on the same time slot. In 1999, SARFT further stipulated that in any national drama production the number of primary creative workers (such as director, script writer and actors) from Taiwan or Hong Kong could not exceed five. This stipulation also limited professional workers from Taiwan or Hong Kong from participating in more than two national productions each year and asked China’s production houses not to hire Taiwan’s or Hong Kong’s producers (SARFT, 2001). All these regulations were aimed at limiting the further development of Taiwan-China drama co-productions.
However, Taiwan’s TV drama producers are pragmatic and flexible. In order to get as much advertising revenue as possible, Taiwan’s producers chose to give up the title of “co-producers” and turned to “national production.” Some choose to work as uncredited; other famous Taiwanese producers selected different titles. For example, Young Pei-pei’s mainland Chinese partner has obtained for her the title of “artistic director”, while Chiungyao is packaged to appeal to the market as “screenwriter” (Lin, 2002b).

**Hong Kong: New Technologies and Media Parochialism**

Why are Hong Kong’s producers not as active as their Taiwan’s counterparts in developing co-production with China’s TV industry? The answer could be multilayered. First of all, the TV industry of Hong Kong is much healthier and well-organized than Taiwan’s or mainland China’s. Because of the solid media organizations provided by TVB and ATV under cultural *laissez-faire* system (Chan, 1996), Hong Kong did not develop a TV drama production system that was dominated by an independent producer. In Hong Kong, if anyone wants to produce TV drama, they have to join TVB or ATV first.

Secondly, the geographic and linguistic proximity (Cantonese), made the whole Pearl River Delta become a media parochialism (Tracey and Redal, 1995) dominated by Hong Kong’s terrestrial TV networks. Hong Kong networks’ spillover covers most of the Pearl River Delta which became one of China’s wealthiest areas after the economic reform. Although it is illegal to receive Hong Kong’s TV signals, most residents of Guangzhou and the vicinity still set up antennae to tune in everyday (Chan, 2003). The estimated number of daily Chinese viewers of Hong Kong TV programming is 10 million, and this enabled Hong Kong networks to attract some advertising revenue from the China’s southern coastal provinces (Chen, 1999).
Thirdly a careful media policy for cable TV helped maintain Hong Kong’s TV market in reasonable competition. Unlike Taiwan’s sudden deregulation of cable which resulted in an over competitive market, Hong Kong’s deregulation was much more cautious about the potential impact on market operation. Until 2003, there were only five pay cable services operating in Hong Kong and the total number of subscribers was about 860,000 (Hong Kong yearbook 2003). This moderate and gradual deregulation policy did not result in a dramatic shortage of programming or seriously decrease of the budget for production.

Finally, using its special liaisons with the Beijing authorities, now Hong Kong networks can directly broadcast their programs through the cooperation with China’s cable TV. For example, since 1994 TVB had produced a 40-hour entertainment program for syndication to 22 cable TV stations in China (Thomas, 2000). In 2001, TVB even reached a cooperation agreement with CCTV. They promised to broadcast each other’s programming through the satellite service (Yuan, 2003). Owing to that Hong Kong has owned the stable position as the hub of Asian satellite TV, through new communication technologies, Hong Kong’s TV networks do not need to strive for the mainland’s TV market by co-production.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I delineated the trajectory of the formation of the Greater China regional media market. As shown in the analysis, this media regionalization can be attributed to a complicated interaction among several factors, such as geopolitics, the nation-state’s cultural and media policies, the inventions of communication technology, and the market force. In addition to macro structural factors, this chapter also focuses on the institutionally oriented context of media regionalization. Through
the discussion of the TV drama production, one can see how the transformations of media industries took place in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, the three main players in the Greater China regional media market. Then, the exploration of the emergence of TV drama co-production between Taiwan and China in the 1990s demonstrates the functional logic within this specific regional media market.

Obviously, the discussion in this chapter is focusing on the operations of structural factors within a regional media market. As the analysis shows, the interactions are not only limited to that between structure and agency. Even among structural factors, there are close connections; the change of one factor usually influences the operations of others. In other words, there is no one factor that can function independently, and all structural factors correlate with other structural factors.

However, as the central concept “duality of structure” of structuration theory shows, no structure exists a priori; they are all the products of “structured agency” (Giddens, 1984). The next chapter dives into the utilization of agency by symbol creators in the operation of media regionalization. Through the case study of Taiwan symbol creator Chiungyao’s *Huanzhu Gege* series, one can see how the cultural worker’s creative agency functions under the structural framework of a regional media market, and takes advantage of the structural factors to benefit their own cultural production.
Chapter 4
A CASE STUDY IN REGIONAL TV CO-PRODUCTION: THE HUANZHU GEGE SERIES, TAIWAN’S CULTURAL WORKER CHIUNGYAO, AND MAINLAND CHINA’S HUNAN MEDIA GROUP

As pointed out in the previous chapters, the cross-strait co-production TV drama series *Huanzhu Gege* (還珠格格) has been heralded as one of the most successful and popular Chinese TV dramas in both the Greater China regional media market and in the global Chinese mediascape (Ouyang, 2001b; Weng, 1999). But why is this cross-strait drama series so successful? This chapter will provide an analysis of *Huanzhu Gege’s* production, with the hope of shedding some light on this popular culture production within a regional media market.

*Huanzhu Gege’s* phenomenal success can be attributed to several factors. First, its enthusiastic reception among Chinese audiences is a result of it being produced by Chiungyao, the famous Chinese popular cultural worker from Taiwan; second, this drama is the result of the long-time cross-strait cooperation between Chiungyao and Hunan Media Group, mainland China’s emerging powerhouse in the TV industry; and third, it is a TV drama of a successful localized “sub-genre,” which employs a genre-blending strategy to utilize several of the most popular TV drama genres in Chinese TV industries.

Chiungyao’s creative career can be divided into three different phases, according to the different media she utilizes: novel writing, filmmaking, and TV drama production. Although Chiungyao is essentially a writer who uses language to transform her imagination into cultural products, her different production modes can be observed in the changing forms of cultural production in different phases of her creative career.
Chiungyao: The Popular Multiple-field Symbol Creator in the Chinese Mediascape

Chiungyao is one of the most popular symbol creators in contemporary Chinese popular culture. This romance writer/filmmaker/TV drama producer is known as “the godmother of love for the modern generation of Chinese people” (Lin, 2006) or “the undisputed ‘queen’ of the Chinese-language romance novel” (Lang, 2003, p. 76).

Chiungyao is the pen name of Chen Zhe (陳喆). According to her autobiography My Story (我的故事, Wo di Gushi, 1989a), she was one of the first-generation mainlanders in Taiwan, born in 1938 while her parents were staying in Sichuan, a southeastern province of mainland China. Her parents were originally from a prominent Hunan family, from another southeastern Chinese province. Before leaving mainland China for Taiwan with her family in 1949, Chen Zhe traveled throughout the mainland to escape the spreading warfare resulting from the KMT regime’s fight against both the Japanese invasion and the Chinese Communists.

Before publication of her first romance novel Outside the Window (窗外, Chungwai) in 1963, the 25-year-old Chen Zhe had undergone a scandalous love affair with her senior high school teacher, two consecutive failures on Taiwan’s College United Entrance Exam, two failed suicides, and a miserable marriage which produced a son. However, the instant success of Outside the Window changed her life forever: It gave birth to her career as “Chiungyao,” the legendary Chinese popular cultural worker.

Chiungyao’s debut in Taiwan’s literary arena, Outside the Window, was based

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34 In Chinese, “Chiungyao” (瓊瑤) means “fine jade.”
on the infamous love affair with her Chinese teacher in senior high school, which was
terminated when her mother intervened. The success of Outside the Window can be
attributed to two main reasons. In addition to the novel’s controversial subject matter
in the Taiwanese society in the 1960s—a forbidden, tragic love affair between a
young girl and her teacher and the conflicts between this young girl and her protective
mother, its success also thanked to the fact that there is no “popular romance novel”
had ever existed in Taiwan before (Lin, 1992, 1994). After its publication, Outside the
Window immediately took Taiwan by storm. However, Chiungyao paid a huge price
for the commercial success of her first novel. This autobiographic romance fiction
made her parents angrily accuse her “selling them out” and “airing the family’s
laundry in the public” (Chiungyao, 1989a, p.213).

At first glance, Outside the Window seemed to bring Chiungyao nothing but
misfortune. Yet, this book allowed Chiungyao to meet with Ping Xin-tao, her second
husband and life-time career partner. Ping’s most distinguished accomplishment was
utilizing his business skills in building the field of cultural production in Taiwan. In
fact, Ping is known as one of the very first pioneers of the Taiwanese cultural
industries. In addition to serving as a literary paper editor for 14 years (1963-1976) in
one of the most influential newspapers in Taiwan, United Daily News (聯合報, Lianhe
Bao), in 1954 Ping established the Crown (皇冠, Huang Guan) magazine, the first
private literary publication in Taiwan after the Chinese Civil War. Afterwards, Ping
also established the publishing company of the same name attached to the Crown
magazine (Ping, 2004). Crown not only has one of the largest readerships in Taiwan, it
has also become the first magazine to successfully reach transnational Chinese
communities. Ping has simultaneously played important roles as gate-keeper and
resource attributor for the development of an emerging Taiwanese cultural creative community.

When Chiungyao finished *Outside the Window*, she found the *Crown* was the only possible venue to get her novel published, so she sent them her manuscript. Exceeding her expectations, *Outside the Window* was not only carried by the magazine, but was also published later as a popular book. In 1964, under the arrangements of Ping, the young writer not only had two novels serialized by the *Crown* and the *United Daily News* simultaneously, but also had four books published by the *Crown* publishing company. This was unprecedented achievement for any Taiwan’s writer.

After the success of her romance novels in Taiwan, Chiungyao’s works quickly attracted the attention of the film industries from both Taiwan and Hong Kong. In 1965, Ping persuaded Chiungyao to sell the copyright of her novella collection *Six Dreams* to Taiwan’s official film studio, *Central Film Company*. In the same year four films based on Chiungyao’s stories were made; they included *The Cousin Wan Chun* (*婉君表妹*, Wanchun Biao Mei, 1965), *The Winding Flower* (*菟絲花*, *Tu Si Hua*, 1965), *Romance in the Rain* (*煙雨濛濛*, *Yanyu Mengmeng*, 1965) and *The Mute Wife* (*啞女情深*, *Ya Nu Qing Shen*, 1965). All these films earned both commercial success and critical acclaim.

Seemingly overnight, Chiungyao became the hottest name in the Chinese mediascape, and her cultural productions were ubiquitous among a global Chinese-speaking audience. When the works of Chiungyao started to appear in the book market, her name also became known by movie-goers. Chiungyao was a cross-media symbol creator when she started her creative career, and with the
penetrating powers of literary publication and movies in the pre-television era, her popularity among the global Chinese audiences boosted her burgeoning creative career.

Chiungyao and Ping Xin-tao: The Combination of Business Partnership and Familial Bond in Cultural Production

The relationship between Chiungyao and Ping developed gradually from strictly business into a deeply felt intimate bond. They married in 1979 after Ping divorced his first wife. However, their relationship goes far beyond a romantic one; Ping played a critical role in Chiungyao’s creative career. According to Chiungyao, she is a typical “dreamer,” who is only good at yarning stories. In contrast, Ping is a hands-down “practicer,” who always helps her realize her dreams. This complementary combination has resulted in Chiungyao’s successful and long-lasting career. According to Chiungyao, their relationship is multi-layered:

. . . . He and I build the best cooperative partnership. . . . Xin-tao, he has become such an important person in my life. He is my “publisher,” and my “agent” as well; he is my “reader” and my “critic” at the same time. He is my “friend” but also my “boss;” He is the “supporter” of my writing career and the “man who makes my dreams come true.” (Chiungyao, 1989a, p. 235. Author’s translation)

This kind of complementary partnership between Chiungyao and Ping Xin-tao, described by Lin (1992) as “the entrepreneurial mode” of cultural production (p. 158), is believed to be one of the most important factors in making Chiungyao such a popular symbol creator among the global Chinese audiences (Lang, 2003; Lin, 1992, 1994). According to Lin’s (1992) definition, this mode of partnership involves
collaboration between the symbol creator and the creative manager. On the one hand, this partnership can help the creator cater to the market’s demands through the creative manager’s direction. On the other hand, the understanding and communication between the creator and the creative manager proffer the necessary creative freedom to the creator. However, what takes the relationship between Chiungyao and Ping beyond the entrepreneurial partnership lies in their familial relationship. This kind of production mode is what Harvey (1989) terms the primary institution (such as family and kinship networks) in postmodern capitalistic flexible accumulation; the importance of these primary institutions for the flexible accumulation lies in their extensions beyond pure business partnerships operating in modern capitalism. In Chiungyao and Ping’s partnership, one can witness greater mutual trust, consensus, understanding and support than in a mere “entrepreneurial mode” cooperation. This unique partnership later also extended to Chiungyao’s filmmaking and TV drama production careers, which have greatly contributed to the building of the “Chiungyao industry” in contemporary Chinese popular culture production.

The Trajectory of Chiungyao’s Creative Career: From Literary Writer and Filmmaker to Television Drama Producer

Chiungyao’s creative career can be divided into three phases: the novelist, the filmmaker, and the TV drama producer. Under Ping Xin-tao’s tutelage, the first phase as novelist was very successful. From the start, Crown was the exclusive publisher of Chiungyao’s popular romance novels. Finally, she became Crown’s brand name writer.

However, the printed word seems not to have been the perfect medium for
Chiungyao to express her imagination. In 1965, she sold her romance fiction’s copyright to film studios. The scarcity of Chinese popular romance around that time not only made Chiungyao’s novels a hot item for Chinese film industries in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, but also guaranteed the movie adaptation based on her fiction—the so-called “Chiungyao movies”—would be a commercial success in the Chinese mediascape.

In 1967, after watching her work being ravaged by other filmmakers, Ping and Chiungyao established their own Firebird (火鳥, Huo Niao) movie company. After two movies failed at the box office, they terminated Firebird. In 1976, when Taiwan’s film industry entered its short-lived golden era, Chiungyao and Ping once again extended her creative career into the field of filmmaking. They established a new filmmaking company, the Grand Star (巨星, Ju Xing). Up until 1983, when the last Grand Star production, The Lamp of Last Night (昨夜之燈, Zuoye Zhi Deng), hit the market, Chiungyao had produced 14 “Chiungyao movies” through the Grand Star company (Ping, 2004). Most of these films employed the same director and cast. This highly controlled production mode in the filmmaking phase of Chiungyao’s creative career indicated that her cultural production had fallen into a formulaic process.

