

# Staging Corruption

## Chinese Television and Politics

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# Introduction

A police chief in a modern Chinese metropolis sought refuge in an American consulate. He used to be the right-hand man of the city's Party Secretary, but the relationship between the two had deteriorated to a point where the police chief found it necessary to make this desperate move. The next day, the police chief stepped out of the consulate and was taken away by state security agents who had been dispatched from Beijing to prevent him from falling into the hands of the local police. The incriminating materials that the police chief had brought with him to the consulate revealed, among other things, that his boss's wife was a leading suspect in the murder of a British businessman close to this elite family. A month later, the Party Secretary, who had been a serious contender for a seat in the seven-person Politburo Standing Committee, the innermost core of power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), was stripped of all his posts and placed under investigation by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the Party's primary anti-corruption body. His wife was charged with murder and sentenced to life in prison. Their son, a Harrow graduate currently residing in the United States, was thrust into the global limelight for his costly education, flamboyant behaviour, and lush lifestyle. In the meantime, rumour mills went into overdrive. Why was the politician betrayed by his police chief? Did he wiretap President Hu Jintao and other top Chinese leaders? How many mistresses did he keep? Is it true that his wife had a love affair with the British businessman? Did he hoard \$6 billion in overseas bank accounts while presenting himself as a guardian of socialist, egalitarian values? Did the businessman help the family funnel money out of China and then threaten to reveal the scheme to get a better commission? Had the populist Party Secretary been set up by his political enemies in Beijing? How would the storm end? To be continued ...

This is not a soap opera. The Bo Xilai scandal, which has been under the scrutiny of the global media since February 2012, poses perhaps one of the biggest political challenges and embarrassments to the CCP since the

1989 Democracy Movement.<sup>1</sup> It casts into the limelight the power and wealth of the children of the CCP's elders,<sup>2</sup> and threatens to shed light on secretive power struggles and webs of corruption at the highest echelons of the Party leadership. Yet it feels like a soap opera. Like many media scandals, it has all the ingredients of a drama – treason, murder, corruption, power, money, lust, and betrayal.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, there has been in the past decade no shortage of real television dramas about crime, corruption, and power struggles among high-ranking bureaucrats set in contemporary or ancient China. Many salacious details of the Bo Xilai scandal, alleged or confirmed, were already found in those drama serials – illicit accumulation of wealth by Party-state officials, money laundering via overseas operations, murders committed to cover up previous crimes, conspiracies and betrayals, intricate webs of shifting alliances and connections among political and economic elites, decadent private lives of the powerful, and so on. In other words, the scandal, with some alteration, could have been taken from a Chinese prime-time television drama. If historical dramas are considered, with their staged political machinations among emperors, princes, and top-level bureaucrats, the parallel between entertainment and contemporary Chinese politics is all the more striking.

Because of the very limited amount of information about the disgraced Bo Xilai in the strictly censored news media, ordinary Chinese draw on a readily available cultural repertoire of narratives and discourses about high-level politics to make sense of this major political shakeup. Rumours, speculations, and fantasies turn out to be rather familiar stories based on widely held assumptions about China's "power elite." These popular narratives, which almost always revolve around abuses of power, are central to the public's perceptions of the Party-state, and therefore should constitute an inherent dimension of our understanding of Chinese society and politics. In what kind of world do characters in these stories reside? What assumptions do the stories make about the contemporary political and social orders that they set out to depict and comment on? What do they say about corruption, both as one of the most prominent political and social issues and as a dominant lens or discourse through which many social problems in China are viewed? What is the significance of these narratives for the Party's claim to legitimacy? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine television drama as a prominent genre in the production of corruption narratives.

Since the mid-1990s, corruption dramas have proliferated and shaped prime-time viewing to such an extent that it is simply not possible to



dissociate public discourses of corruption from television drama representations of the issue. In late 1995 and early 1996, *Heaven Above* (*Cangtian zaishang*),<sup>4</sup> generally referred to as the first “anti-corruption drama,” riveted the nation’s attention with a truly novel television character – a villainous high-ranking government official and Party cadre (vice provincial governor) whose web of corruption wreaks havoc on a city within his jurisdiction. This seventeen-episode China Central Television (CCTV) drama was said to have garnered an audience rating of nearly 40 percent at its peak – roughly 400 million viewers.<sup>5</sup> From then on, high-level official corruption became a legitimate topic for dramatization. Corruption dramas proliferated. Although accurate data on total output are hard to come by, the salience, at least in quantitative terms, of the theme of corruption can be inferred. By 2003, crime drama had become the most prominent drama genre in China,<sup>6</sup> and roughly 30 percent of such dramas had plots featuring official corruption.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, as writers, producers, and publishers rushed to exploit synergistic possibilities, so-called anti-corruption novels flooded the book market,<sup>8</sup> reaching both fans of corruption dramas and new audiences. In 2004, for reasons that will be explored in this book, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) meted out harsh discipline to the television industry by banning the topic of corruption from prime-time television.<sup>9</sup> In the wake of SARFT’s clampdown, dramas that explicitly dealt with corruption among CCP officials dwindled. Around the same time, however, the theme of corruption was reincarnated in a diversity of drama genres that provided a different spin on official corruption. With a radically cynical rendering of the issue, these genres have gained a lot of attention, especially from young urban viewers.

This book examines corruption dramas as a product of the concrete historical conditions of the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. How can one historicize the rise and fall of television dramas about corruption? How are these dramas shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces that are in constant, complex interplay with one another? What do the production and regulation of these corruption narratives reveal about the media order in the context of market society and political authoritarianism? Answering these questions facilitates an exploration of the politics of corruption dramas in two crucial contexts: the “commercial revolution”<sup>10</sup> of the Chinese media overseen by the Party-state, and an increasingly polarized Chinese society brought about by market reform. On the one hand, corruption dramas epitomize a distinctly Chinese commercial media culture. On the other hand, providing a space in which social and political issues are

raised, they draw on social sentiments prevalent since the early 1990s: anxiety about mushrooming social problems and the integrity of the moral and social fabrics, feelings of precariousness about one's well-being in an increasingly marketized society, indignation or unease about the radically unjust distribution of wealth and power, a newly heightened sense of citizens' rights and a desire for change, and so on. In a sense, these popular dramas are collective dreams (or nightmares) that bring to the fore fears and desires deeply harboured in the post-socialist Chinese society.<sup>11</sup> In a nutshell, this book is an inquiry into corruption dramas – how they developed, were suppressed, and became reincarnated as a result of complex interplays between the CCP, SARFT, television stations, and production companies, and how they can be studied as a crucial site where different narratives and discourses about China's corrupt elite contradicted, supplemented, and transformed one another to shape a new ideological terrain.

The book makes the following sets of claims:

- 1 Chinese media may be conceptualized as a contact zone in which dominant political, economic, and social interests meet, clash, and engage with each other to create a disjunctive media order in post-socialist China. The notion of disjunctive order allows us to account for both changes and continuities in Chinese media. Different from disorder, it is a kind of order that is predicated on shifting articulations of interests. The Party's propaganda departments, SARFT, national and provincial media conglomerates, production firms, advertising companies, and key journalistic and creative personnel engage in constant realignment and compromises to maintain the balance and stability of the media order.
- 2 Corruption dramas constitute a significant cultural power that reconfigures and redefines state power. State power does not exist independently of the cultural realm that shapes public perceptions of the legitimacy of the Party and the state. Featuring a panoply of Party cadres, governors, mayors, chiefs of various state agencies, bank officials, state-owned enterprise managers, customs officials, judges, prosecutors, and police officers, corruption dramas are to a large extent tales about the state, teaching moral lessons about what constitutes the legitimate exercise of state power, the proper role of the state in the market economy, and the desirable courses of action for the Party in the face of corruption.
- 3 Corruption dramas started off as a key component of the Party-initiated anti-corruption campaign and moral crusade, and ended up becoming part of the moral and political crisis that the Party sought to manage. The

political acceptability of corruption dramas has been predicated on their embrace of an officially ordained melodramatic imagination that frames its anti-corruption drive as a victorious battle of the righteous Party against a minority of moral delinquents. However, the melodramatic imagination turns out to be hardly sustainable by commercial media, as it competes with alternative imaginations of officialdom. Significantly, corruption dramas become entangled with the depoliticizing agenda of neoliberalism, which idolizes the private self.<sup>12</sup> The end – that is, the self’s need for betterment – justifies the means, even if the means amount to corruption. It is not without irony that since SARFT’s 2004 clampdown, corruption dramas have gone a long way towards normalizing corruption.

Before proceeding, however, I ought to clarify what I mean by corruption and why it should matter as a scholarly concern.

### Corruption Matters

In this book, corruption is treated as both an empirical phenomenon and a discursive category. A standard definition of corruption in political science refers to it as “behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains: or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence.”<sup>13</sup> This definition is largely accepted by China’s disciplinary and legal professionals, who define corruption as “abuse of public power (*gonggong quanli*) by occupants of public office (*gongzhi renyuán*) in the state and party apparatus for private interests.”<sup>14</sup> It describes most of the officially identified forms of corruption, the three most prominent of which are bribery, embezzlement, and misappropriation of public funds. Corruption in China has intensified and grown rampant since the onset of market reform.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing corruption as a problem generated by the deep interpenetration of the state and the market, Wang Hui points out that a critique of corruption must be “a critique of much deeper levels of inequality and injustice involved in the asset-transfer process,”<sup>16</sup> and “critiques of the state cannot be separated from critiques of the movement toward market society.”<sup>17</sup> Since 1978, the post-Mao Party leaders have initiated and implemented reform measures designed to revitalize the economy via marketization. Most likely unforeseen by Deng Xiaoping but nevertheless facilitated by the prevailing pro-market ethos, plundering of public assets ensued and has unstoppably escalated as the market reform

proceeded, benefiting the very guardians of public funds and resources, i.e., bureaucrats presiding over resources allocation and managers of state-owned enterprises, as well as well-connected entrepreneurs. The organic connection between corruption and market reform policies and practices has been painstakingly documented.<sup>18</sup> Put plainly, corruption in contemporary China is an effect of marketization and privatization policies implemented without any democratic participation or supervision. Furthermore, it fuels and sustains the neoliberalization of the economy by serving as a key mechanism for distributing massive wealth, assets, and resources under public ownership to private individuals. In other words, corruption is both symptomatic and constitutive of a flawed economic reform process that systematically favours political and economic elites. It has played a prominent role in the primitive accumulation of capital, the emergence of bureaucratic-capitalist classes, and the proletarianization of the working class in post-Mao years. In this sense, corruption is bound up with China's embrace of capitalism and class reconstitution.

As a socially constructed, discursive category, corruption generates multiple ways of talking about it. It frustrates attempts by social scientists, legal professionals, and politicians to fix its meaning in the discursive realm. The discursive fluidity of corruption is partly due to the shifting and blurring boundaries of the "public" and the "private" as China moves beyond socialism. As "public interest," "public power," and "public office" are all being contested and redefined both in theory and in practice, variant understandings of corruption are bound to arise. Furthermore, in everyday life, ordinary Chinese do not normally fret over what counts as corruption in legal terms. Rather, their perception of corruption tends to be inflected at the affective level by an apocalyptic sense of general social decay on the one hand and a mixed dose of cynicism and moral indignation on the other. Thus, in popular consciousness, corruption signifies something much larger and more pervasive than official accounts would admit. Corruption functions as a discourse also in the sense that it provides a key lens through which the Chinese make sense of and experience the post-socialist reality. It structures people's perception of a myriad of problems resulting from the radical social transformations in the market reform era and gives shape to collective and individual anxiety, confusion, anger, and frustration. In the strongest expression of corruption as discourse, corruption is seen as the ultimate ill of Chinese society, from which all other social problems emanate, and corrupt party and state officials are ultimately culpable for the wrong turn

Chinese society has taken. Whether as a site for contested meanings or as a dominant framing device, corruption is of fundamental importance in helping us understand the ideological conditions for escalation, dissipation, or reconfiguration of social tensions in post-socialist China.

### Corruption Dramas

The term “corruption drama” in this book refers to Chinese television drama serials broadcast in the 1990s and 2000s that deal with the issue of corruption directly or indirectly. Corruption dramas share with most other Chinese drama serials some features that deserve mentioning at the get-go. Of limited length, a drama serial typically consists of twenty to forty episodes of about forty minutes each. In most cases, it has a continually unfolding, close-ended narrative. The narrative may or may not be divided into discrete units or ensembles, through which tensions and conflicts on a smaller scale come to temporary closure while the major plot continues until it reaches a resolution in the finale. When discrete units or ensembles are consciously deployed as a dominant narrative strategy, it would be more appropriate to speak of drama series, implying that self-contained stories are narrated in single or a small number of episodes. Some crime dramas driven by fast-paced resolution of criminal cases fall into this category. Most corruption dramas are extended narratives about a single or a very limited number of corruption cases, so it makes more sense to refer to them as serials rather than series.

Drama serials may be produced by independent production companies, but more frequently, they are co-productions among television stations, production companies, and sometimes other institutions involved in drama production for publicity and/or mercenary purposes, such as the army, the police, schools, hospitals, or, in the case of corruption dramas, the Party’s anti-corruption bodies (central or local disciplinary commissions). Those that are nationally distributed and therefore considered successes in commercial terms reach a nationwide audience either via CCTV or provincial television stations.<sup>19</sup> Due to ferocious market competition, drama serials target general audiences to maximize their ratings. Nevertheless, there have been two countervailing tendencies: an urban bias that accounts for the dominance of urban settings and concerns of urban Chinese, and demographic segmentation in the 2000s as television stations compete to differentiate their drama fare through channel branding and niche marketing.<sup>20</sup> Corruption dramas were developed in the mid-1990s to speak to a national

audience about a prominent public concern; as they evolved in the following decade, they were increasingly inflected by attitudes and sentiments prevailing among young to middle-aged urban white-collar workers and professionals, as I shall discuss in Chapter 5.

Drama serials are broadcast on consecutive days until they are finished. This industrial feature conditions Chinese television viewers to follow their favourite dramas on a daily basis. With an average of two episodes shown each day, a drama serial usually finishes airing in two to three weeks, right after which viewers shift their attention to another story on the air. It is fair to say that Chinese viewers' consumption of drama serials is both concentrated and distracted. Because of the quick obsolescence rate of drama programming, viewers' active engagement with a particular drama normally does not last much longer than the duration of its airing. But it also means that for a limited amount of time, a drama hit may be watched avidly across the country, giving rise to a national phenomenon. This dual logic of consumption has been intensified in the digital environment, as viewers, especially younger ones, increasingly access television dramas through DVDs (pirated or officially released) and video-streaming sites, which means flexible and, often, even faster consumption.

Corruption dramas vary widely in terms of setting, narrative, and style. Most are set in a fictional Chinese metropolis of the market reform era. Among these, some revolve around a corruption case, whereas others bring in plots of official corruption to support main narratives of mafia-related crimes such as drug trafficking, smuggling, gangster fights, kidnappings, and murders. Some are strictly about standard forms of corruption such as bribery and embezzlement, whereas others place corruption in the context of broader issues and questions concerning China's political economy. In government documents, trade journals, or the popular press, these dramas are sometimes referred to as "anti-corruption drama," hewing closely to the Party's anti-corruption agenda. The term is too restrictive, however, and fails to capture the great variety of ways in which the issue has been approached. "Crime drama," another officially recognized category, is both too narrow in its exclusive focus on crime vis-à-vis larger political and social issues, and too broad because a large number of conventional cop dramas have nothing to do with corruption. Thus, instead of using an existing generic category, I have coined the term "corruption drama," which can best account for both the heterogeneity and commonality among different types of drama serials about corruption. In this study, corruption dramas also

include a number of historical dramas, including the so-called serious dramas (*zhengju*),<sup>21</sup> which transport modern anti-corruption battles to the imperial era; historical comedies (*xishuo ju*), filled with lighthearted satires about corrupt officials; or court dramas (*gongting ju* or *gongdou ju*), which dramatize corruption as an inherent component of intricate interpersonal relations and complicated political struggles in an imperial court. These historical dramas are of crucial relevance as they may be readily interpreted as allegories of contemporary Chinese society.

Corruption dramas provide a privileged site for scholarly inquiry in several ways. First, they have shaped and enriched public discourses of corruption in a uniquely powerful way. Compared with investigative news programs, which became institutionalized around the same time that corruption was legitimized as a topic for television drama in the mid-1990s, corruption dramas have accommodated a wider range of discourses of corruption. Not only do they provide more freedom for their creators to narrate and imagine corruption but the serial form also allows greater space for sustained engagement with the issue. To be sure, news that exposes bureaucratic malfeasance and social ills enjoys a higher cultural status than television drama. Yet investigative journalism has always been tarnished by the mouthpiece nature of Chinese news media and has over time lost the original lustre and appeal of the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, although corruption dramas are entertainment, they frequently adopt a realist mode of representation that leads many viewers to accept dramatized corruption as approximating real-life corruption cases. As most of these dramas deal with corruption in city and provincial governments, on which independent reporting is impossible, they provide plenty of fodder for popular imagination of corruption among high-ranking officials.

Furthermore, television drama fuels public discourses of corruption by drawing a number of intellectuals into the “domain of the popular.”<sup>23</sup> A key feature of the commercialization of literary production in China is the growing synergy between book publishing and drama production, with many literary talents crossing over to the much more profitable screenwriting for television.<sup>24</sup> The most influential of them, such as Lu Tianming, Zhang Ping, and Zhou Meisen, have not only played a key role in pushing political boundaries and legitimizing corruption-themed bestsellers and television dramas but have also brought some intellectual debates on corruption into commercial productions. By co-opting intellectuals, the television drama industry has been instrumental in moving the issue of corruption from

marginal spaces occupied by tabloid magazines and satirical doggerels to central domains of popular culture.

Second, corruption dramas provide an opportunity for media scholars to inquire into Chinese media and politics, because of what they can illuminate of the complicated relationship between power, media, and society in a post-socialist context. They are both commentaries on Chinese society and incarnations of societal anxiety, ambivalence, and confusion about China's path to capitalist modernity. Not surprisingly, they are heavily regulated by political and commercial imperatives, and are enmeshed in and foreground intense interactions in the contact zone of divergent social, political, and economic interests. One would be hard pressed to find another drama genre that is so pregnant with tension and that so clearly illustrates both the potentials and limits of Chinese television in engaging with social issues. These dramas occupy both the centre and the periphery of Chinese media and popular culture. They are supplied in large volume by production companies, broadcast during prime time, and watched by hundreds of millions of viewers. Yet more than any other type of television drama, each corruption drama in this study was heavily censored at each stage of production from initial development to final broadcast. In the meantime, because the boundaries of the permissible are fluid, these dramas enable us to examine the logic of censorship in a post-socialist media system, and how the boundaries are maintained, challenged, negotiated, and redefined. One of my contentions in this book is that censorship in China, although repressive, must be seen as a dynamic process shaped by multiple forces and conflicting agendas rather than as something monolithic and unchanging.

Focusing on corruption drama as an ideological power and as a site of ideological contestation, this book attempts to answer the following questions: How did corruption, of all the pressing social issues, become a television staple? As a heavily contested and highly volatile issue, how is corruption defined and framed? Of all the opinions and sentiments of corruption, which ones have emerged as relatively stable discursive frameworks that regulate the generation and flow of meaning? From *Heaven Above* to recent corruption dramas, a sea change can be identified in terms of tone, style, narrative, and characterization. How does one account for the transformation of televisual corruption, especially when considering that the Party's public stance on corruption has remained largely unchanged? What can be said about culture and hegemony in post-socialist China? To answer these questions, it is important to contextualize corruption dramas with a discussion



of the political economy of Chinese media, which I will describe below as “a disjunctive media order.”

### A Disjunctive Media Order

Based on the significant body of research on Chinese media industries and policies, I choose to describe the media landscape in post-socialist China as “disjunctive.” Originally developed as a concept to encapsulate the cultural effects of global flows and ever-shifting “scapes” of capital, people, technology, ideologies, images, and narratives,<sup>25</sup> “disjuncture” is used here to characterize a media culture emerging from the radical transformation of a propaganda-oriented media system by forces of commercialization, globalization, and technological development. Disjuncture describes an order of things that are simultaneously disconnected and interrelated, and a disjunctive media order is one in which the development of media is driven by more than one logic. To be sure, most media systems in the world are shaped by a variety of political, economic, social, and professional forces. But what makes disjuncture a dominant feature of the Chinese media is the coexistence and interpenetration of two equally powerful forces, neither of which dominates or collapses into the other: the political and the economic. State ownership and profit orientation underscore a peculiar political economy of Chinese media. On the one hand, there is the political will to exercise ideological and informational control through state ownership of media outlets so as to maintain a stable symbolic environment for the Party’s rule and the market reform. On the other hand, there are media and cultural industries born out of commercialization, supported by various kinds of capital, and strategically valued for their contribution to the market economy and the national GDP.

This disjunctive media order began taking shape in the years after 1978, when the central government decided to (1) legitimate advertising and let it become the primary source of funding for the state-owned media system, and (2) decentralize the media system by delegating to local governments powers and responsibilities for developing a self-sufficient local media infrastructure. These decisions were intended to address a pragmatic concern of how to modernize and expand the media system without further straining the already impoverished coffers of the central government, but their transformative impact was to be realized and further amplified in the establishment of a commercial media system “with Chinese characteristics.” The system in its current shape is characterized by the entrenchment of the

capital logic in both centrally and locally administered media outlets, ferocious competition among media groups, active participation of private capital, and, above all, the presence of the state, which facilitates, shapes, and oversees the formation of the increasingly capitalistic media order.

Disjuncture of China's media order in television broadcasting can be perceived in at least six areas: (1) state policy and regulation, (2) media institutions (television stations), (3) structure of the television industry, and (4) constitution of media capital, (5) content, and (6) audience.

### **State Policy and Regulation**

Throughout the market reform era, the Party's media policy making has been guided by a "disjunctive" approach that emphasizes marketization on the one hand and ideological control on the other,<sup>26</sup> as expressed in the official language of "material civilization and spiritual civilization." In the 1990s, a recurring theme in official documents and speeches was how to balance the media's "economic effects" and "social effects," often with the implication that media in the marketized environment did not always provide healthy, uplifting, socially responsible, and politically appropriate messages. Part of the problem lay with the sheer number of media outlets, which made it hard for the state to exercise effective control, and this problem was exacerbated by the mercenary ties of local state regulators to the media outlets within their jurisdictions. By the late 1990s, recognizing the difficulties engendered by commercialization of the state media, the CCP resorted to the strategy of recentralization and conglomeration, hoping for more effective political control and faster industrial growth. The turn of the century witnessed a wave of media conglomeration, as a result of which a number of press, film, and broadcast groups emerged. The dual policy orientation was given a new twist in the cultural system reform launched in 2002 that separated non-profit cultural enterprises from the cultural industry at the conceptual level.

The cultural system reform boils down to "divestment, that is, by spinning off market-oriented operations from existing party-state media conglomerates and turning these operations into relatively autonomous market entities that are free to absorb outside capital and pursue market-oriented expansion,"<sup>27</sup> so that the state can concentrate its control on the core part of media, namely, political communication – that is, news and propaganda.<sup>28</sup> However, while the design intended to resolve the conflict between marketization and political control is rather neat, actual practices are much messier, and state control remains firmly in place with regard to entertainment media, which

are officially declared to be governed by the “law of the market.” Media regulation continues to reflect the double objective. From 2002 to 2014, for example, during exactly the same period in which the government was pushing for further marketization and privatization of China’s media industries, SARFT waged a “Clean Up the Screen” campaign, targeting the “excessive entertainment” and hypercommercialism on provincial television (Chapter 3). Clearly Chinese media regulators have perceived the disjuncture or disconnection between the dual objectives, and they do not see a better way of suturing the disjuncture than resorting to coercive measures.

### **Media Institutions**

While television stations remain an essential component of the Party’s propaganda apparatus, their goals, interests, and functions have become fractured in the process of marketization. As state media, they have political and cultural obligations to fulfill. They must satisfy media officials and censors who favour programs that are politically pro-Party or at least innocuous, culturally conservative, and popular with the masses.<sup>29</sup> As businesses faced with a highly competitive media environment and driven by ambitions of national or even global expansion, their daily operations are shaped by market-based calculations. Such calculations often boil down to audience ratings as they cater to advertisers who look for programs that deliver large numbers of viewers and/or the most desired demographics, depending on the marketing goals of the advertising businesses. Audience ratings aside, brand or reputation cultivation is a longer-term business strategy for many television stations. Thus launching investigative news programs may be partially understood as a strategy for a television station hoping to establish an image of respectability and professionalism. Television dramas that deal with serious social issues perform a similar function for television stations. Yet building a reputation based on hard-hitting journalism or socially relevant drama programming is a risky business strategy that has been used by powerful television stations such as CCTV. For provincial and local television stations, brand cultivation is frequently associated with youth-oriented entertainment. In any case, Chinese television stations today deal with multiple interests and demands, and in terms of content production, they are eager to establish common ground between these competing interests by airing programs that ameliorate political concerns, please advertisers, resonate with popular sentiments, and promote a public self-image that dovetails with their long-term business strategies. The very imperative of balancing the party line and the bottom line bespeaks the double logic of Chinese television.

### **Structure of the Television Industry**

Disjuncture also describes a television industry that has done away with the coherence of a state broadcasting system, where CCTV and local (provincial and municipal) television stations were government bureaucracies entrenched in a hierarchical relationship. For years prior to the mid-1990s, CCTV was the only meaningful player in the national market. While local television stations operated terrestrial channels that were able to reach only viewers in their own administrative territories and one or two neighbouring provinces or cities, CCTV reached a national audience as all local stations were obliged to carry its programs. Because of the power and prestige that came with its status, it was able to attract the cream of the nation's creative talents and access the best television programs produced by local stations; directors of local television stations regarded it as an honour to have their programs aired by CCTV. This relatively stable relationship of domination and dependency came under tremendous pressure as advertising and business sponsorship replaced state subsidies to become the major source of funding for television stations. For example, local stations were more inclined to keep popular television dramas to themselves or at least negotiate with CCTV for a much better price. As a result, beginning from the early 1990s, CCTV found itself losing the most popular television programs to local stations, and viewers along with them. After the mid-1990s, CCTV's relative strength in terms of program ratings decreased even more rapidly, as provincial television stations each operated a satellite channel, put their best programs on this channel, and transmitted them to national households. In the 2000s, a number of regional media powers have emerged, each with a provincial television station at its core. The rise and national expansion of provincial broadcasters, predicated on entertainment programming – specifically popular television dramas and reality shows – is one of the most significant developments in China's television industry during this decade.<sup>30</sup> Although they have been abetted by state policies, unintended consequences such as the erosion of CCTV's audience base and the sheer amount of entertainment on provincial television channels, regarded as “excessive” by the Party leadership, have created tension and even antagonism between provincial broadcasters on the one hand and CCTV and SARFT on the other. In a sense, the double logic generating disjuncture in day-to-day media operations and practices is replicated at the industrial level. It should be noted that CCTV and provincial television stations are commercial media monopolies at each other's throats, but their relationship goes beyond business competition. To the extent that CCTV remains the Party's key propaganda

organ, its losing ground to the aggressive, more commercialized provincial television stations serves as evidence of disjuncture between the political and economic spheres.

### **Constitution of Media Capital**

A fourth way of making sense of the disjunctive media order is to look at the heterogeneous capital composition of the broadcasting industry. Currently, the industry is underwritten mainly by four types of capital: (1) bureaucratic capital of television stations, (2) transnational capital, (3) domestic private capital specializing in television program production, (4) and domestic private capital in the form of business conglomerates in non-media sectors such as real estate and international trade. Although transnational and domestic private capital had begun entering the broadcasting sector mostly surreptitiously in the last two decades of the twentieth century, it was only in the first decade of the twenty-first that their participation in content production gained legitimate status as they were “increasingly seen, and indeed called on, as a force that can be harnessed to strengthen the national economy in general and the media and cultural sector in particular.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in accord with the general design of pro-market Chinese media policy makers, private capital has become the mainstay of television program provision (see Chapter 1). Thousands of private firms are now in operation producing, financing, and trading all kinds of television programs (except for news and current affairs programs). Furthermore, following China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), state policies that encourage media organizations to turn their non-news businesses into publicly listed companies have further integrated media production into domestic and global capital markets. Private capital functions mostly to provide content and funding for state broadcasters, is vulnerable to fickle state policies, and remains barred from television channel ownership. Nevertheless, some private firms have gained *de facto* operational rights to television channels by leasing sports, fashion, or entertainment channels as distribution outlets for their own programs. The penetration of private capital into the broadcasting sector means a new division of labour by which private capital generates programs, state capital reaps profits through ownership of television channels, and the government exercises political and ideological control. However, this design is not seamless, and a significant amount of tension can be identified between private production companies and television stations, between private production companies and policy makers, and between provincial television stations and government regulators, as I will illustrate in the following chapters.

## Audience

Disjuncture in the political economy of Chinese media has powerful implications for the ways in which television viewers are addressed and defined, and for the shape of television programs. In the market reform era, “audience” became an increasingly powerful concept, exerting real influence on television drama production. In the era of state-operated broadcasting, viewers were conceptualized and approached as “masses,” implying the “domination and leadership by the Party both through and within the media.”<sup>32</sup> Along with media commercialization, the notion of “audience” came to be widely accepted. On his research trips to Chinese cities in the late 1980s, James Lull became aware of the “growing interdependence between administrative audience research and program decision-making” and noted that “decisions to add, cancel, expand, reduce, combine, reschedule, and change the content of shows have all resulted from recent audience research.”<sup>33</sup> Yong Zhang documented how in the 1990s audience research was gradually institutionalized, routinized, and normalized, and how “the basis for designing and evaluating media content ... shifted from Party policies to primarily audience needs and satisfactions.”<sup>34</sup> To say that audience research is now routinized might be a little exaggerated. Although drama broadcasts are carefully measured and ranked for ratings, systematic audience research has yet to become a routine part of drama production and programming, which are still guided more by guesses based on recent hits rather than carefully constructed techniques of measuring audience preferences. Nevertheless, the notion that television viewers are audiences to be catered to has sunk in deeply.

Yet audience as commodity does not tell the whole story. While the propaganda transmission model is clearly retreating, the media are still expected to mediate between the Party and the people and to play an educative and uplifting function in Chinese society. From the Party’s perspective, audiences should not be merely indulged but also guided politically, morally, and aesthetically. The two different conceptualizations of audience as state subjects and audience as consumers do not exclude each other. One does not need to establish a total dichotomy to acknowledge the distinction, but it is exactly this distinction that creates potential disjuncture. When disjuncture materializes in reality, it sometimes takes the state’s coercive power to re-establish order. It may be argued that SARFT’s revulsion against “vulgarization” of Chinese television and the “Clean Up the Screen” campaign partly arose from the tension between the two conflicting paradigms of television audience. Also pertinent to this discussion is the preference of advertisers and

television stations for affluent urban viewers versus the Party's desire to send its messages to the entire population, especially the not-so-well-off population, whose support for the legitimacy of the Party and market reform needs to be gained and constantly renewed through ideological work. Thus, as Chinese television on the whole demonstrates a remarkable reluctance to engage rural populations and migrant workers in cities, SARFT officials have kept complaining to television stations and producers about the scarcity of programs dealing with issues and topics relevant to country life, in contrast to the abundance of glamorous images of the super rich and the "petits bourgeois" in modern cities.

### **Content**

Disjuncture at the content level is the most manifest. A lot of studies have been carried out to examine how commercialization of media and culture has wrought major changes in the kinds of news, information, and entertainment available to the Chinese. The Chinese media can be described as multi-vocal or polysemic and under the pressure of addressing a plurality of audiences, a plurality engendered partly by advertisers and broadcasters seeking niche markets and partly by social changes that have resulted in heterogeneous interests, claims, and aspirations. The proliferation of voices and meanings may appear across different texts (for example, different news reports on the same event) or may be embodied in one text that is susceptible to different interpretations. One interesting question that inspired many of these studies concerns the fate of the official culture, and along with it, the Party's claim to political and moral leadership, in the age of commercial popular culture. Or, do state discourses suffer an irreversible decline in the cultural market? The answer provided by most accounts is a resounding "no," and hybridization is most frequently mentioned as a primary strategy of culture making in China. Examples include newspapers that carry propaganda on front pages and more diverse and entertaining content on the rest, as well as commercial films, magazines, talk shows, television dramas, and karaoke bars that package and sell politically conservative viewpoints in extremely marketable forms, all pointing to the fact that to survive in marketized authoritarianism, commercial media make propaganda on behalf of the state.<sup>35</sup> It is increasingly hard to find pure political propaganda that does not ride the horse of popularity, or entertainment that explicitly trumps the political bottom line. Indeed, one could argue that the mainstream culture in China is hybrid in nature.

The other side of the hybridity argument is that mainstream culture might suffer an internal pressure to disintegrate. Hybridization never guarantees a perfect marriage between political and commercial messages, and the dominance of state ideologies is all but assured in such a symbolic environment characterized by cacophony and polysemy. The fault line is revealed at the “Aha!” moment when viewers (or readers, listeners, and so on) realize the artificial insertion of the official discourse. Indeed, ever since the term “main melody” came into use in the late 1980s to refer to officially endorsed culture vis-à-vis the expansion of a pluralizing cultural market, Chinese media officials, scholars, and producers have busied themselves with the question of whether and/or how the “main melody” can be made with audience appeal. Each year, a number of exemplary cultural products, whether film, television drama, novel, or song, would be officially touted for achieving both “economic effects” and “social effects.” Nevertheless, they are noteworthy exactly because of their rarity. Besides, even for these popular “main melody” items, it is entirely possible that users filter out the social effects in their private enjoyment. Not only for viewers but also in the minds of producers and broadcasters, the divide between the “main melody” and the commercial is never entirely bridged. “Main melody” films still have to depend on organized viewing to avoid embarrassing disasters at the box office. “Main melody” television dramas have to depend on CCTV or special windows on provincial television stations opened up by top-down propaganda directives for special events such as major anniversaries in the history of the Party and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). When planning for a television drama, the producer first positions it as either a “main melody” for CCTV or a commercial drama for provincial television stations. For a “main melody,” the producer would not ordinarily start the project without first securing an advance purchase contract with CCTV; the purpose of making a “main melody” is not to make money, since CCTV pays not much more than a meagre sum to cover the cost, but to associate the producer or the production company with the name and status of CCTV. If it were easy to incorporate “main melody” into commercial media, the distinction would have long ago disappeared. Despite cases of relatively successful hybridization, disjuncture is simply too salient to ignore.

### **The Chinese State and the Disjunctive Media Order**

Whether manifested structurally or semantically, the disjunctive media order is rooted in the tension between divergent imperatives mapped onto an array of political, economic, and cultural stakeholders. The political and



economic dimensions of China's communicative processes are certainly not irreconcilable. In fact, perhaps the most important contribution of critical scholarship to our understanding of Chinese media is that commercialization has probably contributed to the entrenchment of state control as "media organizations and media managers developed a vested interest in sustaining the current political economic order by following the party line while pursuing financial gains."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, since the mid-1990s, the Party has demonstrated a remarkable ability to harness and reincorporate the energy unleashed in the marketized media sector, energy embodied in capital-hungry media organizations experimenting with innovative ways of audience building, transnational capital clamouring for market entry, and domestic private capital surreptitiously seeping into media-related businesses.<sup>37</sup> As indicated earlier, central to the Party's enhanced capacity for media governance is a resilient approach that subjects different types of media organizations, content, and capital to different control regimes based on their perceived importance to the Party's propaganda and legitimization needs.<sup>38</sup> The rationale underlying the differentiated control is the need to maximize the economic benefits of a growing media sector while keeping political challenges at bay. In doing so, the Party "retain[s] strategic control over media content and enables state media institutions and their senior management to secure income without having to be actually engaged in the mundane tasks of media production. In this way, Chinese state media operators are essentially restructuring themselves along the post-Fordist flexible accumulation strategies of capitalistic production, a development that has been characteristic of media industries all over the world."<sup>39</sup> Thus, despite and perhaps because of media commercialization, the Party reconstitutes its hegemony, and it does so exactly by adapting to the condition of disjuncture of the post-socialist media order with something similar to post-Fordism, as Zhao argues.

The Chinese state has redefined its role vis-à-vis the media sector and secured the "commanding heights" of China's communication systems. Embedded in this view is the idea that hegemony is always a process – a state of always being achieved and contested – and that it is important to recognize the fault lines over which hegemonizing forces are constantly at work. As part of her political-economic critique of China's communication systems, Zhao points to the "polysemic and hybrid nature of Chinese television discourses and their multifaceted readings, with dominant, residual, emergent, and different ideological fragments borrowing from and reinforcing each other."<sup>40</sup> This key observation is elaborated by Xueping Zhong, who

defines Chinese television dramas as constituting site of contestation and attributes their complexity and ambiguity to ideological and social tensions and contradictions in contemporary China.<sup>41</sup> From a different perspective, Xiaoling Zhang examines the dialectic between the Party's hegemony and the media's relative freedom.<sup>42</sup> She points out that Chinese media organizations are now in a better position to negotiate with the state because they are expected by the state to perform multiple functions: "To create an environment favourable for political and social stability, to construct a good image of the Party-state, to harness popular support for the government, to compete with transnational media corporations for the global flow of information, and to be commercially successful in a very crowded marketplace."<sup>43</sup> She points to areas of negotiation between the state and media organizations, where the latter are able to exercise bargaining power to serve their own best interests. Drawing on Daniel Hallin's conceptualization of the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and unacceptable controversy,<sup>44</sup> Zhang reminds us that Chinese media organizations and professionals, although occupying a weak position vis-à-vis the strong state, enjoy a certain autonomy in dealing with issues in the sphere of legitimate controversy and in redefining the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate controversies. In Jacques Ranciere's terms, they participate in shaping the "distribution of the sensible"<sup>45</sup> that determines what things are visible, audible, and doable and what are not in a given society. This space of negotiation, in my view, is pregnant with uncertainties: undoubtedly it is integral to the Party's hegemony, which is characterized by bargaining and reciprocity with a view to establishing common ground; at the same time, however, it may generate centrifugal forces that disrupt or even partially displace the distribution of the sensible. As far as critical social issues are concerned, contestations and challenges are likely to arise when media organizations and personnel, whether out of professional pride or profit-making motives, selectively interpret or simply ignore the Party's propaganda rules or state regulations to put forth non-official and even subversive perspectives on the issues.

A key area that has not been adequately addressed in the existing scholarship of Chinese media studies is the representational realm in which the Party-state is narrated, imagined, and visualized. In my view, how the state is represented in public culture should be of immediate concern to anyone interested in issues concerning state power. If a regime's legitimacy depends on "subjective *perceptions* of the regime, for example, as competent, efficient, fair, committed to the realization of the common interest while avoiding publicly manifest partiality or bias"<sup>46</sup> (emphasis added), then

it follows that images, narratives, and discourses about the state that circulate in the mass media are all closely intertwined with the question of legitimacy. Because ordinary people do not usually have direct experience of, or contact with, the state – its politics, mechanisms, agents and their behaviours (perhaps with the exception of clerks in local state bureaucracies) – they depend largely on media stories, which provide them with knowledge of the state at both the national and local levels, shape their sentiments, and help them form opinions about the state. It is in media stories about the state that disjuncture of the media order is seen most forcefully and concretely.

What are the advantages provided by the conceptual framework of the “disjunctive order”? In a sense, it is closely associated with the Gramscian notion of hegemony. The two terms differ, however, in that whereas hegemony is more helpful in describing and locating effects, the former focuses one’s attention on the complexities and dynamics of the present situation. The notion of “disjuncture” is sensitive to both the structurally generated differences of interests and motives as well as agency of individuals, and the possibilities of alliance, rearticulation, and conjuncture of diverse forces. Commenting on the articulation and rearticulation of various social forces in shaping the Chinese media, Zhongdang Pan fruitfully points out that “some of these forces are contradictory ideologically and that articulation of them often produces changes that defy easy categorization with our familiar theoretical arsenal. Therefore, understanding China’s social changes requires situated and grounded examinations of how such multifaceted (re)articulation takes place and is embedded in the ways in which individuals carry out their work and conduct their life.”<sup>7</sup> This book hopes to delineate the disjunctive media order through a grounded examination of corruption dramas. Further, the “distribution of the sensible” in the disjunctive media order is by no means fixed or clearly mapped out. It is one of the book’s goals to distinguish how the boundaries of the permissible shift as a result of interplays among various institutional and individual stakeholders, what fault lines are amenable to repairs so that a hegemonic equilibrium is maintained, and what fissures would persist and exacerbate the centrifugal pressure from within the disjunctive order.

### Organization of This Book

The book has six main chapters. An overview of Chinese television drama production and regulation from a historical perspective, Chapter 1 contextualizes the book, concretizes the previous discussion of the disjunctive media order, and lays the groundwork for an analysis of the advent and evolution

of corruption dramas in the subsequent two chapters. It delineates the transformation of television drama from an art of propaganda to a commercial cultural form as Chinese television underwent expansion and commercialization from the late 1970s onward. It pays particular attention to the growing presence of commercial production firms from the mid-1990s onward, and assesses whether and how this development has affected the relative strengths of private capital, television stations, and media regulators in shaping the content of television dramas.