According to Lin (1992), this formulaic process exhibited a standardized cultural production mode. It began with Chiungyao’s novels being serialized by Crown magazine. These fictions would then be published as books, and soon afterwards the theme songs from the movies, featuring her lyrics, would hit the market. The process finally ended with the movies based on her novels being shown

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35. Out of the 14 Grand Star productions, 10 were directed by the same female director Liu Lili (劉立立), who later also directed some of Chiungyao’s early TV dramas. Regarding the cast, the famous Taiwanese actress Brigit Lin (林青霞, Lin Qing-xia) played the leading role in eight Grand Star productions.
in the theaters. Starting with her filmmaking career, Chiungyao’s literary creations
became the mere by-products of her formulaic process of cultural production.

Following the collapse of the Taiwan film industry in the early 1980s, Chiungyao bowed out of filmmaking. Then, in 1985, she transferred her creative
career to the small screen and started her TV drama productions. Once again, Chiungyao’s romance melodramas took Taiwan’s TV audiences by storm. According
to Lin (1994), the success of Chiungyao’s TV drama productions resulted from the
then KMT (國民黨, Kuomintung) government’s control over the Three Old TV Stations. Chiungyao’s TV dramas easily received large budgets to produce high production
quality shows with famous casts and high profile promotion. Lin argues that if the
Taiwan TV market had entered the multi-channel cable era then, the success of
Chiungyao’s TV drama productions might have been questionable. The same
formulaic mode developed in her filmmaking phase continued into her later TV drama
productions. The only difference lies in that TV dramas have replaced movies to
become the final and focal products of her cultural production process. As Chiungyao
confesses, she currently even sees herself as a TV drama scriptwriter rather than a
novelist (Chiungyao, 1999b).

Through this formulaic cultural production mode, Chiungyao became the only
person who could utilize creations by “Chiungyao” as raw material for cultural
productions. In the end, the whole production process had essentially become a tool
for “branding;” that is, the accumulation of both the material interests and
non-material popularity for the symbol creator. As a result, Chiungyao has become the
most authoritative interpreter of her cultural creations, and the audience can easily
recognize what is a “Chiungyao novel,” “Chiungyao pop music,” a “Chiungyao
movie,” or a “Chiungyao TV drama” in the market of popular culture products.

Compared with novel writing and publishing, filmmaking and TV drama production involves much more complicated production sectors and processes. It includes the vertical operations (such as recruiting financial investments, taking care of governmental policies for cultural production, and arranging the releasing outlets) and the horizontal operations (such as organizing a production team, making a workable environment both for communication and for cooperation among all divisions, controlling the budget, and scheduling and meeting the various deadlines, from production and promotion to releasing). These complicated operations would obviously be beyond the symbol creator Chiungyao’s ability. Without Ping serving as the creative manager to help to broker Chiungyao’s creations into different fields of cultural production and introduce her to the Chinese mediascape, Chiungyao’s successful creative career might never have existed.

In Chiungyao’s TV drama production phase, Jessie Ho (何秀瓊, Ho Xiu-qiong), Chiungyao’s daughter-in-law, took charge of her TV production business. Ho has worked in TV production for a long time, and right now she is the producer of Chiungyao’s TV drama. Yet, she still defines herself as a mere “executor” who makes Chiungyao’s imaginary scenarios come alive. Ho said, “my responsibility is to serve as a bridge between the production team and Chiungyao. Although Chiungyao does not know much about TV production, she is the storyteller. What the production team does is to faithfully translate her imagination from words to images” (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004).

The production mode of Chiungyao TV drama is quite singular. During the shooting, Chiungyao, the script writer and the meticulous “executive producer,”
spends most of the time in her Taipei villa, but each day the production team edits the footage shot in mainland China and sends it to her. After watching the draft cut, if she is not satisfied with the result, Chiungyao will contact Ho, express her dissatisfactions and ask for a re-shoot. After the shooting is finished, Chiungyao will ask Ho to edit the final cut for her to see. If she is still not satisfied, she will meet with Ho and other key personnel in the production team to decide if the final cut needs to be revised.

It is obvious that now the capable Ho plays the role which used to be Ping Xin-tao’s in Chiungyao’s writing and filmmaking career. Now Ho not only takes care of the administrative affairs such as financing, marketing and promotion, but also utilizes her professional experiences in TV drama production to help transform Chiungyao’s lyrical written texts into a televisual narrative.

**Chiungyao’s Norm of Creation: The Genre, Subject Matter and Motifs**

Through scrutinizing Chiungyao’s creative career and her unique partnership with Ping Xin-tao, one can understand that Chiungyao’s success in Chinese popular culture can be broken down into a series of capitalistic maneuvers in cultural production. However, one would question what made this female symbol creator’s works stand out in the first place and what keeps attracting audiences in the Chinese mediascape.

To answer this question, one should savor the characteristics of her creations. As I pointed out earlier, Chiungyao is a symbol creator who never works outside the romance genre. According to Chiungyao, the motif of all her creations is the belief in and search for love. At the end of her autobiography *My Story* (1989a), Chiungyao wrote:

I still believe that life is a journey to a world of hardships and sufferings. The
greatest learning about life is to learn how to find comfort and solace in the midst of suffering. I have been through many difficult days and painful experiences in my life; the fact that I have been able to transform danger into safety depends entirely upon my “superstition”—that there is “love” in the world. If some day I find out that people in the world have lost the capacity for love, I believe my spiritual pillar will collapse. I hope that day will never come. 36

Chiungyao’s “belief in love” does not come out of nowhere. In fact, it is a product of modern western romance transplanted into the socio-historical context of contemporary Taiwan and crystallized by the writer’s personal experience. As the world knows, Chinese society is deeply influenced by Confucianism, which is characterized by the patriarchal familialism. In this familialism, the female has to obey the male, and the young should not fight against the older generation. This philosophy’s domination of Chinese civilization is reflected in the Chinese traditional value system in which the family is seen as the basic social and political unit, and the Chinese state has been transformed into an expanded family (Tu, 1998). However, when the Chinese empire was invaded by imperialist states at the end of the 19th Century, Confucianism was seen by Chinese intellectuals as the origin of China’s structural weakness. The May Fourth Movement, the nationalist patriotic movement among the intellectuals which took place in 1916, made this point most obvious in its literature. These young writers waged a total iconoclastic attack on Confucianism. In their writings, the family was seen as the microcosm of Confucianism, and the forbidden freedom of love and marriage for the young generation was symbolized as

the repression of individualism in Chinese traditional culture. At the same time, western modern romantic love was introduced to Chinese society and seen as the redemption for the structural cultural weakness embedded in Confucianism. So, the struggle of youth’s freedom of love and mate selection became the symbol of western/modern individualism and an important theme of the *May Fourth* new literature (Lee, 1973; Lin, 1992, 1994).

When Chiungyao started her romance writing career in Taiwan in the 1960s, family, the universal subject matter of the romance genre, naturally become the pivotal center of her creation. Yet, according to Lin (1992, 1994), what is unique in Chiungyao’s writings is her focusing upon the conflict between parents and children over the freedom of love and marriage as the central topic, which is not the usual subject matter in modern western romance writings. In her early writings, such as *Outside the Window* (1963), Chiungyao was famous for creating tragic love stories. Her heroines’ searching for love is obstructed by parental opposition and ends with death, madness, or unhappy marriages (Lin, 1992).

In the 1970s, Chiungyao gradually developed a formula for her romance which strikes a balance between modern romantic love and Confucian familialism, what Lin (1992) called *Chinese affective familialism*. For Chiungyao, a perfect romantic love always solidifies harmonious family bonds. According to Lin (1992), the basic plotline of Chiungyao’s 1970s romances went as follows:

The predominant narrative structure is this: LOVE—CONFLICT—DISINTEGRATION—RECONCILIATION—REINTEGRATION. The binary opposition between love and the family and between the young and the old generations tell us that romantic love is embedded in a larger network of
family relations and has no independent significance of its own. (p. 23, original emphasis)

Lin argues that this narrative formula is a response to Taiwan’s social situation in the 1970s. Around that time, freedom of love and mate selection had become prevalent in Taiwan. The generational conflict over youngsters’ love had lost its social resonance. Lin (1992) concludes that Chiungyao’s ideal picture of romantic love had finally been fulfilled in the affective familialism representing parents’ respect for children’s freedoms of love and marriage, helping to maintain a harmonious family bond. This parental compromise alters the power and authority structure of the traditional Chinese Confucian patriarchy, so these happy-ending stories “embody not only a romantic fantasy of perfect love between a boy and a girl but also an affective fantasy of family harmony” (Lin, 1992, p. 181). This formula is not only the way that Chiungyao captures social transformation in Taiwan, but is also a “moral fantasy” (Lin, 1992, p. 181). In other words, Chiungyao’s romances around the 1970s created a “cultural myth” that “synthesizes the individual value of romantic love and the collective value of family cohesion” (Lin, 1992, p. 100). In other words, Chiungyao has reconciled the binary opposition between western individualism and Chinese Confucianism in her later romance fictions, which made her romance a “localized” popular cultural product that appeals to Chinese audiences.

**Chineseness: A Strategy to Invoke Cultural Identity in Chinese Audiences**

Chiungyao’s popularity is a culturally specific phenomenon. Perhaps the main reason that Chiungyao is virtually unknown to non-Chinese audiences is the

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37Until now, Chiungyao’s fiction has been translated into only two foreign languages: Vietnamese and Japanese. According to Ping (personal communication, May 10, 2004), the reason that most of Chiungyao’s fictions remains untranslated is because they are too “Chinese” to be interpreted by other cultures.
Chineseness of her cultural works. As pointed out earlier, Lin (1992, 1994) claims that the most peculiar characteristic in Chiungyao’s creations is affective familialism. Lin (1994) argues that this motif is a representation of Chineseness in Chiungyao’s fiction:

It is very easy to criticize Chiungyao’s fiction as only fantastic imagination, but most of us ignore the following point: this dreamy world touches one of the most quintessential parts of Chinese cultural collective consciousness, that is, the relationship between individuals and their families. (p. 151, original emphasis. Author’s translation)

Another mainland Chinese cultural critic, Gu Xiao-ming (顾晓鸣), also maintains that the appeal of Chiungyao’s romance to Chinese audiences, in addition to her dexterously employing traditional Chinese narrative skills in her story-telling, lies in that:

Chiungyao’s fiction creates a popular narrative with Chinese characteristics among the world’s popular fiction. In terms of the thoughts and connotations, her works highlight a modernized Chinese lifestyle and traditional ethics. Especially in such fields as love and family lives, Chiungyao not only unearths different and varied perspectives but also exalts the unique quality and character of Chinese women. (1992, p. 113. Author’s translation)

In other words, most critics agree that Chiungyao’s fiction is full of Chineseness.

Here Chineseness refers to a “Chinese” touch expressed in the semiotics or aesthetic texts, and a “Chinese value” embedded in the plotlines and subject matters. This symbolic aura is produced largely by employing traditional Chinese culture. Put another way, Chineseness is a kind of Chinese cultural proximity. It means every
Chinese audience can easily identify with Chiungyao’s stories, even though most of her works before the 1990s are set in contemporary Taiwan, on the periphery of China proper. Chineseness becomes a cultural strategy employed by Chiungyao to attract Chinese audiences to her popular culture products.

The Co-operation between Chiungyao and Hunan Media Group

Chiungyao’s creative career had a critical turning point in 1989. Before that year, Chiungyao had joined thousands of mainlanders in their first homecoming to the mainland after the 40-year cross-strait blockage. Struck by the magnificent beauty of mainland China’s landscapes, Chiungyao decided to move her TV drama production to the mainland despite the bloody crackdown on democratic demonstrators at Tiananmen (天安門) by the Chinese government in that year. Since then Chiungyao has developed a long-term co-operative partnership with the Hunan TV station in her hometown, which has since become a grand media group in mainland China’s booming TV industry. However, whether it was Chiungyao’s move her TV production to the mainland or choice of the Hunan TV station as her co-operation partner, Chiungyao’s identity as a person of the Chinese diaspora played a critical role in these decisions.

The Moving of Cultural Production to the Homeland: The Diaspora Factor in the Cultural Production

Chiungyao is a so called “first generationlander” in Taiwan. The mainlanders (外省人, Waihengren, namely the people from outside of Taiwan) are Han Chinese who moved from the mainland to Taiwan between 1945, when Japan returned Taiwan to the Republic of China ruled by the KMT government after 50 years of colonization, and 1949, when the KMT government retreated from the mainland to
Taiwan after its defeat by the Chinese Communist Party. During this four-year period, it was estimated that a half million mainlanders were displaced to Taiwan, and most of them belonged to affiliates of the KMT government, such as officials, military forces and accompanying dependants. Currently these mainlanders and their offspring account for 15% of Taiwan’s population of 23 million (Ma, 2003; Williams, 2003). These mainlanders, especially the first generation, are a de facto diasporic community; they are exactly what Safran (1991) terms the “ideal type” of diaspora: mainlanders are “expatriate minority communities” that have not only been “displaced from an original ‘center’ to ‘peripheral,’” but also “maintain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland” (pp. 83-84). This diasporic identity can be found in Chiungyao’s memoir of her 1988 homecoming trip to mainland China, aptly entitled The Unsevered Nostalgia (剪不斷的鄉愁, Jian Bu Duan di Xiangchou, 1989b).

Beginning with the 1990’s Xueke (雪珂), Chiungyao totally moved her TV production base to the mainland. She once again employed her formulaic cultural production mode in producing TV dramas, that is, she wrote the new screen scripts and published the novels with the same title, and then produced the TV drama and theme songs. Chiungyao’s 21 new novels and 15 TV dramas since 1990 are all set in the Qing Dynasty or the time before the Chinese Civil War to avoid the political sensitivity between Taiwan and mainland China, and this signified that Chiungyao’s creative career has bid farewell to contemporary Taiwan. According to Ping (personal communication, May 10, 2004), Chiungyao moved her TV drama production to the mainland mainly because she felt that the landscapes there were perfect locations for her creations set in early China.

Of course, this change in her creation did not result solely from her Chinese
cultural identity. To a large extent, it was dictated by the diasporic cultural production mode Chiungyao adopted. In mainland China, she is still seen as a cultural worker from Taiwan. Because of the on-going political confrontation across the Taiwan Strait, drama set in ancient China is the safest strategy to guarantee acceptance of her cultural production in both Taiwan and China, the two most important markets in the Chinese mediascape. On the other hand, although Chiungyao moved her TV drama production to mainland China, this symbol creator still lives in Taipei. Like many in the diaspora, Chiungyao occupies at least two different cultural/national identities. Emotionally and culturally, Chiungyao identifies with the “Chinese” identity; yet, when she pursues her creative career on the mainland, China’s governmental regulations and policies of cultural production continuously reminded Chiungyao of her “Taiwanese” identity. Chiungyao’s ambiguous national identification is a typical example of what Ong (1997) describes as employing “flexible citizenship” to deal with capitalistic accumulation in the globalization era.

As explored in Safrain’s definition of diaspora, what one can see is only the negative unsatisfied yearning for the eternal return to one’s homeland. Yet, according to Ma (2003), recent scholarly discussions of diaspora have undergone a remarkable redefinition:

In the process of this conceptual shift, the negative characteristics of classical diaspora such as the loss of homeland, a collective memory of oppression and the gnawing desire for return have been suppressed, while the positive connotations of transmigrants as well as multiculturalism and transnational flows of capital have been elevated. (Ma, 2003, p. 6)

If we call these people who conform to the classic, negative definition of
diaspora as *the old diaspora*, then the new immigrants utilizing a flexible identity to conduct capital accumulation in an era of globalization can be termed *the new diaspora*. Ong (1997, 1999) argues that the difference between the old and new diaspora lies in the relationship with the homeland. To the former, it is an emotional attachment of cultural identity; but to the latter, homeland is just a place where making profits is easier with flexible identities. To many Taiwanese, especially mainlanders, one would usually find an overlapping of those two diasporic identities. Chiungyao is not an exception. In addition to being seen as a cultural homecoming, her mainland TV drama productions can also be seen as a cultural practice of the new diaspora profiting in her homeland.

*Diaspora and Flexible Accumulation: Building Guanxi across the Taiwan Strait*

Flexible accumulation, according to Harvey (1989), is the dominant mode of production in late capitalism, which has obvious advantages in responding to the new time-space compression and the Fordist production mode emerging in the globalization era. Fordist production is a modern capitalist production mode which emphasizes utilizing big capital to mass produce standardized commodities. By contrast, flexible accumulation is characterized by a combination of a new pattern of production technology, labor processes, marketing, financing and consumption that allows business to address the increasingly fluid global market with more mobility and efficiency. Compared with the rigid mass production and huge capital concentrated in Fordist production, flexible accumulation highlights “an acceleration in the pace of product innovation together with the exploration of a highly specialized and small-scale market niche” (Harvey, 1989, p. 156). Flexible accumulation not only opens up the market for small business, but this highly opportunistic production mode
also allows the primary social institutions, such as family or kinship groups, to regain importance in the operation of late capitalism.

The economic activity of the new diaspora is basically a kind of flexible accumulation. When diasporic individuals are from developed countries or center economies, they utilize the cheap resources of their relatively underdeveloped or peripheral homeland countries to conduct capital accumulation. Because most of the diasporic economies are small-scale and opportunistic in nature, these diaspora businessmen need to build an informal interpersonal network with local officials or business partners to protect their investments in their homeland countries. In the Chinese context, these informal interpersonal networks which Chinese diaspora businessmen, such as the investors from Taiwan and Hong Kong, build to decrease their business risk are known as guanxi (關係) (Hsing, 1997; Yang, 1994).

Furthermore, transnational cultural production is a kind of representative practice of flexible accumulation, particularly in a highly uncertain postmodern and globalization era. Most of these economic activities are small scale and opportunistic, so the success of such a practice depends heavily on the knowledge of different cultural preferences, cultural policies and local market operations. Guanxi is critical to any of Taiwan’s cultural workers’ businesses on the mainland. In Chiungyao’s case, when she decided to transfer her TV drama production base to mainland China, her guanxi or go-between with China’s TV industry was Ouyang Changlin (歐陽長林).

Ouyang, then a reporter at Hunan TV Station, was assigned the job of covering Chiungyao’s first homecoming trip in 1988. With unyielding perseverance this young reporter followed Chiungyao through her entire trip on the mainland, and finally persuaded the low profile popular symbol creator to give him an exclusive interview.
(Chiuangyao, 1989b). In 1989, when Chiuangyao finally returned to her hometown, Hunan, during her second trip to mainland China, Ouyang convinced Hunan TV Station to give her a grandiose welcome party (Ping, 2004). Later that same year, Chiuangyao started to move her TV drama production of the *Six Dreams* serials to mainland China. Not surprisingly, her co-producing counterpart in mainland China was Huaxia Television International Co-Production Company (華夏電視國際合作公司) under the auspices of Hunan TV Station, an institution led by Ouyang and established especially for co-production projects with Chiuangyao (Lin, 1999).

The partnership between Chiuangyao and Ouyang indicates that even though people have no real kinship with each other, having the same hometown can nourish a quasi-kinship relationship. This place-based relationship has been widely utilized by Chinese new diaspora businessmen to develop interpersonal networks with their mainland business partners and Chinese officials. In Chiuangyao’s case, however, this place-based interpersonal network served as the main reason for her to choose a cooperative partner in mainland China. Like those Taiwanese investors, Chiuangyao had a diasporic identity, financial resources, and technological know-how. The advantage Chiuangyao had over the other Taiwanese investors was her status as an established popular symbol creator. With this stellar status in Chinese popular culture production, Chiuangyao not only had no need to intentionally cultivate an interpersonal network through gift-giving and banquets as others did, but she was able to make the transition from TV drama production in Taiwan to mainland China very smoothly and

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38Huaxia International Television Co-Production Company was aimed at TV production projects from Taiwan. After a long-term co-production venture with Taiwan cultural workers such as Chiuangyao, this company started independent TV drama production. After the transformation, this company spun off Hunan TV Station and became an independent business unit, Hunan Huaxia Movie & TV Transmission Company (湖南華夏影視傳播公司). At present, this company not only cooperates with many of Taiwan’s TV producing companies, but has also begun making self-produced TV dramas (Hunan Huaxia, 2004).
successfully.39

*The Co-Production Partnership between Chiungyao and Hunan Media Group*

Owing to both Taiwanese audiences’ cultural proximity and their curiosity about mainland China, when *Wan Jun* (婉君), the first part of *Six Dreams*, was broadcast by CTS on February 19, 1990, this drama series, the first Taiwan TV drama entirely produced in mainland China, garnered nearly 40 percent of Taiwan’s TV viewership (Ma, 2002; Ping, 2004). This success impressed Chiungyao and initiated her 17-year co-production relationship with Hunan Huaxia Movie & TV Transmission Company, an adjunct institution of Hunan Media Group.40

Because of Chiungyao’s popularity and successful track record, during the past 17 years many Mainland Chinese TV stations contacted her with hopes of cooperating with her in TV drama production. But Chiungyao stuck with Hunan Media Group.41 This long-term cooperation, according to Ping (personal communication, May 10, 2004) and Ho (personal communication, April 24, 2004) is, first of all, based on the guan xi networks developed by geographic factors—Hunan is her hometown, so Chiungyao feels a emotional attachment to it. Second, Hunan TV Station used to be a small inland TV station, and had hardly any co-production experiences before the co-production project with Chiungyao. This TV station was proud to be chosen as Chiungyao’s cooperation partner, so it gave great material and logistic support to her production. Third, during their long-term cooperation,

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39During my personal interviews with Cheng and Liu in 2004, both mentioned that when Chiungyao visited some officials for her TV drama production on the mainland, those officials felt excited and even flattered to meet the famous Taiwan cultural worker in person.


41During the past 17 years, the only show that Chiungyao did not make through co-production with Hunan Media Group was *New Romance in the Rain* (情深深雨濛濛, Qing sansan, yu mengmeng, 2001). This TV drama is co-produced with an adjunct company of CCTV, the Chinese International Television and Film Production Company.
Chiungyao and Hunan Media Group have developed an understanding and mutual trust. A long-term and stable cooperation partnership not only helped Chiungyao, a cultural worker from Taiwan who does not know very much about the mainland TV system and polices, to decrease uncertainties and risks, but also provided an environment that allowed her to totally concentrate on production work.

**Hunan Media Group: A New China TV Powerhouse Employing Taiwan’s Popular TV Culture**

In today’s mainland China TV landscape, Hunan Media Group (湖南電廣集團, Hunan Dianguang Jituan) has become one of the most powerful players. Its legendary transformation from a small local TV Station into a major national media group is referred to by China’s TV industry as the *Hunan TV phenomenon*, and has become a pioneer of employing a synergy strategy to merge local broadcasting media into a semi-private media conglomerate in China’s TV industry. The development of Hunan Media Group can be traced back to 1993, when Wei Wenbin (魏文彬) was assigned as the Chinese Communist Party leader of the Hunan Provincial Broadcast and Television Bureau. Hunan is an inland agricultural province in Southeast China with a population of 64 million. Both its industrial development and economic prosperity lag far behind the coastal areas like Shanghai or Guangdong. But the ambitious Wei decided to infuse capitalistic competition into the Hunan TV system. In 1995, he developed a new channel, Hunan Economic TV Station, along with the old Hunan TV Station. In an unconventional open selection process, Ouyang Changlin, who successfully helped Hunan TV Station develop the cooperation partnership with famous cultural worker Chiungyao, was elected as the manager of this non-government funded TV Station operating in a free-market style. Because the new
TV station had to be responsible for its own financial operations, in the beginning Ouyang clearly defined it as an entertainment-oriented commercial business and introduced a capitalistic commercial television model for its operation. All these operational strategies, such as adopting a program producer system and strengthening the marketing, promotion, and advertisement recruitment, were groundbreaking in China’s television industry which had only just initiated its economic reform. These measures helped Hunan Economic Television succeed economically in a short period.

In 1997, Hunan TV Station established Hunan Satellite TV Station and transformed itself from a local TV station into a popular nationwide TV channel whose rating closely dogged the long-time dominant CCTV. In 2000, the Hunan TV system merged into Hunan Media Group and became the first television media enterprise listed on China’s stock market (Cao, 2003; Ouyang, 2001a; Sun, 2003).

The Hunan TV phenomenon is a unique product of China’s media environment which has been changing since economic reform started in the late 1980s. The success of Hunan Media Group was a result of macro structural change in China’s media landscape, such as the semi-commercialization media policy, the emergence of a huge domestic media market, the introduction of cutting-edge television technology, and the employment of foreign popular television formats. Also contributing to the success are the micro actors’ agency, particularly Wei Wenbin and Ouyang Changlin who decided to adopt the capitalistic television modus operandi in the operation of Hunan’s TV system.

There is no clear evidence that the cooperation between Hunan TV Station and Taiwan’s popular cultural worker Chiungyao had influenced its programming strategy. Yet under the guidance of Ouyang, the newly established Hunan Economic TV
Station intentionally developed a series of new programs that imitated the popular Taiwanese entertainment television formats. The two signature programs of Hunan Economic TV Station were *The Citadel of Happiness* (快樂大本營, Kuaile Da Benying, 1996) and *Romantic Meeting: The Rose Date* (玫瑰之約, Meigui Zhi Yue, 1997), both shows imitating successful TV programs in Taiwan. The former is a musical variety show with brisk hosts and audience participation, which is the standard format of Taiwan’s variety show; the latter is a direct cloning of Taiwan’s popular dating show *Special Men and Women* (非常男女, Feichang Nannu). These popular TV formats were not originally created by the Taiwanese TV industry, and most were copied from popular Japanese TV formats. As Liu and Chen (2004) incisively pointed out “. . . indeed, the practice of format exploitation by Mainland television stations, particularly in Hunan, Fujian, Anhui, and Shanghai, mirrors to some extent the Taiwanese appropriation of Japanese formats” (p. 66). However, the Taiwan TV industry obviously contributes to the localization of these formats by making them cater to the tastes of Chinese audiences (Liu & Chen, 2004; Keane, 2004). Recently, the popular entertainment TV format appropriated by Hunan Media Group has exceeded Taiwan’s programming portfolio. In 2004, Hunan Satellite TV Station adapted the popular U.S. TV format of *American Idol* into a Chinese version of a talent singing contest show, *Super Girl’s Voice* (超級女聲, Chaoji Nu Sheng). This show became an instant hit. In its 2005 final contest episode, the show drew in 400 million Chinese viewers and hit a new record in China’s TV rating history (Jakes, 2005).

Facing increasingly fierce competition from other TV stations, Ouyang believes that making a “brand name” for Hunan Media Group is an effective strategy to keep its leading position in China’s television industry. Among other maneuvers,
Ouyang especially highlights the importance of producing high-quality and popular TV dramas in building a TV network’s “brand name.” He argues that

…because TV drama production represents one TV station’s image and capability. . . . What is more important, a good TV drama entertains a very strong brand naming effect. This is the reason why national audiences are getting to know the *Hunan TV Phenomenon* through watching a successful TV drama like *Huanzhu Gege.*” (Ouyang, 2001a, p. 208. Author’s translation)

Is there any connection between Ouyang’s fast promotions or even the success of Hunan Media Group and the co-production partnership he helped to build with Chiungyao? According to Ouyang’s own analysis, the long-term partnership with Chiungyao allowed Hunan TV Station to entertain a distinguished status among the other mainland provincial TV stations. In addition, his understanding of the operation of the cross-strait media market and the know-how of TV production gained from that cooperation helped him be selected for important positions. He admitted that his career and the following success of Hunan Economic TV Station should be attributed to “Chiungyao’s trust toward her homelanders” (Lin, 1999).

Chiungyao’s co-produced TV dramas have also contributed considerable financial support to the establishment of Hunan Economic TV Station. According to Ho (personal communication, April 26, 2004), Chiungyao’s TV dramas had been a valuable commodity in the mainland’s TV market from the start. When Chiungyao

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42Ouyang is the first TV station head in Mainland China whose assignment was not made by the Party official’s black box decision. In 1995, Ouyang defeated 76 competitors to be selected as the head of the Hunan Economic TV Station, a new subsidiary channel of Hunan TV Station. Because of his outstanding performance in running Hunan Economic TV Station, Ouyang was promoted to manager of Hunan TV Station and the deputy secretary of the Hunan Provincial Broadcast and Television Bureau in 2000 (Cao, 2003).
began her TV drama production in mainland China, the copyrights of those early productions were given to Hunan TV Station for free, because at that time Taiwan was still her target market. However, selling the broadcast rights to these Chiuungyao TV dramas helped Hunan TV station earn a handsome profit, and this money was put into the building of Hunan Economic TV Station, a new affiliate of Hunan TV Station.