Chapter 2 addresses the question of how corruption entered prime-time television in the mid-1990s. It focuses on the circumstances surrounding the development and broadcast of the first anti-corruption drama, *Heaven Above*, by CCTV. My argument is that the initial development of corruption dramas cannot be explained in purely political or economic terms; that is, *Heaven Above* was not simply designed as a piece of anti-corruption propaganda or produced by an emboldened media outlet in a commercial environment. It resulted from interplays between political, economic, and social forces and may be interpreted as a response on the part of CCTV, the dominant power in the Chinese television industry prior to 1990, to the uncertainties of the emerging disjunctive media order. On the premise that macro forces do not interact automatically but depend on the embedded activities of individuals, I then focus my analytical attention on the creative personnel involved in the making of *Heaven Above*. I argue that media professionals play a key role in mediating differences in the contact zone of political, economic, and social interests, and that their brokering activities at the textual, programming, and discursive levels constitute an important but largely overlooked dimension of cultural production in post-socialist China. Combining macro- and micro-level analyses, I argue for the usefulness of blending political economic and anthropological approaches, especially in the study of significant moments of Chinese media – moments of conjuncture and disjuncture. To foreshadow my argument in Chapter 3 and 4 about anti-corruption melodrama as the official representational mode, I end the chapter with an analysis of the official reception of *Heaven Above* with a view to determining the terms on which corruption was legitimized as a topic for prime-time television.

Chapter 3 focuses on the breakdown of the strenuously achieved equilibrium represented in *Heaven Above* as a result of deepening commercialization in the 2000s. Such breakdown was reflected in the intensified scrutiny and censorship of corruption dramas from 2002 onward. The intensified

commercial logic gave rise to an increasing number of salacious exposés that diverged from the triumphal narrative of the good Party defeating corrupt local officials. The tacit agreement that corruption dramas must convey crystal-clear moral messages was broken, straining the relationship between market-driven producers and broadcasters on one side and SARFT censors and propaganda officials on the other. The tension reached a breaking point and was resolved with coercion, leading to the ban on prime-time broadcast of crime and corruption dramas. In a sense, this chapter is about the disjunctive media order under pressure. It takes an in-depth look at how censorship of corruption dramas is motivated and conducted.

Chapter 4 shifts the book's analytical focus from the actions of institutional players to the text of corruption dramas. It analyzes the official mode of imagining and narrating corruption – anti-corruption melodrama. In particular, it addresses the question of why the melodramatic imagination declined and corruption dramas ceased to play the role of “moral agent.” The main argument here is that anti-corruption melodrama declined as a result of the intensified logic of capital and the absence of consensus among political as well as intellectual elites on key questions regarding the issue of corruption. The evolution of televisual corruption brings about a new set of images and narratives about good and bad government officials, as well as the desirable and undesirable exercise of state power. Thus, as opposed to the “good official” narrative that seeks a solution to corruption in morally righteous Party heroes, competing frames emerge to portray corrupt officials alternately as heroes of the economic reform and as victims of a backward Chinese culture, and “good officials” as incompetent and even hypocritical.

Chapter 5 continues to engage with the neoliberal revolution in the way corruption is narrated, and focuses on the logical outcome of the revolution – the cynical turn of corruption dramas. The cynic's narrative resemantizes corruption as a cultural problem, as the root of corruption is said to be closely associated with a long-standing bureaucratic tradition under Confucian influences. Deeply nihilistic, the narrative posits that all individuals, as soon as they become part of the bureaucracy, become hopelessly immoral and corrupt, and that politics is all about backbiting and bootlicking for the sake of one's personal interest in power and money. As a perfect illustration of Slavoj Žižek's take on cynicism as a dominant ideology,<sup>48</sup> the culturalist explanation for corruption turns into a fascination with corruption itself. Modelling one's actions on behaviours and rules in the alleged

bureaucratic culture is believed to help one succeed in the workplace, family matters, school, and even romance.

Chapter 6 provides a case study of how audience members take part in the making of the cynical frame. It focuses on a 2009 drama serial, *Snail House (Waju)*<sup>49</sup> and its reception to illustrate how cynicism can rework the meaning of corruption to such an extent that the new role model of the brave new age appears to be none other than a charismatic corrupt official character. In this chapter, I argue for the necessity of exploring the linkages between the cynical attitude in corruption dramas, middle-class anxieties and aspirations, and the hegemony of neoliberalism.

# Conclusion

A key finding of this study is that the trajectory of televisual representations of corruption in China from the mid-1990s to the 2010s has been characterized by the waning of the melodramatic imagination and the rise of the cynical. To conclude, I would like to relate this finding to larger concerns of the book:

- The Chinese Communist Party's efforts to incorporate the commercializing and privatizing television sector into its anti-corruption campaigns have not met with outstanding success, if by success we mean the sustaining and nourishment of the official mode of representation of corruption by commercial television stations and production companies.
- On the affective plane, corruption dramas embody moral outrage and cynical resignation simultaneously. This finding is in line with Richard Levy's prediction, based on research in the late 1990s, that "the public will continue to oscillate between a cynical, resigned, passive acceptance of corruption and bursts of emotional resistance targeted at the manifestations of corruption rather than its roots."<sup>1</sup> The compatibility between the sentiments suggests an urgent need for a radical structural critique of corruption.
- Corruption dramas are also dramas about the Party-state. Multiple imaginations about the Chinese state and state power are conveyed through such dramas.
- The tensions and conflicts concerning the production, regulation, and consumption of corruption dramas may be seen as external manifestations of the pressure within China's disjunctive media order.

## Commercial Television and the Demise of Anti-Corruption Melodrama

The topic of official corruption was allowed into prime-time television with conditions. Based on official documents and speeches about corruption

dramas, critical reviews in officially sponsored journals and the mainstream press, and private expressions of the censors at the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), I have argued that to fully make sense of the legitimization, regulation, and censorship of corruption dramas, we need to understand the role of melodrama as a paramount mode of imagining and narrating corruption. Structured by Manichean conflicts between the incorruptible and corrupt Party and state officials, anti-corruption melodrama serves mainstream politics in many ways. It satisfies the Party's desire for positive self-images, displaces structural critiques of corruption, and, perhaps most importantly, imparts a sense of comfort and stability associated with a morally legible world. In light of moral confusion and ideological ennui as a result of de-Maoification and the ascendance of consumerism and pragmatism in the market reform era, reasserting the existence of a moral universe and reclaiming moral leadership has never seemed so urgent a task to the ruling party. In the context of desacralization,<sup>2</sup> anti-corruption crusades have taken the place of class struggles, and corrupt officials have replaced class enemies as villains, criminals, and trouble-makers in Chinese society. Anti-corruption politics has a strong moral component, and public morality is bureaucratically shaped and administered. Anti-corruption melodrama, broadly or narrowly conceived, personalizes dangers, problems, and contradictions rooted in market-induced social transformations and presents them in moral terms. Anti-corruption struggles and anti-corruption television dramas are therefore homologous. However, if corruption dramas were legitimized on the condition that they fit into the anti-corruption melodramatic imagination, the commercial development of Chinese television has eroded that political condition, rendering corruption dramas susceptible to stringent regulation and censorship.

To be sure, political propaganda and commercially driven media and cultural production are not incompatible; in fact, as forcefully shown by critical scholars, they can be mutually enhancing.<sup>3</sup> Commercial media would not hesitate to package political messages into saleable consumer products as long as they find it profitable to do so, and the CCP's propaganda workers frequently resort to popular cultural forms and techniques to enhance the efficacy of their messages. Yet, this symbiotic relationship is subject to breakdown in reality. To obtain a more nuanced picture of propaganda in the age of popular culture, it is necessary to revisit a few main reasons that commercial dramas turned into an inimical force to the official mode of representation of corruption. The first is the lack of consensus among the Chinese political and intellectual elites regarding the issue of corruption,



an internal fissure that has a lot to do with the CCP's imperative to deal with the "fundamental tensions between the promises of a nominally socialist state and a developmental process that has led to a highly stratified and corrupt society."<sup>4</sup> Concomitant with the Party's anti-corruption drive has been a persistent concern among Party leaders as well as local state agents that anti-corruption might dampen local initiatives for economic development. This concern is supported by Chinese mainstream economists, who argue that a certain degree of corruption is inevitable and even necessary for the success of economic reform, and that the ultimate solution to rampant corruption lies in further withdrawal of the state from the market. Fully accommodated by this neoliberal argument is the tendency among liberal intellectuals to isolate the political from the economic so that power in the bureaucratic realm, rather than the nexus between the political and economic, is identified as problematic, thereby exonerating power in the corporate world. These views, influential among policy makers and intellectuals, trivialize the moral content of the Party's anti-corruption rhetoric. As intellectuals are incorporated into commercial television production, corruption dramas turn into a space for liberal and neoliberal discourses as contending frames of corruption. It can therefore be argued that commercial television tends to manifest pluralism, albeit limited, when there is no consensus among the ruling elites.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the commercial nature of Chinese television renders it susceptible to the desires and sensibilities that predominate among the urban strata. The discrepancy between the CCP's highly publicized anti-corruption struggles and the seemingly unstoppable escalation of corruption has engendered pessimism and cynicism among the general population. These sentiments have led writers and producers to conjecture that it is very hard to please urban viewers with "good-official" heroes, central characters in anti-corruption melodramas. It is surmised by media producers that realistic portrayals of corruption, preferably spiced up with mafia violence, hold stronger audience appeal than feel-good melodramas. As a result, corruption exposés soon outnumbered anti-corruption melodramas in the early 2000s. Yet the corruption exposés supply spectacles without politics. If there is any politics involved, it is personal politics that focuses on self-governance and self-advancement and that prioritizes cynicism as a rational response to corruption. Is there a necessary link between commercial television and the rise of cynicism? I have argued in the affirmative. Cynicism sells, especially among the middle classes, who mock the corrupt behaviour of government officials but are content with living with or even profiting from corruption

themselves. There seems an endless supply of cultural goods designed to help consumers train and optimize themselves, and an equally endless demand for worldly advice from young university graduates and white-collar workers – in other words, middle-class aspirants. It is not coincidental that an increasing number of corruption dramas in the past few years have been adapted from the so-called Internet literature – novella serials produced and circulated online by authors themselves, and consumed by fans who may influence the writing process with feedback. Because of the scope of this book, I have not fully explored the role of Internet literature in television drama production, but existing evidence points to a big role that cries out for further research. In any case, from the Party's perspective, corruption dramas have transformed from a moral agent into an instance of the moral confusion that the Party had sought to dispel in the first place.

The case of corruption drama reveals that a smooth relationship between the CCP's propaganda and commercial media is contingent on at least the following factors:

- *Strong consensus among the elites.* If the propaganda concerns an issue on which consensus among political and intellectual elites does not exist and public debates are allowed to a certain extent, the media will enjoy a certain freedom in dealing with the CCP's propaganda needs. In this scenario, a certain amount of pluralism, albeit regulated, is expected, and the CCP's propaganda is unlikely to monopolize public space. The anti-corruption propaganda and its dominant aesthetics are therefore not necessarily fully supported by commercial television when it can readily draw on other legitimate voices and representational forms available in the public culture.
- *Compatibility between propaganda and middle-class sensibilities.* Although the anti-corruption drive helps the Party recoup some popularity and legitimacy, the Party also has to fight against increasing fatigue and cynicism among the Chinese population. Any effort to showcase the Party's achievements in anti-corruption must also reckon with skeptical and cynical responses calling into question the efficacy, and indeed the necessity, of the entire anti-corruption cause. These responses are not unique to, but are particularly strong among, middle-class viewers. Faced with the need to attract urban middle-class viewers, media producers are unlikely to eagerly propagate political messages that counter middle-class worldviews and sentiments.

- *The media's adherence to political and cultural conservatism.* In post-Mao China, media regulation and censorship are not guided by any systematic, coherent cultural program. If there is one overarching principle, it would be to keep bad things in check. Bad things can be anything ranging from threats to the political power to nuisances defying public morality. A television program may ostensibly support the CCP's propaganda and yet be seen as "bad." War dramas, which were subjected to official rebukes in the "Clean up the Screen" campaign in 2012 and 2013, provide such an example. Even though these dramas are about heroism, patriotism, and the full legitimacy of the CCP-led communist revolution, "excesses of entertainment" in these dramas are frowned on for violating mainstream aesthetics. In the case of corruption dramas, the "excessive" portrayal of corruption, violence, and injustice in Chinese society is considered by SARFT officials as a threat to social stability and is therefore unacceptable.

One crucial caveat needs to be made concerning the demise of anti-corruption melodrama on Chinese television. It cannot be deduced that moral condemnation of corruption is no longer relevant in contemporary China. In fact, the melodramatic continues to provide a dominant lens for many Chinese to make sense of corruption. Judging from the numerous collective actions at least partially galvanized by official corruption, and the waves of Internet vigilantism targeting individual corrupt officials, it is clear that moral indignation over corruption has remained a crucial part of the picture. Collective actions both online and offline suggest that the moral indictment against corruption has not lost social efficacy; from these collective actions emerges an alternative melodramatic imagination in which the centre of action is not the Party but ordinary citizens.

### Moral Outrage and Cynical Resignation

As I stated at the outset of this book, corruption in contemporary China must not be understood as a moral or behavioural problem. It is nothing but systematic commodification and privatization of state power, playing a midwife's role in the formation of Chinese capitalism. Therefore, an effective critique of corruption must also be a critique of the incestuous relationship between political and economic power in post-communist/post-socialist regimes. Furthermore, a critique of corruption must also be alert to the power of the *discourse* of corruption. To speak of "corruption" is often to

assume relative stability in the meanings of the public and private; however, in the post-socialist reality, the “public” and the “private” are essentially contested terms, and the very act of defining the boundary between the public and the private is inevitably intertwined with the exercise of state power. When such exercise of state power is undertaken to benefit a few, it must be subject to critical, public scrutiny. Laws, regulations, and policies that grant legitimacy to privatization of state assets without democratic participation are in themselves corrupt, or “legally corrupt.” The discourse of corruption, however, naturalizes the distinction between criminalized and legalized forms of privatization; by designating certain acts as deviant, it legitimizes the others so that the ensemble of the capitalistic reform may proceed relatively unhindered. As such, a critique of corruption has the potential to both empower and debilitate; therefore, it is crucial that an expansive perspective be adopted so that power, rather than corruption per se, is interrogated.

Corruption dramas do not question the structural linkage between corruption, the state, and capitalism. As a result, they constrain rather than facilitate public debates on corruption. Inability or unwillingness to carry out a radical, class-based critique of corruption leads to two responses: moral indictment of individual corrupt officials and a damning generalization of Chinese bureaucracy, and by extension Chinese culture, as decaying. It is exactly these two responses that have been given full play in the corruption dramas of the past two decades. I have shown how morally based critiques of corruption are well contained in the Party’s anti-corruption narrative, to which Party heroes are central. I am not aware of any corruption drama in which ordinary Chinese taking collective action against corruption play a central role, although it should be noted that in a few dramas, middle-class characters such as journalists, lawyers, and doctors assume relatively more agency compared with the working classes. As for the culturalist critique, at its best when appropriated by liberal intellectuals, it advocates improved political governance; at its worst, it encourages cynical resignation. As corruption dramas evolve in an environment defined by political censorship, commercial media, and the ideological aggression of neoliberalism, they shift to cynical entertainment. Not only do those dramas rationalize corruption but they are increasingly viewed as all-in-one courses providing useful instruction for young people on how to commodify one’s interpersonal relations and cultivate networks with the powerful in order to achieve one’s ambitions. It is worth reiterating that despite the cultural saliency of cynicism, it remains one of many modes of imagining, talking about, and indeed

performing corruption; that cynicism might be a dominant mood in certain social groups and less so in others; and that cynicism does not exclude the possibility of other affects such as anger. A potentially fruitful line of inquiry could revolve around manifestations, implications, and conditions of cynicism (or the disappearance thereof) in the age of scandals.

### The Chinese State in Popular Culture

What stories do corruption dramas tell about the CCP and the Chinese state? Anti-corruption melodramas isolate “bad apples” from the Party-state and reassert the power of the CCP and its anti-corruption organ, the Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI). The local state in these melodramas is portrayed with a certain ambivalence. It is in the local government that corruption takes place, calling into question the Chinese state’s governance capacity at the local level. It is also in the local government that the main anti-corruption hero is located. As a result, anti-corruption struggles are depicted primarily as a localized matter, and the local state is portrayed as a conflicted space. As the melodrama unfolds, the local state is cleansed and redeemed, with local state power seized from the wrong hands and placed in the hands of upright local leaders. The Party leadership in anti-corruption melodramas is shown to stand firmly on the side of the local hero and, embodied as CCDI officers, almost always descends on the scene near the end of the drama, when it is desperately needed to save the situation. The always timely and fortuitous advent of CCDI officers underscores the centrality of the CCP to the anti-corruption cause; paradoxically, however, it also exposes the shaky and unpredictable foundation on which anti-corruption struggles are waged, for it invites the question of “what if” – what if the CCDI had failed to show up? The power of the central Party-state is simultaneously asserted and undermined. Citizens in anti-corruption melodramas are mostly from lower classes, such as workers and farmers, whose livelihood is injured by corrupt officials. They stage sit-ins but their anger is well-contained and their actions strictly localized. They mainly play the role of aggrieved persons in need of protection from the Party-state.

As anti-corruption melodrama gave way to competing modes of representation, imaginations about the Party-state changed vastly. In corruption dramas that depict an irresistibly powerful mafia world intertwined with local government, the local state is portrayed as completely captured by criminal businesses and entirely incapable of normal governance. While there are good people in the local state agencies, these characters appear to be planted in the story to satisfy censors rather than to drive the narrative.

The same is true for characters that represent the Party leadership. These dramas portray a nearly apocalyptic picture of Chinese society unprotected from the raw power of capitalism. In this picture, local state power is criminalized, and the central Party-state power is debilitated, laying bare the governance crisis with which the CCP has had to cope with increasingly urgency in the 2000s. In these dramas, ordinary Chinese appear as victims of ruthless dark forces; they are cowered into silence or are killed off before getting a chance to voice their grievances. These dramas called into question the Party's ruling legitimacy and caused the entire genre of crime drama to be all but wiped out in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

To cater to middle-class sensibilities by avoiding the simplistic, didactic good-official narrative, many corruption dramas treat corrupt officials humanistically and locate the causes of corruption not in individuals but in larger forces such as the political system or social milieu. By portraying local state agents simply as human beings, these dramas go a long way towards softening the image of the local state, despite corruption. Those that explore the roots of corruption in political power raise questions of how state power should be distributed and what mechanisms should be in place to ensure the fair and responsible exercise of state power, that is, questions of political governance. Ordinary citizens in these dramas are not active participants in the debates on corruption, for both questions and answers are provided by intellectuals as screenwriters. These dramas isolate political power from economic power and exonerate the latter as a major source of corruption. Such a narrow conceptualization of state power renders these dramas vulnerable to a political-economic critique of corruption.

Neoliberal tales of corruption are of particular interest to this book because they turn the CCP's anti-corruption discourse on its head. These dramas go further than sympathetic portrayals of corrupt officials to make the point that often those who are considered corrupt officials are also those who contribute to economic marketization and GDP growth, and therefore should be recognized as national heroes. Here state power is relevant only to the extent that it should be used to shatter the legacy of a socialist command economy and advance the capitalistic mode of production. It is not important whether state agents are moral or not, for economic development is outside the sphere of morality. In fact, in these dramas, "good officials" or morally upright bureaucrats are often portrayed as inept economic managers or obstacles to the efficient exercise of state power. In the same vein, ordinary citizens in the dramas do not show much interest in matters of justice, but

are mainly concerned with their own economic well-being as private persons. Corruption dramas of this type are entirely celebratory of the Party-state through the firm endorsement of its market reform policies.

Finally, none of these contending discursive frameworks competes with the most powerful mode of imagining corruption in the twenty-first century: the cynical. In fact, the apocalyptic, the humanistic, and the neoliberal ways of seeing are not only compatible with but also contribute to the cultural hegemony of the cynic's tale of corruption. To the cynic, all Party and state officials are players in political games; they are all self-serving, self-aggrandizing private individuals regardless of their professed allegiance to the CCP. In the realm of officialdom, state power is up for grabs by everyone using any possible means; once acquired, state power is then used very naturally to serve one's private interest, be it material or political. Cynics are inherently nihilistic. They recognize everything the CCP proclaims as a lie and pride themselves on not being deceived; cynics certainly hold no illusion about or belief in the CCP's ruling legitimacy. However, cynics are not interested in challenging state power either. As long as they have a chance to partake in such power or its abuse, they would do it, because, to quote Žižek again, "they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it anyway."<sup>6</sup> In the cynic's tale, ordinary citizens are exhorted to learn the arts of survival in the political realm so as to apply them in other spheres, such as workplaces, for faster promotion. In other words, the state, whether local government in contemporary China or the imperial palace, is a jungle where the fittest survive; it is a microcosm of Chinese society in the jungle of raw capitalism.

### Maintaining the Stability of the Disjunctive Media Order

The state, commercial media, intellectuals, and audiences constitute disparate yet interrelated dimensions of a disjunctive media order. What does the cynical turn of corruption dramas under the watchful eye of the Party and SARFT reveal about the media order in question? The marginalization of the official anti-corruption melodrama is rooted in the disjuncture between political and market imperatives. Whereas the Party had hoped to harness the power of television entertainment in the service of its anti-corruption struggles and the state-making process in general, commercial television has proven uncooperative, resistant, and even subversive to this particular agenda. In response, the state attempted to reassert its control over television by launching a decade-long "Clean Up the Screen" initiative. Strengthened regulation and censorship do not cause the disjuncture to

disappear, however. Instead, the theme of corruption has returned to prime time in altered forms, articulating itself in the narrative of “officialdom” or *guanchang*. A variety of corruption dramas have mushroomed, either in contemporary urban settings as in *Snail House* or portraying struggles among empresses and concubines in the private court of an imperial palace.<sup>7</sup> Advocating the law of the jungle, they are seen by SARFT officials as cultural pollutants and have triggered another round of criticism and regulation since 2011.