The Changing Nature in the Long-term Partnership between Chiuungyao and Hunan Media Group

Through the on-going partnership, the nature of the cooperation between Chiuungyao and Hunan Media Group has undergone dramatic changes. In 1989, when Chiuungyao began to produce her first mainland-based TV drama, the mainland cooperative counterpart, Huaxia Television International Co-production Company, the proxy of Hunan TV station, had no previous TV drama production experience. To answer Chiuungyao’s requirements for professional backup, it had to ask for help from the local Hunan Xiao Xiang Film Studio (瀟湘製片廠). In the very early “assistant production” stage, Huaxia’s main responsibility was to arrange the logistic support, including permission to shoot in the locations, recruitment of extras, and transportation, accommodation and catering for some 70 production crew members from Taiwan (Lin, 1992). During the daily production process, the personnel of the Hunan production team gradually learned the skills of TV drama production and became capable professionals. When the Taiwan government started to loosen the quota restriction on mainlander participation in the TV drama production, many production crew members from Taiwan were replaced by Hunanese local personnel to reduce production costs. Taiwan’s new policy also transformed Chiuungyao’s TV drama production partnership with Hunan Media Group from the “assistant
production” into real “co-production.” In the latter stage of the co-production partnership, the production crew members had been selected predominantly from mainland personnel, with only the key creative persons, such as the producer and director, coming from Taiwan (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004).

During the transition from the assistant production stage to the co-production stage, the Hunan TV network also underwent phenomenal development. The establishment of Hunan Media Group in the end of 2000 helped it to successfully accumulate capital in China’s media reform, so the capital investment in Chiungyao’s TV drama production underwent changes as well. In the beginning, the investment came totally from the Taiwan side; but now both sides make financial investments. Taking the *Huanzhu Gege* series as an example, when shooting on the mainland all the production investment came from Hunan Media group, and Taiwan was responsible for the screen scripts and all other expenses in post-production (Xie, 1999). In terms of copyright, Chiungyao was not only the first Taiwanese TV drama producer that got one portion of the overseas copyright (the mainland copyright) from Taiwan TV networks, but she was also the first to finally own the whole overseas copyright of her TV dramas (Ping, 2004b). In the beginning, Chiungyao’s production company did not place much importance on the sale of the mainland copyright, so most of Chiungyao’s early TV dramas were either given outright to Hunan TV Station or Hunan TV Station was authorized to sell the dramas to other mainland China’s TV stations (Lin, 1992; Yang Z., 1994). However, with the shrinking of profits in Taiwan neo-network TV market today and the rapid expansion of mainland China’s TV market, Jesse Ho (personal communication, April 26, 2004) admitted that now mainland China has replaced Taiwan as the target market for Chiungyao TV dramas.
As a result, Chiungyao asked Hunan Media Group for a higher commission ratio in the license fee of mainland China’s copyright sale.

**The Making of The Huanzhu Gege Series**

Chiungyao’s definitive mainland-based TV drama production was the *Huanzhu Gege* series (1998-2003), originally designed as a 24-episode TV drama, first broadcast in 1998 by Taiwan’s CTV network. However, this drama’s immense popularity took Taiwan, mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and almost all other Chinese communities worldwide by storm. Finally *Huanzhu Gege* expanded to a 112-episode TV drama trilogy comprising two sequel installments, nine novels and many other spin-off cultural commodities. Thus far, this drama series has become the most popular work of Chiungyao’s entire creative career. In the last section of this chapter, there are descriptions of this TV drama’s production; its excellent commercial marketing maneuvers in the Greater China regional media market; its final installment’s embarrassing failures in both Taiwan and Hong Kong; and finally a discussion of the reasons for its original popularity and later failures.

**The Origin of a Popular Culture Product: The Birth of the Huanzhu Gege Series**

The idea of *Huanzhu Gege* series originated when Chiungyao encountered the strangely named place in Beijing called *Gongzhu Fen* (公主墳, *The Princess’s Tomb*). The writer was curious about the story behind the name. Her friend, a Beijing native, told her an anecdote: Qianlong (乾隆), the great Qing Dynasty emperor, had adopted a commoner as his daughter. Since this “commoner princess” did not have real royal blood, she could not be buried in the royal graveyard, but was buried in *Gongzhu Fen*. This anecdote triggered Chiungyao’s imagination and finally gave birth to the creation of the *Huanzhu Gege* series (Chiungyao, 1997).
The *Huanzhu Gege* series revolves around the illiterate commoner heroine Xiaoyanzi (小燕子, Little Swallow) and the majestic Emperor Qianlong. The girl is mistaken by the emperor for his daughter produced with a commoner beauty, and the reluctant Xiaoyanzi is obliged to participate in the commoner princess charade. During her adventures in the royal palace, Xiaoyanzi undergoes a series of farcical identity crises and threatening incidents. Although the lie is exposed in the end, Qianlong, described as a lenient and caring monarch, not only forgives the innocent girl but also confers upon her the title of princess—*Huanzhu Gege*. Like all of Chiungyao’s creations, this drama is basically a romance. While the heroine is busy covering up her fake identity and dealing with tedious royal protocols, Chiungyao does not forget to arrange a true prince to fall in love with her.43

According to Jesse Ho, *Huanzhu Gege* was an unexpected success. When *Huanzhu Gege* was produced in 1997, another Chiungyao TV drama, *The Sky Is Crying* (蒼天有淚, Cangtain You lei, 1998), was in production simultaneously. Compared with *The Sky Is Crying*, which sported better production crews, a higher budget and a well-known all-star cast, *Huanzhu Gege* was a poor bet (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004). In addition to these production weaknesses, the production process was itself not smooth. A serious conflict between the director unit and the camera unit even once made Chiungyao decide to abort the project (Chiungyao, 1999d). While *The Sky Is Crying* is a standard Chiungyao romantic melodrama, the comical and anecdotal *Huanzhu Gege* seems like a playful excursion in Chiungyao’s creative romance genre career. Yet, contrary to conventional wisdom, *Huanzhu Gege* became a surprising commercial dark horse and Chiungyao’s most

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43 For the detailed plotlines of these three installments of the *Huanzhu Gege* series, please see the appendix.
When *Huanzhu Gege* was aired in Taiwan on April 28, 1998, by China TV network (CTV), this drama became an instant hit. Its strong performance once set a viewing record for Taiwan TV drama in the neo-network era. After *Huanzhu Gege*’s debut in the prime time slot (8:00 PM weekdays), CTV immediately arranged a rerun in the 9:00 PM slot and the drama’s rating was even higher. In the following year, *Huanzhu Gege* not only kept a one episode per-week rerun on CTV, it was also moved to CTV’s cable channel, Her TV, and underwent a one-year-long rerun marathon with three episodes a day until the sequel had finished production and was ready for broadcast (Huang & Xiao, 1999; Ping, 2004b).

The most impressive cultural phenomenon of *Huanzhu Gege* is its enthusiastic reception by mainland China’s audiences. According to surveys conducted by the official TV network Chinese Central Television (CCTV), when this drama was aired by mainland TV stations in November 1998, the ratings for *Huanzhu Gege* set records in 20 provinces and big cities all over the country, including several of the most populous TV markets, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Tianjin. In Hunan province, where the drama was first aired in China, the average ratings figure was 45 percent, and at its highest even hit 58 percent (Gau & Wu, 2002). In Guangdong province, the Mandarin production of *Huanzhu Gege* beat Hong Kong TVB’s

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44 According to an AC Nelson survey, the first part of *Huanzhu Gege*’s average ratings in Taiwan was 12 percent, which was much higher than the average Taiwan TV dramas ratings (Zeng, 2002). However, this record was broken later by the Taiwanese Soap Operas, such as *Taiwan Thundering Fire* (台灣霹靂火, Taiwan Pili Huo, 2002-2003) and *Unforgettable* (意難忘, Yi Nan Wang, 2004-2006).

45 The Cable channel, Her TV, was affiliated with CTV, but now is out of business.

46 In China, different regions usually entertain their own local preferences in TV drama. For instance, the Beijing audience’s taste is different from that of Shanghai audiences. But *Huanzhu Gege* is an exception in that its popularity has overcome regional and cultural differences.
Cantonese production which almost always dominates the local audiences’ viewing preferences (Huang & Xiao, 1999). Ouyang Changlin (2001b), Huanzhu Gege’s mainland China production partner from Hunan Media Group, suggested that a “Gege phenomenon” accompanied the broadcast of this drama, which put the characters and story developments among the hottest topics in people’s everyday lives; at the same time, the tie-in products and the title songs were found everywhere in mainland China.

In 1999, popularity brought Huanzhu Gege two awards at the 17th Golden Eagle Award (金鷹獎, Jinyin Jiang), one of the two most prestigious TV competitions in China. One was in the best TV drama category and the other one was the best actress award for Zhao Wei (趙薇, Vicki Zhao), the young actress who played the lead role of Xiaoyanzi (Ouyang, 2001b). Following a 1982 Hong Kong production, this is only the second time that the Golden Eagle Award even went to any “non-pureblood” Chinese TV drama.

Not only popular in Taiwan and mainland China, Huanzhu Gege also marked the renaissance of Taiwanese TV drama on Hong Kong TV screens. In 1994, Taiwan’s production Judge Bao (包青天, Baoqingtian) hit the highest point of Taiwanese TV drama in Hong Kong TV history. Not until Huanzhu Gege was aired did Taiwanese

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47 In China, there are numerous TV awards. However, the two most representative and earliest are the Golden Eagle Award and the Flying Sky Award (飛天獎, Feitian Jiang). The Golden Eagle Award, has been hosted by the film magazine Movies for Mass Audiences (大眾電影, Dazhong Dianying) since 1983. The award is decided by votes cast by audiences, so it reflects popular taste. The Flying Sky Award is decided by officials of the Department of Radio and Television; accordingly it reflects the trend in official cultural policy (Wu, 1997).

48 The first non-locally produced TV drama to get the best TV drama award in the Golden Eagle was the 1982 Hong Kong ATV’s martial arts costume drama Huo Yuan Jia (霍元甲).

49 Judge Bao was acclaimed as one of the most popular Taiwanese TV dramas ever made. First made by China TV Station (CTS) in 1974, this costume period drama produced 350 episodes before it bowed out. In 1993, this subject matter was remade by CTS again, and this time the 236-episode drama again took Taiwan and other Asian markets, such as Singapore, South Korea and other southeast Asian Chinese communities, by storm. This drama also marked Taiwanese TV drama’s golden days in Hong
TV drama again dominate the Hong Kong TV screens. The long-time ratings underdog in the Hong Kong TV industry, ATV beat TVB by airing *Huanzhu Gege* parts I and II. ATV estimated that this drama series attracted 80 percent of the Hong Kong audience (Huang & Xiao, 1999).

In addition to the three main Chinese media markets, the fever of *Huanzhu Gege* was also sweeping to other Chinese diaspora media markets, like the Chinese communities in Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, North America, and Europe. Jesse Ho proudly proclaimed that “wherever there are Chinese, they must have watched *Huanzhu Gege*” (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004). The unexpected success encouraged Taiwan’s investor CTV to persuade Chiungyao to produce a sequel. Chiungyao had never done this before in her entire creative career. CTV made an generous offer that not only allowed the budget per-episode to reach the record high of 1.6 million NT dollars (approximately 53 thousands U.S. dollars), but also allowed Chiungyao to be the sole overseas copyright owner. Compared to the average per-episode budget of 850 thousand NT dollars (approximately 28 thousand U.S. dollars), which did not always including the overseas copyright, this was an offer that could hardly be ignored (Zhan, 1998). In September, 1998, even before the drama stormed mainland China, Chiungyao had already started to make *Huanzhu Gege* Part II. She wrote the screenplay as it was shooting, and it took only 4 months and 23 days to finish the production of the 48-episode *Huanzhu Gege* Part II. Competitors ferociously bid for the broadcast rights of *Huanzhu Gege* Part II in mainland China, and it was finally sold for RMB 545,000 yuan (approximately 68 thousand U.S. dollars) per episode. This was not only much

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*Kong: First aired by TVB and instantly taking up 80 percent in the ratings. Later *Judge Bao* even caused a notorious broadcast race between TVB and ATV because the middle man sold the copyright to both TV networks (Wang, 1996).*
higher than the RMB 390,000 yuan (approximately 48 thousand U.S. dollars) per episode of the original Huanzhu Gege, but it also set the highest sales record for a TV drama in China’s TV history at the time (Zhan, 1999). In addition to the high profitability, the efficiency of the production was another impressive achievement of the Huanzhu Gege sequel. All 72 episodes were finished in just one year, which set a record for the fastest TV drama production in China’s TV industry. The success in the making of the Huanzhu Gege sequel has been hailed as “the new breakthrough of commercialization in China’s TV drama production” (Ouyang, 2001b, p. 243). The success not only made the symbol creator Chiungyao and her mainland China co-production partner Hunan Media Group the winners of huge material profits, this brilliant track record also improved their reputation in Chinese TV drama production.

The Fluctuating Popularity: The Failure of Huanzhu Gege Part III

Because of the success of Huanzhu Gege and its sequel, the TV industries of Taiwan, mainland China and Hong Kong all together tried to persuade Chiungyao to produce Part III of this series. However, Chiungyao seemed very determined that the drama series should finish with the end of Part II. In 2000, Chiungyao started to produce another new TV drama, New Romance in the Rain (情深深, 雨濛濛, Qing Shenshen, Yu Mengmeng), with an affiliate of CCTV. However, in 2002, Chiungyao broke her own promise and invested a much higher budget into the production of Huanzhu Gege Part III.

On July 7, 2003, Chiungyao’s Huanzhu Gege Part III began to air in Taiwan on CTV. In the same week, about 21 TV channels across mainland China and TVB in

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50One of Chiungyao’s mainland China co-production partners Liu Xiangqun (劉向群), now president of Hunan Economic TV Station, reported that he had persuaded Chiungyao to produce Huanzhu Gege Part III right after Part II. However, Chiungyao once told him that “there will never be a Huanzhu Gege Part III” (Liu, personal communication, July 20, 2004).
Hong Kong joined the airing of the 60-episode finale of the *Huanzhu Gege* series. This was the very first time in Chinese TV history that one drama had ever been broadcast simultaneously in the three main Chinese media markets, what Jesse Ho called “the simultaneous world release.” Although by nature “the simultaneous world release” is a commercial strategy to curb fierce overseas piracy (Ho, personal communication, April 26, 2004), it was also an excellent promotion for a TV drama to target the Chinese mediascape in its home markets.

Surprisingly, the performances of this new production faced embarrassing debacles in both Taiwan and Hong Kong. In Taiwan, *Huanzhu Gege* Part III was defeated by a low-budget Taiwanese Soap Opera, *Taiwan Thundering Fire* (台灣霹靂火, Taiwan Pili Huo), and, in Hong Kong, the poor performance of this Chiungyao TV drama persuaded TVB to move it from the prime time slot to early evening. Among the main Chinese media markets, only mainland China retained the high ratings. However, the failure of the finale of the *Huanzhu Gege* series in Taiwan gave Chiungyao a telling setback. In an interview about the show’s poor performance (Chu, 2003), Chiungyao was described as going through an emotional downturn—“from surprised, depressed, to disheartened.” Chiungyao told the reporter in tears that,

> Taiwan wants me no more. . . . I used to be the most popular screenplay writer from Taiwan. . . . It [the poor ratings of *Huanzhu Gege* Part III] proves to me that Taiwan’s audiences do not want to watch my productions. Taiwan wants me no more! (Chu, 2003)

*Huanzhu Gege* Part III, which was claimed to be the production requiring Chiungyao’s greatest energy and efforts, not only paled before the previous two installments, but also brought to an end the brilliant record of “Chiungyao TV drama”
which had never been beaten in Taiwan (Ping, 2004b). This failure obviously deeply frustrated Chiungyao, because it brought about the longest hiatus in her productive TV drama production career. Not until three years later did Chiungyao start to make a new production. 51

Factors Influencing the Performance of the Huanzhu Gege Series:

The Genre and the Production Interval

When discussing the fluctuating popularity of the *Huanzhu Gege* series, one of the most difficult yet unavoidable challenges is to provide some reasonable explanation for the different performances between the first two series and the final installment. Through analysis, these answers can be shown by at least two main factors: the genre and the production interval.

Employment of Genre-blending in the First Two Installments and the Final Part

As pointed out in the previous section, Chiungyao is a symbol creator who always works in the romance genre, and in the past four decades her standard works have fallen into a kind of formulaic melodramatic romance. However, the first two parts of the *Huanzhu Gege* series were the only comedic romantic melodramas to appear in Chiungyao’s entire creative career. The storylines of the first two parts entertained a similarity to Mark Twain’s (1882) classic comedy *The Prince and the Pauper*, but *Huanzhu Gege* and the following Part II are not TV drama of a pure genre. Instead, they form a “generic recombinant” (Gitlin, 1985, p. 281) or “generic hybrid” (Vande Berg, 1991). These two series represent a unique intergeneric invention which

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51Chiungyao’s latest TV drama is the *New A Screen of Dreams* (又見一簾幽夢, You Jian Yilian Youmeng, 2006), which is a remake of her 1996 TV drama (Liu, 2006).
blends some tested popular Chinese TV drama genres: comedy/slapstick, wuxia (武俠, martial arts), fictionalized history (戲說歷史, xishuo lishi), and romantic melodrama.

This genre-blending strategy obviously helped to expand Chiungyao’s TV drama audience base. Her popular culture products, her novels, movies, and TV dramas, are traditionally categorized as women’s “tear-jerking romance” (Wang, 1996, p. 266), and from this pejorative term one can imagine that Chiungyao’s traditional audiences are female. As a matter of fact, the consumption of Chiungyao’s popular cultural products has become a collective “rite of passage” for several generations of Taiwanese women (Lin, 1994). However, the popularity of the first two Huanzhu Gege series demonstrates for the first time that Chiungyao’s works can appeal to audiences from different genders and age groups. The most obvious evidence is that Huanzhu Gege has become a children’s favorite and gathered a huge fandom in grade schools (Huang & Xiao, 1999).

The making of the first two Huanzhu Gege series into lighthearted comedic dramas seems to have been Chiungyao’s intentional decision. This “queen of Chinese romance” admitted that the style change simply reflected the change in her outlook on life and creation. Chiungyao explained why she created Huanzhu Gege:

Life has already been intermingled with joy and sorrow, partings and gatherings, and this makes me believe that there is nothing more important in life than simple happiness! Because of this belief, I started to change my writing style and create this TV drama series and the novels. Right now, what I hope to bring to my audiences is only “entertainment” . . . . Writing to me is

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52 Huanzhu Gege has been categorized by China’s critics as a fictionalized history drama (Yin, 2002). As a popular Chinese TV drama genre, the fictionalized history drama emphasizes the employment of folklores, legends, anecdotes and dramatic twists of historical materials to create colorful and dramatic narratives. Basically, it can be seen as a dramatic strategy of historical rewriting and invention widely employed by China’s TV industry in the late 1990s.
only the way to entertain my readers and myself. If it [Huanzhu Gege] can touch you for a moment or make you laugh a little, then I will be satisfied.

(Chiungyao, 1999b, p. 5. Author’s translation)

However, any media text is a commodity in cultural productions. According to Liu Xiangqun (劉向群), Chiungyao’s long-term cooperation partner in Hunan Media Group, the standard Chiungyao romantic drama which usually culminates with a tragic ending, has reached the limits of its commercial performance, that is, these dramas were moderately well-received but not immensely popular hits. In fact, adoption of the comedy/slapstick genre in Huanzhu Gege was originally suggested by Ouyang Changlin (Liu, personal communication, July 20, 2004). As its strong performance in the TV markets shows, the change of style and adoption of genre-blending in Huanzhu Gege definitely brought a freshness to Chinese audiences who were familiar with Chungyao’s formulaic romance melodramas.

As pointed out earlier, Chiungyao was once reluctant to produce the final installment of the Huanzhu Gege series. What made this symbol creator finally decide to produce the last segment, according to Ho (personal communication, April 26, 2004), was repeated encouragement and persuasion from TV industries. Yet, in Part III, the hybridity of genres is missing. The comedy/slapstick genre which was frenetically employed in the first two Huanzhu Gege series almost disappeared in the finale. As a result, the whole drama turned back to a Chiungyao standard romance melodrama. What made Chiungyao relinquish the lighthearted comical narrative she successfully created in the first two Huanzhu Gege series and return to her familiar genre turf—romantic melodrama?

It can be explained from two points of view. First of all, the phenomenal
success of *Huanzhu Gege* was beyond the expectations of its creator Chiungyao. Originally, this comdic TV drama was only a trial stint in Chiungyao’s established romance career, and its schematic storyline was designed for a simple and clear-cut 24-episode drama. When the decision was made to develop a 48-episode sequel, the storyline of Part II outgrew the original story blueprint. However, comedic melodrama is not Chiungyao’s specialty. After the strenuous fabrication of the storylines, Chiungyao seemed too creatively exhausted to develop another follow-up series. Any sensitive reader can easily detect the signs of Chiungyao’s exhaustion in the postscript of *Huanzhu Gege* Part II novels. It started as the following:

Finally, I finished *Huanzhu Gege* Part II. . . . In the beginning, when I created the characters in *Huanzhu Gege*, it was unimagineable that I would become embroiled in their world for two years. . . . The writing was so difficult that it made me depressed, losing confidence. . . . Several times, I even tried to give it up. When this novel finally reached “the end,” I was totally exhausted. In my whole life, it seems to me that I have never been so tired. (1999, pp. 1443-1447. Author’s translation)

In 2003, after the final part of *Huanzhu Gege* was on air, it could not maintain the same popularity as the previous two installments. This result frustrated Chiungyao deeply. In the postscript of the novel, Chiungyao further expressed her exhaustion in creation:

In my childhood, my parents usually played a game with their four children. This game is called “spin a yarn.” One person has to begin a story, then the second person has to continue to “spin” it, and then the next person continues . . . everyone has to take turns to fabricate this narrative. . . . The
creation of *Huanzhu Gege* trilogy is exactly the product of the game “spin a yarn.” Sometimes, even I cannot believe that I can use this method to continue this story. (2003, pp. 1096-1097. Author’s translation)

In addition to the creative exhaustion which resulted from her unfamiliarity with other genres, Chiungyao’s personal life had gone through a series of upheavals when she created *Huanzhu Gege* Part III. It began with the 9/11 terrorist attack in America. The deeply shocked symbol creator stopped her script writing for the first time because she “deeply felt for the impermanence of life and was horrified by the dark side in the human nature” (Chiungyao, 2003, p. 1098). Two months later, Chiungyao, gradually recovering from the troubled feelings, started to work on the script again. However, at that time the health of her 94-year-old father started to deteriorate and he finally passed away in July, 2002. Suffering from the passing of one of her dearest family members, Chiungyao once again suspended her writing. When she finally started the revision, her husband and career partner, Ping Xin-tao, was hospitalized with a serious viral infection. So the script of *Huanzhu Gege* Part III was finished amidst tribulations, and this emotional turmoil was obviously reflected in the narrative. This is why melodramatic elements such as partings, deaths, and war fill this drama’s storyline. When reflecting over the creation of *Huanzhu Gege* Part III, Chiungyao said:

I have to admit that this story was finished during a period of turmoil in my life. My own feelings unavoidably influenced the development of the story. . . . Life is filled with too much heaviness, too many sorrows, too many burdens, but too little freedom to decide one’s own destiny. (2003, p. 1100. Author’s translation)
Comparing the tones between Chiungyao’s reflections about the creation of the original *Huanzhu Gege* and its final part, one can easily see the difference: the former is lighthearted and bold, but the latter is heavy and lacks confidence. The creator’s mood swing was directly reflected in the different narrative styles in the trilogy. The first two are comical and optimistic; the final part is dark and melodramatic. On the other hand, Chiungyao’s limitations in employing other genres also influenced the style of *Huanzhu Gege* Part III. The result was that the finale of the *Huanzhu Gege* trilogy retreated back to her most familiar genre: the romance melodrama. Understandably, the discontinuity of the dramatic style betrayed the audience’s expectations of this drama series, and this disappointment was reflected in its poor performance.

*The Production Interval in Popular Culture Production*

As argued in the previous section, cultural production in the postmodern era can be seen as a kind of flexible accumulation. Harvey (1989) argues that this postmodern popular culture production is more closely connected with the consumption side than is traditional cultural production. This means that cultural production is much more sensitive to quick-changing fashions, cultural transformations and fluid tastes of mass audiences. Harvey further contends that these popular culture products have to shorten their “turnover time” to keep up with trendy fashions (p. 156). Harvey’s insight into the logic of postmodern cultural production can shed some light on the fluctuating popularity of the *Huanzhu Gege* trilogy.

The success of the first two installments of the *Huanzhu Gege* series can be attributed partly to the short turnover time between them. Right after *Huanzhu Gege* had become a popular show in the Chinese mediascape, the sequel immediately began
production. The interval between the broadcasts of these two drama series was less than a year. The successful performance of its sequel obviously took advantage of the still-hot “Huanzhu Gege phenomenon” around that time. However, the four-year lapse between Huanzhu Gege Part II and Part III is surely an important factor that weakened the latter’s performance. When the final part of Huanzhu Gege began appearing on screen, the Huanzhu Gege fad had cooled off. Especially in today’s neo-network media environment, it is very difficult to keep an audience with an obvious short attention-span when they have so many other choices on the cable TV channels.

Another important factor that impaired the reception of Huanzhu Gege Part III was the cast change. After the successes of the first two parts of this drama series, most of the original cast had become popular stars in China’s TV industry. Because of their busy schedules and rising wage scales, Huanzhu Gege Part III could not keep the original cast. However, Chiunyao’s decision to replace the original cast with new actors definitely impaired the integrity of this trilogy. In particular, the replacement of Vicki Zhao in the role of the heroine Xiaoyanzi took a heavy toll on the popularity of the final installment of Huanzhu Gege. Obviously, Xiaoyanzi is the soul of the Huanzhu Gege series because all the storylines revolve around this rambunctious illiterate commoner princess. As a little-known actress, Zhao vividly embodied Xiaoyanzi and had been taken as the incarnation of this role by the audiences. With her image adamantly imprinted on the viewers’ minds, Huanzhu Gege made Zhao an instant popular cultural icon in the Chinese mediascape. In 1999, her performance in Huanzhu Gege earned her the title of “best popular actress” by over 400 thousand audience votes in China’s 17th Golden Eagle TV Awards, which is known for having
its winners decided by the ordinary audiences rather than party officials or professionals from the TV industry. For a series with the same characters, the cast change in the final part was certainly a huge spoiler of its popularity, particularly when a specific actor has already been identified with the idiosyncratic title role in the drama series by the faithful fans.

In addition to the discontinuity in its genre-blending narrative style, the long time lapse in production combined with the unfamiliar cast made the final part seem like a whole new drama. These mistakes in the production resulted in the declining popularity of the final installment.

*The Critique of The Huanzhu Gege Phenomenon: The Critical Community’s Discomfort with the Surging Mass Culture in China’s TV Industries*

Although the *Huanzhu Gege* series had taken the Chinese mediascape by storm, its popularity had incurred an unexpected critique in China, the most important market in the Chinese mediascape.

The critique of the *Huanzhu Gege* series began with the popular genre it employed, the fictionalized history (戲說歷史, xishuo lishi) drama. According to China TV critics, this dramatic genre originated with the 1992 Taiwan-mainland China co-production TV drama *The Story of Qianlong* (戲說乾隆, Xishuo Qianlong) (Gau & Wu, 2002). Most of these mainland Chinese critics see the popularity enjoyed by fictionalized history TV drama to be a result of China’s TV commercialization in the 1990s (Gau & Wu, 2002; Sui, 2004; Yin, 2002). For example, Yin (2002) argues that “this popularity demonstrated that *xishuo lishi* serials had a definite consumer market in China. In these serials history is invented and played around with. The concept is a kind of game, but one that is an outlet for people’s feelings and emotions” (p. 34).
That *Huanzhu Gege*’s popularity became questionable in mainland China’s critical community reflected that China’s TV critics still hold a more serious attitude toward TV programming. In other words, they still believe that to some extent TV programming should play a positive didactic role to inculcate the right ideologies and elitist cultural tastes in audiences, rather than only serving as the provider of entertainments. As Sui (2004) argues, “the overly ‘fictionalized’ history, the exaggerated historical cultural text . . . will impair the truthfulness of history and its cultural meaning. What the overly fictionalized historical narratives provide to people is not only a fictionalized imagination, but even a historical illusion or historical misunderstanding” (p. 130. Author’s translation). Finally, Sui (2004) concludes that “the popularity of *Huanzhu Gege* has proven that those entertaining and enjoyable *xishuo* dramas essentially challenge the historical and cultural depths of the mainstream and elitist ideologies” (p. 133. Author’s translation).