The drastic, unpredictable SARFT measures taken to rein in corruption dramas reflect dissonance among different objectives and missions attributed to the media by political and economic stakeholders. They also bring to the fore the unwieldiness of the state’s media policy, which is designed to have it both ways: establishing a powerful cultural industry by means of commercialization and privatization on the one hand, and aligning this cultural industry with the state’s political and cultural goals. Given the absolute dominance of private capital in television drama production, the stormy relations between SARFT and commercial media also suggest that private capital, once incorporated into the media sector, tends to follow its own logic. Given the capital-intensive nature of television drama production, the logic of capital has a particularly powerful impact. As far as corruption dramas are concerned, it can even be argued that representations of the state in television entertainment have been largely incorporated into the realm of capital.

What, then, keeps the disjunctive media order from disintegrating? Coercion in the form of outright bans is deployed, as mentioned earlier. Because it lays bare the weakness of the regime, coercion seems to be the last resort for the state. The functioning of the media order has depended on the willingness of various stakeholders – Party leaders, SARFT officials, media managers, production companies, advertisers, and so on – to make compromises. The making of compromises is in turn premised on the softening of the boundaries of the permissible on prime-time television. As we have seen in the case of corruption dramas, the boundaries of television entertainment have been constantly made and remade. Redefining boundaries does not occur automatically. I highlighted the role of cultural mediation taken up by Chinese intellectuals since the early 1990s. Intellectuals include writers, producers, and other media professionals centrally involved in the making of television dramas. These “cultural brokers” play a key role not only in legitimizing corruption as prime-time subject matter but also in shaping how corruption should be portrayed. By virtue of their mediating



activities, structurally engendered differences in the disjunctive media order are ameliorated and smoothed over. I have also argued that the cultural brokerage role of intellectuals does not mean that intellectual interventions are no longer possible. Rather, it means that intellectual interventions are predicated on a willingness to play the game in the commercial media environment in the first place. In any case, disjuncture and conjuncture are two sides of the same coin. The notion of disjuncture does not foreclose the possibilities of alliance, rearticulation, and conjuncture of diverse forces in dynamic interplay with one another. The strength and longevity of such conjuncture are contingent on the extent to which the interests of different stakeholders overlap, and in the case of partial overlapping, how elastic the boundaries can be that delimit the legitimate and the illegitimate. In the case of strong consensus among dominant political, economic, and intellectual forces, commercial media may form a strong ally with the state. This book shows that commercial media never question the dominant assumption about market reform, the single most important item on the Party's political agenda. As well, while commercial media produce a great number of corruption exposés, they never touch on corruption at the core of the Party leadership. In these instances, there is a perfect alignment and tacit agreement between commercial and political imperatives. It is in the area of weak consensus that compromises and negotiations take place and deals are made or broken. Questions that belong in this area are: Who has the authority to speak about and act on the issue of corruption? How is corruption framed so that certain actors, actions, explanations, and solutions become part of the picture while others are left out? Which voices and emotions are legitimate and recognizable, and which are not? It is exactly with regard to these questions that disjuncture manifests itself most unmistakably, and where a great deal of mediation is needed to "maintain the stability" of the disjunctive order.

### Corruption Dramas and Internet-Facilitated Corruption Scandals

Finally, I would like to end this book with some reflections on the implications of this study for our understanding of the culture of scandal in twenty-first-century China. As of this writing, the Internet in China has become a site for corruption scandals to break out. Each year since the middle of the first decade, a number of scandals have been exposed through the Internet. My own incomplete account records more than seventy Internet-facilitated scandals involving local party and state officials from 2008 to 2013. These scandals share several characteristics:

- Citizens take the lead in getting a scandal going (although whistleblowers are differently motivated), sustaining it, amplifying it, and forcing relevant government authorities to take action.
- The salience of sex scandals is unprecedented. Previously, the sexual misdemeanours of officials involved in scandals were exposed as a “by-product” of investigation; sex was never the primary offence and was always treated with restraint in official and mainstream commercial media. Now it is often sex scandals that power subsequent investigations into financial or power scandals.
- Not infrequently, political scandals originate *right in the media*. Officials get into trouble for inappropriate remarks that they make, ill-calculated facial expressions, expensive wristwatches that they wear, and boorish manners that they put on, captured by professional, amateur, or surveillance cameras and spread over the Internet. Similar to sexual wrongdoings, these accidental appearances are frequently interpreted by netizens as signs of deeper truths, be they abuses of power or financial wrongdoings.
- The Internet-powered scandal culture derives much of its influence from visuals. Widely circulating on the Internet are sex tapes, lewd photos, diaries filled with details of bribery, power brokering, and sexual adventures, pictures of luxurious accessories, copies of itemized receipts detailing overseas travel costs or expensive purchases, and so on. These spectacles turn political scandals into highly colourful and entertaining events, and in some cases activate the so-called human flesh search engine – collective intelligence gathering – in order to identify wrongdoers.

Both corruption dramas and Internet-generated political scandals provide a large number of corruption narratives mediated by popular culture. Because of crucial differences in terms of mode of production, distribution, and consumption, they should be treated as entirely different genres. Yet they are also closely related. If corruption dramas initiated a visual turn in public discourses of corruption, it is the Internet that has generated something that may be called a visual culture of corruption. If corruption dramas, by bringing the otherwise backstage behaviour and politics to the living room, tested the bounds of publicity that the Party-state and its officials had warily guarded, it is the digital media and communication technologies that facilitate citizen surveillance, thereby making it increasingly difficult for politicians to manage and control their visibility. Furthermore, the dominant

affective modes in corruption dramas – moral outrage and cynicism – are also identified in Internet forums. As noted earlier, the same emotions might manifest differently with varying implications. For example, moral indignation that ultimately places hope for revenge in the CCP is clearly different from outrage that leads citizens to take matters into their own hands. Clearly, the political implications of the culture of scandals still remain to be distinguished. Future research in this area may well benefit from a broad perspective on the co-evolution of corruption and popular culture in general.

# Notes

## Introduction

- 1 The scandal came to a resolution when Bo Xilai was sentenced to life in prison on 22 September 2013, on charges of bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power.
- 2 Bo Xilai is the son of Bo Yibo, a highly influential senior CCP leader in the 1980s and 1990s.
- 3 James Lull and Stephen Hinerman propose that “a media scandal occurs when private acts that disgrace or offend the idealized, dominant morality of a social community are made public and narrativized by the media, producing a range of effects from ideological and cultural retrenchment to disruption and change.” See Lull and Hinerman, “The Search for Scandal,” in *Media Scandals*, edited by James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3.
- 4 *Cangtian zaishang* [Heaven above], directed by Zhou Huan, produced and broadcast by China Central Television, 1995; novel and script written by Lu Tianming. Cited hereinafter as *Heaven Above*.
- 5 This is the only information available on the ratings of the drama serial. It is widely quoted in newspapers and trade magazines as well as by scholars. See Tian Anli, Quan Hua, and Wu Qian, *Dianshi de jiyi* [Memories of television] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009); Yan Yanwen, “*Cangtian zaishang* yu shiji zhijiao de Zhongguo wenxue [Heaven Above and Chinese literature at the turn of the century],” *Guangming ribao* [Guangming Daily], 28 February 1996; Jeffrey Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: The Return of the Political Novel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 26.
- 6 See Yangshi Suofurui [CCTV SOFRES], ed., *Zhongguo dianshiju shicheng baogao (2003-2004)* [China TV drama report (2003-2004)] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004).
- 7 This figure is an estimate by an industry insider whom I interviewed in 2009. I confirmed it through a close reading of the abstracts of hundreds of crime drama titles on a popular online video store in China, Dangdang.com (<http://www.dangdang.com>).
- 8 See Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*, 14-18.
- 9 SARFT merged with the State Administration of Press and Publication to form the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television in 2013.
- 10 Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 76.
- 11 In this book, “post-socialist China” refers to China since 1992, the year that signalled the formal advent of market economy in China.
- 12 Neoliberalism may be understood as “a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2. It may also refer to a means of biopolitics, a technology of governing human life “in order to harness and extract life

- forces”; this technology “relies on market knowledge and calculations for a politics of subjection and subject-making that continually places in question the political existence of modern human beings.” Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 13. In this book, both of these interrelated interpretations are deployed.
- 13 James C. Scott, *Comparative Political Corruption* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 2.
  - 14 Quoted in Yan Sun, *Corruption and Market in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3. Disagreement exists, though, on how this broad definition should be interpreted. What counts as public power? Are managers of state-owned firms considered occupants of public office? What does “abuse” mean? Should “abuse of public power” be quantitatively defined? For example, Chu Wenkai, a CCDI researcher, believes that for a behaviour to be considered an instance of corruption, it must “bring great damage to the interests of the state and the people.” Chu Wenkai, “Fubai gainian de fanhua he jieding” [Generalization and delimitation of the concept of corruption], *Zhongguo jiancha [Supervision in China]* 16 (2005): 51-52.
  - 15 Sun, *Corruption and Market*; Andrew Wedeman, “The Intensification of Corruption in China,” *China Quarterly* 180 (2004): 895-921; Melanie Manion, *Corruption by Design: Building Clean Government in Mainland China and Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
  - 16 Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2011), 13.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, 55.
  - 18 See, for example, Xueliang Ding, “Systemic Irregularity and Spontaneous Property Transformation in the Chinese Financial System,” *China Quarterly* 163 (2000): 655-76; *ibid.*, “Informal Privatization through Internationalization: The Rise of Nomenklatura Capitalism in China’s Offshore Businesses,” *British Journal of Political Science* 30, 1 (2000): 121-46; *ibid.*, “The Illicit Asset Stripping of Chinese State Firms,” *China Journal* 43 (January 2000): 1-28; Ting Gong, “Jumping into the Sea: Cadre Entrepreneurs in China,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 43, 4 (July-August 1996): 26-34; Xiaobo Hu, “The State and the Private Sector in a New Property Rights System,” in *China after Jiang*, edited by Gang Lin and Xiaobo Hu (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), 69-89; Richard Madsen, “One Country, Three Systems: State-Society Relations in Post-Jiang China,” in *China after Jiang*, 91-114; David Wank, *Commodifying Communism: Business, Trust, and Politics in a Chinese City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Yuezhi Zhao has provided key accounts of corruption among Chinese journalists and other media practitioners in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. See Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), and Zhao, *Communication in China*. Li Zhang discussed corruption in China’s real estate industry in her *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010). According to her, “many local government officials have extensive clientelist ties with developers and profit from new development projects. As such, corruption is deeply embedded in the operation of the entire real estate industry. It is increasingly difficult to disentangle corporate interests from bureaucratic power, leaving individual homeowners little room to seek justice” (142).
  - 19 CCTV’s monopoly of the national market as the only national television network was broken when provincial television stations were allowed to launch their own satellite-transmitted channels. See Chapter 1 for more details.
  - 20 Zhao, *Communication in China*, 88-89.
  - 21 Producers of “serious dramas” claim to adopt a conscientious and sombre attitude towards representing historical figures and events. The difference between “serious drama” and

other historical dramas is overblown, since they are all modern-day tales dressed up in ancient costumes. I argue that the difference is manufactured to achieve product differentiation within a homogeneous genre.

- 22 For existing literature on China's investigative journalism, see Alex Chan, "From Propaganda to Hegemony: *Jiaodian Fangtan* and China's Media Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, 30 (2002): 35-51; Xiaoping Li, "'Focus' (*Jiaodian Fangtan*) and the Changes in the Chinese Television Industry," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, 30 (2002): 17-34; Jingrong Tong, *Investigative Journalism in China: Journalism, Power, and Society* (London: Continuum, 2011); Yuezhi Zhao, "Watchdogs on Party Leashes? Contexts and Implications of Investigative Journalism in Post-Deng China," *Journalism Studies* 1, 4 (2000): 577-97.
- 23 I appropriated the term from Judith Farquhar, "For Your Reading Pleasure: Self-Health (*Ziwo baojian*) Information in 1990s Beijing," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 9, 1 (2001): 107.
- 24 Shuyu Kong, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jianying Zha, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers are Transforming a Culture* (New York: New Press, 1995). Both authors noted the role of intellectuals in the making of Chinese popular culture in the 1990s.
- 25 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 26 Joseph Man Chan, "Commercialization without Independence: Trends and Tensions of Media Development in China," in *China Review 1993*, edited by Joseph Cheng and Maurice Brosseau (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993), 1-25. For a summary of the main points of this article, see Joseph Man Chan, "Administrative Boundaries and Media Marketization: A Comparative Analysis of the Newspaper, TV and Internet Markets in China," in *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*, edited by Chin-Chuan Lee (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 160.
- 27 Zhao, *Communications in China*, 112.
- 28 For a similar discussion of the cultural system reform, see Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From Propaganda to Hegemony* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2011), 56.
- 29 Media officials see television as an ideological instrument. Popular television programs are valued by officials for their ability to disseminate official messages to many viewers. Chapter 2 will further elaborate this point.
- 30 For the ambition of provincial media, see Chan, "Administrative Boundaries and Media Marketization;" Wanning Sun, "Localizing Chinese Media: A Geographic Turn in Media and Communication Research," in *Mapping Media in China: Region, Province, Locality*, edited by Wanning Sun and Jenny Chio (New York: Routledge, 2012), 13-28; Yuezhi Zhao and Guoxin Xing, "Provincial Papers, National Power: The Scaling Up of the Nanfang Daily Media Group," in *Mapping Media in China*, 31-46.
- 31 Zhao, *Communication in China*, 207.
- 32 Yong Zhang, "From Masses to Audience: Changing Media Ideologies and Practices in Reform China," *Journalism Studies* 1, 4 (2000): 618.
- 33 James Lull, *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991), 35.
- 34 Zhang, "From Masses to Audience," 629.
- 35 Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy*; Geremie R. Barme, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Chin-Chuan Lee, Zhou He, and Yu Huang, "'Chinese Party Publicity Inc.' Conglomerated: The Case of the Shenzhen Press Group," *Media, Culture and Society* 28, 4 (2006): 581-602.

- 36 Zhao, *Communication in China*, 82.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid., 202, 205.
- 39 Ibid., 205.
- 40 Ibid., 216.
- 41 Xueping Zhong, *Mainstream Culture Refocused: Television Drama, Society, and the Production of Meaning in Reform-Era China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).
- 42 Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China*.
- 43 Ibid., 126-29.
- 44 Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- 45 Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004).
- 46 Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley, "Reclaiming Legitimacy in China," *Politics and Policy* 38, 3 (2010): 400.
- 47 Zhongdang Pan, "Articulation and Re-articulation: Agendas for Understanding Media and Communication in China," *International Journal of Communication* 4 (2010): 517-30.
- 48 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2009).
- 49 Liu Liu (writer). *Woju (Snail House)* (Beijing: Beijing Jindun Shengye Film and Television Culture, 2009).

#### Chapter 1: Chinese Television Dramas

- 1 For a summary of the drama, see Peng Yaochun, "Zhongguo duanpian dianshiju de zuji" [Footprints of Chinese short-length television dramas], *Nanjing shehui kexue [Nanjing Social Sciences]* 10 (1996): 68-74.
- 2 Chen Geng, "Guanyu 'yikou caibingzi' de chuanguo qingkuang" [The production of "A Mouthful of Vegetable Pancake"], in *Huisu yuantou: zhongguo zaoqi dianshiju huigu* [Search for the origin: a review of China's early television dramas], edited by Li Peisen (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2007), 30-31.
- 3 The provincial television stations included Shanghai TV, Guangdazhou TV, Harbin TV, Tianjin TV, and Changchun TV. Beijing TV broadcast 90 of them, followed by Guangzhou TV (about 40), Shanghai TV (about 40), and Harbin TV (about 20). See Wu Hui and Zhang Zhijun, *Dianshiju shehuixue [Sociology of television]* (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2002), 6.
- 4 Cao Hui, "Zhongguo zaoqi dianshiju fazhan gaikuang" [A survey of China's early television dramas], in *Huisu yuantou*, edited by Li Peisen, 18-29.
- 5 They were *Kaochang shang de fanxiu douzheng (An Anti-Revisionist Struggle at the Test Site)* (1967), *Gongshe dangwei shuji de nü'er (Daughter of the Commune's Party Secretary)* (1975), and *Shensheng de zhize (Sacred Duties)* (1975).
- 6 Yu Huang and Xu Yu, "Broadcasting and Politics: Chinese Television in the Mao Era, 1958-1976," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 17, 4 (1997): 563-74.
- 7 Zhao Yuming, ed., *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi tongshi [A history of Chinese broadcasting]* (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 582.
- 8 Cao Hui, "Zhongguo zaoqi dianshiju fazhan gaikuang."
- 9 For example, Wang Fulin (b. 1931), a director of twenty live dramas, went on to make China's first popular drama serial, *Diyi shibanian (Eighteen Years in the Enemy Camp)* (9 episodes, 1981), *Honglou meng (Dreams in the Red Chamber)* (36 episodes, 1987), and *Sanguo yanyi (Romance of the Three Kingdoms)* (84 episodes, 1994). The latter two are now considered as classical televisual adaptations of Chinese literary classics. Cao Hui, who participated in eight live productions as screenwriter, director, or both, would take

- part in the following decades in a number of major productions such as CCTV's historical dramas *Nu'erhachi* (*Nurhaci*) (16 episodes, 1986) and *Tang minghuang* (*Emperor Ming of Tang*) (40 episodes, 1990). Zhou Huan (b. 1943), who appeared in at least four live dramas prior to the Cultural Revolution, later directed the first anti-corruption drama, *Heaven Above* (17 episodes, 1995).
- 10 Chen Duo, "Zeren.jiqing" [Responsibility/passion], *Dianshi yanjiu* [*Television Research*] 7 (2011): 51-53; Xia Zhiping, "Yimai xiangcheng: cong guangbo ju dao dianshi ju" [*Continuity: from radio drama to television drama*], in *Huisu yuantou*, edited by Li Peisen, 37-39.
  - 11 CCTV established its first advertising department in 1984 as part of its newly launched subsidiary, China International Television Company. The department came under CCTV's direct control in 1987, showing its growing importance to the latter. See Liu Yinghua, "Zaidu guanggao shi (1) koushu lishi: Zhongguo guanggao 30 nian 30 ren" [Re-reading the history of advertising (1) oral history: thirty people in the thirty years of Chinese advertising], *Zhongguo guanggao* [*China Advertising*] 12 (2010): 58-67.
  - 12 See Zhao, *Communication in China*, 96.
  - 13 Huang and Yu, "Broadcasting and Politics," 563-74, 572.
  - 14 Ibid.
  - 15 Qian Bin, "Zhibo fenli: jiakuai dianshi chanyehua jincheng de biran xuanze" [Separating production from broadcast: an inevitable result of industrialization of television], *Xinwen chuanbo* [*Journalism and Communication*] 6 (2011): 220.
  - 16 In 1994, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had a total of ten drama production units. See Ming Zhenjiang, "Jianchi gao biao zhun, hongyang zhuxuanlu" [Maintain high standards and promote the main melody], *Zhongguo dianshi* [*Chinese television*], 6 (1994): 25-26. Based on quarterly statistics of television drama distribution permits released on the SARFT website, between 2006 and 2011 the PLA's affiliated production units made a little more than one hundred drama serials. The most actively involved is the August First Film Studio, the PLA's only film studio, followed by the PLA Air Force, the General Logistics Department of the PLA General Headquarters, Second Artillery Corps, Shenyang Military Region, and so on. Data are available at <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications.shanty?appName=announce>.
  - 17 Zhang Huashan, "Difang dianshiju de guanli" [Administration of local television dramas], in *Dianshi xuanchuan guanli lunji* [Anthology of television propaganda and regulation], edited by Wang Chuanyu and Zhao Qun (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 437-65.
  - 18 Ibid.
  - 19 "Guanyu jiaqiang he gaijin guangbo dianshi wenyi xinwen zhengfu jiang pingjiang gongzuo de tongzhi" [Circular on strengthening and improving the administration of government awards in radio, television, art and literature, and journalism] (issued by SARFT on 30 March 1999), [http://www.law-lib.com/law/law\\_view.asp?id=69162](http://www.law-lib.com/law/law_view.asp?id=69162).
  - 20 Yuezhi Zhao recounts the story of a Chinese industrialist, Lou Zhongfu, who founded the Guangsha Group, the country's largest private construction company. Lou's interest in sponsoring cultural activities dated back at least to 1985, when he sponsored a television drama serial produced by Zhejiang Television (a provincial television station of Zhejiang, a coastal province in eastern China). His sponsorship of television drama production was a normal practice in the 1980s (Zhao, *Communication in China*).
  - 21 Zhang Huashan, "Difang dianshiju de guanli."
  - 22 Wang Feng, "Tuanjie qilai, wei fanrong woguo dianshiju yishu er fendou" [Be united and strive for the development of television drama art in our country], *Zhongguo dianshi* [*Chinese Television*], 6 (1991): 40-45.
  - 23 "Guanyu shixing dianshiju zhizuo xukezheng zhidu de zanxing guiding" [Provisional rule regarding the television drama production permits] (issued by the MRFT, 1986), available in Zhou Jingbo, ed., *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi wenyi daxi (1977-2000): shiliao suoyin*



- juan [A comprehensive overview of Chinese radio and television arts (1977-2000), 1: Historical sources and index] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2008), 111.
- 24 Ibid.
  - 25 During my interviews in 2003, Ren Dahui and Jin Yusheng, two senior (or “first-generation”) television drama producers at CCTV, discussed the relationship between directors and production chiefs in the 1980s.
  - 26 Michael Keane, “Ethics and Pragmatism: China’s Television Producers Confront the Cultural Market,” *Media International Australia* 89 (1998): 75-86.
  - 27 Zhang Daqin, “Dianshiju jiemu de zhizuo yu guanli” [Production and regulation of television dramas], in *Dianshi xuanchuan guanli lunji*, edited by Wang Chuanyu and Zhao Qun, 423-36.
  - 28 CCTV imported dramas and movies from a wide variety of countries, including the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, Holland, Norway, France, West Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, Hungary, Romania, Poland, East Germany, Yugoslavia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Japan, the Soviet Union, Mexico, and so on.
  - 29 These shows, though considered second-rate in the United States, fascinated the Chinese immediately. Mark Harris of *The Man from Atlantis* impressed viewers inadvertently with his sunglasses. Following the show’s screening, it became fashionable for Chinese youths to wear sunglasses, known locally as “maike [“Mark”] glasses.” *Garrison’s Gorillas* caused more polarized opinions. Critical viewers, including some senior Party leaders, condemned the show as violent, meaningless, and bourgeois. See Wu and Zhang, *Dianshiju shehuixue*.
  - 30 Examples include *Isaura the Slave* and *Bianca Vidal*. Lucilia Santos, who played Isaura, was so popular among the Chinese that she won the first Golden Eagle Award for best foreign actress in 1985.
  - 31 Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), 5.
  - 32 Wanning Sun, “Dancing with Chains: Significant Moments on China Central Television,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, 2 (2007): 194.
  - 33 Yi Wang, “Intellectuals and Popular Television in China,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, 2 (1999): 222-45. A famous Chinese cultural critic, Tao Dongfeng, refers to *Yearnings* as signalling the end of the “Enlightenment” era of 1980s China. Tao Dongfeng, “Qimeng de zhongjie: kewang yu Zhongguo tese de dianshiju moshi de queli” [The end of the enlightenment: yearnings and the formation of television drama with Chinese characteristics], <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/detail.php?id=22808>.
  - 34 For example, in early 1990, before *Yearnings* became a hit, MRFT vice minister Wang Feng called for drama producers to learn from Japanese, Mexican, Brazilian, and Taiwanese soap operas to improve the productivity and production values of Chinese television dramas. He mentioned studio shooting and multiple camera positions, which were being experimented with at CCTV and BTAC. See Wang Feng, “Tongchou guihua, jiaqiang guanli, fahui xitong youshi, zhuyi zonghe xiaoyi: Wangfeng fubuzhang zai quanguo dianshiju guihuaui he yinjin haiwai dianshiju guanli gongzuo huiyi shang de jianghua” [Plan concertedly, strengthen regulation, exploit systemic advantages, and stress comprehensive effects: speech of deputy minister Wang Feng at the national television drama planning conference/work conference for regulating imported television dramas], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 8 (1990): 2-7.
  - 35 See Wang Feng, “Tuanjie qilai.” This awareness of the need for a paradigmatic shift in drama production became dominant at BTAC. Zheng Xiaolong, a BTAC official and producer, also expressed the belief that it would no longer be effective to depend on literary and artistic talents alone, and that television dramas should be mass-manufactured like regular factory products instead of as artifacts. See Wang Shuo, “Wo kan dazhong

wenhua gangtai wenhua ji qita" [My views on popular culture, Hong Kong and Taiwan culture, and others], in *Wuzhizhe wuwei* [The ignorant fears nothing], edited by Wang Shuo (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 2-46.

- 36 In the words of an official critic named Meng Fanshu, "from *Yearnings*, we know how to tell stories through television dramas. An appealing television drama must be (1) popular but not vulgar; (2) loved by ordinary people; and (3) heart-wrenching. Television dramas are for ordinary audience, mainly composed of women, children and the elderly. They are faithful and easy to be moved." Ni Min, "Guochan dianshiju zenme neng genghaokan" [How to make more appealing television dramas], *Zhongguo xiaofeizhe bao* [Chinese Consumers News], 11 May 2001.
- 37 Based on the ¥135,000 sponsorship agreement between Bailong, a manufacturer of mineral water dispensers, and BTAC, a Bailong water dispenser had to appear in each episode for no less than five minutes, and the two main actors, Ge You and Lu Liping, had to appear in an ad for the product. Zhi Rang, "Liuxingyu guanggao duoyin fansi: neidiju guanggao zhiru dashiji" [Product placement in rain of meteors causes debates: a chronology of product placement in Chinese television dramas], Netease, <http://ent.163.com/09/0818/19/5H18GRU300031GVS.html>.
- 38 Yin Hong, "Yiyi, shengchan, xiaofei: Zhongguo dianshiju fazhan de zhengzhi jingji xue fenxi" [Meanings, production, and consumption: a political economy analysis of Chinese television drama], in *Yingshi wenhua qianyan* [At the front of a film and television culture], edited by Hu Zhifeng (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 105-36.
- 39 Shuyu Kong, "Family Matters: Reconstructing the Family on the Chinese Television Screen," in *TV Drama in China*, edited by Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 76.
- 40 Lisa Rofel, "Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in Contemporary China," *American Ethnologist* 21, 4 (1994): 700-22.
- 41 Wanning Sun, "Dancing with Chains," 195.
- 42 My thanks go to Guobin Yang for this insight.
- 43 "Dianshiju *Kewang* bochu zhihou shoudao lipeng zongli kending" [Television drama *Yearnings* was positively regarded by Premier Li Peng], *Beijing ribao* [Beijing Daily], 28 March 1991, reprinted in Zhou Jingbo, ed., *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi wenyi daxi*, 40.
- 44 "Li Ruihuan tong *Kewang* juzu renyuan zuotan" [Li Ruihuan met with the crew of *Yearnings*], *Beijing ribao* [Beijing Daily], 9 January 1991, reprinted in Zhou Jingbo, ed., *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi wenyi daxi*, 40-41.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 46 "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe zhidao fangzhen de jueyi" [Resolution concerning guidelines on building socialist spiritual civilization] (1986), *Xinhua News Agency*, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-02/06/content\\_2553491.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-02/06/content_2553491.htm).
- 47 Zhou Hualei, "Libukai zhuxuanlu de rizi" [Days of the "main melody"], *Nanfang zhoumo* [Southern Weekend], 14 June 2007.
- 48 Each year from then on, special state funds were allocated for "main melody" film and dramatic productions, television stations were obligated to make and broadcast a certain number of "main melody" dramas, public institutions were often required to purchase group tickets for their employees to watch "main melody" films, and so on.
- 49 Data are gleaned from Lu Di, *Zhongguo dianshi chanye de weiji yu zhuanji* [Crises and opportunities for Chinese television industry] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2002); Huang Shengmin, "2004 nian Zhongguo guanggao shichang diaocha" [Survey of 2004 Chinese advertising market], in *Zhongguo chuanmei chanye fazhan baogao* [Report on development of China's media industry (2004-2005)], edited by

- Cui Baoguo (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005); and annual reports (2000-3) of China's advertising industry from "Chinese Advertising Online" (<http://www.a.com.cn>).
- 50 See Lu Di, *Zhongguo dianshi chanye de weiwei yu zhuanji*; She Xianjun, *Dianshi guanggao yingxiao* [Television advertisement and marketing] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2004); and Chen Rongyong, "Xinmeiti shidai dianshi meiti de yingxiangli" [Influence of television medium in the age of new media], *Zhongguo guanggao [China Advertising]* 5 (2011): 40-42.
  - 51 It has been observed that CCTV actually yields more money in taxation than the nominal subsidy it receives from the government each year. According to Li, the government provides no more than 0.5 percent of total CCTV income. Li Xiaoping, "'Focus' (*Jiaodian Fangtan*)."
  - 52 Zhou Yan, Wang Wei, and Wang Ying, "Dianshitai: dang moni shidai de guanghuan jijiang tuiqu" [Television stations: when the halo of the analogue age is fading away], *Meijie [Media]* 3 (2003): 26-31.
  - 53 For example, in 1997 it grossed ¥4.1 billion in advertising income, whereas the combined advertising income of the ten largest provincial stations was only ¥3.146 billion. See Xie Yungeng, "2006 zhongguo dianshi guanggao shichang baogao" [Report on China's television advertising market in 2006], *Xinwen zhanxian [News Front]* 3 (2007): 54-56.
  - 54 Shen Hua, "Dianshiju guanggao shichang de kunju yu zhuanji" [Dilemmas and opportunities facing television drama advertising], *Chuanmei [Media]* 8 (2005), <http://home.donews.com/donews/article/8/81917.html>.
  - 55 Zhao Hui, "Zhongguo dianshiju chanye xianzhuang wenti tanxi" [Exploring the problems of China's television drama industry], *Xiandai chuanbo [Modern Communications]* 9 (2010): 167-68.
  - 56 Personal interview with Yuan Fang, 17 August 2005. At the time of the interview, Yuan Fang was the director of the CTR market research company, a joint venture between TNS (Taylor Nelson Sofres) and CCTV.
  - 57 Shen Hua, "Dianshiju guanggao shichang de kunju yu zhuanji."
  - 58 Wu Yunpu, "Zheng Xiaolong: Zhongguo dianshiju 30 nian wangshi" [Zheng Xiaolong: the past 30 years of Chinese television dramas], *Xin jing bao [New Beijing News]*, 24 April 2008, <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/40462/40463/7161288.html>.
  - 59 Wang Lanzhu, "Zhiji Zhongguo dianshiju shichang" [Investigating the market for Chinese television dramas], *Zhongguo guangbo yingshi [Chinese Broadcast and Film]* 11 (2003): 30-32; Zhao Zizhong and Ma Lan, "Jiedu shehui zhipian gongsi" [Analyzing independent production companies], *Meijie [Media]* 4 (2003): 46-50.
  - 60 Zhao Wenxia, "Dianshiju guanggao shouru heshi neng fanbu zhizuofang" [When will drama production companies truly partake of the advertising pie], *Beijing ribao [Beijing Daily]*, 5 June 2009.
  - 61 Cheng Ying, "Cong woguo dianshiju shichang de fazhan licheng kan eryuan qudong de tongxiangxing yu nixiangxing" [Analyzing the development of our country's television drama market under the dual control of the state and the market], *Nanfang dianshi xuekan [South China Television Journal]* 4 (2004): 38-40.
  - 62 Also see Bonnie Rui Liu, "Chinese TV Changes Face: The Rise of Independents," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 7, 1 (2010): 73-91. There is some overlap between Liu's findings and mine, although we conducted research on this topic independently.
  - 63 Hong Bing, ed., *Beijing guangbo yingshi nianjian (2009)* [Beijing radio, film, and television yearbook (2009)] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2009).
  - 64 Examples include *Heidong (Black Hole)*, *Guojia gongsu (Prosecuted by the State)*, and *Weixie (Threats)*.

- 65 See “Guowuyuan guanyu feiyou ziben jinru wenhua chanye de jue ding” [The State Council’s decisions concerning the entry of non-public capital into the cultural industry] (2005), [http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2005/content\\_64188.htm](http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2005/content_64188.htm).
- 66 “Zhenxing wenhua chanye gui hua” [Plans to strengthen the cultural industry] (2009), [http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/26/content\\_1427394.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-09/26/content_1427394.htm).
- 67 In 2005, Poly Huayi, which controlled Xinbaoyuan and Yingshi Film and Television, sold half of its shares to the Youli Group, a Sichuan-based real estate group listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, thereby gaining indirect access to the stock market.
- 68 Zhao, *Communication in China*, 231.
- 69 “Shipin wangzhan shouci touqian pai dianshiju; Leshiwang yinian huoli 600 wan” [First attempt to invest in television drama by videostreaming site; LeTV grossed a profit of ¥6 million in a year] (13 February 2011), [http://tech.gmw.cn/2011-02/13/content\\_1607665.htm](http://tech.gmw.cn/2011-02/13/content_1607665.htm).
- 70 Gong Qiong, “Shipin wangzhan huopin zizhi” [Online video sites compete with self-made dramas] (13 June 2012), *NetEase*, <http://tech.163.com/special/rw18/>.
- 71 Yangshi Suofurui, *Zhongguo dianshiju shicheng baogao (2003-2004)*, 92.
- 72 It made a total of fourteen dramas in 2005, and the number decreased to ten in 2006, six in 2007, seven in 2008, thirteen in 2009 (2009 was packed with important anniversaries for the Party and the PRC, such as 1919, 1949, and 1979, which probably explained the small surge in the Center’s output), six in 2010, and three in 2011. The information is gleaned from the SARFT website, in the section that publicizes quarterly reports on television drama distribution permits.
- 73 Yang Shuying, “Zhongyang dianshitai bofang de dianshiju cong he er lai?” [Where do CCTV’s television dramas come from?], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 6 (1995): 2-5.
- 74 Wang Lanzhu, “Zhiji Zhongguo dianshiju shichang.”
- 75 Li Jian, “Zhizhuo tansuo chuanguangxin weilai – xiezai Zhongguo guoji dianshi zong gongsi chengli 20 zhounian zhi ji” [Commitment and innovation – on the 20th anniversary of the founding of CITVC], *Dianshi yanjiu [Television Research]* 1 (2004): 29-31.
- 76 Available at <http://www.ctv-media.com.cn/zyyw/ysyw.htm>. See also Yong Zhong, “Relations between Chinese Television and the Capital Market: Three Case Studies,” *Media, Culture and Society* 32, 4 (2010): 649-68.
- 77 For details of the strategic alliance, see the Public Notice posted on the CTM website, <http://www.ctv-media.com.cn/tzzgx/lsgg/2010-18.htm>.
- 78 Chen Gongde, “Dangqian woguo dianshiju chanye fazhan de silu” [The current development of television drama industry], *Shengping shijie [Audio-Visual World]* 4 (2009): 4-8.
- 79 Le You, “Zheshang ‘aishang’ yingshi quan” [Zhejiang merchants “fell in love” with film and TV business], [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ent/2012-05/23/c\\_123180177.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ent/2012-05/23/c_123180177.htm).
- 80 The cost of purchasing a permit is usually a small fraction of the total production cost, ranging from a nominal amount if the two parties have a congenial relationship to a generous 1 percent of the total budget. Based on my interviews with producers, the cost of a permit was not a big concern to them. For example, a permit might just cost ¥20,000 to ¥30,000, compared with a total budget of ¥4 million to ¥7 million. Personal interview with Zheng Zhenxiu, producer.
- 81 Liu Fang and Xu Xuefeng, “Miandui zizhiju, minying yingshi gongsi ying ruhe yingdui” [How private film and TV firms should respond to stations making their own dramas], *Dongnan chuanbo [Southeast Communication]* 2 (2010): 51-52.
- 82 Wei Ping, “Li Ruihuan gao da dongzuo saochu zuofeng” [Li Ruihuan takes a big step to sweep out the “leftist” wind], *Zhongguo shibao [China Times]*, 30 August 1992, 9-11, quoted in Mayfair Yang, “Of Gender, State Censorship, and Overseas Capital: An Interview with Chinese Director Zhang Yimou,” *Public Culture* 5, 2 (1993): 299.

- 83 Shaoguang Wang, "The Politics of Private Time: Changing Leisure Patterns in Urban China," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, edited by Deborah S. Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, and Elizabeth J. Perry (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149-72, 165. Also see Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).
- 84 Kang Liu, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 83.
- 85 Lisa Atkinson, "China TV Guide," *China Business Review* 21, 5 (September 1994): 29-34.
- 86 "1992 niandu quanguo dianshiju ticaiguihua huiyijiyao" [Minutes of the 1992 television drama planning conference], *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi nianjian [Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook]* (1993).
- 87 "1999 niandu quanguo dianshiju ticaiguihua huiyijiyao" [Minutes of the 1999 television drama planning conference], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 5 (1999): 41-43.
- 88 Wang Lu, Wang Donghui, Shen Chirui, and Ye Shaogang, "Zhongguo zhongyang dianshitai" [China Central Television], in *Zhongguo guangbo dianshi gaiyao* [A brief history of Chinese broadcasting], edited by Zhang Zhenhua, Zhou Tongshan, Liu Hongcai, and Yin Lianzhao (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), 120.
- 89 "1993 niandu quanguo dianshiju ticaiguihua huiyijiyao" [Minutes of the 1993 national television drama planning conference], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 5 (1993): 2-6.
- 90 "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu cujin shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe ruogan zhongyao wenti de jueyi" [The Party Center's resolution on several important matters to promote socialist spiritual civilization] (1996), <http://sy.mca.gov.cn/article/jmgj/jswmjs/200707/20070700001119.shtml>.
- 91 Liu Xiliang, "Shishi dianshiju jingpin zhanlüe, tuidong dianshiju jingpin shengchan" [Implement strategies for promoting the production of quality television dramas], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 4 (1997): 2-9.
- 92 Liu Xiliang, "Jiaqiang guanli shi cujin dianshiju chuanguo fanrong de guanjian" [The key to invigorating television drama production is to strengthen regulation], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 4 (1996): 4-10.
- 93 Ji Bingxuan, "Hongyang xianjin wenhua, suzao meihao xinling – zai di ershi jie quanguo dianshiju feitian jiang banjianghui shang de jianghua" [Promote advanced culture and mould beautiful minds – speech at the 20th Feitian Award ceremony], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 5 (2001): 2-7.
- 94 Wang Weiguo, "Zhuxuanlü dianshiju shenmeihua chuyi" [A preliminary discussion of the aesthetics of main melody dramas], in *Yingshi wenhua qianyan: "Zhuanxingqi" dazhong shenmei wenhua toushi* [At the forefront of the film and television culture: popular aesthetics and culture during the "transitional" period], edited by Hu Zhifeng (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 212-21.
- 95 "Yingshi zhizuo jingying jigou guanli zanxing guiding" [Provisional rules on entities in the film and television drama business] (issued by the MRFT, 1995), [http://www.cnci.gov.cn/content%5C199591/news\\_13617.shtml](http://www.cnci.gov.cn/content%5C199591/news_13617.shtml).
- 96 "Guanyu shixing guangbo dianshi jiemu zhizuo faxing hangye zhunru zhidu de shishi xize (shixing)" [Detailed rules on licensing for radio and television program production and distribution] (issued by the SARFT, 2001), <http://law.people.com.cn/showdetail.action?id=2588512>.
- 97 Ibid.
- 98 "Guangbo dianshi jiemu zhizuo jingying guanli guiding" [Rules for regulating radio and television program production and businesses] (issued by SARFT, 2004), <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/PI-c/629184.htm>.
- 99 For example, there were more than two hundred attendees in the 2000 conference, including the SARFT director, the director of CCTV, the deputy chair of the Chinese

- Writers' Association, and the chief of the Literature and Art Bureau of the Party's Propaganda Department. See "2000 nian quanguo dianshiju ticaiguihui zongshu" [Minutes of the 2000 national television drama planning conference] (2000), *Zhongguo dianshi* [Chinese Television] 5 (2000): 59.
- 100 Xu Guangchun, "Zai 2004 nian quanguo dianshiju ticaiguihui shang de jianghua" [Speech at the 2004 national television drama planning conference] (18 March 2004), <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/manage/publishfile/10/1686.html>.
- 101 Chen Xiaochun and Zhang Hong, *Dianshiju zhipian guanli: cong xiangmu cehua dao shichang yingxiao* [Management of television drama production: from project planning to marketing] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 95.
- 102 A television drama is submitted to either a central government agency or its provincial bureau, depending on the administrative level of its production unit (licence holder).
- 103 "Guangdian zongju zongbianshi chengli dianshiju guanli chu" [The general editorial department of SARFT established television drama regulation section] (2002), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-03/27/content\\_333373.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2002-03/27/content_333373.htm).
- 104 Zhang Zongwei, "Zouguo 2006: guochan dianshiju yousi lu" [At the end of 2006: worries about domestic television dramas], *Shoushi zhongguo* [Rating China] 7 (2007), <http://www.csm.com.cn/index.php/knowledge/showArticle/ktid/1/kaid/582>.
- 105 Data are compiled from SARFT's monthly reports released at its website, <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications.shanty?appName=note>.
- 106 "Guanyu 2006 nian 7 yue quanguo paishe zhizuo dianshiju beian gongshi de tongzhi" [Report on registered television dramas in production in July 2006] (issued by SARFT, 2006), <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications/note/view.shanty?appName=note&id=011fd9e2c6f20061402881f71fd9e2a5>.
- 107 "Guanyu 2007 nian 4 yue quanguo paishe zhizuo dianshiju beian gongshi de tongzhi" [Report on registered television dramas in production in April 2007] (issued by SARFT, 21 September 2007), <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications/note/view.shanty?appName=note&id=011fd9e35269021d402881f71fd9e2a5>.
- 108 "Guanyu 2008 nian 12 yue quanguo paishe zhizuo dianshiju beian gongshi de tongzhi" [Report on registered television dramas in production in December 2008] (issued by SARFT, 2008), <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications/note/view.shanty?appName=note&id=011fd9e4c4a70706402881f71fd9e2a5>.
- 109 "Guanyu 2009 nian 7 yue quanguo paishe zhizuo dianshiju beian gongshi de tongzhi" [Report on registered television dramas in production in July 2009] (issued by SARFT, 2009), <http://dsj.sarft.gov.cn/tims/site/views/applications/note/view.shanty?appName=note&id=0122977139360074402881a122874887>.
- 110 "Dianshiju neirong guanli guiding" [Rules for television drama content regulation] (issued by SARFT, 2010), <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/articles/201%5F19/20100519175650130586.html>.
- 111 *Ibid.*, Article 5.
- 112 Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China*, 110.
- 113 Yu Liangxin, "Dianshiju she siji shencha zhi; shangxing pindao xiayue qi hongyang 'zhuxuanlu'" [A four-tier censorship in place; satellite channels to promote 'main melody' next month] (2007), <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/5326987.html>.
- 114 "Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang dianshiju shencha gongzuo de tongzhi" [Notice of strengthening television drama censorship] (issued by SARFT, 2005), <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/articles/2005/10/15/20091225144900240667.html>.
- 115 See Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*.
- 116 It can only be speculated whether the Party leadership (Hu Jintao) was involved and what specifically about the reinterpretation really caused the problem.
- 117 "Zouxiang gonghe bei tingbo" [Marching towards the Republic was halted] (2003), <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2003-06-03/0648152751.html>.