At first glance, although the criticism of *Huanzhu Gege* seems to target its employment of the fictionalized history genre, the actual origin of these critics’ discomfort with the entertainment-oriented drama series was its popularity with the audience. These criticisms imply that China’s critical community still cannot completely accept the TV drama as simply mass entertainment. In their minds, the ideology of capitalistic consumerism reflected in these popular TV dramas represents “a contagious erosion of the social cultural psychology and value system” (Sui, 2004, p. 133. Author’s translation). Generally speaking, even after two decades of marketization and commercialization adopted by the cultural industries, the Chinese intellectuals still hold an attitude of distrust against the nature of mass culture in the popular culture productions. Most of the intellectuals who criticize popular dramas
such as *Huanzhu Gege*, to a certain extent, possess the same critical position towards the cultural industries held by the Marxist-inspired Frankfurt School, which believes that mass culture produced by the culture industries will be harmful to the entire society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1977).

However, some critics have taken a position in defense of “mass culture” produced by cultural industries. They point out that the popularity of *Huanzhu Gege* should not be treated as a dangerous cultural product that will contaminate the public’s well being. According to Hao (2002), the success of *Huanzhu Gege* in mainland China is because this drama presents Chinese traditional values such as filial piety, faithfulness, and righteousness in an entertaining way. Although the storyline is full of dramatizations and exaggerations, it provides China’s audiences with heartfelt and fulfilling entertainment. In a section entitled “*Huanzhu Gege*—what does the audience want from it?,” Gau and Wu (2002) argue that the “*Huanzhu Gege* phenomenon” is “the best explanation of the fact that TV drama is ‘a means of mass entertainment’” (p. 190), because right now TV has already become the cheapest and most convenient provider of entertainment in China’s highly competitive society. In other words, the popularity of *Huanzhu Gege* not only represents a change in cultural consumption among Chinese audience, it also signifies a transformation of China’s society after economic reform.

### Summary

In this chapter, a case study of the *Huanzhu Gege* series is conducted to demonstrate some characteristics in the cross-strait TV drama co-production. These characteristics can be categorized as the factors of human agency operating in a regional cultural production.
Such factors that can be observed in Chiungyao’s cross-strait TV drama production include the “brand name” effect enjoyed by the symbol creator’s cultural production; the partnership between the symbol creator and the creative manager; the special creative style, localized genre, and cultural proximity utilized by the symbol creator to appeal to the audiences; the particular production mode employed by the symbol creator; using diasporic identities to benefit the cultural production; and building of an interpersonal network and cooperative relationship with the regional co-production partner. The success and failure of the Huanzhu Gege trilogy has epitomized both the advantages and limitations of human agency that can be brought to cultural production through the cultural worker.

The cultural production within a regional media market, as I demonstrate in this chapter, is an example of flexible accumulation in the era of globalization. Flexibilities in this kind of cultural practice are the employment of human agency within the structural framework of a regional media market. Following Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory, the cultural production can be seen as an output created by the interactions between structure and human agency. Although the structure still entertains the possibility of change, it is the human agency that provides the vehicle for cultural workers to transform and manipulate the structural framework to their advantage.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:
THE OPERATION OF A REGIONAL MEDIA MARKET—FLEXIBLE ACCUMULATION IN CULTURAL PRODUCTION, REGIONAL DIVISION OF CULTURAL LABOR, AND HISTORICAL CONTINGENCY

This dissertation project explored the operation of a regional media market through the case study of a successful TV drama series co-production within the Greater China media market. This TV drama series is the Huanzhu Gege trilogy, a costume drama created by Taiwan’s popular symbol creator Chiungyao, but produced in mainland China with the Hunan Media Group. In the introduction, I laid down the four main research questions of this project. First, what is the operational logic of a regional media market? Second, what factors gave rise to such a co-production project within the Greater China regional media market, especially given the confrontational atmosphere between Taiwan and China? Third, what factors have contributed to the phenomenal popularity of this drama series within the Greater China regional media market and the global Chinese mediascape? And finally, what implications in this case study can further the understanding of media globalization through media regionalization? The previous chapters have delved into the factors contributing to the emergence of TV drama co-production projects within the Greater China regional media market and the popularity that Huanzhu Gege series enjoyed in the Chinese mediascape. In the following pages, I will synthesize some final findings to examine the operational logic of a regional media market and the connections between media regionalization and media globalization.
TV Drama Co-production as a Practice of Cultural Flexible Accumulation and Regional Division of Cultural Labor

According to Harvey (1989), compared with dominant modern capitalistic production mode Fordism which emphasizes the mass production process of standardized commodities with huge capital investments, flexible accumulation entertains the flexible operations in production, marketing, and financing to respond to the new time-space compression emerging in the globalization era. The flexibility of flexible accumulation may not allow it to produce standardized commodities in huge quantities during a short time-span, but the overall consumption mode in the late capitalism (or postmodern era) has a different face from the high capitalism that followed World War II. The consumption became increasingly individualized. In other words, people came to use consumption to represent their different tastes and aesthetics in life style intentionally. As Harvey (1989) pointed out, Fordism should not be seen as a mere mechanism of mass production in capitalism. Instead, it should be seen as a whole life style. In the same way, the domination of flexible accumulation in the late capitalism represents not only the changes of the production and consumption modes in the postmodern era but also stands for the transformation of cultural logic from modernism to postmodernism. To respond to dramatic changes of the consumption mode in the globalization era, Harvey (1989) argues for flexible accumulation as a new production mode characterized by a combination of new pattern technologies, labor processes, marketing, financing, and consumption that allows business to answer the increasingly fluid global market with more mobility and efficiency. Compared with Fordism, flexible accumulation highlights “an acceleration in the pace of product innovation together with the exploration of a highly specialized
Flexible accumulation appeared in the popular culture production much earlier than the productions of other commodities in the postmodern era. The mode of standardized mass production of culture may only have appeared in the 1940s and 1950s during Hollywood’s golden era, when the film studios produced many movies with a highly identifiable style, genre and cast during a short time period (Bordwell, Thompson & Staiger, 1985). Otherwise, the popular culture productions like filmmaking and TV drama shared some important characteristics with the production mode of flexible accumulation. For example, the highly opportunistic nature of investment and non-stop genre-blending catering to the ever-changing taste of the audience, represent the flexibility in postmodern cultural production. On the one hand, these characteristics cast a limitation on popular culture productions to appropriate Fordism as their modus operandi; on the other hand, the flexibility in popular culture production provides a powerful vehicle for cultural industries to cater to fragmented audiences in fragmented markets. Yeh and Davis (2002) argue that flexible accumulation has been dominating the Hollywood film industry since the 1970s, and has also served as the main competitive advantage of the Hong Kong film and TV industry in the pan-Asian market.

From the start, the international film (Guback, 1969, 1974) or TV drama co-production can be seen as a kind of cultural flexible accumulation. These co-production projects try to take advantage of flexibility in the process of cultural production: sharing investment to decrease financial risk; using division of labor from different national TV industries to lower production budgets; and utilizing co-production ventures to enter the participant countries’ markets. In the era of
globalization, some developed media centers started to directly move their production base to the relatively underdeveloped media periphery within the regional media market, or utilize the practice of co-production to cut rising costs and broaden target markets. The most obvious cases are Hollywood’s “runaway productions” in Canada (Hoskins & McFadyen, 1993, p. 226).

Miller (1996, 2002) employed the concept of a *New International Division of Labor* from economics to explain flexible accumulation in cultural production. He suggested that a New International Division of Cultural Labor has emerged in global culture production, which demonstrates that cultural industries in the First World (the cultural production center) have relocated to cultural production peripheries in the Second and Third Worlds to take advantage of the flexible accumulation in cultural production. Among the most frequent production strategies taken by the global cultural production centers is developing co-production projects with other cultural production peripheries. In other words, these kinds of co-productions should be seen as a form of cultural outsourcing in the globalization era. The purpose of these co-productions is for the media center to exploit cheap labor and similar cultural settings from the peripheries to reduce production costs without lowering the cultural product’s production quality.

Miller (1996, 2002) has cited many cases to support his argument. However, these cases are mostly between the U.S. (in particular, Hollywood) and Canada, Britain and other European Community member states, and most of these cases are focused on film production. Compared with film production, which has long been dominated by Hollywood, the TV markets are much more fragmented in both spatial and cultural terms. This is why numerous empirical studies have shown that audiences
like to watch nationally or locally produced programs instead of shows imported from the U.S or other media production centers. This outcome resulted from natural barriers of cultural proximity which have fostered the functioning of regional media markets and have kept presumptive cultural homogeneity at bay in the globalization era.

Yet, in Miller’s (1996, 2002) discussions of the New International Division of Cultural Labor, one should notice there is a *Regional Division of Cultural Labor* operating in the spatial-limited and culture-specific regional media market. Instead of taking the First World cultural production center as the *only* center which takes advantage of division of cultural labor from the peripheries, the Regional Division of Cultural Labor is a necessary conceptual construct to analyze the cultural production and consumption in the real world. In the case of Chiungyao’s cultural production within the Greater China regional media market, taking advantage of the Regional Division of Cultural Labor was exactly the nature of Chiungyao’s mainland-based TV drama co-productions from the start.

Miller (2002) also argues that the New International Division of Cultural Labor will be strengthened by the GATT and WTO which might expand this practice on a global scale. Yet, worries that this kind of cultural outsourcing will spread globally in the post-GATT/WTO era might be far-fetched. Rather, they will still be limited to the framework of a regional media market. This is because the barriers of culture, language, and the particular production and consumption mode have developed into a natural force to strengthen the division of cultural labor within the already existing regional media market.

Hence, I argue that the nature of the New International Division of Cultural
Labor needs a much more nuanced re-theorization to adjust to the complicated
cultural practices taking place in the globalization era. It is clear that the theoretical
archetype of Miller’s New International Division of Cultural Labor is the
America-centered media imperialism which developed from the economic
dependency theory in the 1970s. It takes American media industries (especially
Hollywood) or West-centered transnational media conglomerates as the media centers
which exploit the media peripheries all over the world through the division of cultural
labor. However, it did not take into consideration the possibility that the periphery can
also benefit from the New International Division of Cultural Labor, or more
specifically, the Regional Division of Cultural Labor.

Take the Greater China regional media market as an example. Since today the
center/periphery of the Greater China media market has undergone restructuring, the
dynamic of the Regional Division of Cultural Labor within this regional media market
has started to take a different turn as well. While the media center (mainland China)
entertains a structurally advantageous position in cultural production (such as the
market, capital, labor, natural landscapes, and the cultural heritage), what the
peripheries can think about is how to utilize their own limited advantages (such as the
cultural/linguistic/geographic proximity and the symbol creator’s creativity) to use
this dependency to their own benefit. Using metaphors borrowed from biology, this is
how a parasite can maintain the symbiosis with its host. Seen in this way, the
Regional Division of Cultural Labor could also serve as a positive cultural strategy for
the peripheries. As Chiungyao’s recent mainland-based TV drama productions
exemplify, this symbol creator from Taiwan has exerted her creativity to take
advantage of the restructured center/periphery asymmetry between China and Taiwan,
which has permitted her to keep her popular culture productions strongly grounded in the global Chinese mediascape. Her successful experience demonstrates how a symbol creator from the periphery can benefit from utilizing the flexibility of the cultural production operating in a regional media market.

**Through Media Regionalization to Media Globalization**

An unexpected consequence of Chiungyao’s cultural strategy is globalization. As pointed out, Chiungyao is a very culture-specific symbol creator. Basically, her popularity is limited to the Chinese world. Although her TV dramas were not broadcast by transnational media conglomerates, thanks to the invention of communication technology, Chiungyao’s cultural productions still reached numerous overseas Chinese through the selling of the overseas copyrights, narrowcasting on ethnic TV channels, and selling or rental of videotapes, DVDs and VCDs from local video outlets in Chinese diasporic communities.

This means Chiungyao’s mainland-based TV drama can be seen as a cultural production which originally targeted just the regional media market, yet, turned out to be a global cultural commodity. It became both the product of *inner globalization* and *globalization-from-below*. The inner globalization indicates a process of globalization which is achieved by “using small-scale and unofficial negotiations among fewer parties to reach relatively informal arrangements targeting regional markets” (Mittelman, 2000, pp. 42-43). Here I borrow the paired concepts of *globalization-from-above* and *globalization-from-below* from scholar Richard Falk. According to Falk, globalization-from-above indicates “the activities associated with the collaboration between leading states and the agents of free-market economic liberalism” (Mittelman, 2000, p. 205); on the contrary, globalization-from-below was
used to describe “communities’ attempts to regain the resources they need, to nurture their environment, and to democratize the decision-making process” in the globalizing economic activities (Mittelman, 2000, p. 205). It is obvious that I extract the political implications from these concepts. For my purpose here, if globalization-from-above represents media texts flowing through transnational media conglomerates or as a state’s official exports, then globalization-from-below indicates a process of globalization not intentionally designed by nation-state players or transnational conglomerates. Instead, it is a result of a market-driven global network developed by the individual actors or small institutions through cultural, interpersonal, or business linkages.

To some extent, this result strongly challenged Appadurai’s (1996) analysis of global cultural flow through the disjunctures among media, migration, technology, politics and capital in the global era. Through scrutinizing the success of Chiungyao’s cultural productions that penetrated the global Chinese communities, one can notice a complicated web fabricated among these different forces in the global cultural flow. This web is basically initiated by the cultural consumption taking place in the mediascape. However, this cultural consumption reflects the conjuncture, instead of Appadurai’s disjuncture, of global Chinese migration (ethnoscape), the development and employment of communication technology (technoscape), Chinese national identity operated as a common habitus (ideoscape), and the globalizing flexible capital accumulation (finanscape). In other words, at first glance, just as Appadurai argues, these individual forces function as different structural elements following their own logic in global cultural flows, but ultimately it relies on the agencies of the cultural workers and the audiences to materialize this cultural flow in the era of
globalization.

I argue that one important aspect of the agencies of cultural workers and audiences is their ability to imagine. One could say that the consumption of cultural products is basically a practice of imagination. Appadurai (1996) has pointed out how important imagination is in the formation of the global cultural order. He argues that through imagination presented through mass media one can have vicarious experiences from different societies; hence, this imagination can forcefully bring about a global culture.