- 118 “Guangdian zongju foun ‘Woju’ bei jinbo; Beijingtai yi tingbo” [SARFT denies ban on *Snail House*; Beijing Television has taken it off the air] (2009), <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2009-11-26/02532785352.shtml>.
- 119 “‘Woju’ lizheng erlun bochu; zhipianfang: ‘didiao zuoren jixu xiugai’” [*Snail House* is hoping for rerun; producer says to lie low and continue revising] (2010), <http://gb.cri.cn/27564/201%3/04/108s2773379.htm>.

## Chapter 2: Corruption Dramas as a Mediated Space

- 1 See, e.g., SMG (Shanghai Media Group), *Guangyin ruju zhi cangtian zaishang* [Time of drama], broadcast on 8 June 2008 by the News and General Channel of Shanghai Television, 60 minutes. The transcript is available at <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2008-06-10/121315714982.shtml>; also available in Tian Anli, Quan Hua, and Wu Qian, eds., *Dianshi de jiyi* [Memories of television] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009).

It should be noted from the outset that *Heaven Above* was not the first television drama to portray a corrupt Party cadre. In 1986, CCTV broadcast a twelve-episode mini-series, *New Star* [*Xinxing*], which was about how a young reform-minded Party official fought a conservative, corrupt, and inefficient bureaucracy (see Lull, *China Turned On*). A critical, reflexive look at the suffocating Chinese bureaucracy, it may arguably be seen as a predecessor of corruption dramas; the same is true of a few other 1980s dramas that exposed the ills of bureaucratism. I argue, however, that they were too different from corruption dramas to be included in this study. They belonged to the discourse of reform rather than of corruption. They were remembered as “television dramas of reform,” a term that can be traced back to its literary counterpart, “literature of reform.” Reform was an ascendant discourse in the 1980s, and the term “literature of reform” was coined by literary critics to refer to novels that dealt with the theme of reforming and modernizing Chinese society. The critical impulse reflected in *New Star* was of a piece with the prevailing mood – characterized by sombre soul searching and irrepressible desire for change – among Chinese intellectuals and ordinary people in the 1980s, a mood that culminated in the 1988 television documentary *River Elegy* and the 1989 Democracy Movement. The highly controversial *River Elegy* was a scathing condemnation of Chinese traditional culture and triggered a nationwide debate about the past and future of China. Though different in tone and conceptual framework, both *New Star* and *River Elegy* can be seen as Chinese intellectuals’ interventions that were driven by a deep sense of crisis and change. The critical fervor would be extinguished in the ill-fated 1989 Democracy Movement; when Chinese television became once again politically engaged in the 1990s, its social meanings and significance would no longer be the same. *New Star* and other dramas of reform had greater affinity with the cultural fever of the 1980s than with the anti-corruption dramas of the 1990s.

- 2 This chapter draws in part on Ruoyun Bai, “Cultural Mediation and the Making of the Mainstream in Postsocialist China,” *Media, Culture and Society* 34, 4 (2012): 391-406.
- 3 Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involvement of the Chinese Communist Party* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 300n1.
- 4 Manion, *Corruption by Design*, 190.
- 5 Ting Gong, “More than Mere Words, Less than Hard Law: A Rhetorical Analysis of China’s Anti-Corruption Policy,” *Public Administration Quarterly* 27, ½ (2003): 159-83.
- 6 “Jiang Zemin zai zhongjiwei diliuci quanti huiyishang jianghua” [Jiang Zemin’s speech at the CCDI’s Sixth Plenum], *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], 27 January 1996.
- 7 Zhao, “Watchdogs on Party Leashes?” 582.
- 8 Zhao, *Communication in China*, 215.
- 9 Yang Shuying, “Zhongyang dianshitai bofang de dianshiju cong he er lai?”
- 10 Wu Hui and Zhang Zhijun, *Dianshiju shehuixue*.

- 11 Zhang Huashan, "Youshi chunguang manyuan shi – 1992 nian zhongdian tica dianshiju luoshi jianshu" [Spring comes to the garden again – a brief review of television dramas with important themes in 1992], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 3 (1993): 21-22.
- 12 Zhao, "Watchdogs on Party Leashes?"
- 13 See Gabriele Kreutzner and Ellen Seiter, "Not All 'Soaps' Are Created Equal: Toward a Cross-Cultural Criticism of Television Serials," in *To Be Continued ... Soap Operas around the World*, edited by Robert C. Allen (London: Routledge, 1995), 234-55.
- 14 Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 74.
- 15 Chen Xin, "Duokuile sigē 'Cangtian zaishang'" [Kudos to four "Heavens Above"], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 19 January 1996.
- 16 Rong Xiaojing, "Guochan dianshi jiemu jingcheng buzhen" [Domestic television programs compete in Beijing], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 15 September 1996; personal interview with Zhou Huan, director of *Heaven Above*.
- 17 Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 59.
- 18 The account of the production of *Heaven Above* in this section is based on my interviews with Lu Tianming unless otherwise specified.
- 19 Shi Yi, *Chen Hanyuan fangtan* [Interviews with Chen Hanyuan] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2008), 238-39.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 236.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 237.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 239.
- 23 Benjamin L. Liebman, "Watchdog or Demagogue? The Media in the Chinese Legal System," *Columbia Law Review* 105, 1 (2005): 56.
- 24 Xie Lan and Chen Hanyuan, "Laobaixing kandianshi shi weile sha" [Why do people watch television], *Xinwen chenbao [Morning News]*, 13 September 2009.
- 25 It was based on two novels written by a well-known Chinese writer, Liu Zhenyun. More in Chapter 5.
- 26 Michael Keane, "By the Way, FUCK YOU! Feng Xiaogang's Disturbing Television Dramas," *Continuum* 15, 1 (2001): 57-66.
- 27 Chen Hanyuan, "Dianshiju cehua suixiang" [Some thoughts on television drama planning], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 4 (1998): 20-23; Chen Zhi'ang, "Cangtian zaishang de zhongda yiyi" [The great significance of *Heaven Above*], *Wenyi lilun yu piping [Literary Theory and Criticism]* 58 (1996): 24-27.
- 28 Zhou Huan, personal communication, 2005.
- 29 Perry Link, "The Limits of Cultural Reform in Deng Xiaoping's China," *Modern China* 13, 2 (1987): 115-76.
- 30 You Xiaogang later became a heavyweight drama producer known for his commercial blockbuster series *Qinggong mishi (Secret Files of the Qing Court)*.
- 31 Zhu Jinming and Zou Jinliang, "Cangtian sanchongchang chuxian moca" [Three "Heavens" contend], *Dangdai dianshi [Contemporary Television]* 12 (1996): 20-21; Xu Chunping, "Dianshiju cangtian zaishang wenshi jishi" [The birth of TV drama *Heaven Above*], *Sichuan dangde jianshe [Sichuan Party Building]* 4 (1996): 37-38.
- 32 Xu Chunping, *ibid.*
- 33 Lu Tianming, personal communication, 2005; Chen Xin, "Duokuile sigē 'Cangtian zaishang'"; Chen Tushou, "Lu Tianming: xiabi youyou qianjin zhong" [Lu Tianming: a heavy experience], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 19 January 1996.
- 34 Personal interview, Zhou Huan.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Such competition for discursive control had significant implications at the textual level. For one thing, the name of the drama, *Heaven Above*, would not have been viable if the



- CCDI had had any major influence on the production process. One tends to invoke the power of heaven when help is not available on earth. Lu Tianming intended the title *Heaven Above* to express a collective desire for justice in the face of rampant corruption. The title conveyed a populist message. However, the CCDI found it offensive because it implied a lack of confidence in the anti-corruption mechanism set up in this world. A television drama made with the CCDI's participation would almost certainly have focused on discipline inspection officers pitting themselves heroically against corrupt government officials while allowing little room for other discourses.
- 37 Elsewhere I discussed the useful concept of cultural mediation in Chinese media studies. Others have also theorized the role of filmmakers, writers, and journalists along similar lines. See Ruoyun Bai, "Cultural Mediation"; Yomi Braester, "Chinese Cinema in the Age of Advertisement: The Filmmaker as a Cultural Broker," *China Quarterly* 183 (2005): 549-64; Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Hugo de Burgh, *The Chinese Journalist: Mediating Information in the World's Most Populous Country* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Michael Keane, "Ethics and Pragmatism: China's Television Producers Confront the Cultural Market," *Media International Australia* 89 (1998): 75-86; Chin-chuan Lee et al., "'Chinese Party Publicity Inc.' Conglomerated"; Peter Pugsley and Jian Gao, "Emerging Powers of Influence: The Rise of the Anchor in Chinese Television," *International Communication Gazette* 69, 5 (2007): 451-66; Haiqing Yu, "Mediation Journalism in Chinese Television: Double-Time Narrations of SARS," in *TV China*, edited by Chris Berry and Ying Zhu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
  - 38 Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China*, 11.
  - 39 Shi Yi, *Chen Hanyuan fangtan*, 236.
  - 40 Tang Zhiping, "Zai zhenshi he shenchen zhong zhangyang gexing" [Expressing individual subjectivity in truth and depth], *Dangdai dianshi [Contemporary Television]* 10 (2002): 32-34.
  - 41 Liu Jianghua and Yu Jing, "Guangdian zongju yao yasuo she'an ju fanfu ju; gejie fanying buyi" [SARFT is about to reduce crime dramas and anti-corruption dramas, causing different responses], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 12 April 2004, <http://www.chinanews.com/n/2004-04-12/26/424261.html>.
  - 42 Xu Min, "*Cangtian zaishang*: Fanfu changlian de jingshi zhizuo" [*Heaven Above*: a drama of admonition for anti-corruption], *Fazhi ribao [Legal Daily]*, 15 January 1996.
  - 43 "*Cangtian zaishang dashiji*" [A chronology of *Heaven Above*], *Fazhi ribao [Legal Daily]*, 15 January 1996.
  - 44 Luo Jinsong, "Sixiang de zhenhan: dianshiju *Cangtian zaishang* yantaohui jiyao" [A touch in the heart: summary of speeches at the TV drama *Heaven Above* seminar], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 16 January 1996.
  - 45 Lu Tianming, *Cangtian zaishang [Heaven Above]* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995).
  - 46 Yan Yanwen, "*Cangtian zaishang* yu shiji zhijiao de zhongguo wenxue"; Luo Jinsong, "Sixiang de zhenhan"; Shang Deqi, "*Cangtian zaishang* de danzi yu dianzi" [Courage and intelligence of *Heaven Above*], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 2 March 1996; Jiang Zengpei, "*Cangtian zaishang* suigan" [Casual thoughts on *Heaven Above*], *Renmin ribao [People's Daily]*, 14 February 1996.
  - 47 Shang Deqi, "*Cangtian zaishang* de danzi yu dianzi."
  - 48 See Ma Ye's comments in Ji Wen, "*Cangtian zaishang* deshi tan" [Talking about strengths and weakness of *Heaven Above*], *Renmin ribao [People's Daily]*, 8 March 1996; Wang Yongjiang, "Dianshiju *cangtian zaishang* de quehan" [Regrettable weakness of TV drama *Heaven Above*], *Dianying wenxue [Film Literature]*, no. 9 (1996): 43-44; Li Shujie, "Yishushang zuojin jianzhou" [Impoverished art], *Gongren ribao [Workers' Daily]*, 13 February 1996.

## Chapter 3: Censorship, Governance Crisis, and Moral Regulation

- 1 Based on my own accounting, during this period CCTV broadcast four corruption dramas set in contemporary China, including *Party Member Erleng Ma* (*Dangyuan Erleng Ma*, 1996), *Black Face* (*Hei lian*, 1996), *Passing through Liuyuan* (*Zouguo liuyuan*, 1998), and *Choice* (*Jueze*, 1999). These dramas are noteworthy for their portrayal of corruption among rural Party cadres (with the exception of *Choice*). Corruption in rural areas was frequently ignored in the highly commercialized television dramas of the first decade of the twenty-first century, which catered to urban viewers by focusing on corruption in cities. Even fewer corruption dramas were broadcast by local television stations. Only two came up in my research: *Director of Anti-Corruption Bureau* (*Fantan juzhang*, 1996) broadcast by Beijing Television, and *Anti-Corruption Storm* (*Fantan fengbao*, 1997). They did not appear to have much impact and soon fell into oblivion.
- 2 Cheng Kejie was governor of Guangxi, a southwestern province, from 1992 to 1998, and served as deputy chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress from 1998 to 1999. From 1994 to 1998, Cheng helped Yinxing, a real estate company, obtain a shopping mall construction project in the capital city of Guangxi, obtained bank loans and diverted government funds for the project, and greatly underpriced the land. Before becoming Jiangxi deputy governor in 1998, Hu Changqing was chief of the National Tax Agency and deputy chief of the National Religious Affairs Agency. He took bribes of no less than ¥5.45 million for securing bank loans, construction projects, business licences, permanent residency in Hong Kong, and so on for the bribers. Another major charge was his decadent lifestyle, including his lavish consumption and uncontrolled sexual desire.
- 3 Hai Rui was a "model official" in the Ming Dynasty, famous for his moral rectitude, honesty, and perseverance in fighting corruption.
- 4 Zhang Ping, *Jueze* [*Choice*] (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 1997). For an elaborate discussion of the novel, see Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*.
- 5 On 24 August 2000, the director of the film *Shengsi jueze* (*A Life-and-Death Choice*), Yu Benzhen, and *People's Daily* reporter Xiang Bing chatted with participants in the "Strengthen the Nation Forum" hosted by *People's Daily*. Some excerpts from the chat are available at <http://www2.qglt.com.cn/wsrmlt/jbft/200%8/xb.html>.
- 6 Chen Fang, *Tiannu: fantanju zai xingdong* [*Heaven's Wrath: the anti-corruption bureau in action*] (Huhehaote: Yuanfang chubanshe, 1996). For a detailed discussion of *Heaven's Wrath*, see Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*.
- 7 Hai Tao, "Heaven's Wrath: Anti-Corruption TV Series Produced but Not Ready for Show Yet," *Voice of America*, 15 September 1999, <http://www.voia.gov/chinese/archive/worldfocus/sep1999/thur/091699heavenlyrage.htm>.
- 8 This movie was also based on Zhang Ping's novel of the same title. Yu Benzhen (director). *Shengsi jueze* (*A Life-and-Death Choice*) (Shanghai: Shanghai Film Studio, 2000).
- 9 Peng Li, "Kangkai yinmu zhengqi ge – qiekan shengsi jueze" [An upright film – on *A Life-and-Death Choice*], *Beijing wanbao* [*Beijing Evening News*], 23 August 2000.
- 10 Mei Zhiqing and Fang Zheng, "Qingting zhongguo dianying de sanzong shengyin" [Three viewpoints about Chinese cinema], *Nanfang ribao* [*Southern Daily*], 25 November 2000; Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*.
- 11 Peng Li, "Kangkai yinmu zhengqi ge."
- 12 The box office record said more about the state's heavy promotion of the film than about its popularity among viewers. Reportedly, 98 percent of the viewers watched the film on group tickets purchased for them by state employers. Dong Ying, "Zhuxuanlu yingpian de shangye tuwei" [Mainstream films' commercial breakthrough], *Shichang bao* [*Market News*], 27 February 2008, <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/6929758.html>.
- 13 Yuan Lei and Zhou Hualei, "Dianying: Libukai zhuxuanlu de rizi" [Film: in the mainstream], *Nanfang zhoumo* [*Southern Weekend*], 14 June 2007, <http://www.southcn.com/>

- weekend/culture/200706140028.htm; Jiang Zemin, "Jiang Zemin tongzhi guankan *Shengsi jueze* hou de zhongyao jianghua" [Comrade Jiang Zemin's important speech after watching *A Life-and-Death Choice*], *Dangde shenghuo [Party Life]* 10 (2000): 1.
- 14 Guo Qubo, "Yibu jiang zhenhua de yingpian: ji shengsi jueze" [A film that speaks the truth: *A Life-and-Death Choice*], *Changjiang ribao [Yangtze Daily]*, 24 August 2000.
  - 15 Wang Lijuan, "Guanyu dianshi lishiju zouhong de sikao" [Thoughts on the popularity of historical dramas], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 10 (2002): 18-24.
  - 16 "Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang dianshiju yinjin hepai he bofang guanli de tongzhi" [Notice on further strengthening the regulation of television drama importation, co-production, and broadcast] (issued by SARFT, 2000), <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/articles/2005/10/15/20091225144900240667.html>.
  - 17 In 1995, the Ministry issued a related "Notice on Further Strengthening and Improving the Regulation of Importation and Broadcast of Foreign Films and Television Dramas." There, the specifically regulated time frame changed to 19:00-22:00. The document was also endorsed by the General Office of the CCP's Central Party Committee and the General Office of the State Council.
  - 18 "Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang dianshiju yinjin hepai he bofang guanli de tongzhi."
  - 19 Zeng Qingrui, "Yishu shiye, wenhua chanye yu dazhong wenhua de hundun yu mishi: lue lun zhongguo dianshiju de shehui jueze he wenhua celue bing yu yin hong xiansheng shangque" [Confused and entangled relations of art, cultural industry and popular culture: debating with Yin Hong on the social function of Chinese television dramas and cultural strategies], in *Yingshi wenhua qianyan: "zhuanxingqi" dazhong shenmei wenhua toudi* [At the forefront of film and television culture: popular aesthetics and culture in the transitional period], edited by Hu Zhifeng (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 137-75; Wei Jingna, "18 jia dianshitai tongbo *Tianlong babu*" [Eighteen television stations broadcast *The Demi-Gods and the Semi-Devils*], *Beijing chenbao [Beijing Morning News]*, 22 February 1999; Lin Jiefei, "34 jia shengji dianshitai tongbo *Tianlong babu*" [34 provincial television stations broadcast *The Demi-Gods and the Semi-Devils*], *Yangcheng wanbao [Yangcheng Evening News]*, 4 April 1999.
  - 20 You Xiaogang, Bo Xia, and Tong Zhao, "Xianqi nide gaitou lai: guochan dianshiju shichang xianzhuang yu sikao" [Raise your veil: thoughts on the market for domestic television dramas], *Nanfang dianshi xuekan [Southern Television Journal]* 2 (2001): 36-42; Radio, Film and Television Bureau of Jilin Province and Industrial Development Department, "Dianshiju chanye fazhan xianzhuang yu qushi yuce" [The current situation and forecast of television drama industry], *Beifang chuanmei yanjiu [Northern Media Research]* 5 (2006).
  - 21 Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*, 18.
  - 22 Kong, *Consuming Literature*, 21-22.
  - 23 "Zhiqingren jiemi neimu: zhongguo bianju de sida shengcun xianzhuang" [Insiders' information: four truths about Chinese screenwriters] (9 May 2005), <http://yule.sohu.com/20050509/n2255481892.shtml>. According to an insider, ¥50,000 per episode is the minimum they would have to pay for any screenwriter with several years of experience; for top-calibre people, the going rate has risen to over ¥200,000 (W. Wu, personal communication).
  - 24 These writers include Lu Tianming, author of *Cangtian zaishang (Heaven Above)*, *Daxue wuhen (Pure as Snow)*, *Shengwei shuji (Provincial Party Secretary)*, and *Gao weidu zhanli (Tremor at the High Altitude)*; Zhang Ping, author of *Tianwang (Heaven's Web)*, *Jueze (Choice)*, and *Guojia ganbu (Government Officials)*; Zhou Meisen, author of *Juedui quanli (Absolute Power)*, *Guojia gongsu (The Public Procurator)*, *Zhigao liyi (Supreme Interest)*, *Wozhu chenfu (The Leader)*, etc.; Zhang Chenggong, author of *Heidong (Black Hole)*, *Heibing (Black Ice)*, *Heiwu (Black Fog)*, *Yingxiong lei (Heroes' Tears)*, and *Xuan feng bao (Tornado Storm)*; Chen Xinhao, author of *Hongse kangnaixin (Red Carnation)*; and Zhang Hongsen, author of *Da faguang (Chief Judge)*, among others.

- 25 For an estimate, I conducted a basic statistical analysis of all crime dramas in DVD or HDVD sold at dangdang.com, a commercial website specializing in books and audiovisual products. Over 900 items can be found in the crime drama category; after excluding duplicate items and dramas in historical settings or made by overseas producers, 565 remain. Dangdang.com has a separate category for anti-corruption dramas, which add up to 118 after a similar screening exercise. All 118 have corruption plots. To determine how many crime dramas have corruption plots, I randomly sampled 132 of the 565 crime dramas and scrutinized their abstracts and, in cases of vague abstracts, the synopses for individual episodes. Twenty-nine of the 132, or 21.9 percent, have at least one corrupt government official. If we subsume anti-corruption drama under the broader “crime drama” category, then 35.4 percent of crime dramas have plots involving corruption.
- 26 Of course, not all listed dramas have been actually broadcast. In fact, many are sold directly to video stores.
- 27 My informant estimated that about 30 percent of all crime dramas touch on the issue of corruption.
- 28 Lu Chuan and Zhang Chenggong (writers). *Heidong (Black Hole)* (Beijing: Beijing Jinyingma Film and Television Culture, 2001).
- 29 These seven dramas were *Juelu (Dead End)*, *Heidong (Black Hole)*, *Jinji zhuibu (Hot Pursuit)*, *Diba jingqu (The Eighth Police Zone)*, *Jisi yao'an zu (Anti-Smuggling Unit)*, *Baofeng fating (Stormy Court)*, and *Fuhua beihou (Behind the Glitters)*.
- 30 See the overview piece on CCTV.com at <http://cctvchiridion.cctv.com/20090617/113152.shtml>.
- 31 “Guanyu qieshi jiaqiang gong’an ticaì yingshi jiemu zhizuo, bochu guanli de tongzhi” [Circular on further regulating production and broadcast of films and television dramas dealing with public security matters] (issued by SARFT and the Ministry of Public Security, 2001), <http://info.broadcast.hc360.com/HTML/001/003/003/55961.htm>.
- 32 Kinkley writes in *Corruption and Realism* that major literary magazines stopped serializing anti-corruption novels in the summer.
- 33 “Liu Bin: huangjin shidai bi heidong gengyou tiaozhan xing” [Liu Bin: *Golden Age* is more challenging than *Black Hole*], 19 May 2003, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2003-05-19/1426150163.htm>. As a result, *Black Fog* was changed to *Cloud and Fog (tianzhiyun, dizhiwu)*, and *Black Gold* was changed to *Winter Solstice*.
- 34 Liu Jianghua and Yu Jing, “She’an ju, fanfuju, ying bimian yidaoqie” [Do not lump all crime dramas and anti-corruption dramas together], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 11 April 2004.
- 35 “Laoniang lei zhuanjia yantao hui” [Seminar on *Mother’s Tears*], 29 June 2006, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2006-06-29/ba1140225.shtml>.
- 36 Xu Guangchun, “Zai 2004 nian quanguo dianshiju ticaì guihua huiyi shang de jianghua.”
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 “Guanyu jiaqiang she’anju shencha he bochu guanli de tongzhi” [Circular on strengthening the censorship and broadcast regulation of crime dramas] (issued by SARFT, 19 April 2004), <http://www.chinalawedu.com/falvfagui/fg22598/24035.shtml>.
- 40 Hu Zhanfan, “Zai 2005 nian quanguo dianshiju ticaì guihua hui shang de jianghua” [Speech at the 2005 national subject-matter planning meeting for television dramas], *Zhongguo dianshi [Chinese Television]* 4 (2005): 8.
- 41 At a 2012 international workshop on Chinese television, “Television, Power and Ideology in Postsocialist China,” Wanning Sun suggested that the term “media ecology” might help make sense of SARFT’s motives behind the “Clean up the Screen” campaign.
- 42 Guo Zhongshu (writer). *Juebu fangguo ni (I’ll Never Let You Off)*. (Beijing: Beijing Jinshi Yinghua Cultural Communication, 2002).

- 43 Strictly speaking, it was a co-production, with the participation of the Jilin Provincial Bureau of Culture, Changchun Film Studio, Jilin Golden Shield Film and Television Center, Jilin Juqing Cultural Communication Company, and Beijing Jinshi Yinghua Cultural Communication Company. As discussed in Chapter 1, in a typical drama co-production, the private firm takes the lead in financing and organizing the production, while the state entities help secure a production permit and provide facilitation and advice.
- 44 The other two are *Daxue wuhen* (*Pure as Snow*, 2001) – see Ruoyun Bai, “‘Clean Officials,’ Emotional Moral Community, and Anti-Corruption Television Dramas,” in *TV Drama in China*, edited by Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 47-60 – and *Dajiang dongqu* (*Rumbling Rivers*) (2003) (see Chapter 4). *Pure as Snow* was a CCTV broadcast, written by Lu Tianming, whereas *Rumbling Rivers*, like *I’ll Never Let You Off*, was typical of the highly commercialized corruption dramas of the first decade of the century.
- 45 Zhang Yuewen, “Changchun heishahui tuanhua toumu Liang Xudong heyi chengba heibai liangdao” [How did Changchun mafia leader Liang Xudong dominate the illicit and licit worlds], *Xinhua she* [*Xinhua News Agency*], 18 August 2000, <http://news.sina.com.cn/china/2000-08-18/118439.html>.
- 46 Wang Kuilong, “Juebu fangguo ni, Kangxi wangchao bei dianming piping” [*I’ll Never Let You Off* and *Kangxi Dynasty* received official criticism], *Chengshi wanbao* [*Metropolitan Evening News*], 8 January 2003, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2003-01-08/1714124463.html>.
- 47 Zhang Xiuan, “Zhidao sanbuqu; shanliang yikexin – fang zhuming daoyan Lei Xianhe” [Directed a trilogy with a sincere heart: interview with famous director Lei Xianhe], *Jilin ribao* [*Jilin Daily*], 8 September 2002.
- 48 The director’s name has been removed to protect his identity.
- 49 The censor’s private communication with Lei Xianhe.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Wang Kuilong, “Juebu fangguo ni, Kangxi wangchao.”
- 53 See Kaibara Ekken and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *The Philosophy of Qi: The Record of Great Doubts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 54 Xinyan Jiang, “Mengzi: Human Nature Is Good,” in *Asian Texts, Asian Contexts: Encounters with Asian Philosophies and Religions*, edited by David Jones and E.R. Klein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 128.
- 55 Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Kevin J. O’Brien, ed., *Popular Protest in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Elizabeth Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).
- 56 Qian Gang, “‘Weiwen’ heshi chengwei changyongyu” [When did “weiwen” become a buzzword], *New York Times* (Chinese edition), 19 September 2012, <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20120919/cc19qiangang2/>.
- 57 “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jianshe de jue ding” [The Chinese Communist Party Central Committee’s resolution to improve governance] (19 September 2004), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-09/26/content\\_2024232.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-09/26/content_2024232.htm).
- 58 Xiaoying Wang, “The Post-Communist Personality: The Spectre of China’s Capitalist Market Reforms,” *China Journal* 47, 1 (2002): 3-4.
- 59 Ibid., 7.
- 60 Jiwei Ci, “The Moral Crisis in Post-Mao China: Prolegomenon to a Philosophical Analysis,” *Diogenes* 56, 1 (2009): 20.
- 61 Ibid., 21.

- 62 Heike Holbig, "Remaking the CCP's Ideology: Determinants, Progress, and Limits under Hu Jintao," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, 3 (2009): 53. Yuezhi Zhao made the same argument in *Communication in China*, 39.
- 63 This finding is line with Kang Liu's argument concerning the relevance of Maoist revolutionary ideology in China, and Yuezhi Zhao's argument that the Party has rearticulated communist ideologies rooted in the revolutionary era to the present time. Kang Liu, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*.
- 64 Wanning Sun, "Localizing Chinese Media."
- 65 For a detailed account of the "Clean Up the Screen" campaign, see Ruoyun Bai, "'Clean Up the Screen': Regulating Television Entertainment in the 2000's," in *Chinese Television in the Twenty-First Century: Entertaining the Nation*, edited by Ruoyun Bai and Geng Song (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
- 66 "Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang he gaijin weichengnian ren sixiang daode jianshe de ruogan yijian" [Some opinions on further improving moral education for minors issued by the Party Central Committee and the State Council] (22 March 2004), [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/22/content\\_1378649.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/22/content_1378649.htm).
- 67 "Guangbo yingshi jiaqiang he gaijin weichengnian ren sixiang daode jianshe de shishi fang'an" [Plans for implementation by the broadcast sector to strengthen and improve moral education for minors] (issued by SARFT, 30 April 2004), [http://www.lawyee.net/act/act\\_display.asp?rid=242155](http://www.lawyee.net/act/act_display.asp?rid=242155).
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 "Guanyu hongse jingdian gaibian dianshiju shencha guanli de tongzhi" [Circular on censorship and regulation of television dramas adapted from "red classics"] (issued by SARFT, 25 May 2004), <http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2007/09/10/20070910135304210333.html>.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 For discussions of "red classics" drama serials, see Qian Gong, "A Trip Down the Memory Lane: Remaking and Re-Reading Red Classics," in *TV Drama in China*, edited by Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 157-71; Zhao, *Communication in China*, 217-19.
- 72 They are *Laonian lei (Mother's Tears)* (2005), *Wozhu chenfu (The Leaders)* (2005), *Guojia ganbu (State Cadres)* (2006) (based on Zhang Ping's novel of the same title), *Tiandi liangren (Man of Grain)* (2006), *Daming wangchao 1566 - Hairui and Jiaqing (The Ming Dynasty 1566 - Hai Rui and Jiaqing)* (2006), *Qianfu (Lurking)* (2007), *Qiao shengzhang he tade nüermen (Provincial Governor Qiao and His Daughters)* (2007), *Suiyue (Passage of Time)* (2007), *Gao weidu zhanli (High-Altitude Shudder)* (2008), *Woben yingxiong (I Am the Hero)* (2009), *Woju (Snail House)* (2009), *Banlu xiongdi (Half-Brothers)* (2010), *Lianshi chuanqi (Legends of the Clean Stone)* (2010), *Mingyun (Fate)* (2010), *Yuanshan de hongye (Red Leaves in the Mountains)* (2010), and *Zhenhuan zhuan (Legends of Zhenhuan)* (2011).
- 73 "Yangshi qinqingju *Laonian lei* zhuanjia yantaohui shilu" [Seminar on CCTV drama *Mother's Tears*] (29 June 2006), <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2006-06-29/ba1140226.shtml>.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Zhao Yunying (writer). *Laonian lei (Mother's Tears)* (Beijing: CCTV, 2006). It was directed by Lei Xianhe. He was also to direct another corruption drama for CCTV, *Red Leaves in the Mountains* (2010), which was based on a real-life role model, a female discipline inspection officer.
- 76 "Yangshi qinqingju *Laonian lei* zhuanjia yantaohui shilu."
- 77 Ibid.

## Chapter 4: Anti-Corruption Melodrama and Competing Discourses

- 1 Bai, "Clean Officials." I used "clean official" there as a literal translation of the Chinese original, *qingguan*.
- 2 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985).
- 3 See Ding Zhaoqin, *Su wenxue zhong de Baogong* [Judge Bao in popular culture] (Taipei: Weijin chubanshe, 2000).
- 4 Such figures include Song Ci and Di Renjie of the Song Dynasty; Hai Rui of the Ming Dynasty; and Yu Chenglong, Ji Xiaolan, Liu Yong, and Li Wei of the Qing Dynasty.
- 5 Jeffrey C. Kinkley, *Chinese Justice, the Fiction: Law and Literature in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- 6 For an insightful account of the revived Confucianism and Chinese television dramas, see Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*.
- 7 Lu Tianming (writer), *Daxue wuhen* [Pure as snow] (Beijing: CCTV, 2001).
- 8 Its production crew included a number of people whose names were famously associated with corruption dramas. Lu Tianming, who wrote *Pure as Snow* in both drama and novel form, authored *Heaven Above* and would write three more corruption dramas from 2003 to 2008. Lei Xianhe, the director, directed at least four other corruption dramas: *I'll Never Let You Off*, *Rumbling Rivers*, *Mother's Tears*, and *Red Leaves in the Mountains*.
- 9 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).
- 10 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 11 *Ibid.*; Ang, *Watching Dallas*; Ning Ma, "Signs of Angst and Hope: History and Melodrama in Chinese Fifth-Generation Cinema," *Screen* 44, 2 (2003): 183-99.
- 12 Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 42.
- 13 See Bai, "Clean Officials."
- 14 *Daxue wuhen*, Episode 11.
- 15 *Ibid.*, Episode 2.
- 16 Lu Tianming, *Cangtian zaishang*, 350.
- 17 Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 42.
- 18 Chen Xinhao (writer). *Hongse kangnaixin* (*Red Carnations*) (Beijing: China International Television Corporation, 2001).
- 19 For a detailed discussion of these two drama serials, see Zhong, *Mainstream Culture Refocused*.
- 20 On the code of ethics based on brotherhood in Chinese film, see Philippa Gates, "The Man's Film: Woo and the Pleasures of Male Melodrama," *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, 1 (2001): 59-79.
- 21 Jiang Wei and Lin Lisheng (writers). *Fuhua beihou* (*Behind the Glitters*) (Beijing: Beijing Jintiandi Culture, 2002).
- 22 Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China*; Zhong, *Mainstream Culture Refocused*.
- 23 Zhou Meisen (writer), *Zhigao liyi* [Supreme interest] (Beijing: CCTV, 2003).
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Zhou Meisen (writer), *Juedui quanli* [Absolute power] (Changsha: Hunan TV, 2002).
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Zhou Meisen, personal communication, 2007.
- 28 Richard Kraus, "Bureaucratic Privilege as an Issue in Chinese Politics," *World Development* 11, 8 (1983): 678.
- 29 Xu Guangrong and Wang Ning (writers), *Dajiang dongqu* [Rumbling rivers] (Shenyang: Shenyang Sunshine Film and TV Company, 2003).
- 30 Zhou Meisen (writer), *Wozhu chenfu* [The leaders] (Nanjing: Jiangsu TV, 2005).
- 31 *Ibid.*, Episode 3.

- 32 Ibid., Episode 5.
- 33 Ibid., Episode 5.
- 34 Rosen, "The Victory of Materialism"; Yuezhi Zhao, "The Rich, the Laid-off, and the Criminal in Tabloid Tales: Read All about It!" in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, edited by Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 111-35.
- 35 Zhou Meisen, *Wozhu chenfu*, Episode 33.
- 36 Maurice Meisner, "The Deradicalization of Chinese Socialism," in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience*, edited by Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), 353-54. See also Keane, "Ethics and Pragmatism: China's Television Producers Confront the Cultural Market." In his article on Chinese television dramas of the early 1990s, Michael Keane noted how successful entrepreneurs became role models as the Chinese state sought to co-opt television drama "as a means of inculcating new modes of ethical behaviour appropriate to a modern commodity economy" (75).
- 37 Zhou Meisen, *Wozhu chenfu*, Episode 35.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Zheng Zi, Yang Jie, and Shaoke, "Wozhu chenfu fangtan lü liang fangtan" [Interview Lü Liang of the Leaders], Xinlang yule [Sina Entertainment], 13 December 2004, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2004-12-13/1818598063.html>.
- 40 Zhou Meisen, *Wozhu chenfu*, Episode 35.
- 41 Ibid., Episode 34.
- 42 Ibid., Episode 35.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.

#### Chapter 5: Cynicism as a Dominant Way of Seeing

- 1 According to the World Bank report, "a person is 'middle class' if she lives in a household with consumption per capita between the median poverty line of developing countries – namely \$2 a day at 2005 purchasing power parity – and the US poverty line of \$13 a day." Martin Ravallion, "The Developing World's Bulging (but Vulnerable) Middle Class," *World Development* 38, 4 (2009): 445-54.
- 2 Lan Fang, "ABD Report Said that Chinese Middle-Class Has Reached a Size of 817 Million" (27 August 2010), <http://policy.caing.com/2010-08-27/100174757.html>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Quoted in Hai Ren, "The Neoliberal State and Risk Society: The Chinese State and the Middle Class," *Telos* 151 (2010):117.
- 5 Lu Xueyi's *Dangdai zhongguo shehui jieceng yanjiu baogao* [Report on the social stratification research in contemporary China] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2002) came out of the first systematic nationwide study of social stratification between 1999 and 2001. Ironically, at a time when class polarization and re-formation are taking place rapidly, the term "class" has been dropped from official parlance, social science research, the media, and everyday discourse, for it evokes the defunct communist ideology and also draws unwanted attention to class tension in market reform China. Modifying the definition to focus on the service nature of middle-class occupations, He Li defines middle-class membership as private entrepreneurs, the mid-level managerial stratum, professionals and intellectuals, and the less influential but sizeable mass of urban white-collar workers, lower-level managers, and staff workers in the service sector. He Li, "Emergence of the Chinese Middle Class and Its Implications," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 33, 2 (2006): 67-83.
- 6 See Yongshun Cai, "China's Moderate Middle Class: The Case of Homeowner's Resistance," *Asian Survey* 45, 5 (2005): 777-99; Jonathan Unger, "China's Conservative Middle Class,"



- Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, 3 (2006): 27-31; Li, "Emergence of the Chinese Middle Class and Its Implications."
- 7 Andrea Lee Press and Elizabeth R. Cole, *Speaking of Abortion: Television and Authority in the Lives of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.
  - 8 Ibid.
  - 9 Ren, "The Neoliberal State and Risk Society," 117.
  - 10 Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (*Suzhi*)," *Public Culture* 16, 2 (2004): 200.
  - 11 Ren, "The Neoliberal State and Risk Society," 119.
  - 12 Unger, "China's Conservative Middle Class," 28.
  - 13 Janice Hua Xu, "Building a Chinese 'Middle Class': Consumer Education and Identity Construction in Television Land," in *TV China*, edited by Ying Zhu and Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 150-67.
  - 14 Mark Liechty notes that "class culture is always a work-in-progress, a perpetual social construction that is as fundamentally bound to the 'concrete' of economic resources as it is to the cultural practices of people who jointly negotiate their social identities." Liechty, *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4, quoted by Xu, *ibid.*, 154. In China, the sense of middle-class "work in progress" is all the more strong because of the newness of this category.
  - 15 Leo Ou-fan Lee and Andrew Nathan, "The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journalism and Fiction in the Late Ch'ing and Beyond," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 360-95.
  - 16 For a discussion of castigatory novels, see David Der-Wei Wang, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
  - 17 Li Zongwu, *Houheixue* [Thick and black learning] (Beijing: Qiushi chubanshe, 1989).
  - 18 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 135.
  - 19 Li, *Houheixue*.
  - 20 Xu Yan, "'Houhei' shifei lun dao jin: houheixue jiqi 'dufa'" [Evolution of "thick and black learning": thick and black learning and its readings], *Shuwu [Reading Room]* 6 (1996), [http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post\\_show.asp?idWriter=0&Key=0&BlogID=700059&PostID=16371767](http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post_show.asp?idWriter=0&Key=0&BlogID=700059&PostID=16371767).
  - 21 Chen Guanglu, "Lüelun Liu Zhenyun de liangda xilie xiaoshuo chuanguo" [A brief analysis of two novella series of Liu Zhenyun in contemporary literary circle], *Dangdai wentan [Contemporary Literati]* 2 (1994): 30.
  - 22 Wang, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*, 330.
  - 23 Quan Yongxian (writer). *Suiyue (Passage of Time)* (Beijing: Beijing Hualu Baina Film and Television, 2007).
  - 24 Cultural critic Xie Xizhang states: "Genre novels suffer from a high degree of homogenization. One can tell from the titles of guanchang novels what they are about. The titles describe titles and ranks from chauffeurs and secretaries to chief of Beijing Office of provincial government and provincial party secretaries. People joke, right now only two positions are left untouched: one is Prime Minister and the other is General Party Secretary. Guanchang novel has reached a dead end." See Xie Xizhang, "Zhongguo leixing xiaoshuo zoujin sihutong; chule renao he chiqi haiyou shenme?" [Chinese genre novels are reaching a dead end: is there anything left besides sensationalism?], *Beijing qingnian bao [Beijing Youth Daily]*, 6 November 2009, <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/news/2009/2009-09-07/76566.html>. The following titles, casually picked, are suggestive of the extent of cloning: *New Provincial Party Secretary*, *Municipal Party Secretary*, *Each Step Higher*,

Power: Director of the People's Congress, New County Chief, Chief Procurator, Public Servant, Officials' Wives, Diary of a Public Servant, Observing Guanchang, Director of Beijing Office, Director of Television Station, Cadre's Driver, Mayor's Driver: Who Sits in front of the Mayor, Secretary-General, Mayor's Secretary, Director of the State Tax Bureau, Director of Quality Inspection Bureau, Director of Anticorruption Bureau, Shanxi Coal Tycoons, Chinese-Style Banquet, Auditing, and so on.