As Appadurai (1996) pointed out, some imaginations are able to enter our lives more successfully than others, and among them popular culture production occupies a particularly significant position. One can contend that the imagination is initiated by the creations of cultural workers and completed by the appropriation of these cultural productions by the audiences. However, our imagination is not a one-way street. From the cultural production perspective, these imaginations can lead progressively to develop what Appadurai specified as global culture. They can also be utilized by the creators to appeal to primitive feelings as a cultural strategy to maximize the audiences. Chiungyao’s mainland-based period dramas produced in the 1990s, such as the *Huanzhu Gege* series, provide an excellent example of the cultural strategy leading audiences’ imaginations back to a pre-modernized Chinese world. This cultural strategy may explain why the *Huanzhu Gege* series was able to take the global Chinese mediascape by storm. Entering an imagined ancient Chinese world is much easier than enticing the audience in the Chinese mediascape to enter a contemporary Chinese society with a specific time-space framework, because an imagined ancient Chinese world is built on the Chinese habitus and cultural proximity.
shared by the global Chinese audiences. When an imagined world is based upon the common cultural constructs of a specific audience, the entrance barrier is naturally much lower than for others built upon localized modern cultures.

**The Dynamics of Center and Periphery in the Greater China Regional Media Market**

Compared with other regional media markets, such as North America, the Greater China regional media market is a relatively young one. “Young” indicates that the structure of this regional media market is still not fully settled and still entertains potential openness to fluidity.

Chan (1996) used to categorize Taiwan and Hong Kong as the popular culture production centers within the Greater China regional media market and mainland China as the periphery. However, when China started its media reform in the late 1980s, the cultural production center/periphery within the Greater China regional media market began to change. In addition to its small market size, Taiwan’s TV industry did not have a sound media policy (for instance, the adoption of oligopolistic competition in the TV industry in the past and the hasty implementation of regulation policies in the early 1990s). The result is a poorly-established TV industry with only limited production capability. Taiwan’s cultural industries’ competitive advantages within the Greater China media market dramatically dwindled after China started its media reform, resulting in rapid growth of China’s media industries, increased maturity of production capabilities, and a more lucrative domestic market. Hong Kong, another popular culture production center within the Greater China regional media market, although with much stronger cultural industries, is also now grappling with the loss of comparative advantages when facing China’s growing cultural
According to Curtin (2003), Hong Kong’s status as a media capital in Asia is now encountering strong competition from China’s Shanghai. In the past decades, one main explanation that made Hong Kong’s popular cultural productions retain the leading place in the Chinese mediascape, was that both Taiwan and mainland China did not see cultural production and exports as a priority in their media policy. In a sense, the governments of both Taiwan and mainland China treated the media or popular culture production as a kind of ideological state apparatus. They did not see that it could be a lucrative enterprise. Until recently, when mainland China started to loosen its control over popular culture productions, the regional co-production projects made China’s newborn yet vigorously growing media industries notice that in addition to their own populous domestic market, there existed a global Chinese media market. The increasing prevalence of popular culture productions emerging from China into the Chinese mediascape provided Hong Kong cultural commodities with competition for the very first time.

The Greater China regional media market is a mixed product of new regionalism and old regionalism (Hettne, 1994). New regionalism indicates the region is taking shape in a more spontaneous process driven by the regional constituent states; yet, the political triangular division within Greater China—mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—originated from old regionalism, originating from the bipolar Cold War power context. If there were no political triangular division enforced by old regionalism after the Second World War, then there would be no Greater China region existing today. Consequently, if there were no Greater China regional media market, then the resulting division of the cultural production center/periphery would have to
be rewritten. One can say that Taiwan and Hong Kong developing into cultural production centers within the Greater China regional media market is a historical contingency. If the development had followed the general logic of regional media market formation, no matter the market size, the resources, or the cultural heritage, there would be little chance for Taiwan or Hong Kong to have developed into the cultural production centers in the first place.

It is clear now that Taiwan and Hong Kong have been marginalized to the cultural production peripheries within the Greater China regional media market. In addition to the natural structural advantages of mainland China in cultural production—such as the huge domestic market and abundant human, cultural and material resources, another reason that helped mainland China to ascend to the cultural production center is that its TV industry caught on to the technologies of popular cultural production in a short time period. Just as Lotman (1990) argued, through a process of contact, exchange and dialogue, the cultural periphery can gradually transform into the cultural center, as we have seen with mainland China replacing Taiwan and Hong Kong as the center of Chinese cultural production.

Within the Greater China media market, we have witnessed the structural transformation epitomized in Chiungyao’s TV drama co-productions. Within this changing landscape of the Greater China regional media market, Chiungyao gradually transferred her target market from Taiwan to mainland China and the global Chinese communities. In adapting to this marketing adjustment, Chiungyao’s TV drama productions have already transformed into a cultural production of the China TV industry, produced with financial investments, personnel and other material resources from mainland China. In this transformation, Chiungyao herself became the only
Taiwanese element still remaining in her productions. Further illustrating this point, the title of “Taiwan and China co-production” in Chiungyao’s mainland-based TV dramas has already become a nominal label rather than the actual cultural practice. This transformation demonstrates that within a regional media market there has tended to be a division between periphery and center in cultural production and consumption. Once the structural asymmetry of the regional media market has been settled, the resulting division of labor in the cultural production will also be transformed accordingly, indicating that the regional media market has matured.

However, even the mature structural asymmetry within a regional media market is not unchangeable. As Curtin (2003) demonstrates, the status of the center of cultural production or, using Curtin’s term, the *media capital*, is a historical construct that depends on the synchronization of different economic, demographic, technological and cultural factors. In other words, it is the product of the interactions between structural constraints and the active human agency. The uniqueness of Greater China lies in the fact that, during the past two decades, this emerging regional media market has provided us a rare opportunity to observe the formation, structural transition and gradual maturation of a media regionalization development process.

Through the analyses of how the regional media market operates, I argued that media regionalization is a practice of flexible accumulation which aimed at taking advantage of Regional Division of Cultural Labor. On the other hand, the discussion of the transformation of the cultural production center and periphery within the Greater China media market has disclosed the uncertainty embedded in the functioning of a regional media market and that human agency plays a critical role in reshaping the structural asymmetry within a regional media market.
In the final section of this dissertation, I will recap the main findings from the case study of the co-production of *Huanzhu Gege* series between Taiwan and mainland China and hope to enhance the understanding of the emergence and the operation of a regional media market.

Following Gidden’s Structuration theory’s binary division between the structural factors and human agency, this summary will examine these two sets of factors functioning in the Greater China media market.

**The Emergence of TV Drama Production in the Greater China Regional Market: The Structural Factors**

For some case studies of media regionalization (Sinclair, 1999; Straubhaar, 1991), the formation of a regional media market seems a natural outcome of the operation of linguistic and cultural proximity factors within the intricate historical, political and economic regional context. However, within a region such as Greater China, the formation of a regional media market is much more complicated than, for example, in the North America regional media market.

Through analysis of the emergence of TV drama co-production between Taiwan and mainland China, it is clear that the cultural proximity and linguistic advantage were a necessary condition in the emergence of media regionalization. In addition to cultural/linguistic proximity, the inner dynamics of the Greater China media market needed the co-existence of at least five other structural factors to put it into operation:

First of all are geopolitical factors. The formation of the Greater China media market was triggered by the specific geopolitics in the late 1980s. At that time, both
mainland China and Taiwan were facing serious challenges in domestic politics\(^{53}\) and intentionally sought a peaceful way to manage the cross-strait confrontations. Only with the thawing of the 40-year old political tensions between Taiwan and mainland China, did the Greater China media market become a possibility.

Second, are the cultural proximity and linguistic advantages shared by the three main members in this regional media market. This might be the most obvious factor contributing to the formation of the Greater China media market and the possibility of the emergence of TV drama co-production across the Taiwan Strait. However, this advantage was partly formed under the Cold War power context of old regionalism. For instance, Taiwan’s language policy (which stipulated Mandarin as the official language and suppressed the use of the Taiwanese dialect in civil society) and cultural policies (on the one hand, strengthening its citizenry’s Chinese national and cultural identity through the national cultural maneuvers; on the other hand, constraining the development of local *Taiwanese consciousness* among the Taiwanese) were originally designed and implemented to sustain the weak legitimacy of the KMT (Kuomintang) government in order to fight for the representation of *China* in the post-Cold War international community. Otherwise, Taiwan would have developed a much more localized culture and not have had the strong advantage of cultural/linguistic similarity with mainland China.

Third are technological advancements. Without the invention and introduction of cable TV, the change of Taiwan’s TV market from the oligopolistic competition dominated by the Old Three TV Stations to the free competition of neo-network era

\(^{53}\)For the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) government, it was the crackdown of the 1989 Tiananmen democratic movement and the decision whether or not to carry out economic reform. For Taiwan, it was how to appease the opposition movement’s questioning of the legitimacy of the KMT (Kuomintang) government and the rising voices for Taiwan independence.
would not have happened so quickly. On the other hand, without the introduction of cable TV and satellite TV technology, mainland China’s TV market would not have expanded so quickly just two decades after the economic reform and would have resulted in a shortage of programming in the 1990s as well. In a similar vein, without satellite technology and the invention of video cassettes, DVDs, and VCDs, Hong Kong could not have become a regional media capital, dominating the global Chinese mediascape and attracting global media conglomerates (such as News Corporation Channels) to choose it as a base to target the populous mainland China TV market.

The fourth structural factor is market force. Without mainland China’s populous and profitable media market (the population is 1.3 billion), Taiwan’s TV drama producers may not have found desirable financial investments and a market outside of the island. China’s economic reform introduced marketization to the media market, and this marketization consequently brought about a huge demand for popular culture products in mainland China. It is the pull (China TV industry’s drama demand) and push (Taiwan’s TV producers searching for new markets) of the market force that made the cross-strait TV drama co-production possible.

Last but not the least, the final structural factor that contributed to the emergence of the Greater China regional media market is the media policies adopted by the nation-states and implemented in respective media markets. The adoption of a certain media policy not only played a critical role in deciding the development trajectory of the national media market, it also initiated a chain of effects on the dynamics of the TV markets within the regional media market. For example, had Taiwan’s TV media deregulation and China’s media marketization been implemented in a well-planned, step-by-step form, then the TV co-production programming across
the Taiwan Strait may not have flourished as it did in the 1990s.

All the factors discussed above can be categorized as structural factors for the operation of a regional media market. One can see how closely they connect and interact with each other. Yet, without the symbol creators and the audiences actively utilizing their agencies in production and consumption within these structural factors, there still would not be a regional media market.

**The Symbol Creator’s Agency in Cultural Production**

Any cultural production is an articulation of different elements. Among them, some are structural factors, but others belong to human agency. In the following pages, some of the creative agencies utilized by Taiwan symbol creator Chiungyao in making her popular mainland-based TV dramas will be analyzed.

First of all, Chiungyao utilizes her Chinese cultural identity/cultural proximity as a creative strategy to attract not only the audiences across the Taiwan Strait but also the audiences in the Chinese mediascape. She is using Chineseness in her creations to invoke Chinese audiences’ identification.

Her Chinese diasporic identity is the second creative agency that Chiungyao employs in her mainland China TV drama co-production career. As a person of the Chinese diaspora, Chiungyao exerts her Chinese cultural proximity to create popular culture products appealing to Chinese audiences. Her Chinese diaspora identity also confers Chiungyao a flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999) to make inroads into the largest media market in the world and the audiences that includes.

Third, Chiungyao exerts the creative agency in her employment of genre to produce popular culture products. She not only uses Chineseness to localize the romance genre, but also combines some tested popular Chinese TV drama genres,
such as comedy, wuxia, and fictionalized history, into her own Chinese romantic melodrama. Her traditional audience base with the success of this strategy.

Working closely with her family members as creative managers—Ping Xin-tao and daughter-in-law Jesse Ho—in her creative career is another use of her creative agency. As Harvey (1989) argues, this kind of small business built upon family or kinship relationships enjoys flexibility and mobility and can benefit the creator’s career in the increasingly unpredictable late capitalism.

In addition to Chiungyao exerting her agency in her mainland-based TV drama production, one can also credit Chiungyao’s mainland co-production partner, Hunan Media Group, which utilized its agency to benefit from the co-production partnership with Chiungyao.

Starting from a local and inland provincial TV station, Hunan Media Group not only became the first television media company listed on China’s stock market in 2000, but its popular programming also threatened the long-dominant position occupied by CCTV in the China TV industry. The success of Hunan Media Group has been cited by the China TV industry as the Hunan TV Phenomenon and has become a model for other local TV stations to emulate. However, the Hunan TV Phenomenon is a unique product of China’s media reform, which was produced by macro structural change in China’s media landscape—such as the semi-commercialization media policy, the emergence of a huge domestic media market, and the introduction of state-of-the-art television technology—and the micro actor’s agency, which was demonstrated in the decision-maker’s adoption of both the modus operandi of a capitalistic television system and popular TV formats from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

There is no clear evidence to show that the co-production partnership with
Chiungyao influenced the Hunan TV Station’s programming strategy. Yet, it is true that after the cooperation with Chiungyao, the Hunan TV Station, under the guidance of her co-production partner Ouyang Changlin, started to intentionally imitate and copy popular Taiwanese TV entertainment formats. It is reasonable to claim that Chiungyao acted as a catalyst in introducing popular Taiwanese entertainment TV to Hunan Media Group. Utilization of the tested popular TV formats from Taiwan and Hong Kong worked as a cultural strategy to get a formidable foothold in the highly competitive China TV industry, representing how Hunan Media Group aptly exerted its agency within the structural framework of China’s media milieu. The success of cross-strait co-production projects between Chiungyao and Hunan Media Group demonstrates how a partnership can provide opportunities for both participants to use their agencies for mutual benefit.

**Concluding Remarks**

From these analyses, one may conclude that a regional media market is more a product of historical contingencies than of natural formation. Historical contingency is created through the continuing interactions between the structural framework and human agency. Although I would not want to overemphasize the importance of human agency in the formation of a regional media market or any kind of regional and global division of labor, Mittleman (2000) reminds us:

> in . . . . a reaction to changing material conditions on a global and regional scale, individuals are not passive occupants, but active agents who negotiate socially prescribed roles. They enter and shape decision making in national and multilateral arenas by reconstituting culture, beginning with micropractices. (p. 124)
To some extent, the center and periphery within the regional media market are a kind of fluid division of cultural labor instead of fixed positions. After the development of the past two decades, it is obvious that mainland China is the political, economic and even cultural production center within Greater China. Hong Kong struggles to maintain its position as the media capital both in the Greater China regional media market and in global Chinese communities. In the case of Taiwan, it lost its position as cultural production center and has become increasingly marginalized within Greater China. Yet, when the structural asymmetry of center/periphery in the Greater China regional media market is settled, the cultural workers’ agencies become the most powerful leverage to possibly help Taiwan or Hong Kong break their passive periphery status. As Chiungyao’s success in the Greater China regional media market and Chinese mediascape shows, she utilizes her creativity, the production mode of flexible accumulation, and her diasporic identity with great sophistication to create a new field of cultural production between two arch political adversaries, and gains a foothold for herself in the industry of global Chinese popular culture production.