- 25 According to a 2008 bestseller list, 4 *guanchang* novels were among the top 20 most popular titles. In a list of most-clicked novels at <http://www.sina.com>, *guanchang* novel is the second most popular genre, and among the 30 most popular novels, one finds 8 *guanchang* titles. In the first quarter of 2009, 123 *guanchang* novels were reportedly published, more than the total output of this genre in 2008. See "Ruhe kandai 'guanchang xiaoshuo' de shengwen?" [How to make sense of the popularity of *guanchang* novels?], *Wenhui bao* [Wenhui Daily], 6 November 2009, <http://book.yzdsb.com.cn/system/2009/10/26/010196986.shtml>.
- 26 Ibid.; "Zhang Ping: Guojia ganbu bushi yibu guanchang xiaoshuo" [Zhang Ping: State Cadres is not a *guanchang* novel], *Xin jingbao* [New Beijing News], 12 March 2004, <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/RS/515372.htm>; "Li Chunping fangtan: Guanchang wenhua, yige teyou de xianxiang" [Li Chunping interview: *Guanchang* literature, a unique cultural phenomenon], *Xin jingbao* [New Beijing News], 3 November 2009, [http://book.ifeng.com/special/guanchangshu/list/200911/1103\\_8506\\_1418203.shtml](http://book.ifeng.com/special/guanchangshu/list/200911/1103_8506_1418203.shtml).
- 27 For a discussion of *Dossier on Smuggling*, see Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism*, 127.
- 28 Li Chunping's curriculum vitae is available at [http://www.aktc.net.cn/zwx/News\\_View.asp?NewsID=100](http://www.aktc.net.cn/zwx/News_View.asp?NewsID=100).
- 29 Chen Lei, "Wang Xiaofang: I Was Ma Xiangdong's Secretary," *Southern People Weekly* [Nanfang renwu zhokan] 9 (2008).
- 30 Liu Zhenyun (writer). *Yidi jimao* (*Chicken Feathers on the Ground*) (Beijing: Beijing Television Art Center, 1994).
- 31 Qin Peichun, Shi Ling, Zhang Rui, and Bai Hua (writers). *Zaixiang Liu luoguo* (*Prime Minister Hunchback Liu*) (Beijing: Beijing Chengxiang Film and Television Production, 1996).
- 32 Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth Perry, eds. *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
- 33 See Michael Keane, "By the Way, FUCK YOU!" for a fuller discussion of *Chicken Feathers*.
- 34 *Mengduan zijingcheng* [Dreams in the Forbidden City], *Da tanguan He Shen* [Big Tanguan He Shen], *Qipin qinchai Liu Luoguo* [Seventh-Grade Imperial Commissioner Hunchback Liu], *Canghai bainian* [A Hundred Years of Vicissitudes], *Tie jiangjun A Gui* [Iron Army General A Gui], *Buyi tianzi* [Emperor in Plain Clothing], *Shaonian da qinchai* [Young Imperial Commissioner], *Shaonian Jaiqing* [Young Jiaqing], *Qingtian yamen* [Clean Local Government], and *Qianlong wangchao* [Qianlong Dynasty].
- 35 The series revolves around the relationships of Emperor Qianlong, Liu Yong, and He Shen.
- 36 "Wanggang zuoke ban he shen" [Wang Gang Plays He Shen], in *Yong Le Hui*, a CCTV talk show hosted by Li Yong, 8 June 2009. The video clip is available at <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/1Gfu7z53l10/>.
- 37 *Tiechi tongya Ji Xiaolan* [Eloquent Ji Xiaolan], Episode 4.
- 38 Interview with Wang Gang, in *Zuijia xianchang* (*Best Live Show*), a program on Beijing Television (BTV), 30 November 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63bvC1XJs0k>.
- 39 See *Feichang shuoming* (*Meet with Celebrities*), a program on the Science and Education Channel of Beijing Television (BTV), 30 June 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XmVQrQPW1>.
- 40 Zhou Meisen, *Wozhu chenfu*, Episode 15.
- 41 Ibid., Episode 17.

- 42 Ke Yunlu (writer). *Longnian dang'an (Dragon Dossiers)* (Xi'an, Shaanxi: Xi'an Film Studio, 2003).
- 43 Ibid., Episode 11.
- 44 Ibid., Episode 15.
- 45 Yet the connection between the novel and the drama serial was never made explicit anywhere in the opening credits of the drama, the promotional materials, or press interviews with the production crew, perhaps to deflect unwanted attention from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). Rather, the drama was initially titled *Urban Spring (Chengshi li de chuntian)* and promoted as a love story. Despite such marketing ploys, SARFT was not to be hoodwinked. In the wake of the 2004 ban, *Passage of Time* was kept off the air. Between 2008 and 2010, some local television stations began showing it without much publicity, judging from the meagre amount of press coverage it generated.
- 46 *Suiyue (Passage of Time)*, Episode 1.
- 47 Ibid., Finale.
- 48 Jiang Wei (writer). *Qianfu (Moles)* (Zhejiang: Dongyang Qingyu Film and Television Culture, 2008).
- 49 Zhu Lili, "Jianzhi nei de duoyuan jiedu: diezhan ju miqunti, wenhua biaozheng yu zhongguo yujing – yi 'Ansuan,' 'Qianfu' weili" [Established pluralism reading: the fandom of spy drama, cultural representation, and the Chinese context – a case study of the TV series *Plot* and *Undercover*], *Chuanbo yu shehui xuekan [Communication and Society]* 23 (2013): 143-76.
- 50 "'Qianfu' fensi shijianbu zhi yingshe bangongshi qianguize" [Fans of *Moles* point to hidden office protocols], 14 April 2009, [http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2009-04-14/18152471651\\_3.shtml](http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2009-04-14/18152471651_3.shtml).
- 51 "'Qianfu' zhichang houheixue rey: zhuanjia dui repeng quanmou wenhua gan youlu" [*Moles* causes lively discussions of thick and black learning in office], *Yangcheng wanbao [Yancheng Evening News]*, 1 May 2009, [http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/200905/0501\\_17\\_1135294.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/200905/0501_17_1135294.shtml).
- 52 Tao Dongfeng, "Making Fun of the Canon in Contemporary China: Literature and Cynicism in a Post-Totalitarian Society," *Cultural Politics* 3, 2 (2007): 203-22.
- 53 For a wonderful discussion of styles of political contentions on the Chinese Internet, see Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
- 54 Ruoyun Bai, "Disrobing CCTV: Scandals, E'gao, and Resistance in China's Cyberspace," *Paradoxa* 22 (2010): 249-68.
- 55 Tao, "Making Fun of the Canon in Contemporary China," 206.
- 56 These two databases, *China Academic Journals (Zhongguo qikan quanwen shujuku)* and *Century Journals Project (Zhongguo qikan quanwen shujuku – shiji qikan)*, were accessed from the University of Toronto Library.
- 57 An example is *Go Lala Go!* (also translated as *Du Lala's Promotion*), a novel depicting women in *zhichang*. It was adapted into a movie and a drama serial, both released in 2010.
- 58 Xin Wang, "Desperately Seeking Status: Political, Social and Cultural Attributes of China's Rising Middle Class," *Modern China Studies* 20, 1 (2013): 1-44.
- 59 Tao, "Making Fun of the Canon in Contemporary China," 213.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 25.

#### Chapter 6: Speaking of the "Desirable" Corrupt Official

- 1 *Snail House* was especially popular among urban Chinese in their twenties and thirties, as it addresses pressing social problems that immediately concern these age groups, such

as unaffordable housing, changing sexual morality, and so on. It has been observed that the drama, although garnering high audience ratings for television stations, has had its greatest impact through the Internet, a medium that attracts more young people than television. See “Beijing tai shoushi baogao chulu; *Qianfu chengwang, Woju shishou*” [Beijing TV stations’ audience rating report released: *Moles defeated Snail House*], *Xin jinbao* [New Beijing News], 29 December 2009, <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/10668750.html>.

- 2 For an extensive account of the production of and controversies surrounding *Snail House*, see Haiqing Yu, “Dwelling Narrowness: Chinese Media and Their Disingenuous Neo-liberal Logic,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 25, 1 (2011): 33-46.
- 3 This chapter is based in part on Ruoyun Bai, “Fubai, guanchang zhexue he xin ziyou zhuyi – jiedu Woju” [Corruption, ‘world of officials’ discourse, and neoliberalism – interpreting the Chinese TV drama *Snail House*], *Chuanbo yu shehui xuekan* [Communication and Society] 23 (2013): 177-99.
- 4 For example, a survey conducted by China Radio International Online in 2009 found that 2,900 of the polled population picked Song Siming as their favourite character, almost double the number of viewers whose favourite character was Haizao’s ex-boyfriend, Xiaobei. See “Woju li shui zuishou xiai? Nüren yuanzuo Song Siming xiaosan de shida liyou” [Who is your favorite character in *Snail House*? Top ten reasons for women wanting to become Song Siming’s mistresses], 25 November 2009, <http://gb.cri.cn/27564/2009/1%5F1326s2686721.htm>. Another survey at China’s most popular social networking site, Tencent, produced a similar result, with 171,261 preferring Song Siming to Xiaobei and 89,214 in the opposite camp (“Xiao Bei vs. Song Siming: Who Would You Choose if You Were Haizao?” 19 November 2009, <http://lady.qq.com/a/20091119/000253.htm>). Similarly, a CCTV online survey asked: “If you were Haizao, would you choose Song Siming (who gives you a shortcut to a better material life) or Xiaobei (who gives you untainted love)?” Of the 1,067 respondents, 32.61 percent voted for Song Siming and 26.34 percent for Xiaobei; another 32.52 percent were unable to make a choice because they felt “really divided.” Liu Wei, “Woju de jiazhi xuanze” [The value orientation of *Snail House*], *Liaowang xinwen zhoukan* [Outlook News Weekly], 49 (December 2009): 43. On Youku.com, a major video-sharing website, someone posted a survey, “I am having a crush on Secretary Song. What about you?” By 29 January 2010, a total of 3,140 people had responded, with 2,537 (78 percent) choosing “I am also having a crush on him” and another 165 (5 percent) choosing “I am having a temporary crush on him” (available at [http://kanba.youku.com/bar\\_barPost/barid\\_D2BQNA5gVWAIPA==\\_subjectid\\_1860260](http://kanba.youku.com/bar_barPost/barid_D2BQNA5gVWAIPA==_subjectid_1860260)). The thread is posted in “Woju ba” [Snail House Café] at Youku.com. It was listed on page 6 of all postings in this forum on 9 September 2010.
- 5 One can gain a broad sense of who participated in discussions of the drama from available information about the current state of the Internet and its users, published in a 2010 report released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CINIC). The report recorded 384 million Internet users as of 2009, and reveals a stark class, geographical, and, to a lesser extent, gender bias in Internet use in China. More men than women use the Internet (a ratio of 54.2:45.8); 60.4 percent are young users between the ages of 10 and 29; and 72 percent live in towns and cities. In terms of occupation, students constitute the largest group of users, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the total online population. Farmers and workers combined, including migrant workers, make up only 9.6 percent of all Internet users. The balance consists mainly of business managers (3.1 percent), bureaucrats and rank-and-file civil servants (7.5 percent), engineers and other specially trained personnel (10.4 percent), self-employed/freelancers (13 percent), and white-collar clerks (15 percent). See CNNIC, “Zhongguo huliaan wangluo fazhan zhuangkuang tongji baogao” [The twenty-fifth statistical report on Internet development in China], 15 January 2010, <http://www.cnnic.cn/hlwfzjy/hlwxzbg/201001/P020120709345300487558.pdf>.

- 6 Wang Xiaoming, “Banbianlian de shenhua” [The myth of a half-face], in *Zai xin yishixingtai de longzhao xia: 90 niandai de wenhua he wenxue fenxi* [In the shadow of the new ideology: cultural and literary studies of the 1990s], edited by Wang Xiaoming (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000), 29.
- 7 See, e.g., an anonymous posting at 17:20 on 16 November 2009: “As a woman, I have to say that Song Siming touched me with just one sentence: I will make wind and rain at her beck and call.”
- 8 See a post by a user named *qianxu202*: “Zuwei nanren, wo budebu shuo Song Siming shi ge zhenzheng de nanren” [As a man, I have to say that Song Siming is a real man], <http://tieba.baidu.com/f?z=665531891&ct=335544320&lm=0&sc=0&rn=30&tn=baiduPostBrowser&word=%CE%CF%BE%D3&pn=0>.
- 9 *Woju [Snail House]*, Episode 29.
- 10 *Ibid.*, Episode 18.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Episode 10.
- 12 This is one of the replies to a post titled “Wo zhishuo Song” [Only talk about Song]. The thread can be found at <http://movie.xunlei.com/comment/68577>. This reply is on the second comment page, posted at 16:05, 18 November 2009.
- 13 This is the thirty-third reply to “Faxian ziji hao milian Song mishu, nine?” [I am having a crush on Secretary Song. What about you?], [http://kanba.youku.com/bar\\_barPost/barid\\_D2BQNA5gVWAIPA==\\_size\\_20\\_subjectid\\_1860260\\_page\\_2.html](http://kanba.youku.com/bar_barPost/barid_D2BQNA5gVWAIPA==_size_20_subjectid_1860260_page_2.html), or the second comment page, posted by *yueyaorong* at 11:20, 28 November 2009. The thread “I am having a crush on Secretary Song. What about you?” was posted by *Lengheng taiyang yueguang baobei* [Cold sun and moonlight babe] at 21:08, 26 November 2009.
- 14 *Woju*, Finale.
- 15 *Ibid.*, Episode 11.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Episode 33.
- 17 The thread is titled “Sun Shuju shuo guan shi wei shenme fuwu de, tianxia shi renmin de. Ni ganjue ci'er ma?” (Secretary Sun said that officials should serve whatever and the country belongs to the people. Do you find him offensive?) and is found at: <http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=673225632>.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 See note 13 in this chapter.
- 20 See note 12 in this chapter.
- 21 Reply to “Wo zhishuo Song” [Only talk about Song], posted at 19:50, 18 November 2009.
- 22 *Ibid.*, posted at 18:55, 23 November 2009.
- 23 *Ibid.*, posted at 23:37, 22 November 2009.
- 24 Reply to “Moran huishou, naren yi buzai denghuo lanshan chu” [Awakening], posted at 20:45, 26 November 2009. The review piece is available at <http://movie.xunlei.com/comment/75810>.
- 25 Reply to “Wo zhishuo Song” [Only talk about Song], posted at 00:59, 21 November 2009.
- 26 *Ibid.*, posted at 18:11, 2 December 2009.
- 27 This is the seventeenth reply to “I am having a crush on Secretary Song. What about you?”
- 28 Reply to “Wo zhishuo song” [Only talk about Song], at Xunlei.com, posted at 17:49, 4 December 2009.
- 29 Huang Chaofeng, “Kanwan *Woju* de fansi” [Reflections on *Snail House*], *Guancha yu sikao [Observations and Thoughts]* 24 (2009): 9, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2009-12-18/162819290421.shtml>.
- 30 Reply to “Wo zhishuo Song” [Only talk about Song], at Xunlei.com, posted at 05:35, 8 December 2009.
- 31 *Ibid.*, posted at 00:26, 29 January 2010.
- 32 *Ibid.*, posted at 01:49, 3 May 2010.

- 33 Ibid., posted by *Zuo jiaoya* [Left foot] at 11:23, 20 January 2010.
- 34 See the 87th reply to “Wo milian Song mishu” [I am having a crush on Secretary Song], posted by *Xingxing hanghang*.
- 35 Reply to a review piece titled “Moran huishou ...” [Awakening], <http://movie.xunlei.com/comment/75810>. The reply is on the second comment page, posted at 15:03, 25 November 2009.
- 36 Posted by *perhaps candy* at 18:14:25, 7 August 2009, <http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/1558829.shtml>.
- 37 The 184th reply to “Wo milian Song mishu” [I am having a crush on Secretary Song], posted by *Laolao shuai le* [Super handsome].
- 38 Posted by 211.138.184 at 14:22, 21 November 2009.
- 39 Posted by 221.201.155 at 14:37, 21 November 2009, <http://tieba.baidu.com/?ct=335675392&tn=baiduPostBrowser&sc=6986000056&z=665531891&pn=0&rn=30&lm=0&word=%CE%CF%BE%D3#6986000056>.
- 40 The 184th reply to “Wo milian Song mishu” [I am having a crush on Secretary Song], posted by *Laolao shuai le* [Super handsome].
- 41 The 37th reply to *ibid.*, posted by *Xueluofuqu* at 12:14, 3 December 2009.
- 42 Reply to “Wo zhishuo Song” [Only talk about Song], at 16:40, 30 November 2009.
- 43 *Woju*, Episode 15.
- 44 Sun, *Corruption and Market in Contemporary China*, 165.
- 45 *Woju*, Episode 19.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 See a recent report by Bill Schiller, “‘Ant Tribe’ Chases Chinese Dream,” *Toronto Star*, 4 October 2010.
- 48 Qiu Lihua, “Liu Liu xiaoshuo *Woju* gaibian dianshiju, qingqing jiangshu fangnu gushi” [Liu Liu’s novel *Snail House* is adapted into television drama, a story about house slave], *Xinwen chenbao* [Morning News], 29 July 2009, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2009-07-29/07562629288.shtml>.
- 49 Colin Gordon, “Government Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44, quoted in Anagnost, “The Corporeal Politics of Quality (*Suzhi*),” 203.
- 50 Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 3.
- 51 “Awakening,” posted by *a826318008* on Xunlei.com, <http://movie.xunlei.com/comment/75810/page1>.
- 52 For a discussion of “quality” and neoliberal rationality in contemporary China, see Anagnost, “The Corporeal Politics of Quality,” and Hui Faye Xiao, “‘Love Is a Capacity’: The Narrative of Gendered Self-Development in Chinese-Style Divorce,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, 66 (2010): 735-53.
- 53 Rosen, “The Victory of Materialism,” 33.
- 54 Anagnost, “The Corporeal Politics of Quality,” 201.
- 55 Li Jingsheng, a SARFT official, disparaged *Snail House* for catering to vulgar interests with dirty language, *guanchang*, and sex. “Guangdian zongju guanyuan pi *Woju* kao hunduanzi xing huati chaozuo” [SARFT official criticizes *Snail House* for dirty language and sex topics], *Yangzi wanbao* [Yangzi Evening News], 12 December 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2009-12/12/content\\_12634070.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/society/2009-12/12/content_12634070.htm). The drama was pulled off the air by the Science and Education Channel of BTV halfway through its broadcast, although no one has confirmed the exact reason for censorship.
- 56 Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- 57 I am grateful to Yuezhi Zhao, who pointed out this limitation to me.

### Conclusion

- 1 Richard Levy, "Corruption in Popular Culture," in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, edited by Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 39-56.
- 2 Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*.
- 3 See Barme, *In the Red*; Ann-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China*.
- 4 Zhao, "Watchdogs on Party Leashes?" 579.
- 5 This argument is in line with critical media scholarship in the Western context. See, for example, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).
- 6 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 25.
- 7 A perfect example is *Zhenhuan zhuan* (*Legends of Zhenhuan*, also translated as *Empresses in the Palace*). This seventy-six-episode drama serial revolves around a female character, Zhenhuan, who completes her transformation from a kind, innocent girl to a manipulative, ruthless, powerful woman in the treacherous imperial palace, where each empress/concubine of the emperor connives to trap and avoid being trapped by others. Victimized by numerous cruel setups, Zhenhuan gradually learns to get what she needs. She defeats the empress and all her enemies among the concubines, wins the heart of the emperor through deception, endears her adopted son to the emperor, and eventually becomes the most powerful woman in China, the empress dowager. The palace is a place in which kindness leads to suffering and the ability to outsmart the others is rewarded. It is also a place in which friendship is fragile and alliances are always shifting. This is a universe defined by the irrelevance of morality and the triumph of self-interest and self-optimization. Liu Lianzi and Wang Xiaoping (writers). *Zhenhuan zhuan* (*Legends of Zhenhuan*) (Beijing: Beijing Television Art Center, 2011).

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