Yet, one may question how this local/regional study would contribute to the understanding of the operations of cultural productions on a global scale. As McRobbie (1998) argues, a geographically “local” case study can be knowledge-generating. Because, she contends, “it allows us the opportunity to see how things actually work in practice and know more general social, and even global, trends like those discussed by the theorists of globalization can be translated or modified when they become grounded” (p. 11). This project is exactly an endeavor to explore the dynamics of regionalization/globalization through a case study of a
successful local cultural production in the Greater China regional media market. It is the author’s humble hope that this study can provide some new perspectives to enrich the understanding of the dynamics operating between media regionalization and globalization.

Today, there is an emerging regional media market under formation in East Asia, which includes China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. There are increasingly more regional media flows, TV dramas in particular, taking place in this region. Straubhaar (1997, 2002) refers to Samuel Huntington’s essentialist thesis of civilization, and argues that “if his analysis extends to culture as represented on television, then we might expect to see the Chinese market broaden to a ‘Confucian’-cultural influence area market” (2002, p. 195). This might be overemphasizing the importance of the cultural factor in the formation of a regional media market, while ignoring the other structural factors functioning as limitations in its operation. Yet, Curtin (2003) argues that “the illusory visage of a Greater China audience—the Asian counterpart to aspirations for a pan-European ‘television without frontiers’ or a Latin ‘audio-visual space’” (p. 220), is another extreme simplification. As one has witnessed the substantial operation of this regional media market in the past two decades, such as Chiungyao’s cross-strait TV drama productions that I delineate in this dissertation, the Greater China regional media market cannot be denied of its real existence.

However, compared to the Greater China media market, this potential East Asia regional media market is only taking baby steps. Until now one could only see its potential to form a regional media market in the future. Although these countries are all deeply influenced by Confucianism, this does not mean that it will develop its
operation on the basis of division of labor within the Greater China regional media market. Can we really see a new East Asia regional media market in formation? Will this potential new regional media market replace the existing Greater China media market? How, then, will the structural asymmetry, center/periphery, and the regional division of cultural labor be formed within this new regional media market? What kinds of strategies will popular symbol creators from different national cultural industries utilize to keep their popularities, or even broaden their creation careers into this potential regional media market? These new media flow developments, cultural production and consumption possibilities in East Asia will deserve close observation and interpretation in years to come.
APPENDIX

The Storylines of The *Huanzhu Gege* Trilogy

**Part I**

*Huanzhu Gege* (還珠格格) is a costume drama serial set in Beijing during the Qing Dynasty (清朝). In part one, the story centers on a young girl Ziwei (紫薇), who is the love child of Qianlong (乾隆), who is one of the Emperor’s excursions when he disguised himself as a commoner and visited Jinan. During his stay, he had an affair with commoner beauty Yuhe (雨荷) and left her pregnant. Eighteen years later, Yuhe died of illness. But in her last breath, Yuhe disclosed this secret to her daughter, Ziwei, and urges her to reunite with her father in Beijing. After arriving in Beijing, Ziwei can not get to the Emperor. She meets Xiaoyanzi (小燕子, Little Swallow), a sympathetic but streetwise orphan girl who earns her living as a street performer, thief and cheat. No two can be more different than these two girls—Ziwei is tender, educated and good at traditional literature and arts, but Xiaoyanzi is straightforward, illiterate and able to practice some mediocre martial arts—yet they click with each other and become not only fast friends but also later sworn sisters.

When Ziwei learns that the Emperor plans to go autumn hunting in a secluded site, she asks Xiaoyanzi to help her get access to her father. Unfortunately, Ziwei gets hurt and cannot finish the journey. She gives Xiaoyanzi the pledge Yuhe bequeathed—a scroll of painting by the Emperor—and asks her sworn sister to tell her story to the Emperor. However, at the hunting site, Xiaoyanzi is accidentally shot by an arrow. The Emperor’s men bring Xiaoyanzi to the palace for treatment. Although she tries to explain, after seeing the pledge, Qianlong mistakes Xiaoyanzi
for his daughter with Yuhe. Xiaoyanzi is intoxicated by the Emperor’s caring and innocently decides to pretend to be Ziwei for a few days. Qianlong is glad to reunite with his daughter and confers the title of princess upon Xiaoyanzi—*Huanzhu Gege*\(^{54}\).

After understanding that title cannot be abolished or returned, Xiaoyanzi asks Qianlong to allow Ziwei to be her maid in the palace. During their days in the palace, Xiaoyanzi and Ziwei are suspicious to the Empress. In order to defend the royal ancestry, the Empress schemes against these two suspicious civil princesses. On the other hand, through a sophisticated maneuver, Ziwei plans to come out to Qianlong and tell him the truth. Yet, interrupted by a series of unexpected accidents because Xiaoyanzi cannot get herself accustomed the protocol and royal red tape in the palace and the Empress’s scheme, the charade breaks down. The wrathful Qianlong finds out the truth and decides to sentence both two girls to death. However, at the last minute, touched by their bond and an eloquent vindication from Ziwei, Qianlong finally changes his mind and forgives Xiaoyanzi and Ziwei. He also confers the title of *Mingzhu Gege* (明珠格格, Pearl Princess) upon Ziwei.

*Huanzhu Gege* is not merely an identity comedy of princess and pauper. As a Chiungyao drama, *Huanzhu Gege* is a romance as well. During their days in the palace, Xiaoyanzi falls in love with the prince *Wu A Ge* (五阿哥, the fifth Prince), Yongchi (永琪), and Ziwei with Erkang (爾康), the most attractive gentleman-at-arms of the Emperor. When Xiaoyanzi and Ziwei are sent to the prison waiting for the

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\(^{54}\) *Huanzhu Gege* literally means “Returned Pearl Princess.” Regarding the “Returned Pearl,” there is an allusion in Chinese culture. In Chinese idioms, “a missing pearl in the wide sea” (滄海遺珠, Canghai Yizhu) is used to describe something valuable and cherished but lost by ignorance. So, the “returned pearl” means the treasure found again and taken care of. Here *Huanzhu Gege* indicates this princess was once lost in the civil society and is now recognized by the royal family.
execution, Yongchi and Erkang desperately rescue their loves by force and plan to escape with these two girls even at the possible expense of their own lives.

Finally, with forgiveness and understanding the Emperor changes his original marital arrangements for these youngsters. Both pairs of lovers get permission from Qianlong to get married with their true loves.

**Part II**

In the second part, the storyline surrounds the anecdote of the Xiang Fei (香妃, Fragrant Concubine). Xiang Fei, Han Xiang (含香), is the princess of Xinjiang, a subject state of the Qing empire. She is entitled Xiang Fei because of her natural born fragrance. She is sent by her father to Qianlong as an offering in exchange for the security and peace of her people and country. At the same time, Mengdan (蒙丹), a Xinjiang knight who Han Xiang has loved since their childhoods, stalks Han Xiang to Beijing in hopes he can elope with his love. After entering the harem, the beautiful and exotic Han Xiang immediately wins the heart of Qianlong. Yet she steadfastly resists the Emperor’s advances for her love of Mengdan. Xiaoyanzi, Ziwei, Yongchi and Erkang befriend both of them. Touched by their star-crossed love story and the pains they suffer, these four youngsters make up a plan to help Han Xiang and Mengdan to reunite and escape the royal palace. Finally, their intrigue of letting Han Xiang elope with her lover is perceived by Qianlong. Enraged by his own children’s betrayal and defiance of the authority of the Emperor, Qianlong sentences these four youngsters to death. Yet, under the help of sympatheic imperial concubines and of their commoner friend, the chivalrous fighter, Xiao Jian (萧剑), the four and Xiao escape the guillotine to the south. Deep in his heart, Qianlong does not really want to take their lives. He plans to lift the death sentence in the last minute when these
youngsters admit their wrongdoings. Yet, the public escape further offends and challenges Qianlong’s authority both as Emperor and father. However, Qianlong is worrying about their safety outside the palace. For saving face and trying to get these youngsters back to him, Qianlong sends troops and warriors to arrest them alive. Since these youngsters do not know the intention of Qianlong, they fight desperately against the warriors and get hurt seriously during their escape.

Another parallel storyline surrounds Xiao Jian, the mysterious knight who intentionally gets close to these four youngsters and finally befriends them. Xiao possesses majestic martial arts skills and has many acquaintances in jiang hu (江湖). In their escape, the resourceful Xiao plans the route and arranges the hide-outs for these youngsters. Yet, there seems a strange emotional bond developing between Xiao and Xiaoyanzi gradually. This situation really distresses Yongchi, who is getting more and more jealous and sharp toward Xiao and Xiaoyanzi, and the relationships between these youngsters are getting increasingly tense. Finally, it turns out that Xiao is the brother of Xiaoyanzi. Their father, Fang, used to be a Han magistrate of Hangzhou but was executed by Qianlong for his ruthless literary inquiry. After arranging their family friends to take care her son and daughter, the magistrate’s wife killed herself. Several years later, their little daughter in Beijing is lost in the crowded street during the Lantern Festival and finally becomes an orphan street kid. This missing girl turns out to be Xiaoyanzi. Although Xiao Jian acknowledges to Xiaoyanzi that he is her older brother, he does not disclose their family feud with Qianlong.

Literally, jiang hu means rivers and lakes, however, according to Lee (2003), jiang hu is an untranslatable term which “refers to an outcast world that exists outside the conventional institutions of family and country (家国, jia guo). Jiang hu’s substantial reality takes place in the inn, the bamboo woods, temples or back alleys” (p. 284). Generally speaking, the world of jiang hu is similar to the ungoverned world in the western saga of Robin Wood.
On the other hand, after being informed by the courtiers that these four youngsters resisted the officers so desperately because they do not believe the Emperor has forgiven their reckless behavior, Qianlong comes to the south and tells the four in person that he will take this whole incident as a “family affair.” Deeply moved by Qianlong’s fatherly love, these four finally come back to the palace with Qianlong. In the end, both pairs of lovers, Xiaoyanzi and Yongchi, Ziwei and Erkang, happily get married with a brilliant wedding taking place in the palace.

**Part III**

In the finale, several years later, Ziwei and Erkang have a lovely son, but after two miscarriages Xiaoyanzi and Yongchi still have not produced any offspring. Since Yongchi is the adorable heir of Qianlong, having children is a critical issue for this young couple. In the meantime, the Queen Mother has disliked Xiaoyanzi since the first glance. She abhors Xiaoyanzi’s uncultured manner, disrespect for the aristocratic protocols and her suspicious background. Therefore, she believes that Xiaoyanzi cannot be an appropriate Empress in the future. The Mother Queen has made up her mind that one day she will pick another cultured girl from a grand family with good reputation for Yongchi, a girl to replace Xiaoyanzi.

Qianlong organizes a grand southern tour with the Queen Mother and the four youngsters. Xiao Jian met a princess, Qinger, at the wedding of Xiaoyanzi and Ziwei, and they fell for each other at first sight. To pursue his love, Xiao Jian stayed in Beijing in the past few years. However, Qinger forbids herself to stop taking care of Queen Mother, so her love with Xiao cannot find any outlet. Xiaoyanzi arranges for her brother to join this tour and masterminds a way for Xiao and Qinger to elope during the tour. Yet the plan fails and their affair is brought to light. The astonished
and angry Queen Mother starts to investigate Xiao Jian’s background and then she finds out that Xiao and Xiaoyanzi are the children of a political criminal.

On the other hand, Queen Mother was impressed by Zhi Hua (知画), a daughter from an illustrious family during the tour, and she wants this beautiful and cultured girl to be the ideal princess for Yongchi. After the marriage, the angelic looking but scheming Zhi Hua not only gets pregnant immediately, but also designs fake incidents to spread the impression in the palace that she is bullied by Xiaoyanzi. On the one hand, Xiaoyanzi is jealous and angry about Zhi Hua’s interference in her marriage with Yongchi; On the other hand, she learns Qianlong whom she took as father is the killer of her birth father. These grievances make Xiaoyanzi’s days in the palace nothing but miserable.

In the meantime, a war between Qing Empire and Burma breaks out. Yongchi and Erkang are assigned as generals, and Xiao Jian is joining them to help. Although the Qing Empire finally wins this war, Erkang gets caught by a Burmese princess in an ambush and was mistaken as dead. Attracted by Erkang, the Burmese princess makes Erkang addicted to opium to control him. In Beijing, the heartbroken Ziwei does not believe that Erkang is really dead. Meanwhile in the south, Xiao Jian hears that Erkang is alive, so he comes to Beijing to inform Ziwei. Unfortunately, when Xiao Jian comes to Beijing he is obstructed by the Queen Mother and Qianlong. In their confrontation, the secret of Xiao Jian and Xiaoyanzi’s backgrounds and their feuds with Qianlong is brought to light. Torn between her own feud with Qianlong and Yongchi’s filial obligations toward Qianlong, Xiaoyanzi is totally lost. Yongchi is found that he is caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, there is the love of his life, Xiaoyanzi; On the other hand, there is his familial obligation and his loving father,
Qianlong. The astonished Qianlong finds out for the first time that Xiaoyanzi, the girl whom he took for his own daughter, is his enemy. Qianlong reopens the case of magistrate Feng and finds out that the execution was undertaken by some of Feng’s kin folk as result of a grudge against magistrate Feng. Qianlong explains to Xiao Jain and Xiaoyanzi that he is not the murderer of their father. At the same time, Qianlong makes a hard decision to compensate Xiaoyanzi and Xiao Jians’ losses. He decides to let Qinger leave with Xiao Jian and allows Yongchi and Xiaoyanzi to leave the palace to lead their lives as commoners.

Then, Xiaoyanzi and Ziwei go on their final adventure, to look for Erkang. After a difficult journey, Ziwei and others take back a ghostly disfigured Erkang. Under the help and support from Ziwei, Erkang gets rid of the addiction. Now the four youngsters have to bid farewell to their best friends. Ziwei and Erkang go back to the palace, and Xiaoyanzi and Yongchi stay in the south.

The saga of Huanzhu Gege ends with a brief reunion between Qianlong and the Yongchi family several years later. Now, Xiaoyanzi is a mother of four children, Yongchi becomes a village doctor, and Qianlong is old. After a short gathering, with the intermingling of sorrow and joy, Qianlong bids farewell to his beloved son and daughter-in-law and goes back to his royal throne in the Forbidden City.
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